Is your Website Springing a Leak?

Imagine that you own a beautifully designed yacht. It looks great on the surface of the water, with superb lines, gleaming decks, a well-appointed galley . . . **but you're having real trouble getting out of the harbor and you can't figure out why!**

You investigate, and you find that beneath the surface your beautiful boat has a number of slow, silent, leaks. None of them are big enough to sink you on their own, so there's no obvious immediate crisis - just a constant drain on your efficiency and your speed.

I've been reviewing Web traffic reports for over 10 years, and I believe that this analogy applies very well to almost all business websites. Very few sites are so terrible or have something so wrong with them that they're clearly a disaster. Yet **just about every site has some area where it's quietly losing traffic, losing potential business or the opportunity to create relationships - or failing to attract visitors in the first place.**

If you're not regularly reviewing your traffic analysis, you can't know for sure if your site is leak proof. In this article, I'll show you a few of the most common areas where you can look for - and fix - those silent leaks.

1. Leaks in your Brand & Positioning

The excellent folks at MarketingExperiments online research laboratories have shown that clearly articulated and differentiating value propositions have a critical effect on Website conversion rates.

(The conversion rate is the measurement of visitors fulfilling your desired outcomes - which might include calling you, buying a product at your site, signing up for your newsletter or blog feed, etc.)

Your value proposition should be front and center on your home page. It should answer the classic question: *"Why should we do business with you instead of your competition?"*

Although this question isn't a Web strategy issue in itself, it is one that many people struggle to answer. But the lack of a compelling opening message can be a major impediment to your online success.

How to check for this leak: Even if they don't enter your site at the home page, most visitors who don't know you will go there as the second page they look at to find out more about you and your business.

If visitors are taking a quick look at your home page and then immediately leaving, something is wrong. Your copy is failing to pique their curiosity or to answer their questions: *"Can this company meet my needs?"* and *"Should I explore further?"* **You have a leak!**

2. Leaks in Visitor Engagement

Popular theory says that you have 10 seconds to engage a visitor - i.e. convince them to stay on your site before they click away in search of something more interesting.

While I don't believe that it's quite that simple, there are some definite ways to get rid of visitors fast before they've had a chance to really check you out.

The best of these is probably the infamous splash page - the entry page to your site that your Web designer persuaded you to have because it *"does cool stuff"*. Hopefully there's a *"Skip Intro"* button somewhere on the page!

In all my reviews of traffic reports I've seen a consistent leak of **up to 30% of visitors leaving** from this page alone - before they've ever seen who you are or what you offer.

How to check for this leak: Easy - look for the splash page in your traffic reports and see how many visitors exit at that point. If it's more than a small percentage, **you have a leak** - take the page out today!

The other major area where you should watch for leaks in visitor engagement is in what are called *"landing pages"*. These are inside pages of your Website which turn out to be the first page that a visitor sees, usually because you have some well-indexed content that they've found in a search engine.

Here it's absolutely critical to understand the visitor's mindset. Each visitor is at your site looking for something specific, they may well have found you by accident, so they may have no idea who you are - and worse, no interest in you.

The first page that they see on your Website must engage them immediately in accordance with **their** needs, **and** it must have enough context to draw them into other areas, and to want to find out more about you. It's not enough to give great information on this page - they'll soak that up, and then leave.

How to check for this leak: Hopefully your traffic reports are sophisticated enough to show you which keywords bring visitors to each specific page of your site. This shows you each visitor's *"mindset"*.

If visitors are leaving a page very quickly, then it probably isn't satisfying their informational needs, so you should review the content.

If visitors are reading the page (your traffic reports should show the time spent at each page) and then leaving, you've given them what they wanted but failed to draw them into the rest of your site. This can be fixed with more compelling navigation and calls to action.

Either way, you have a leak!

3. Leaks in Directions & Outcomes

I'm constantly amazed by the number of Web pages that give great information and content - and then just end abruptly - perhaps with some navigation tabs if you're lucky!

Steve Krug in his excellent book *"Don't Make Me Think!"* describes how crucial it is to direct visitors to the next step that you want them to take. If you don't do this, and rely on your visitors to figure this out for themselves, there's a strong chance that they'll make a different choice than the one you want - or they'll leave your site altogether, creating leaks in your potential revenue stream.

Every page of your site needs strong calls to action that stand out visually and click directly to where the visitor can fulfill the outcome that you want (e.g. *"buy now!"*, *"sign up for our newsletter / RSS feed"*.) Pages can have more than one call to action, and there's nothing wrong with repeating them on longer pages so that they're always within eyeshot.

And by the way, *"Back to top"* is **not** a call to action!

How to check for this leak: If your traffic reports show this information, look at the paths that visitors take through your site - where do visitors go next from each page? If many of them are exiting the site and / or they fan out across many pages with no clear pattern or direction, **you have a possible leak.**

4. Leaks in your Credibility Building

MarketingExperiments research has also shown that powerful, specific, and authoritative testimonials can have a major impact on your site's conversion rates.

Consider this statement: *"Documented results show that just a few hours with [expert] can increase lead generation by 125%"*. Imagine how much stronger that assertion would be if there were some examples of the *"documented results"* and some customer quotes to that effect.

However, including a page on your site called *"What Customers Say"* doesn't do it - I can safely say that visitors don't go to those pages. And it's not just traffic reports that tell me this - whenever I ask a live audience *"Would you click this link?"* there's always a resounding *"No!"*

How to check for this leak: This is a much more subtle leak to detect, but it's an important one. The question here is whether you are potentially losing business because your site fails adequately to establish your value and credibility.

My recommended approach is to review your site for credibility-building content such as client lists, testimonials and case studies. You need to spread your testimonials through your site, using short one or two line excerpts that are relevant to the content of each page - whether it's about a product or a service, or the value of subscribing to your newsletter or blog.

Make sure that all of this material is linked to from other pages so that it's easily found by visitors. If you then experience an increase in calls, or in the quality of your leads, then you **might have just fixed a leak!**