



When online is off-target

**Nobody likes your website: why?
Jonathan Richman has a few suggestions.**

Paul Pannifer

When it comes to making successful digital marketing programs, oftentimes the same four mistakes are made over and over (sometimes more two or more of the four). Once you understand

what they are, they're actually easy to avoid if you're willing to change the way you think about digital marketing. Here are the digital marketing sins that cause your customers to say: "We Hate Your.com".



Blunder 1: Trying to do it all

I get asked one question a lot. It's one for which my answer changes from day to day based on what I've seen recently. The question is this: what is the worst website you've ever seen? As someone who has seen his fair share of terrible sites and beautiful ones, this is a difficult question to answer. Sadly, there seem to be no limits to the number of competitors vying for this position and the competition is fierce at times. The reality is that there are a lot of 'worst' websites out there. But if you need one visual, I'll supply it.

Anyone who looks at the site above, even if they've recently been brought to civilization within the week, knows that something is wrong here. What it lacks in 'white space' it makes up for with, well, everything else. All it seems to be missing, by my accounts, is a dancing baby animation. That's the problem of course, it's got everything, which makes it impossible to see or focus on anything.

Now, before you start chuckling at this example, let's take a look at your website. I'm fairly certain it isn't this busy or cluttered, but

if it's like most sites, it may as well be. Most brand sites suffer from the same issue. They try to do everything (seeing the parallels from my example to your site yet?). You have all of your 'key messages,' probably a few 'call to action' boxes or links. You've also got some giant images from the photo shoot on which you spent a small fortune to secure time on that private beach in Madagascar. You've got links to your other sites and probably to any brand extensions you have. You've got a call out or (ugh) a pop up featuring your latest promotion. You almost certainly have a few different boxes imploring me to like your page or share it with friends and I know you have a sign-up box for your email program. Am I close? Should I keep going?

How many more things do I need to list before your site starts to sound even more cluttered than our example? And while doing this on a website is bad, doing it within an application is a disaster. Apps are supposed to be a streamlined experience. The more you add, the worse they are, as they become too hard to use and defeat their own purpose.



Blunder 2: Random targeting

For most big brands, you can probably find a study laying around that cost well into the six figures that was commissioned to help identify ‘the target.’ That’s ‘target’ as in the people who are the ideal audience for your brand messages.

Fortunately, we use this information fairly often. We pick the right age people to show up in our TV commercials and pick the right magazines to place our print ads. But, when it comes time for digital marketing, we seem to forget who our target really is. Just because it’s digital doesn’t mean that Marketing 101 rules don’t apply.

Just like this ill-fated ad (above) for denture cream at the X-Games (PS: not a real ad, but rather some semi-fancy Photoshop), we often make these same types of mistakes online. This happens when we don’t bother to understand what our target really does online and what they are likely to do. If the average person in your target audience doesn’t own a smartphone, it doesn’t make much sense to create an iPhone app. Obvious, right?

Apparently not because I seem to see at least three brands a day that are targeted to nice, old ladies asking them if they want to follow the brand on Twitter. Twitter? What’s that?

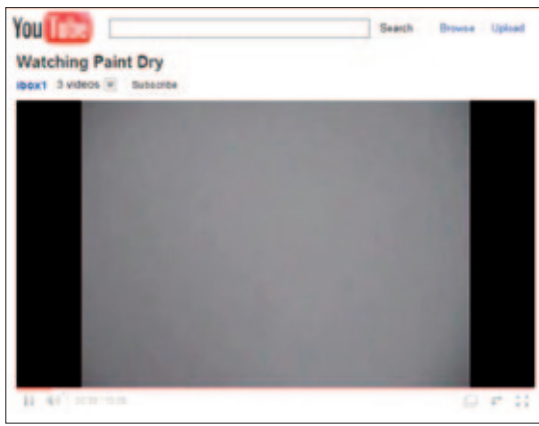
Blunder 3: Bored to death

Many of the digital marketing programs I see out there have a common, fatal flaw. They’re boring. And not just a little boring, mind-numbingly boring. Remember how we redefined your competition online a while back? Boring won’t cut it against this competition. This blunder is as simple to recognize as it is difficult to avoid. You see, creating content that isn’t boring isn’t easy. Very few people can do it. It’s a skill and a gift. There’s a reason why not every movie wins an Academy Award and most new shows get cancelled. There’s a reason why about 30% of all videos on YouTube have less than 100 views and 55% have less than 500. The reason: they stink. They are boring and not remotely interesting to watch. Many of these are of the home movie variety, but others are expensive production efforts done by major companies.



Sure, there are probably some undiscovered gems among the hundreds of thousands of videos uploaded each day, but most wouldn't be missed if they disappeared. Based on these percentages, your videos probably aren't watched by anyone and it's probably because they aren't that good. If you ever thought about disabling ratings on your videos for fear that you'd get bad marks, that's a good indication that your videos are bad.

And just to keep you humble, one of the videos of paint drying on YouTube has more than 200,000 views. How does that compare to your top videos?



Blunder 4: One for all and... one for all

There is nothing more frustrating to your customers than this final blunder. In a digital world where they are used to being able to easily search (and find) what they want, read reviews from friends, and customize their viewing experience online, your customers don't react well when all of this power is suddenly taken away.

This is yet another by-product of the new expectations your customers have for all digital content. They expect to be able to see what they want, when they want it, and exactly how they want it. That means they want to control and filter what comes in. They want to be able to view it anytime whether online or off. They want it in whatever format they feel like at that moment whether it be on their laptop or fancy new iPad. They expect this because they get it from other websites and it's exactly the experience that they're used to when it comes to mobile apps.

Many websites either allow their visitors to customize their experience in some way by

selecting which type of content they want. Others do this automatically based on what the visitor searched for to get there in the first place or by user profiles and cookies.

With apps, you'll find the most successful are those that are narrowly focused and allow people to view and absorb content exactly how they want to absorb it. People expect a personalized experience and it's your job to deliver it.

Yet, you don't do this. And you don't do it in almost spectacular ways.

Whilst the image below of an email from Product-a-Rama is a fake (but it's not far off from what I actually get each day), it should illustrate a few key points. First, a bad attempt at personalizing something is almost worse than doing nothing at all. In this case, the fine folks at Product-a-Rama have tried to personalize my email with everything they know about me. The problem is that this isn't much, so they can't tell much more beyond the fact that I'm likely a human with a four-chambered heart. And, because they don't know me and haven't invested the time to really personalize my experience, I get some disparate and wildly untargeted offers that include, in this case, 'sexy' boots, horse feed, and vinyl siding.



If you find yourself chuckling at this absurd example, look a bit deeper. You might find that it's nervous laughter because you know that you've been guilty of this before in the past. Someone sends me offers for women's shoes every month even though I've made it pretty clear that I am, in fact, a man. You know who you are. ■

Jonathan Richman
Possible Worldwide, Cincinnati
We Hate Your.com

