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Creating and Maintaining a Successful Website

© Mr. Lace A. Wilson – Owner & Creative Designer of Furry Friends Web Design

Dear Stacy,

Everyone says it, we hear it all of the time - "The pet industry is booming!" Well, it's nothing short of the truth. According to the American Pet Product Manufacturers Association (APPMA), consumer spending on pets continues to climb, expected to reach \$35.9 billion this year, up from \$17 billion just a decade ago! Consumer spending just doesn't mean food dishes and toys either, folks; we're talking everything from day care, to grooming, to homemade gourmet treats, to pet massage – and everything in between. With pet lovers continuing to look at their "pet" as more of a child these days – more and more people are turning to the #1 source to spend their money AND make their money – the World Wide Web.

As the owner of a web design company that caters exclusively to the animal community, clients contact us with one of two main requests: they either want their own website, or they already have their own website yet it's not working for them as well as they had hoped. Both types of clients want to know just one thing...

How in the heck do you create and maintain a **SUCCESSFUL** website in the pet industry?!



No matter what your niche, no matter what service or product you're selling, follow these ten tips to get on the road to success!

1) Decide on a domain name for your new website. It should reflect the name of your business and be something catchy and easy to remember. Remember the saying "Keep It Simple Stupid"? Now is a good time to! Domain names, or URLs, should be kept as short and as simple as possible. Avoid hyphens and keep the URLs under 25 characters if possible. Check to see if your desired domain name is available [here](#).

2) Steer clear of free web hosting services (such as Geocities, Homestead, AOL, Tripod, etc.). Having a free web hosting account might seem like a bargain at first, but it's difficult to form a trusting bond with your potential customers when your site is frequently unavailable and your content is cluttered with ads. Not to mention, it's quite difficult to get listed properly in search engines with a website that is hosted on a free service. There are

plenty of web hosting companies that offer great rates, impressive features, and low down-time. Shop around and do your research before making any decisions. We highly recommend [1&1 Hosting Service](#) as they're one of the top hosting companies in the world, offering their customers the lowest rates to be found anywhere when compared to their unbelievable features and 99.9% uptime.

3) If you're completely unfamiliar with coding such as HTML and CSS, now is the time to self-educate a bit. There are an abundance of tutorial websites out there to learn from – we like [htmlgoodies.co m](#) – it's a great starting point! If you don't have the time or desire to learn proper coding techniques, you're left with two choices: you can either use software that uses a point and click interface to build your website yourself or you can hire a web designer to do the job. The point and click software, commonly known as website builders or website editors, are another one of those things that seem like a great bargain – especially when the finished product looks like a professionally designed website. But, what you and your visitors can't see behind the scenes – the actual coding of your website – is such a mess that your website puts off search engines instead of welcoming them. Website builders don't care about proper coding – their goal is to make the finished product LOOK as professional as possible. I highly doubt that having a fancy looking website will matter to you if it's not getting any traffic!

4) Avoid using clipart, animations, background images/textured backgrounds, background music, and any other sort of fancy, cutesy things. Sure, you think it adds entertainment and flair to your website (especially if you're new to all of this!) – but your visitors find it annoying and want to get away from your site as quickly as possible. Your goal is to make your website inviting, not coma-inducing. To do this, offer your visitors what they came for – quality content. Give them a reason to stick around and browse through your website, give them a reason to bookmark it or add it to their favorites, give them a reason to tell others about it. Always, always, always put yourself in the shoes of a potential customer!

5) Pay for a design company to custom design a logo for your business. Don't even attempt to do this yourself or get your son's high school buddy who is good with computers to do it for you. Your logo is the face of your business and it will be **everywhere** – from your website, to your online and offline advertising, to your business cards, and everything in between. Deciding a year or two down the road that you hate your logo and want to get a new one will cost you plenty more money (and headaches!) than if you just had one professionally designed from the beginning!

6) Find your voice – then use it and keep using it! Is your voice friendly, corporate, energetic, modern, hip, funny? Find out what message you want your business to give off and don't ever lose it. This voice should be present everywhere – logo, design, client communications, inventory, advertising – all areas of your business should reflect your voice once you've found it.

7) What happens if you can't compete with the prices being offered by your competitor(s)? Well, for starters, you don't ever let that discourage you! People are willing to give their business to those who earn their trust, make them feel valued and appreciated rather than give it to Joe Schmoe who can offer the same product or service for a few bucks less. If you can't compete on price – compete on service! Spend as much time as you can getting

to know your clients, show them that you value them and appreciate them – and they'll be yours for life!

8) Keep the content of your website fresh and inviting. A **good** website is never truly completed – it's always being edited, added to, improved. Give your visitors and customers a reason to want to keep coming back to your site – and it's not by having the same old stale information. Make your site interactive; offer surveys, contests, free gift certificates, polls, news, sales, etc. Make your visitors feel involved and valued (there's that word again!)

9) Passivity never works. Activity, however, does. So, what do you do once your new website is up and running? Sit around and wait for people to somehow stumble upon it? No way! Get out there and start advertising your website and your products/services to the world! Visit forums and message boards, visit other pet-related websites and contact them to ask if they would like to exchange links with you, submit your website to pet-related directories. These means of advertising are usually rather time consuming but they're free. To help speed up the process a bit in the meantime, seek out websites that attract the kind of traffic that would also be interested in your website – find out if they offer paid advertising on their site. You can also receive paid advertising in Newsletters, E-Zines, Message Groups, and other similar means.

10) Last, but certainly not least - **never, ever** trust your website, your business, and your money to a so-called "expert" freelancer or "expert" firm who claims they can get you top placement on search engines. First of all, search engine placement is **never** something that can be guaranteed (not even by the search engines themselves!) We've had so, so many clients who have contacted us near broke and overly frustrated, asking us to help, telling us that they've spent several thousand dollars on "guaranteed" services. A website's placement on search engines has a hundred different factors – including complex algorithmic formulas – that are constantly changing. The sure and best way to get your website decent search engine placement is through hard work, knowledge, dedication, and by leaving the more difficult Search Engine Optimization (SEO) services to a company that you trust – a company that values you, patiently explains things to you, encourages questions, and keeps you well informed.

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© Mr. Lace A. Wilson – Owner & Creative Designer of [Furry Friends Web Design](#)– is a business owner, entrepreneur, and a very proud Daddy to eight furry babies!

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