



The Professional's Website: So Fresh and So Clean

By: Joe Geisman

About 12 years ago the rap group *Outkast* released a song entitled “*So Fresh and So Clean*,” which featured a chorus proclaiming how extraordinarily “dope” or cool the members were in their unique attire (<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=120255173>). The qualities referenced in the title – freshness and cleanliness – are of course applicable beyond the fashion and music industries. In this post, I want to focus on websites that are developed for providers of professional services (i.e., attorneys, accountants, consultants, real estate brokers, etc.) and the important role that these two characteristics play in both the development and maintenance of such websites.

Cleanliness refers to the overall structure and design of a website; whether it’s user-friendly or difficult to navigate. Simplicity and ease of usability – which are typically achieved at the website development stage, when the site map and wire frame are constructed – are especially important for providers of professional services. Companies looking to hire outside professionals typically value usability over appearance. They are interested in locating information about the firm, its professionals, its service offerings and its areas of expertise. And they want to access this information quickly through a familiar and uncluttered home page and navigation bar. What they don’t want are superfluous subpages and redundant copy that makes the relevant information more difficult to find.

This is not to suggest that poorly designed or outdated websites are acceptable so long as they are easy to navigate. Clients, prospects and referral sources are put off by websites that look like they were developed over a decade ago and not suitable for the devices on which many websites are accessed today. But while design and visual elements are important, such considerations should not trump functionality and usability.

Freshness, on the other hand, refers to the age and accuracy of the content on the website. Unlike cleanliness, freshness requires an ongoing commitment, whether in the form of a professional’s own time or the budgeting of funds to outsource website maintenance.

In today’s competitive business environment, it is imperative for providers of professional services to always have relevant, valuable, accurate and up-to-date content on their websites. A website is how a professional presents herself online. It is a controlled platform that can be used to demonstrate a professional’s expertise and affect the first impression that is made on prospective clients and referral sources. To maintain a website’s freshness, the relatively static information on the site – things like biographies and practice summaries, which communicate who you are and what you do – should be updated regularly to reflect ongoing experience and accomplishments. In addition, new content – such as industry news, press releases, articles, blogs, and so on – should be added on a regular basis.

At bottom, when it comes to websites developed for providers of professional services, freshness and cleanliness are especially important qualities. And maybe, just maybe, by having a website that is both fresh and clean, even a provider of professional services can proclaim herself to be extraordinarily “cool” – well, at least on the Internet.