The Story Behind the Stone
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Online and up to speed for jewelers

Jewelers, designers and suppliers have made strides in understanding what's in it for them by utilizing the Internet to promote their brand and capture an over-scheduled and stressed consumer who says, "Time is the new luxury."

Just a few years ago, an online presence for jewelers seemed like a forward thinking option. Today it's critical to survival and growth, industry leaders would agree. Yet many designers and merchants secretly suspect they aren't using this technology to its best advantage.

Lingering questions persist with merchants. Are we getting it right? Are we really reaching the market we intend and how can we increase market share via the Internet? Scariest of all - how can we keep up with the runaway train of technology? Technology is evolving before we can process and utilize last month's hot new app.

Here's a candid conversation with Marlene Murphy, the techno wizard behind Jewelry Website Designers www.jewelrywebsitedesigners.com. Implement any or all of the tips presented that you find helpful to your business - we can all prosper together in this trade.

Q: What are the most common mistakes that jewelers stumble over when creating their website?

Marlene: In my opinion, jewelers, along with other businesses fail to think through their unique selling position. What do they offer that gives them a leg up over the competition and sets them apart from those merchants selling the same thing? Then they should focus their website message on promoting those strengths and unique traits. Countless merchants seem to want to display online catalogs with every possible item they have to sell in hopes that something will attract shoppers instead of first hooking the consumer and then guiding them to the right purchase.

Finding the right web developer is crucial. There are oodles of high school kids and fresh-out-of-college computer geeks who can handle the technical aspects of website creation very cheaply. Yet they lack training and experience in sales, search engine optimization and marketing. In particular, it's key to have engaging web content which sells and contains the right combination of targeted search phrases which help achieve top search engine rankings. A good web developer will possess multi-faceted skills, or has a team of specialists who create the entire package.

Q: What are the most common misperceptions that jewelers have about their website - like how it should perform, or what their expectations are?

Marlene: Online Retailers often think that all they need is a website which in turn will drive their products to the top of the search engine results, and thousands will flock to buy their goods, resulting in another success story.

Use Google to search for any product you like. You'll see millions of pages of results matching your search term. The question is; what makes your site or product warrant a top ten placement?

Web marketing just begins with a website - web owners need to budget for aggressive marketing and promotion of their site; whether it's social media marketing, pay-per-click, or print advertising.

Q: Thinking about merchants starting from scratch, what advice would you give them to get going in the right direction?

Marlene: It boils down to why - what - who - how. Decide why you want a website, what you want to accomplish, who your target market is and how you will measure success. Be clear about your specific goals. Refrain from generalities like "I want to sell my jewelry online." Be very specific, "I want to sell 10 of my custom designed charms to teenagers in the Midwest every day." By clarifying your goals, you and your web developer will have concise marching orders of how to achieve those goals.

Q: For those who've had a website for some time that has not performed to their expectations, what should they investigate as a potential trouble spot?

Marlene: Just as the jewelry industry is ever evolving, the web is changing almost daily. New technologies, laws and regulations track in tandem with increased competition. What worked five or even three years ago is now woefully passé. Websites need to be kept fresh and contemporary, offering current information and engaging content to potential customers who will then rely on the site for valuable resources to which they'll return time and again.

Q: What use of technology do you see jewelers using that are not delivering results or driving traffic to them, and why?

Marlene: Jewelry designers are essentially artists, aren't they? So they lean toward creating ethereal designs in Flash technology, with fading abstract artistic pages and background music – much like they were producing a foreign film. While it may please the jeweler-artist, it often leaves the visitor confused as to the real purpose of the site. The bewildered visitor quickly hops off site and the jeweler forfeits a sale.

Flash movies have utility in web design, but a complete site built from Flash, can be perplexing to visitors. More importantly, it derails Search Engines which

only see the site as one movie with no critical textual content. On the web, "content is King." If your content can't be read by Search Engines, there's no chance of being recognized - no matter how charming and well written your content was. It will never achieve the rankings you need for visitors to find you.

Q: What advice would you give to anyone who wants to get more visitors to their site?

Marlene: A couple of things come to mind; Google recently launched "Google Places" which was originally tested as "Google Local". Google's new technology assumes that if you are searching for a jewelry store you prefer results in your own geographical area and not sites that could be thousands of miles away. So at the top of the search results they display the top 7 jewelry stores in the searcher's area, with links to more. Brick and mortar stores should strive for ranking in this "seven-pack" rather than trying to compete with millions for top placement in generic search results. There are companies that specialize in this ranking service.

Non brick and mortar stores seeking top generic search engine rankings will benefit from valid coding. That's tech jargon for the invisible stuff that makes a web page display, and the well-written targeted content that's updated frequently. Right now Social Media like Facebook and Twitter are enjoying popularity, but mobile sites are the next big deal.

Q: This is as good an example as it gets of technology's speedy race into the future. What exactly are mobile sites?

Marlene: Mobile sites are scaled down versions of regular websites, and are created to accommodate the growing number of consumers who utilize their mobile phones to connect and shop directly from the Internet. Most mobile phones nowadays access the Internet with limited navigational functionality. Without a mouse, mobile phone users must rely on arrow keys to advance from page to page.

Even the smartphones like

Marlene Murphy, the technology expert behind www.jewelrywebsitedesigners.com.

iPhone and Droid have problems downloading large web pages with lots of images. It's just painfully slow to display on a mobile phone. Practically none of today's phones can handle Flash technology. Until mobile phone capabilities are on par with laptop computers, special mobile sites will serve this demanding sector.

Q: How tech-savvy do jewelers need to be to keep up with their own website?

Marlene: First they need to own a computer. I'm not joking. I've had business people shop for a website who either don't own a computer or worse, don't know how to access the Internet once they turn their computer on. It's like shopping for a horse if you've never ridden one.

Honestly, a jeweler with only basic computer skills can learn to manage their website content if the administration system is simple and intuitive. However, many of the mundane tasks like adding new jewelry items can be outsourced to a high school student on a per need basis, leaving the jeweler to focus on more inspirational and rewarding tasks - like designing and selling jewelry.

Website promotion can also be economically outsourced to marketing specialists for social media, pay-per-click advertising and other targeted promotional efforts, like placement in the Google Places top 7.

Q: Technology is moving so fast, it's hard for even 'insiders' to keep up with the advances being made - especially in regards to applications from which jewelers could benefit. What are some of the hottest apps and technology that jewelers should consider using in their websites?

Marlene: Technology is advancing so rapidly that by the time this interview is published, my latest exciting 'fave', jQuery, which does amazing things with interactive web pages - like updating and changing page content, rotating images without refreshing the web page - will probably be in its next evolution.

Look at the diamond on the Jewelry Website Designer site (Portfolio page) which revolves from a crystal rough to a brilliant cut. That's an entertaining and visually informative application!

HTML 5, the latest web page presentation technology currently under development which will be widely available soon, is designed to improve the inclusion and handling of multimedia (video and audio) and graphic content; offering web surfers a better user experience.

The colossal popularity of YouTube made Internet users expect video content like how-to instructions. Search Google for "How to Build a Pandora Bracelet" and find numerous videos on this topic. Well done videos draw visitors to your site and convert them into paying customers. They might establish your business as the authority on a topic resulting in lots of incoming links and higher page ranking.

Static web pages with blinking images and irritating pop-up windows are dinosaurs. Today's web surfers want inter-activity and real time response to their questions with applications like "Live Chat" or "Online Help" where they converse with a live person – rather than filling out a form and waiting days for a response. The Internet is all about *now*.

Award winning trade journalist and gemologist Diana Jarrett is also a Registered Master Valuer Appraiser and a member of the National Association of Jewelry Appraisers (NAJA). She's a popular speaker at conferences and trade shows. Jarrett writes for trade and consumer publications, various online outlets, and for sightholders and other industry leaders.. Contact her at info@dianajarrett.com, visit her website, www.dianajarrett.com, and/or follow her on FaceBook and Twitter (Loupey).