"How to Create Successful Websites"

Experience shows a large percentage of websites fail to get results.

Yet, Stefano Boscutti has created successful websites for Orica, SBS, Foxtel and others.

We've created over 170 websites. There's no magic formula. Each website evolves from a specific market situation and objective.

We've spent $650,000 researching websites and user experience. And we've found out a great deal about what makes a website succeed.

Here are 24 of the things we've learned.

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People aren't online in order to see your website. One website in 50 makes a good impression on the viewer.

Few companies can survive without a website. It's the most effective medium ever invented for communications.

What follows are some ways you can get the most for the money you invest in a website.

1. Universal truth. Communications is an art, not a science. People first make decisions emotionally which they then rationalise logically. Putting logic before emotions in any communications puts the cart before the horse, the media buy before the idea. Despite recent upheavals in media, people all over the world across every demographic want what they've always wanted - love, acceptance, beauty, health, nutrition, community, social status, relief from suffering, transcendence. Ease up on the technology and the code. Go for the humanity.

'The engineers of the future will be poets.'
Terence McKenna

2. Everything is communications. Advertising, public relations, corporate affairs, marketing, branding, design, etc. It's all communications. Every way your brand interacts with people via your website is an opportunity to communicate successfully. Or not. Every problem is a communications problem. *(And every communications problem is a writing problem.)*

3. Unifying personality. Ninety-five percent of all communications are created ad hoc. Most brands lack any consistent personality from one year to another. This breeds scepticism and distrust, and weakens the brand over time. Define your brand's distinctive personality. List your unique qualities and bring them to life every way you can.

4. Most important decision. What you say is more important than how you say it. Your most important decision is *how to position your brand.* Should you position Qantas as an airline - or as the spirit of Australia? Should you position Lexus as a luxury car - or as an idea in pursuit of perfection?

5. Make a promise. Once you determine how to position your brand, boil your communications down to a simple promise. Then deliver that promise via your website as if your life depends on it. *Keep it simple.*

6. What's the big idea? It takes a big idea to jolt viewers out of their indifference - to make them engage with your website, enjoy a positive experience and take action. Big ideas are usually simple ideas - like the triple drumsticks beating the drum we devised for Triple J, still running after 20 years.

7. Be consistent. Good websites are sometimes pulled before they've begun to pay off. Your brand image implicit in your website should be consistent from year to year. Awareness takes time.

8. Have a heart. You're communicating with human beings. They cannot be bludgeoned or bored into paying attention. A website that is warm and human is more likely to succeed than one which is cold and impersonal. Stefano Boscutti's website for SBS delivered a strong promise of human stories in a human way. After 12 months, audience share had grown in every category while setting new ratings records.

The techniques that work best on websites

You must find a way to stand out from the 10,000 websites the average viewer sees in a year.

You will seldom be noticed and remembered unless you blaze new trails.

Stefano Boscutti attempts to create unconventional websites for every brand they work with.

Here are some techniques that we've found work best. But to stand out they must be executed in an unorthodox manner.

9. Demonstrations. A website allows you to demonstrate the benefits of your products and services. Words are important but not as important as pictures in demonstrations. Let your products do the talking.

10. Testimonials. In an era when people are growing more sceptical of brands, testimonials by genuine, satisfied buyers can be one of your most effective communications tools. They can help increase returns faster than projections.

11. Continuing presenter. Websites built around a continuing presenter - a character who appears in all communications and becomes associated with your brand - often work for years. But make sure that your brand isn't overpowered by the personality of your presenter. You're asking people to buy your products and services, not your spokesperson.

12. Celebrity presenter. People love to look at celebrities. They afford instant awareness. Before you use a famous person, be sure that he or she likes your products and services. If your presenter is not convinced, your viewers will see they're lying. No one likes a liar.

13. Slice of life. Websites featuring slices of life work because they're based on the simplest form of teaching - the dialogue. Questions from a Doubter are countered by persuasive answers from a Believer. Eventually, through dialogue, the Doubter is converted. This method of teaching worked well for Plato. It still works today. Although without conflict between Doubter and Persuader, it will fail.

14. Story appeal. Stefano Boscutti has achieved noteworthy results with websites structured as a story. People are naturally drawn to a universal narrative sequence that puts them at the heart of a story that leads to transformative success. Brands that make themselves the hero of the story miss the point entirely and waste everyone's time. No one likes (or believes) a braggart.

How to write better websites

Good writing and good copy are key to creating a successful website.

The better the writing, the more successful a website will be. But good writing is not a natural gift.

You have to learn to write well.
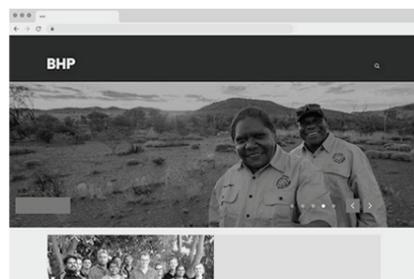
'Without words even the biggest website is meaningless. It's the copy that creates the meaning, the value. Improving your copy is the quickest and most affordable way to improve your website. Choose your words carefully.'
Stefano Boscutti

15. Do your research. Find out which words people use when they search for your products and services. They're usually different to the ones you think they use.

16. Avoid professional jargon. Don't talk about 'cooling solutions' if your viewers are searching for 'fans' or 'air conditioners'. Use the same language your buyers use. Make it casual, conversational.

17. Use 'you' more. Use the word 'you' more than the word 'we'. This speaks directly to the viewer. Rely on the word 'we' and they'll switch off and go elsewhere. Talk about the buyer, and how the products and services help them personally.

18. Avoid clichés. They're dull. So are words like 'innovative', 'passionate' and 'proactive'. They bore people - they've already read the same empty phrases dozens of times this week.

19. Highlight benefits, not features. Very few people read whether your new paint has a patented chemical formula. What they do want to know is whether it's easy to apply, quicker to dry or non-toxic. Is it? Then say so.

20. Simple words and short sentences are best. If you want people to pay attention, get your point across before they have a chance to nod off. Say what you want to say in clear, simple language.

21. Ignore the grammar police. The object isn't grammatical correctness but to welcome the reader and then tell a story. Who says you can't start a sentence with 'Because', 'As' or 'And'?

Because you can. As you're writing for people in their own language. And not for an audience of nitpickers.

22. Long website pages work. It's a myth that you have to write short web pages. So far, you've read 1,295 words, and you're still reading. Research shows people are more likely to buy if your website uses effective long copy.

23. Break up your text. Use short paragraphs, lists, pictures, captions, quotes, subheadings, lines and boxes to give your page variety. If you do, more people will read to the end.

24. Insert relevant words in the right places. Ask your web agency whether there are relevant keywords in browser titles, heading tags, opening paragraphs and search engine code. If there aren't, change your web agency immediately. Stefano Boscutti can advise you.

Website production - How to get the most for your money

In the past decade, the cost of creating a website has increased significantly.

You need to make sure that the website you're creating is the right one. If you're testing several websites, use the cheapest production technique consistent with giving each website a fair chance.

Once you've found the right website, don't rush pell-mell into production. Have your agency's producers estimate a price for website production. Then ask website production houses to bid against that price. Compare the bids.

Some techniques are always expensive. If you use them, use them to full advantage.

How to review your website

Good research can help you decide if you have a good website. Stefano Boscutti has developed a review process for measuring emotional intelligence, key positioning, value promise and other key metrics.

This unique process highlights (and prioritises) which areas you'll need to concentrate on to make your website more successful.

Research can help you find the answer. But it's not, in itself, the answer.

The website is only as good as the products and services

The most powerful element of any website is the products and services it sells. People buy products and services, not websites.

In many successful websites the product or service sells itself. The agency simply represents it.

On the other hand, even the best website cannot sell a bad product or service beyond a first trial.

If your products and services are good, follow the guidelines on this page. Chances are, your website will be just as good.

'Do something different. Conventional websites will produce conventional results.'
Stefano Boscutti

Is there more?

These findings apply to most brands, most categories of products and services. But not to all.

Stefano Boscutti has developed a separate and specialised body of knowledge on what makes successful websites for food products, travel destinations, financial services, media properties and other industries.

But this special information is revealed only to the clients of Stefano Boscutti.

Stefano Boscutti

Want to make your website more successful? Stefano Boscutti has a comprehensive one-hour presentation on creating successful websites. If you'd like to see it, please email stef@boscutti.com