

“DON'T LET YOUR WEBSITE WREAK HAVOC ON YOUR BRAND.”

“WEBZILLA VS. BRANDOPOLIS”

BY DRU MARTIN, GUEST COLUMNIST

So many brands today rely on their websites as the most significant driver of their brand. Just like the famed beast of Japanese movie stardom, websites can either terrorize the city you call your brand, or be it's greatest ally. Websites are often the most prominent visual expression of a company's brand platform, and as a result, one of the greatest influences on how your customers *feel about you, your products or services* (ie: your brand).

A new site will be as conspicuous to your customers as a 50-foot lizard walking down 5th Avenue. But all too often web redesigns are not handled by the team that developed the original brand platform. The logo and brand direction may still be valid, but your website needs some brand 'evolution' (insert visual: Japanese soldiers with rocket launchers). Sound familiar?

Will the enormity of the website redesign process annihilate the brand you've invested so much into? I've outlined some critical topics that need consideration before any major website changes are set into motion:

- 1) Are your changes motivated by the need to provide 'something fresh?' You may have the wrong approach. A brand is a living, breathing web of relationships. So a plan should be set at the start that delivers a continuously evolving experience for your viewers. If your changes are continuously 'reaction' based, you're not guiding the future of your brand, you're chasing it's tail (insert visual: Webzilla eating Oscar Meyer mobile).
- 2) Be sure to stay true to your brand center. In most cases, if your new website or homepage plans are dramatic, you're making brand changes. Launching a new website is inherently a 'rebranding' process whether that was the intention or not. If the changes are wide-sweeping, you can put yourself at risk of losing the market share you've invested so much in. So be sure your additions or changes are based on very targeted, brand-centric objectives.
- 3) Avoid taking-out your brand when you launch your web attack. Many outcomes can be achieved without changing the brand experiences you deliver, and may be much less risky (ie: 'Giant Beast Ravages Carnival'). For example, your homepage may have the right information, but it may just need to be reprioritized, relocated or simplified rather than completely renovated.
- 4) And if your markets stretch far and wide, your business may depend on the search engine rankings you've worked so hard to attain. Great care should be taken with filenames, meta tags, headlines and site structure to prevent big hiccups in your visitor counts to critical content. Something as simple as providing sitemap information on the 'page not found' page can prevent you from losing a customer.

So how can you be sure that the new brand energy of your site will produce the results you'd hoped for? Consider bringing in reinforcements that are well qualified to lead your efforts, whether you're dealing with monster web emergencies, or epic brand battles.

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