

10 STUPID THINGS PEOPLE DO TO MESS UP THEIR WEBSITES... *AND HOW TO FIX OR AVOID THEM!*



LIBBY GILL & COMPANY

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Thank you for joining me to discover the ten stupid things that people do to mess up their websites. Of course, I'm not going to leave you hanging... I'll also share some really smart things you can do to fix those mistakes if you're already making them or, better yet, to avoid them in the first place.

I am passionate about helping people brand and build their businesses. And I believe that other than you yourself, your website is the biggest platform you have for establishing your brand. Before we go any further, I want to clarify what I mean by brand because branding can be really a confusing concept. It shouldn't be, however, if you think of it this way: Branding is simply the articulation of your authentic value across multiple platforms. Think of your website as the mother-ship of all your messaging platforms including your newsletter, your blog, your sales conversations, your social media profiles, even your "elevator pitch." In other words, it's the totality of the messages you put out to reach your ideal customers and to let them know about the unique value – whether product or service – that you can provide to them.

But that's not all... A brand makes a promise to the customer or the prospect. A successful brand – one that I call a Mindshare Brand because it gets into people's heads - delivers on that promise consistently over time. First, your brand message sets an expectation, then, you deliver on that expectation. What I do as a brand strategist is help you articulate your unique value, and then create powerful verbal and visual messages around your value that will establish your credibility and give you a competitive edge. After that, it's up to you to deliver on your brand promise. As a business coach I help clients with that, too. In fact, my promise is to help you take your brand and your business to the next level of success. If you want to know more about how I do that, feel free to call us at 310.440.4200 to schedule your complimentary consultation to see if coaching is right for you.

What I want to do in the next few minutes is tell you about ten of the most common mistakes that people make on their websites and how you can correct them. So counting down from the smallest to biggest mistake, here is my list of the Top Ten Stupid Mistakes People Make to Mess Up Their Websites...

#10 STUPID WEB MISTAKE - TOO MUCH INFORMATION

The number ten stupidest thing that people do to mess up their websites is being guilty of TMI, that is, giving Too Much Information. If you've got too much information, including copy, audio, video, boxes, checklists, photos, or graphics on any page – especially the homepage – of your website, you are at risk of sending your customers away in droves. Website TMI puts your visitors immediately on sensory overload. They don't know where to look, they don't know what to do, and this is really bad news for "capturing the mindshare" of your customer. Instead of winning their heads and hearts, you are sending them packing and increasing your bounce rate in the process. Your bounce rate is the number of site visitors who come to your website and immediately leave or bounce (hence the term bounce rate) before they even visit another page.

Here's the fix: Pare it down! It's just like cleaning the clutter from your office or home. Decide what is really essential for your site visitors to know about your business, then narrow it down to your core message and a secondary or tertiary message. Next, move all those extra details and additional information further down the page or onto one of your internal pages.

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If you've got a lot of extraneous stuff that you meant to get rid of a long time ago, now would be a good time to give it the old heave-ho. And when you're finished, go clean all those old clothes out of your hall closet! I've seen people who have pages that actually say "Updated in 2007" right at the top of every site page and I want to tear my hair out. It's bad enough that you haven't updated your site in years, but do you really have to make sure that everyone who comes to visit discovers that you've left your site to languish in cyberspace? After all, what kind of impression do you want to make? Make sure you prioritize and reorganize.

#9 STUPID WEB MISTAKE – LACK OF VISUAL APPEAL

The number nine biggest mistake that you might be making right now on your website is not having visual appeal, which usually comes down to bad use of graphics, flash or contrast. Your site doesn't have to win any design awards, but it must have strong visual appeal if you're going to grab and hold people's attention. And, just to up the ante a bit, you should know that you've only got about 4-6 seconds in which to grab them. That means you've got to have a professional, contemporary look. Please don't confuse "contemporary" with "modern," by the way, because modern is not the right look for everybody. By contemporary, I mean that your site has to be of today's web world with a good look and feel that is a true representation of you and your business.

Some of the biggest offenders to watch out for:

Tiny little text that makes anybody over 40 go absolutely bonkers. So stop with the teensy 8.5 font, your copy needs to be big, bold, and readable.

Contrast is also an important issue. Have you ever noticed how hard it is to read blue text on a green background, or even white on a black background? Yes, sometimes people do it for drama and emphasis, but it's not my favorite if it's difficult on the eyes of the reader. If in doubt, black or dark gray text on a light-colored background is, by far, the most readable.

As for graphics – and I warn you, I am a nut on this - your graphics need to be professional, creative and relevant. I had a client who was a big-time executive recruiter. For some reason she decided she needed this huge photo of a butterfly right in the middle of her homepage. It made no sense at all in the context of her work, and it wasn't even a particularly appealing graphic. I asked her why it was there, and she said she wanted something pretty on her home page. I'm all for pretty, but not if it needlessly takes up prime real estate and adds nothing to the message.

Here are my thoughts about "clip art," meaning those photos that you download or buy from the internet. Clip art is okay, but watch out for visual clichés. You know what I mean, those graphics you've seen a million times, the happy hands high-fiving or the stylish young workers with their snappy business suits and designer briefcases. All of those things are way overworked, just like the verbal clichés you've heard a million times and learned to avoid like the plague (did you catch that one I just snuck in there?). If you don't have an artistic eye, ask a friend who has a good design sense. Be sure to consider the best fix of all: Hire a professional to help you design your site, if not build it altogether. You'll be glad you did.

By the way, it is fine to use photos and images from stock footage sites like istockphotos.com, shutterstock.com or even Google Images, but be careful to check about copyrighted material before you grab an image you are not entitled to. And of course, use your own photos of your products, events or just you doing your thing whether that is speaking, coaching or dancing. Just make sure that you've got crisp, in-focus, professional images that are appropriate for your business. And remember to watch out for flash or complicated images that take too long to load. Your site visitors are impatient. If they have to wait for your pages to load, you increase the odds that they might decide to go elsewhere.

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#8 STUPID WEB MISTAKE – LIMITED CONNECTABILITY

The #8 web mistake is limited means of connectability with your visitors. If you don't have multiple ways to connect with people on your site (and across the web) you could be missing out on opportunities for creating relationships with your prospects or deepening relationships with your clients and your customers. With very few exceptions, most of you should have an email capture system to gather the email addresses of people who come to visit your site. While it's nice to have visitors drop by, if you don't capture their email addresses, you have no way of continuing the dialogue. This means you'll never have the opportunity to control the conversation or convert your prospects into paying customers, i.e. sell to them.

A note to those of you who think sales is a dirty word – get over it. If your site is meant to drive business directly or indirectly, you need to get comfortable selling. This goes for anyone selling a product, service, book or simply the opportunity to connect, influence or share. Just think of it this way – if you are passionate about what you do, you should also be passionate about the ability to share your value with as many people as possible. That's why you need multiple ways to connect with your audience.

And that means you've got to have an online system for gathering email addresses. So how do you get those precious addresses? Please, not with a "free newsletter." Most people really don't want one more email to hit their inbox. Instead, you've got to offer them a great freebie, what some people call the "ethical bribe," whether it is a free video series, an audio or an eBook (like this one) – and the value should be so obvious that this gift would be something your visitors would have paid for willingly. You will need some kind of email marketing system, such as Constant Contact, iContact, Vertical Response or Mail Chimp. Or you may wish to install a system such as Infusionsoft or One Shopping Cart that can manage your mailing list as well as handle affiliate marketing campaigns and e-commerce.

Be sure that you are also giving your visitors an opportunity to connect with you through social media. You need to post those little icons that are now universally recognized for Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube, Pinterest, and Google+ as well as orange RSS feed for your blog or your video show. Give your audience lots of opportunities and options for connectedness and then make sure you continue to communicate and stay emotionally connected.

#7 STUPID WEB MISTAKE – GETTING IN THE WAY OF THE BUYER

This mistake is something you never want to be guilty of and it's called getting in the way of the buyer. Anything on your site that slows down the sales process could be losing you business and prospects. Remember that sales includes getting your site visitors to give you their email addresses for that chock-full-of-value freebie that you're offering. Some of the ways you might be getting in your buyer's way include:

Forcing your customers to click not once or twice but multiple times to get where they want to go. The more times they click, the greater the chance that you'll lose them along the way.

Not having a phone number on your site. Okay, I know that some of you want email interaction only, but for most of us, a phone number posted in a very obvious place, like the upper right corner of every web page, is critical. Don't hide it on the Contact page only. I do recommend that you have a form on your Contact page so that people can submit a question or suggestion to you, but you should also include your phone number, email and land address. Note to those of you with home offices: get a PO Box (with an actual street address) and use that as your office address. Once your home address is out on the web, you put your own security needlessly at risk. And if you don't have a dedicated business line, you can search Google for free or cheap 800 numbers. For about \$10 a month, you can set up a dedicated voice mailbox. Be sure to set up a great personal greeting message and remember to check it every day.

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Slowing your customer down with flash or pages that take too long to load. Do you really think they want to stick around and wait while your fancy pages load? (Check out Stupid Mistake #9 for more on this.)

The best way to avoid getting in the way of your customer is to have a strong Call-to-Action on your website. Your call-to-action should not only invite but compel your visitors to do something - whether that's signing up for your freemium, clicking on a link, picking up the phone to call you, purchasing a product, or registering for a class that you're offering. Think of it as taking your prospect by the hand and walking them through your website. This means that the process must be intuitive and problem free and that your back-end operations are functioning properly at all times.

#6 STUPID WEB MISTAKE – ASSUMING ANYONE CARES

The number six stupidest thing that people do to mess up their websites may surprise you. It's assuming that anyone really cares about you, your business or your website. Face it, because that's the harsh reality. If you think people are coming to your site because they care about you, you are sadly mistaken. They are there for themselves, as they should be, and they're interested in the WIIFM Factor. That's wiff-em, as in, "What's in it for me?"

You can address that mistake by simply changing your mindset about your website. You need to change your thinking forever from it's all about me to it's always about them. This doesn't mean you don't have to explain who you are and why you've got the right product or service (more about that in a minute), you just have to remember to look at your site from your visitor's perspective. So make sure you get an objective opinion from a trusted colleague, friend or professional to see if your site delivers information your ideal customers actually care about. Ask yourself if your customer can find themselves, their stories and/or their pain in your site so that they know they are in the right place to get their problem solved.

#5 STUPID WEB MISTAKE – CONFUSING NAVIGATION

The #5 Stupid Mistake may seem like something very obvious, yet so many people are guilty of it: confusing site navigation. This is also an example of Stupid Mistake #7 Getting in the Way of Your Buyer. It's so important, though, that it deserves its own section.

Okay, here's the bottom line: Confusing navigation makes for a confused customer, and a confused customer is rarely a buying customer. Let me give you an example of what I mean. There is a house in Northern California that's become my metaphor for this mistake. It is called the Winchester Mystery House. The house was built by the widow of the heir of the Winchester Rifle fortune. Legend has it that the widow was so grief-stricken by the death of her daughter and husband, and that she felt so guilty about all the people killed by that very rifle, that over 20 years (and with apparently unlimited funds) she transformed her eight-room house into a seven-story mega-mansion with staircases that go nowhere and rooms that open into nothing.

Sometimes that's exactly what our websites look like. Maybe you're guilty of adding random pages or leaving broken links on your site - I know I have been. Or whenever something new pops up, you stick the information anywhere there is a square inch of open space. Pretty soon, you've got a hodge-podge that is so confusing your customers can't navigate their way through your site to save their lives.

The way to fix it is to regularly give your site a serious going-over. If you make a lot of changes, go through it once a month. If you make relatively few changes, check every link and page at least quarterly.

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Ask yourself the following:

- Does your navigation bar make sense at a glance? Or are you using cute and clever terms at the expense of clarity?
- Can people travel through your site with ease, readily locating the information they want?
- Are you following expected conventions of the web world?
- And, if you're breaking the rules, are you doing it for good reasons and with good results?

For example, most of us expect the Home button to be far left on your navigation and the Contact button to be far right. We expect to be able to click on the logo on the banner of each page to get back to the homepage. Alter those conventions at your peril.

Are your social media icons and your freebie sign-up easy to locate on your homepage or, ideally, on a sidebar on every page?

Again, check your site to see if it takes your visitors by the hand and leads them through your site, just like you'd take a first-time visitor on a tour of your home (which I hope is more logically laid out than the Winchester House). You also want to offer two or three different ways for people to find the information that they want. If you want them to learn about a video coaching course you're offering, for example, you might mention it on your Home page, then click through to your Coaching page or list it in the sidebar on every page. Don't worry about repetition, people search for things in very different ways, so give them several options.

#4 STUPID WEB MISTAKE – MISTAKING YOUR SITE FOR A MARKETING STRATEGY

Mistaking your website for a marketing strategy is a serious error in judgment and could be costing you business. Naturally, your site is a part of your brand and it should be a big part of your marketing strategy – but it is not, in itself, a strategy. Sooner than you think, you'll have to recognize that you need a marketing plan and a marketing budget to support your efforts, including keeping your site up to date. If you don't have a marketing budget already, a good rule of thumb is that it should be about 10% of your revenue. You've got to be dedicating those funds to your marketing budget, and you also need to start thinking about building a team if you don't have one already. This team might include a sales manager, marketing expert, social media strategist, designer and web developer, and perhaps a coach like me.

You may not need all these people at once, and they may not be all regular full-time employees. They could be contract players or outsource companies. Be aware of what you're building toward, who you need on your team, and how your website will support each of their functions. So, while your website isn't a marketing strategy, if done right, it can provide a strong foundation for your marketing strategy and your current or future team.

#3 STUPID WEB MISTAKE – YOUR CONTENT SUCKS

It drives me crazy that people will spend time, money and energy making their site look good, which is very important (see Stupid Mistake #9), but it's not all that's important. Why would you go to all that trouble and then have content that doesn't jump of the page and engage your site visitors?

Being able to pull in customers is what I call "Capturing the Mindshare." You've got to capture the mindshare with compelling content. In other words you need to get into the heads and heart of your prospects with relevant, original and well-written content that provides real value. That includes your blog, your social media posts, and everything that stems from your website, which is the primary expression of your brand and the mother-ship for your content.

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You can fix this mistake by scheduling the time to create great content, editing carefully, or employing a professional to do it for you. You cannot afford to have content that is boring, unoriginal or irrelevant to your readers.

You should also always be building content, whether that's by speaking, conducting workshops, writing blogs or books, or whatever best suits your style. Challenge yourself to create more content and give ever-greater value. It's not easy, but it can be done. If you want some examples, just check out the blog on my website and you'll see what I'm talking about.

#2 STUPID WEB MISTAKE – YOU HAVEN'T ESTABLISHED YOUR CREDIBILITY

The number two mistake can really be a business killer. It's not having a strong credibility story on your website, especially a brief grabber on your homepage. Your credibility story should also be in your Bio and your Testimonial pages. In fact, it should be wherever your visitors are going to go to learn about the results they can expect from you.

If you fail to distinguish yourself within your field, you are going to lose customers, revenue, and growth opportunities. Whether your prospects found you online or knew of you and came to your site to check you out further, trust me, they will also find your competition.

You can prevent or fix Stupid Mistake #2 by firmly establishing yourself as the "go-to authority" in your field. Here are some ways to do that:

Create value statements that sum up results that current or past customers have received, like "I can streamline your online marketing operations in three weeks." "I guarantee a clutter-free office that will last you six months or I'll come back and reorganize it for free."

Use powerful testimonials, that is, quotes from satisfied clients that tell about their experience working with you. These can be written or done via audio or video, but whatever way, they should be strong, specific statements about what you actually accomplished for your client, not just how great you are. If you don't have testimonials, here's a Branding Quick Tip to remedy that. Contact 5-10 customers you've worked with in the past and let them know you're adding Testimonials to your website. Ask them if they'd be willing to give you a quote about the results you achieved on their behalf. Offer to write a couple of sample quotes that they can edit – easier for them and better for you. Now post that Testimonial page, which you can also call Client Results, Praise, Reviews, even Love, whatever fits your tone and to your style.

#1 STUPID WEB MISTAKE – LACK OF CLARITY ON YOUR HOME PAGE

Drum roll, please... The #1 stupid thing that people do to mess up their websites is the lack of clarity of message on your Home page. The worst thing you can possibly do is have a prospect come to your website and not understand exactly what you do, for whom you do it and why you're right for them. It's got to be so clear that your nine-year-old nephew and your ninety-year-old grandma could both understand it at a glance.

When potential buyers, customers, clients, joint venture prospects, funding partners or anybody else with whom you might wish to build a relationship come to your site, you've got about four seconds to let them know who you are, what you have to offer, and how you deliver your value. It seems like a lot to pack into a little time and space, but remember you don't have to tell the whole story – only entice your visitor to want to read further (re-read Mistake #3) where they'll get all the details they need.

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Here's the fix:

Start with the WHO. Determine the most meaningful and memorable way you can describe yourself. No jargon, hype, or fancy titles that don't mean anything. Just use straightforward professional language. If you can be clear and clever, fabulous. If you can only be one, be clear. Clarity always trumps cleverness.

Next, describe the WHAT. Explain exactly what it is that you do for your customers and clients. For me, the WHO and WHAT is "I'm a brand strategist who can overhaul your online brand to give you a competitive edge in the marketplace." (I'm also a speaker, business coach and bestselling author, but just like you I have to tailor my message for multiple audiences....which is also how you build multiple revenue streams.)

Finally, define the HOW. Here's how I provide value - through one-on-one coaching programs, which is my "I do it for you" consulting work. Teleseries and webinars and [my online course](#), are my "do it yourself" programs. And there are also books, products, keynotes and more. My goal is that you find what you need in how I provide my services.

Of course, you've also got to establish the WHY. Why are you the best choice for the job? We addressed this in your credibility story in remedying Stupid Mistake #9. Once you've explained WHO you are, WHAT you do and HOW you do it, then backed it up with your value statements, testimonials and more, you are well on your way to having a very clear and powerful brand message.

Final thoughts: I hope you've learned a lot from this e-Book. Just remember that you've got four to six seconds to capture the mindshare of your prospects. And you must capture the mindshare before you're going to win market share. Clarity of message - and everything else listed above - will help you do just that.

Please let me know if this e-Book was useful to you. I always welcome your feedback (and, of course, your testimonials!) at Libby@LibbyGill.com. And sign up for my newsletter on www.LibbyGill.com so we can keep you updated on webinars, special offers, online courses, tips, tools and lots more.

Thanks for allowing me to help you brand and build your business!



Libby Gill is an executive coach, leadership expert, and international speaker. She is the former head of communications and PR for Sony, Universal, and Turner Broadcasting, and author of award-winning "You Unstuck: Mastering the New Rules of Risk-taking in Work and Life" and "Capture the Mindshare and the Market Share Will Follow."

Learn more about Libby's work at LibbyGill.com or take her career assessment at www.YourCareerQuiz.com.