



May 08, 2008

Case Study #CS853:

## **Persuading Management Your Website Needs Fixing Pronto: 4 Steps & Great Results**

**SUMMARY:** Overhauling a website can work wonders for a business. However, convincing upper management that a fix is worth the investment might take some persuasion.

Here's the strategy one marketer used to convince higher-ups to fund a full overhaul. The changes resulted in a 482% lift in SEO traffic, website conversions are up 43% and their cart abandonment rate dropped 20%.

### **CHALLENGE**

You can see the walls between you and stronger marketing. The hard part is convincing top managers to pay to tear down the walls.

For Rachele Deal, VP, Marketing, American Council on Exercise, the wall was the nonprofit organization's website. Among its deficiencies: an undefined target user, incomprehensible navigation, poor branding and no SEO strategy.

Deal and her team knew they needed to fix the site to sell more fitness training-certification materials and services. The problem was convincing ACE's management that investing more money in the website would bring in more revenue.

"They're looking at it from a dollar-and-cents perspective and a deadline perspective," Deal says. "When is this going to happen? When can I expect this increase? And what is it going to cost?"

### **CAMPAIGN**

Deal decided to go slow. First, she and her team ran a third-party usability and SEO diagnostic of the site, made a few quick changes and monitored the results. Then they drafted an overhaul plan and stated their case.

Management liked the plan and funded the overhaul. Here are the four steps they took:

-> Step #1. Conduct a third-party site diagnostic

Deal and her team knew some of the website's problems, but they wanted to make sure they uncovered them all. They hired a third party to run a site diagnostic, which took almost four weeks to complete.

-> Step #2. Identify quick fixes with big benefits

Next, they identified the site's target user: a person seeking to purchase materials related to fitness training certification.

They searched the diagnostic for three problems they could quickly fix for immediate results:

- o Chop down the navigation
- o Reorganize the navigation for the target user
- o Redesign the header

The three fixes took about three weeks to complete. Here's what they did:

#### Fix #1. Reduce links

ACE's left-hand navigation contained more than 110 links -- some of which were redundant or mislabeled. They chopped it down to just over 20 and started labeling more consistently.

#### Fix #2. Reorganize the navigation

Before the fix, "there was not a clear direction as to where to go and why you were [on the website]," says Deal. Users typically had to click five or six times to locate the information they wanted -- if they knew where they were going.

"Where [the navigation] says, 'Get certified,' that's really all we needed to do," get people certified, says Deal.

#### Fix #3. Redesign the header

"We really tried to just put too much information in [the old masthead] and were really even hiding the fact that we were the American Council on Exercise," says Deal.

Deal and her team cut down on the size, amount of text and added a more clearly branded design to the header. "It was more clear right away that you were on the ACE page. It was clear that this was a certification organization."

#### -> Step #3. Monitor results

Deal and her team monitored the results of the three changes for two months. They mainly watched:

- o Unique visitors
- o Return visitors
- o Page views
- o Conversions
- o Abandonment rate
- o Sales

#### -> Step #4. Present findings to management

Here are four areas Deal and her team needed for her presentation to management:

##### - Results

Deal presented the two months of results from the quick changes and compared them to the same months from the previous year. The results illustrated to management that an overhaul was a good idea.

The numbers were "enough to give [management] a taste of what was to come. It was nothing really phenomenal, with the exception of conversions. But really, it was coupled with the fact that I think they were ready to accept the fact, too, that we needed to change," Deal says.

##### - Road map

The third-party diagnostic of ACE's site identified a host of problems. Deal and her team listed the problems, grouped them by relevance and gave each three scores based on:

- o Time needed to fix
- o Resources needed (such as expertise or money)
- o Priority

"Without a doubt, you've got to go with that road map and a clear plan and say, 'This is what we need to do, this is a timeline in which we can do it and complete it,' " she says.

TIP: Plan a staged rollout to capture gradual results while the project is under way. Deal calls this breaking the project into "small digestible pieces" so management can see your progress.

##### - Third-party info

The vendor created the diagnostic and helped create the road map. Having its input in the

presentation greatly helped Deal argue her case. "Using that third party was definitely a plus on our side because we had someone with no vested interests now saying, 'This is what you do need to do to see these increases.' "

#### -Projections

If you want management to fund your proposal, you need to "make a leap of faith" and make some projections, Deal says.

They told management to expect:

- o 20% increase in sales
- o 10% lift in exam registrations
- o 20% increase in online course registration
- o 20% increase in online renewals
- o Stronger branding on the website
- o Fewer customer service calls

"We probably had a set of 10 goals that we went to the team with, some projections, and said, 'This is what this will do for us.' So, then our CFO could translate it to dollars."

## RESULTS

"It was amazing, the difference. With the aggressive goals we had set forward, we are in line of making them," Deal says. "We've totally exceeded some of the goals. And we're just shy of, but on track of, making our other goals."

Here are some results about a year after the transformation:

- o Monthly sales are up 16% to 17%, and rising
- o Website conversions are up 43%
- o Organic search conversions are up 482%
- o Repeat visitors are up 37%
- o Cart abandonment rate decreased 20%

"Our partners were calling in saying, 'Oh, my gosh, we're getting increased traffic now that you redesigned because people can find us now.' So we made our partners happy."

Deal had other non-tangible successes, too. "Because the site was so confusing in the past ... our customer service department ended up becoming a Web tour guide. The [redesign] dramatically decreased support calls, which allowed customer service do to what they're supposed to do, and that is sell."

When redesigning a website, your projections must be realistic, though, or you face disappointment. "It's very easy when you get caught up and you want this money and you know it's the right thing to do and you'll do anything to get it, it's very easy to increase those projections," Deal says. "My advice is to stay very realistic and to hold your ground because it's much easier to celebrate successes."

## Useful links related to this article

Creative samples from American Council on Exercise's website redesign:

<http://www.marketingsherpa.com/cs/ace/study.html>

BusinessOnLine - helped with site diagnostic:

<http://www.businessol.com/>

American Council on Exercise:

<http://www.acefitness.org/>

### See Also:

- [Web site & landing page design](#)

## Comments about this Case Study

**May 08, 2008 - Chris Bauman of [www.jobjett.com.au](http://www.jobjett.com.au) says:**

Great article. I have already referenced two of my colleagues to your site as they are

currently in the process of trying to convince the boss. Very timely. Chris

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