

Less Is More

Overpromising on your agency website is bad for business

By Matthew Davis

Much ink—and a lot of webinar time—has been devoted to the topic of agency websites leading to errors & omissions claims in recent years. The message is simple: Our insureds are getting skewered in lawsuits because they make grandiose promises on their websites, which then become “star witnesses” against the agency. Your own words are used against you in devastating fashion, over and over.



And yet, the problem persists. Why?

We hear a variety of reasons for these repeated, self-inflicted wounds. Many blithely suggest that “it’s just an ad!” Others respond that this is a concern for their E&O carrier.

We understand the easiest approach is to hand the keys to your website over to an ad agency that will fill it with the same hyperbolic guarantees they placed on the last 10 competitor websites. They rev up the “PromiseMaker 5000” website designer and crank out phrases like, “The best coverage at the best price!”

But does making one bold promise after another really do you any good? Research suggests that the answer is a resounding “No.” In fact, the recurring theme you’re likely to find is that in the long run, the best approach is to “under-promise and overperform.”

Big Commerce makes this point in its blog, *E-commerce Branding: 11 Examples and 27 Expert Tips to Help Build Your Brand Online*. “Never overpromise on your company. People absolutely hate disappointment. You do not want your e-commerce branding to be associated with false promises,” the post says. “Creating an untenable situation where you promise more than you can always deliver will alienate your audience and destroy the trust you worked so ardently to attain.”

In “All You Need to Know About Branding for Digital Products,” Net-guru continues this theme: “Promising people the world might seem like a good idea at first and might even be beneficial in the short term, but remember about all the places where the users can leave their reviews later.”

In “Over Promising Is Not Good for Your Business,” Percento Technologies writes: “In a bid to get ahead of their competition, many businesses today overpromise almost regularly. They don’t think there’s anything wrong with overpromising and that it will not land them in trouble.”

“Only someone who’s deluded or blind to the reality would say such a thing,” Percento Technologies continues. “Customers today have hundreds of choices available to them right at their fingertips. Therefore, the only thing that will make them return to your business after a first experience is delivering on the promises you made. The best way ... is by under-promising.”

Finally, “Differentiation: The Key Challenge For Professional Service Firms” by BrandTaxi states that in challenging times, two things can occur. “First, brands tend to amplify and exaggerate their brand promises to ensure that their voices are heard above the crowd. This often accelerates customer frustrations as claims are often filled with overpromise and become unbelievable to key audiences,” the article says.

“Second, brand marketers may become nervous and start to throw as many promises against the wall as possible hoping that some will resonate somewhere,” it continues. “This creates an atmosphere of uncertainty and wariness. To succeed in today’s world, it is imperative to resist overpromising ...”

So, what can you include on your website besides the proverbial name, rank and serial number?

Readily available research answers that question. It is expertise, not hype, that today’s customers want, according to Hinge Branding & Marketing. In its article, “B2B Website Strategy: The Expertise Driven Sale,” Hinge notes that today’s customers are most interested in:

- Relevant experience and past performance (35.1%)
- Team expertise and skills (33.4%)
- Knowledge of the industry and client business (20.6%)
- The ability to deliver results (19.6%)
- Good reputation (16.8%)

Hinge notes these results have changed since 2013, when “a good general marketplace reputation, price and cultural fit were the top three criteria.” In a nutshell, businesses will benefit from explaining who they are, where they’ve been and what they’ve accomplished—all in purely factual terms.

Walmart’s Sam Walton built a business empire by following a simple credo: “Exceed your customer’s expectations. If you do, they’ll come back over and over. Give them what they want and a little more.” Achieving that outcome begins with setting reasonable expectations and putting the spotlight where it belongs: on your agency and what it truly has to offer.

Matthew Davis is a vice president and claims manager at Swiss Re Corporate Solutions, working out of the office in Kansas City, Missouri. Insurance products underwritten by Westport Insurance Corporation, Kansas City, Missouri, a member of Swiss Re Corporate Solutions.

This article is intended to be used for general informational purposes only and is not to be relied upon or used for any particular purpose. Swiss Re shall not be held responsible in any way for, and specifically disclaims any liability arising out of or in any way connected to, reliance on or use of any of the information contained or referenced in this article. The information contained or referenced in this article is not intended to constitute and should not be considered legal, accounting or professional advice, nor shall it serve as a substitute for the recipient obtaining such advice. The views expressed in this article do not necessarily represent the views of the Swiss Re Group (“Swiss Re”) and/or its subsidiaries and/or management and/or shareholders.