

Web sites can be window to how a company does business

BY KERRY DUFF

Contributing Writer

Whether e-commerce, brochureware, or a full-blown database-driven membership management site, most companies have some type of Web site promoting their business.

Yet often these Web sites are neglected and outdated, lack a clearly defined goal or have an unprofessional appearance.

"Without a doubt, a Web site can harm your business," said Randy Taylor, co-owner of GraphicsGraphics Website Design & Development in Tempe. "If a company invests in a brand name and logo and Cousin Willy down the street builds the site with all kinds of animation jumping around, you can bet it will harm your business.

"Hire a professional Web site design firm, settle on a goal for your site and then work together to achieve the goal," he said. "A Web site is a constant, ongoing process that should present a good image of your company."

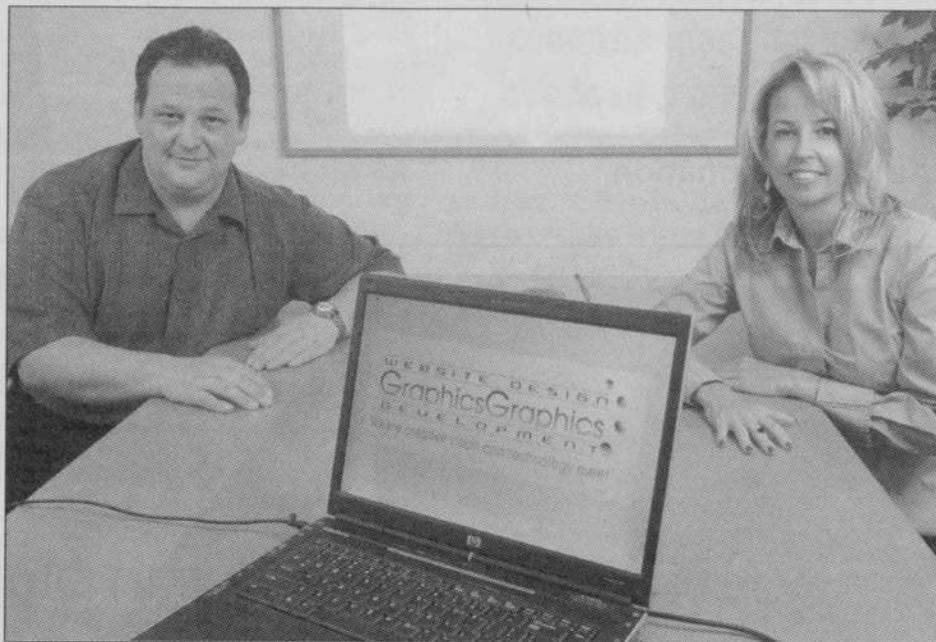
Corcoran Associates Business Advisors of Scottsdale, a business and program management firm, interviewed three local Web site design firms before hiring GraphicsGraphics in 2004.

Key in the selection was the company's portfolio of professional Web sites, level of customer support and the fact they offer ongoing site maintenance and development.

"We needed a company that does excellent work and has talented go-getters who will work with us to broaden our footprint in the industry we practice in," said Kelly Isley, a partner at Corcoran Associates.

"It was also very important for us to be able to submit copy, updates and design ideas to GraphicsGraphics on a monthly basis and let them implement the changes on the Web site. It's cost effective for us and saves us time."

For updates and maintenance, GraphicsGraphics charges clients by the hour and in 15-minute increments. A typical monthly bill based on customer need ranges from \$18 to



JIM POULIN/THE BUSINESS JOURNAL

Randy Taylor and Julie Still, co-owners of Tempe-based GraphicsGraphics Website Design & Development, say developing a firm's Web site is an ongoing process.

a couple hundred dollars, Taylor said.

"About 30 percent of our small-business customers make their own changes and updates to their Web site," he said. "Oftentimes it starts out this way, but then they call us back because they don't have time. We can do most updates and changes in 24 hours. I always say that I can change the oil in my own car, but it's easier and timelier for a lube shop to do the work."

Arizona Academy of Real Estate launched its first Web site six months ago when the school opened.

Gatesix, a Phoenix firm that offers Web development, Internet marketing, custom applications and business productivity solutions, created the custom-designed Web site so students can sign up and pay for classes online. Students have a username and password for the site, so they have access to the school calendar to see which classes they

have taken and which ones they have yet to attend.

Gatesix also created a do-it-yourself solution for the real estate academy, so its staff can update the school calendar and class schedules as necessary.

"Our students have to take 18 classes, but they don't have to take them in any particular order, so people lose track," said Nate Hoelzen, the academy's marketing director.

"Now they can look at the calendar online rather than ask the person at the front desk of the school. Before we launched the Web site we had a staff person who did nothing but answer those questions on a fulltime basis."

Arizona Real Estate Academy spent \$10,000 to have Gatesix design and host its Web site. A second phase of the site costing \$5,000 will be implemented in 90 days.

When that phase is executed, instructors

QUICK TIPS

Tips from for maintaining a successful Web presence:

- Keep Web site information fresh and up-to-date
- Track results
- Request feedback from clients and prospects
- Redesign Web site every two to three years to keep up with competition and changing technology
- If your business is best-in-class, make sure your Web site is, too

Source: Gatesix

will scan a barcode on each student's book to record and monitor class attendance. Right now, students sign in and then a staff member manually enters the information into a computer.

To assess the Web site's effectiveness, Hoelzen logs on daily to check search engine statistics. The stats substantiate how people found the site, as well as recording how long they spent on a particular page and how they navigated the site.

If visitors do not stay long enough on the pages that list and explain the school's programs, for example, Hoelzen can see that in the stats and make changes immediately.

RT Foods of Scottsdale, a distributor, marketer and seller of Tiger Thai tempura seafood, analyzes the effectiveness of its Web site by the number of hits. Officials also gauge success by the number of unsolicited e-mails from people praising the food and packaging and from the surveys answered by visitors to the site.

Gatesix designed the site for RT Foods and launched it in April to promote the company's

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