

## **Five Ways to Know If You Need A Pro**

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Some sites are built using “cutting edge advanced design techniques” that draw from several sources. Some have poorly structured databases. Some look as if they were slapped together seven years ago and have since existed as an afterthought. The one thing they all have in common is that they offer search engine spiders far too little information to grab onto. Having to negotiate between the needs of technically unfocused clients and the highly focused technical needs of the SEO staff, a SEO good salesperson can spot problem issues a mile away.

A few weeks ago, our sales manger and I scrolled through a number of potential client sites he had moved to his “problem-issue” file, compiling a dossier of examples of SEO-unfriendly sites that have come our way over the past six months. It’s amazing how much you can learn from the mistakes of others. It is equally amazing to see these basic mistakes repeated time and time again.

There are any numbers of basic, simple SEO mistakes, most of which are inconsequential, that find their way across our monitors on a daily basis. Here is a short list we consider today’s Top5.

### **1/ Multiple Pulls from the Similar Databases**

There are thousands of web-based businesses that exist to provide content-snippets for sites in specific industries. The real estate and travel sectors provide the best examples with MLS-esque listings and hotel recommendation affiliates. In both cases, websites tend to serve a limited geographic area that limits the number of options they offer. Since everyone involved in either sector wants to drive consumers to the same attractions, amenities and properties, their websites often draw from shared databases. In one extreme instance, we saw one travel page drawing from over a dozen local and international databases at the same time but presenting absolutely no original information, even in their title.

The shared databases themselves are not the problem. For the most part, they are actually very useful for agents and web-entrepreneurs. Our problem is in how they are often used by webmasters trying to set up their sites on the cheap. We see way too many sites that look exactly the same because they are exactly the same. While their color schemes and layouts might vary, the information found on those pages is not unique. Given the number of competitors looking for placement under the same set of keyword phrases, creating your own content is incredibly important. You can still use those shared databases but place them among your own descriptive content.

### **2/ Un-Optimized AdWords or YSM Landing or Entry Pages**

An interesting effect of Google’s AdWords program has been the development of stand-alone entry pages built specifically for users from different markets. There are two ways to work with AdWords or YSM entry pages, one that makes them part of a larger network and one that effectively blocks spiders from accessing the pages. Both are appropriate in different situations.

Regionally directed PPC campaigns can be crafted to target users from specific cities, zip codes and interests. For national chains, a visitor from New Hampshire can thus be directed to businesses based in Manchester, Rochester, Derry or Concord, while visitors from Washington can be directed to businesses

in Spokane, Bellingham, Olympia or Seattle. This has led to the proliferation of singular entry pages that exist as traffic-directors but are not really user or spider friendly.

In some cases, they shouldn't be. Unless they are part of a larger site designed for an intended audience, they should prevent spidering using [robots exclusion protocols](#) (the simplest: `<META NAME="ROBOTS" CONTENT="NOINDEX, NOFOLLOW" >`)

In others cases, PPC landing pages can be part of a larger chain of web documents that provide unique and useful content to visitors. There is a very large commercial cafe company that is slowly cluing into this trend. High-end real estate, popular music and online gaming companies are also early adopters of optimized landing pages, getting the benefit of high organic rankings, amazing relevant link networks and positive notches in their site-profiles. They can also be useful for local-search listings.

### 3/ Splash Pages

Splash pages still exist. Every year someone writes a list like this and includes splash pages as one of the most often made mistakes. The trend continues with a multitude of pages that say absolutely nothing about the subject matter of the site behind the veil they create. Often beautiful manifestations of multiple hours of work, the page is practically useless in its present form. In many cases, the work we would need to do on the page would harm the esthetic effect the designer was trying to create. To complicate things for SEOs, splash pages often precede sites designed with a multimedia experience in mind.

Sites designed entirely with FLASH are still proving difficult to place for most SEOs. Unless involved in the making of the files, adding header and descriptive information after the product is produced is simply not possible.

There are two ways to compensate, both of which require the creation of new documents. One is to make a series of HTML documents with the FLASH presentation embedded as part of the page and text information presented below. An other, easier way is to provide an HTML version of the FLASH show as a script for spiders to follow.

### 4/ Wal-Martization Effect

Does your database go on forever? We have come across dozens of catalog-based sites that resemble online versions of a Wal-Mart store, without the vaguest sense of style. These online warehouses never seem to end showing category after category of unrelated inventory.

Like the database driven sites of the travel and real estate sectors, these sites present a lot of information found on millions of other web documents, often without the benefit of context. The difference is, these sites really do go on forever.

A better idea for owners of such sites is to separate products and focus on presenting online consumers your wares in an easier to understand format. You can make a number of stores selling items from the same database, the point is to make sites that focus on specific topics, not sites that try to emulate the Wal-Mart experience of a million and one things under one roof.

While we are sure there must be a way to work with one of these mega-base sites, we need to stress that it will be extremely expensive to do properly.

### **5/ Poor User Conversions, lack of ROI**

By now, most established webmasters and site owners use some form of analytic tool to measure the success of their sites. For many, that tool is the stats provided by their ISP while for others tools such as WebTrends or Google Analytics compile more detailed stats.

There is one analytic that is available to a site owner that isn't found in the stats. That analytic measured is the money he or she is making from their online business. We hear from an increasing number of site owners who have good placements and relatively high traffic but report low user conversions.

From where we are sitting, site visitors are telling the site owner something and it has less to do with keywords the site places under than it does with how users relate to the site.

### **Rebuild and renew**

The value of a search engine friendly website, document or file cannot be understated. There are more ways to get information to interested Internet users than ever before. There are also a number of ways to mistakenly impede the flow of your own information. Fortunately, most blockages are easy enough to remove but some are simply too jumbled to deal with. That's when you might want to rebuild.