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So You Need A New Casino Website

Effective websites are possible—even for the computer novice

by Erin Jones

You aren't a web designer; you are a casino marketing executive in charge of making sure a new website is produced. HTML and Dreamweaver are not a part of your daily dialect. How do you begin?

Go to the Source

Research three to five potential agencies using the web. Two types of companies will reveal themselves—those that can be deemed tech-savvy and those that just make you go "wow."

There are literally thousands of online agencies in the country, hundreds of which possess the ability to bring such fantastical things as creatures to life in the virtual world, the newest web 2.0 techniques, or super-technology that will enable your site visitors to interact with a virtual cocktail waitress.

Who do you choose?

Choose the agency with the most pop and flash, right? These people are young, hip, cool. They have their finger on the pulse of this young industry, and it shows in their final products.

But do they know *your* customer?

Your customer is a gambler—these are the people you want to leave their homes and computers to come to your casino and play. So the dilemma remains. How do you create a site with all of the bells and whistles and still attract and satisfy your gambling customer base?

Start with the database.

It is the nucleus of your marketing efforts; it enables you to record play cycles, store dislikes and preferences, and project behavioral patterns of your players. When you query agencies with an RFP, the right one will understand the almost lifeline-like effect of the database, and will structure your site around it.

The responses you receive from your chosen pool of agencies should also include recommendations centering on acquiring as much about your consumers through their transactions as possible. It can look cool, too.

But gee-whizzery is only whizzery if it is relevant.

Below are just some of the ideas and functionality that should be proposed by your web designer and team. They are only possible if they bring them all back to

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the d-a-t-a-base.

Give them a place to call their own. Casinos can be big, even huge, but the more personal and intimate you make the experience, the more you can strengthen your brand. Try building a player's CRM module. With a personal login, your players will be able to check points, find locations for redemption, see their current direct mail/email offers, sign up for promotions, check their host's name and email them directly, check into their rooms from home and have the ability to view tee times and dinner reservations.

Integrating the players' history with their current reservations and upcoming deals gives them a single, easy-to-view snapshot of their upcoming experience, reduces waste and makes them the master of their own experience.

Talk their language. What entices gamblers? Quite a few factors—but all have the common desire to feel like a winner. Your website's functionality should showcase the 28 reasons they are a winner at your place. Then reel them in. A jackpot alert system is great bait. If you know a jackpot is nearing while in the comfort of your own home, wouldn't you be more likely to get up from the couch and head to the casino to test your luck?

Display dynamic online current progressive amounts and deliver an email or SMS alert to your database to let them know the jackpot is looming. Then, consider showing a running tally of how much players have won at your casino today, weekly or even monthly.

Make it easy and give them what they want. You work in the casino industry, an industry like no other. Your understanding of what gamblers want is your most powerful marketing advantage. Gamblers, like other online visitors, want to find information easily, and they want the functionality to be helpful, not just fancy.

They also want to play, eat and be entertained—all without wasting time. So sell things everywhere. Make sales prominent on every page (your reservation module, show ticket purchases or reservation engines). And as they shop, store their click-throughs and get to know them a bit more.

Make it look good. Prospective gamblers may very well first come in contact with your property through the virtual world. They want to be enticed by beautiful, real-life imagery. When they get to your property, they shouldn't feel as if they were fooled by the images on their computer screen. It should be the second-best thing to the real thing.

Don't make them jump through hoops to get to what they want, but do make it fun. And if you still want the "virtual experience," just ask. Your agency of choice should be fully capable of creating anything you need—even a virtual cocktail waitress.

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