The 5 COSTLY Mistakes

Most Camp Directors Make

Redesigning Their

Camp's Website

(and how to avoid them)

Hi, my name is Chris Davis. I'm the owner of DVS Camp Marketing—we specialize in designing and developing great websites for camps.

Working with many camp directors over the years, we've discovered 5 mistakes that seem to be the most common and costly when it comes to redesigning camp websites. We knew that these camp directors were all well-intentioned, perfectly intelligent people who had just made these mistakes because they weren't privy to the right information. And we realized that armed with the right information, any camp director would have a much greater chance of actually ending up with a website that achieves their most important goals.

So, I wrote this short E-Book and decided to offer it for free to you and the camp community at large in the hope that more camp directors will have what they need to make informed decisions while redesigning their camp's website.

I hope you find the information here useful and clear. If you have questions about anything in the E-Book, or if you'd just like to chat, I always love talking about camp and camp websites, so give me a call at (914) 481-1131 or shoot me an email at: chris@dvscampmarketing.com

Best of luck,

Chris Davis

COSTLY MISTAKE #1

CMS Lockdown!

If you don't already know, a CMS is a Content Management System. In plain language, it's just a way of building your website so that basically anybody can edit it. It's much more convenient because you or anyone on your staff can easily make edits to your website anytime you want, for free. So, CMS is good. But, a *proprietary* CMS is bad. A proprietary CMS is a CMS that was custom-developed by a web design company. So, if you're considering hiring a web design company and they tell you that they've created their own CMS and that's what they'll use to build your website on, **run to the hills!**

Here's the real deal: With a CMS, you and your staff can make many of the edits and changes you'll need on your camp's website, like: changing text, changing photos, updating PDF forms, etc., all with no help from your web company. But, there are limits to what any CMS can do and at some point you will need to make more substantial changes to your website. And, these changes must be made by your web company.

Building your new camp website on a proprietary CMS locks you into using only one web company <u>forever</u>.

SUMMARY:

Don't hire a company that wants to build your new camp website on a proprietary CMS because only they will be able to make changes to your new site in the future. What happens if they raise their prices, or their service starts to stink, or you find someone better and cheaper? You're stuck!

But, what happens when your web company raises their prices, or their service starts to stink, or you find someone that's cheaper and better? Here's the bad news: If your website is built on a proprietary CMS, you won't be able to switch to a new web company and you'll be stuck with the company that built your proprietary CMS website—stuck paying their higher prices and enduring their non-responsive and lackluster service. *Why can't you switch to a new web company?* Because, if your website is built on a proprietary CMS, no respectable programmer or web design company will touch your website with a ten-foot pole. (Neither will most unrespectable ones.) So, now you're stuck. You're tethered to this one web company forever, unless you decide to build a whole new website again. **And, that's why this mistake is so costly!**
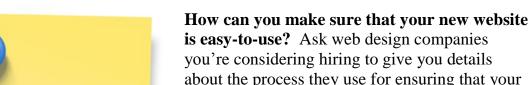
How can you avoid this costly mistake? Don't hire a web company that uses a proprietary CMS platform. Instead, insist upon having your website built on a CMS that is used by and can be programmed by many different programmers and web companies. This way, you'll have more options in the future, when you need them.
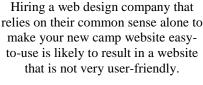
Your new website is NOT easy-to-use

You probably already know how important it is to have a website that's easy-to-use. Your website needs to allow visitors to find the information they're looking for as quickly and easily as possible and it should also make people feel comfortable. When people visit websites with new interfaces and navigation layouts they've never seen before they get confused, anxious and frustrated. When people get frustrated some portion of them will leave your site and you'll lose your chance to tell them your story. You probably already know most of that...
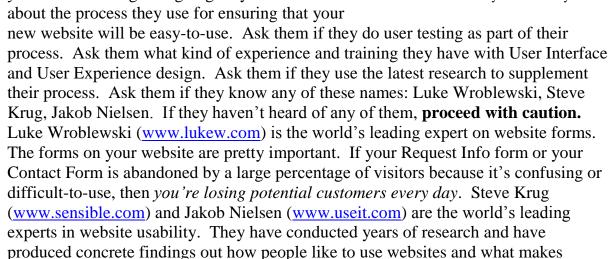
What you might not know is... most web design companies and individual web designers just "wing it" and use *only their common sense* to make your website easy-to-use. And, you might not know that **it takes a lot more than just common sense to make a new website easy-to-use.**

Hiring a web design company that relies on their common sense alone to make your new camp website easy-to-use is likely to result in a website that is not very user-friendly.

SUMMARY:

If your website isn't easy-to-use, that's the ballgame. Many web design companies rely on their common sense alone to make your website easy-to-use. Find a good web company that will also use research, expert advice, established standards and user testing to make sure your new website is easy-to-use.

How can you make sure that your new website is easy-to-use? Ask web design companies you're considering hiring to give you details about the process they use for ensuring that your new website will be easy-to-use. Ask them if they do user testing as part of their process. Ask them what kind of experience and training they have with User Interface and User Experience design. Ask them if they use the latest research to supplement their process. Ask them if they know any of these names: Luke Wroblewski, Steve Krug, Jakob Nielsen. If they haven't heard of any of them, **proceed with caution.** Luke Wroblewski (www.lukew.com) is the world's leading expert on website forms. The forms on your website are pretty important. If your Request Info form or your Contact Form is abandoned by a large percentage of visitors because it's confusing or difficult-to-use, then *you're losing potential customers every day*. Steve Krug (www.sensible.com) and Jakob Nielsen (www.useit.com) are the world's leading experts in website usability. They have conducted years of research and have produced concrete findings out how people like to use websites and what makes websites easier to use.

COSTLY MISTAKE #3

Your new website doesn't convey the true "feel" of your camp

Why do parents and kids really choose one camp over another? Is it because you have an Olympic-sized swimming pool, or a Go-Kart track? Maybe. Is it because Johnny's friends are going there too, or because Johnny's mom heard from all of her friends that it's the hot camp now? Yeah, sometimes. In the majority of cases though, I think parents and kids ultimately choose a camp based on the "feeling" they get about that camp. And, I think most camp directors know this. That's why in-home visits and tours are so widely practiced... because those methods *work*. And, I think they work because they're better than any other method at conveying the true "feel" of your camp to parents and kids.

These days, your website is the first place new families will see, hear and read about your camp. Now, your website is certainly no match for your in-home visits or tours when it comes to conveying your camp's true "feel." But, if your website is planned, designed and developed properly, it can capture and convey your camp's essence and true "feel" better than most other camp websites, and this will accomplish one very important objective for you—*get your camp on more new families' short lists.* Of course, if you never make it onto a new family's short list, you'll likely never even have the chance for an in-home visit or a tour. So, it's very important that your website do everything it can to emphasize and project the greatest selling tool you have—your camp's true "feel."

Using an inadequate pre-production process and not spending enough time on discovery and strategy can result in a new website that does not reflect the true "feel" of your camp.

So, what's the mistake that camp directors make in this area? They hire a web design company that doesn't do enough in the pre-production phase of building their website (the stuff you do before the design work starts). This leads to the web design company not really knowing what your camp is all about, what's really different about it, and what your camp's true "feel" is. And, if they don't know that stuff, then they won't be able to inject it into the new camp website they're building for you.

How do you avoid this mistake? Ask web design companies, before you hire them, to explain their process for learning about your camp, about differentiating your camp from others in your market, about how they will make sure that your new website captures and conveys the true "feel" of your camp. Good web design companies spend a surprisingly significant amount of time in pre-production because they know that this is where success is built for websites. They do in-depth interviews with you, your staff and even your customers. They study your competition and look for holes in the marketplace that can be filled with your camp's unique strengths. They gather information specifically for the purpose of creating innovative web pages and features, and more.

COSTLY MISTAKE #4

Uh oh—Google doesn't like your new website!

If Google doesn't like your camp website, then you're literally blocking traffic (read: new families interested in camp) from getting to your website. Like it or not, Google is a formidable gatekeeper that stands between you and many of your potential customers. And, if your website doesn't play by Google's rules, you will be punished with less traffic and fewer new, qualified leads.

But, this problem need not stand in your way—you just need to make sure your website is built in a certain way by people who understand Google and Search Engine Optimization (SEO).

Here's what you should do: before you hire any web design company, ask them if your new website will be SEO-optimized. *But, don't stop there.* Ask them to spend some time with you and describe exactly what things they will do to make sure Google loves your new site and, if necessary ask them to tell you how SEO works. Any good web design firm worth their salt should know all of this stuff and should be willing to spend some time with you going over it, if for no other reason than simply making you feel comfortable that they know their stuff.

Make sure your new website is Google-friendly or you could lose out on a lot of new visitors and traffic.

SUMMARY:

Make sure you hire a web design company that knows SEO and knows how to make your new website Google-friendly, or you could lose a lot of potential new campers and families.

Here are some specific SEO questions to ask any web design company:

- I heard somewhere that the length of time I have my domain registered for can influence my rankings in Google – is that true? And, how many years should I register it for?

- Does Google like websites with fewer or more pages better?

- What are the components of a properly SEO-optimized web page?

- Will you set up our new website so me and my staff will be able to easily change the important SEO tags and the content of our web pages?

- Should the main titles on each of our interior web pages be text or images?

- Do meta description tags matter? I heard they have nothing to do with ranking in Google.

COSTLY

MISTAKE #5

Not investing enough in your new website

I think some camp directors have a bit of a myopic view of their website and don't realize how important it really is to their camp. And, because of this, they make the mistake of not investing enough into their website in terms of time, effort and money. Ultimately, this mistake causes them to miss out on some significant benefits for their camp and can also do some real harm to their camp in terms of reputation, image and perceived credibility. You may not be part of that group, but it's worth it to take a quick look at what effects a really good website has on your camp and what effect it has on your camp when you don't invest enough into your camp's website.

A really good website... can increase enrollment... can increase re-enrollment... attracts better staff... gets more traffic from Google... helps you start and build more and better relationships with camper parents... makes life easier for parents and staff... and more.
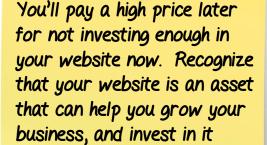
The most successful camp directors treat their website as an investment, not an expenditure.

A website that didn't get enough investment of time, effort and money... can damage your camp's reputation and image... makes your camp look unprofessional to some people... makes some people perceive you as less credible* and trustworthy, which is pretty important for a camp (*Stanford University conducted a study entitled: *How Do People Evaluate a Web Site's Credibility?* This study invited 2,684 average people to rate the credibility of a total of 100 websites. **The study found that participants used visual cues, such as the site's overall design or look, to assess a site's credibility more than any other website feature.)**

So how do you make sure you invest enough into your new camp website? (1) <u>TIME</u>: take the time to do the tasks that might seem like drudgery, but really do have an impact, like going through hundreds of photos to find the very best ones to put up on your new website.
(2) <u>EFFORT</u>: The content on your website is the most important thing. It takes effort to write your content so that it's compelling and truly representative of *your* camp, but it's worth it.
(3) <u>MONEY</u>: **You don't need to spend a fortune on your new website,** but this is also not the place to try to pay the lowest price possible. A really good website (as described above) requires an organized, efficient process, an experienced team of talented and skilled professionals, appropriate resources and significant time and effort. The lowest cost providers, at the prices they charge, just cannot provide everything that is needed to build a really good camp website.

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