

“What Makes Web Sites Credible?”

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A Stanford–Makovsky Study

Makovsky + Company, a top 30 independent global public relations + investor relations firm, headquartered in New York, sponsored and joined with Stanford University’s Persuasive Technology Lab to conduct this survey of over 1600 internet users in both America and Europe.



Guidelines for Establishing Web Credibility

"Today the Web has become the journalist's first source of information about you. And that is true for a growing number of audiences. This study emphasizes the importance of embracing your Web site as one of the keys to communicating with your various constituencies, as well as a way to enhance or detract from your reputation overall."

Ken Makovsky, President of Makovsky + Company

1. Avoid errors of all types, no matter how small they seem.

Misspelled words, grammatical errors, out-of-service phone numbers, outdated contact information . . . Web sites with errors damage online credibility just as badly as sites of organizations facing financial or legal troubles. Companies that pay strict attention to detail exemplify the care they will take with a customer's business.

2. Add value to each Web visit.

Companies add value to their sites by recognizing the needs of their audiences and providing targeted content or tools to meet them. Building relationships with customers in this way promotes online credibility and keeps them coming back for more.

3. Show that there's an authentic organization behind your site.

Showing that your Web site is for a legitimate organization will boost its credibility. List a physical address, phone number and e-mail, post photos of your offices, list a membership with the Chamber of Commerce or any awards received.

4. Use restraint with any promotional content.

Avoid mixing editorial content with advertisements. Pop-up ads, especially, annoy users and decrease credibility. If ads are a must, clearly distinguish the sponsored content from your own.

5. Make it simple to get around.

Web sites win credibility when they are easy to navigate. Organizing your site's content in a functional, succinct manner allows visitors to spend more time learning and less time "hunting."

6. Update your site's content often.

Make sure that your site's content is current and valid. Reviewing your site continuously and updating content regularly displays your commitment to providing value for your visitors.

7. Highlight the expertise in your organization in the content and services you provide.

Do you have experts on your team? Are your contributors or service providers authorities? Be sure to give their credentials. Are you affiliated with a respected organization? Make that clear. Conversely, don't link to outside sites that are not credible. Your site becomes more or less credible by association.

8. Provide a quick response to customer service questions.

Be certain that your site delivers what it says it can deliver. Providing timely answers to customer service inquiries shows that your organization is responsive and trustworthy. Additionally, e-mailing confirmations of inquiries or transactions exemplifies the value your organization places on its customers.

9. Design your Web site in a professional manner.

A site that is professionally designed with a graphic layout that is consistent and appropriate to the subject matter will enhance belief in your organization's sophistication and mission. A well-designed site is more captivating and will lengthen the amount of time visitors spend there.

10. Ensure functionality continuously.

Simple technical errors, "broken" links, slow download times and unexpected down times have a devastating impact on site believability. Simple design functionality enhances user experience and promotes trust.



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Contact Robbin Goodman
212.508.9620
rgoodman@makovsky.com

About Makovsky + Company

Founded in 1979, Makovsky + Company (www.makovsky.com) is today one of the nation's leading independent global public relations and investor relations consultancies. The firm attributes its success to its original vision: that the Power of Specialized Thinking™ is the best way to build reputation, sales and fair valuation for a client. Based in New York City, the firm has agency partners in more than 20 countries and in 35 U.S. cities through IPREX, the third largest worldwide public relations agency partnership, of which Makovsky is a founder.

575 LEXINGTON AVENUE, NEW YORK, NY 10022
212.508.9600 P 212.751.9710 F

WWW.MAKOVSKY.COM