

# Web Whacked



BY JIM HAMILTON, WITH DAN ANTONELLI



*Building wisdom on the World Wide Web.*

**M**Y BROTHER BILL and I had managed to grow our studio's business over the years the same way we finished our signs — the old fashioned way. We got involved with the Chamber of Commerce, direct mail, knocked on doors, did the Yellow Pages thing and most importantly put our name proudly on every project we put out.

This had been successful for the business environment at the time and our studio continued to grow year after year.

*But the times, they are a changing...*

## WEB BEHIND THE EARS

It's kind of ironic that I never got the high-tech bug early on to get involved in the Internet because we had always prided ourselves on investing in the latest technology.

When I did finally get the bug, I dreamed of creating the ultimate Web site, broadcasting to the world that the best place to buy a sign was from Northcoast Signworks, Inc. It would only take a little bit of time to learn the programs — hey, how tough could this possibly be?

*Year One:* I resolve to buy and learn some new programs.

*Year Two:* I realize there's more to this than what appears on the surface.

*Year Three:* I visit more sign shop sites on our new Internet service and see the advantages of e-mailing.

*Year Four:* More and more people ask, "Do you have a Web site?" I reserve a domain name.

*Year Five:* I finally realize I don't have time. This is a special talent that is best left to a professional!

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Logo prominent, also acts as home page button

Main navigation, showing mouseouts in action. Serves to simplify the navigation. Solid background for button names helps speed load time.

Footer on bottom with contact information repeats on every page through the site, making it easy to call.

Simple background image fills empty space on larger browser windows.

Simple Javascript rollovers

Page header/identifier graphic changes to identify every section

This is the main body area for Web content. Cell structure of site will expand downwards for larger sections.

Table set for 780 pixels wide x 580 pixels high, which accommodates most popular monitors.



With some tweaking, Dan created a new version of our logo, which has a more updated, dimensional look and reproduces better online.



#### ENTER DAN ANTONELLI



I had admired Dan's work as a *Jersey Style* vehicle guy and logo design guru. I was particularly impressed with his ability to make high-tech graphics look traditional; he

did the same thing with digital graphics that we did with dimensional stuff. I also noticed that Dan had recently diversified his business into Web design, and had designed a few other sign company Web sites.

One day late last year, I tallied three calls in one day asking if we had a Web site. I took the rest of the day off to address what I had blown off for too long and finally called Dan to inquire about his services.

**Jim:** "Dan, you do a great job with graphics. I think that I would be an awesome Web designer also, but I'm too busy designing signs and operating my studio. There can't be much to this Web stuff, so I'd like you to take a look at creating our site. Now Dan, this is no ordinary site. I want this to be the best home page ever, it must generate enough business to double last year's sales, enable me to cut our advertising budget in half. And, did I mention with a Web page up and operating I know I'll be able to retire in five years?"

**Oh yeah, I have a budget of \$500."**

**Dan:** Well Jim, the \$500 might cover registering your domain, and about a year's worth of Web hosting, and the time I'm spending talking to you right now. Now that we've spent that money, you'll need several thousand dollars to actually build a site.

**Jim?** — you still there? Hello?"

#### INSIGHT IN SITE GOALS

After the sticker shock wore off of what a basic site, and a not-so-basic site like Jim's would cost, we went over what Jim's goals were for the site, and what his expectations were. Sometimes people have the wrong idea of what a Web site is good for. They think that once you build a site, everyone will find it, and the phones will start ringing.

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The one-page introduction for each section explains that specific type of signage with a link to thumbnails of the images.

It's not like the *Field of Dreams*' "If you build it, they will come." Actually, building it and getting people there are completely separate things.

One feature a good site has is the ability to help close a sale. Here's that scenario: You get a phone call from a potential client, and they ask to set up a meeting.



When clicked, thumbnails go to larger images, that each has its own "Before" and "Next" navigation button.

You schedule one for a few days later, but ask the client in the meantime, to please visit your Web site so that they will have a better idea of what your shop does.

Now, they hit your Web site, and immediately establish their perception of what kind of operation you have. If your site is professionally done, instantly their perception of your business is elevated. On the flip side, if you have an amateurish site, people will associate amateurism with your business.

Another feature of a good site is to generate leads via Web-based marketing. This involves actively promoting your site via search engines. In Jim's case this is especially important, because Jim's intention is to market his services nationwide. For shops that wish to concentrate locally on their business, search engine leads are generally ineffective.

After explaining some of these marketing concepts to Jim, I explained the process of building a site. I told him to develop a rough outline of the site with an approximate number of photos for each section. He would also need to send me a file of his logo, photos and other marketing materials, and he would need to write some copy for the various sections.

*Jim:* "Sure Dan, I'll go through my past marketing materials and send you a boatload of pictures from our portfolio, I'm sure it won't take you long to whip this thing together. By the way, what's an outline? Is that like a summary report we used to put together in high school?"

**LOGO BOUND**

I began to put together a package for Dan, then sat down at a blank computer screen and contemplated the creation of an outline for the site. Then suddenly, Dan's suggestions started to make sense. Most people in our local area are already familiar with our work, so the purpose of the site for that part of our market would be as an instant brochure following a phone inquiry.

What Web marketing could do differently than our past marketing efforts was to promote our dimensional theme park and development signage to potential customers around the country.

I was now more realistic of what should go into the site and found direction on what I wanted it to accomplish! It was as if Dan had become my marketing therapist; he wouldn't tell me exactly what to do but instead made me figure it out.

I phoned Dan to inform him of my recent revelation.

*Jim:* "Dan, I think I finally get it! I trust your judgement to move in the right direction."

*Dan:* "Thanks for the vote of confidence. Now, I've got this package you sent. First thing, and I don't want to hurt anyone's ego, but can I do something with that logo of yours? Can I change it, or are you married to it?"

*Jim:* "Why? What's the matter with it?"

*Dan:* "It won't reproduce very well on the site, and I think I could tweak it a bit to give it a more updated look. Plus I want to make Northcoast dimensional and the current letter style doesn't allow for that. We can keep the same sign background and shape. I just want to tweak a few things."

*Jim:* "We've got a lot invested in that logo, so don't go too far away from the original."

Dan modified the logo, and I really liked its online reformatting. Next he showed me the mock-up of the home page, and how the new logo is integrated into the site. The mock-up is very corporate, and instantly suggests a professional operation. Dan also explained the navigation buttons and started building the site's functionality.

Next, I sent him another CD with some 300 images scanned at 72 dpi, at 600 pixels wide.

*Dan:* "Got that disk Jim. Ahh, 300 pictures is a little much. No one's going to look through that many pictures. Let's take a good sampling of about 12-16 pictures per category, and leave it at that. I think it's best to create a one-page introduction to each section, explaining that specific type of signage, then we'll put a link to thumbnails of the images, that when clicked will go to larger images, that will each have its own before and next navigation."

*Jim:* "How about that in English, Dan?"

**THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS**

Dan and I remained in close contact throughout the site construction process. Dan had the site posted at a temporary address, allowing me easy access and to give him feedback.

Dan was able to move forward on the page and picture layouts and simply left the areas for copy blank until it was provided, which worked well and neither of us held things up. He also kept me informed of each step, asking ahead of

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time for materials so the momentum of making the site would not stop.

Overall I was extremely pleased with the look and easy navigation of the site. I'm glad I heeded Dan's advice about thinking of potential clients visiting the site rather than going hog wild about what I thought was best for a Web page.

Dan's professionalism and enthusiasm was all the motivation I needed to put together the information he needed to stay focused on our task. It may be a surprise to some that this is a *team* effort. Although you may be paying a professional for their services, if you want your site to reflect your business philosophy or personality, it will still require a lot of work on your part.

As our site neared completion and I became comfortable accessing the temporary progress, I suddenly discovered the site's real importance to me.

I receive several phone calls a day about our sign products from both within

and outside our area. To my amazement a majority of the callers could easily access the Web, some even while we were talking on the phone! I could then simply give them our address and walk them through the site to a project that was similar to what they requested.

It was an instant, virtual showroom! Between listening to the customers needs and quickly directing them to similar successful projects posted on our site, my closing ratios grew and the time between closes shrank substantially!

This was a major time savings for me and a benefit to having a site I never really thought about. Actually it has paid for itself as my new sales tool.

Go figure.

In the three or four weeks I spent with Dan on our Web site, my whole philosophy of what the Web could do for our shop totally changed. Dan's Web-marketing therapy enabled me to better understand the Internet and made me

discover ways it could be used I never imagined.

I'd like to thank Dan Antonelli for his Web therapy and hard work on our site. Next time you're surfing, make sure you stop in to visit.

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