



The Website Problem: How changes in the population are making a website even more critical.

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Article summary

[Research by Boston Consulting Group](#), the world's leading advisor on strategy indicates that millenials- the generation of people now 18- 34 years old is transforming marketing. First this generation is critical to any economy. In Uganda 78% of the population is under 30 and hence clearly the majority of us are milenials.

What is however critical to note is this: Millenials are distinguished from older generations in the way they interact with a company's brand. They engage with brands far more extensively, personally, and emotionally – and in a very different way from previous generations.

What is it therefore about this generation that makes it critical to reach out to them, including through a website?

Do Ugandan companies really care about the internet?

In Uganda, companies do not seem to see the importance of changing the way they reach out to consumers. They do not seem to recognize the fast moving trends in the population and how they interact with companies – including on the internet.

Perhaps they seem to think that websites are only for only based businesses – this view is clearly outdated.

The [Top 100 midsize Ugandan firms](#) as ranked by the Monitor Newspaper for example do fairly well. To be ranked a top 100, your firm must have a minimum turnover of Shs. 360m (and a maximum of Shs. 25bn).

This is quite a significant achievement considering that [67% of Ugandans are vulnerable to poverty](#).

However when a [Ugandan firm did research](#) on which of these Top 100 companies had a website, the results were shocking!

60% of the Top 100 companies (in 2011) had no functional website! In 2013, we reviewed the Top 100 firms and expect the results to be similar.

Ugandan companies – even the top ones don't seem to see the importance of the internet. It seems they are still operating in the 1990s thinking that the internet usage in the population is still small or they feel so comfortable in their positions – they see no need to change.

In fact this view is wrong. By 2012, 17% of the population or 6 million users were on the internet of which at least 1 million are on Facebook (January 2014).

Can internet technology disrupt traditional businesses?

Ugandan companies by not embracing website related technology are therefore losing a small fortune by continuing to ignore the internet.

And meanwhile this idea of who is top today or tomorrow can change very quickly because internet technology has the capability to disrupt entire industries. For example:

- **Traditional auto traders/dealers** (e.g. Azaan trading the no. 3 company) can easily be disrupted by online car traders who no longer need to maintain expensive car stocks physically but can order them using what is called "[drop shipping](#)" – and have them delivered to Uganda in about 5 weeks. This is taking shape in the US and UK for example.
- **Electronics dealers** (eg. Prestige electronics, one of top 10) these can easily be disrupted by an online classifieds platform (e.g. like ebay or Amazon) that partners with a local logistics company to quickly and conveniently deliver (e.g. on boda boda motor bicycles) required consumer electronics.
- **Lending.** (e.g. banks, money lenders, MFIs and SACCOs). The traditional lending model for banks, money lenders and the like is easily disrupted by Crowd Funding platforms.

These are where a borrower is able to get money directly from the population who each contribute a small amount (hundreds of lenders hence a crowd) via online lending.

This model is already working both in the none profit sector for rural Uganda (via Kiva.org), for the business borrowers (e.g. funding circle.com), for money lenders (e.g. Wonga.com) and even for technology and creative arts entrepreneurs (e.g. Kickstarter.com).

What is changing about the population and the internet?

In the olden days, the first thing someone did when they wanted to find out about something they didn't know or a problem they had – they asked their friends.

Now – they ask the internet search engine *Google* or even their friends on Face book.

These days a lot of people will go online and research products and companies before they make a purchase. They don't simply rely on word of mouth or traditional adverts.

Even if people don't buy your product online they are still likely to research it online so you have to have a website so these people can learn about your business.

And even when they are not searching for business or products, they are online. Some statistics that might interest you about this [generation's leisure time](#) and [use of Face Book](#):

- % of Millennials (18 – 34 year olds) who use Face book: 66%
- % of Facebook users who login daily: 76%
- % of Facebook users who login multiple times daily: 40%
- Amount of time spent on internet per day: 13 minutes.
- Amount of time spent daily using a computer for leisure (games, videos etc): 100 minutes

This tells you one thing – Your customers are often online, even in Uganda. You need to start reaching out to them.

Does a website matter with all this social media hype?

What is it about a website that is critical for business success in the first place? Here are just some benefits from a myriad of online sources:

1. **To make a great first impression.** Think of your website as the online entrance to your boutique. You know the importance of a shopper's first impression when they walk in your doors. You spend countless hours optimizing your store layout and flow, cleaning and straightening and ensuring the latest and greatest merchandise is prominently featured. With so many shoppers finding and consuming information online, why wouldn't you give the same attention to your website?

"Just because you don't have something that can't be sold online doesn't mean that you can't making the sale online."

Customers are increasingly starting their searches for products/services online (e.g from Google) – including local Ugandan products. You need to therefore tap into this, particularly considering that the costs of putting your information online are much smaller than in traditional advertising.

2. **Attract potential customers - 24/7.** Unlike a traditional business like a shop where a customer needs to walk in, look around or call you on phone to ask (but only during office hours), with a

website, there is no need for this. A customer simply logs in and searches at their own time and convenience, anytime.

3. **Save them time.** The pace of life has changed, particularly for Millennials who have to deal with information overload from mobile, internet and real world sources. As a result we have a shorter attention span and demand everything now. This means that a business needs to meet these needs of the Millennials for fast information – just like fast food, fast cars (hopefully not fast women ☺)
4. **Reputation including to attract international business.** For the foreigner or even Ugandan living abroad, the first point of contact for your company is through an online search and therefore it is critical that you have a website.

Having no website makes you seem less trustworthy – what are you hiding? Or less reliable – your quality is not good enough and so you are not honest enough to put your information online for all. Or too small – You are only a one man team and so cannot manage a large international partner.

5. **Social media is not enough.** Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, LinkedIn and a whole load of social media platforms are all a means by which a company can get its message across. But a [research](#) on the 2011 Global Index Report for example shows that in the US, only 22% visit a branded social networking page (like Face book) while 62% regularly visit a branded website.
6. **Millenials expect a two way benefit** – Marketing for millenials is no longer a one way thing – being pushed by a company to consumers.

They want to know that the company/ brand treats them well – and in return they reciprocate by spreading the message to other consumers and customers in their own social circle, which is also both online and offline.

Before they purchase from a company, they need to know about its values (e.g on an about us page) – are they “ doing good”- help those in need, are socially responsible, are good environmental stewards, protect personal data, or are transparent and sincere?

They therefore expect to interact with a company in multiple ways, both offline and online including via your website or newsletter and on social media, all of which should clearly communicate the values of your company.

What this means is that likewise, for a consumer, brands are a means of the Millennials making a “Value statement” – by purchasing from a particular company, they are for example saying, I believe in “Animal rights” – Because for example their preferred brand sponsors homeless animal shelters.

They can then show off this brand as a “status statement” to their social friends network i.e – “I support animal rights.”

Isn't it hard and expensive to set up and maintain a website?

Many Ugandans frequently ask this question but again this is an outdated view, perhaps from the 1990s when website design and maintenance required a knowledge of complex IT languages like HTML and JAVA.

Free website building tools

There is a proliferation of website building platform that use very simple “drag and drop” tools.

Examples include 1and1.com, wix.com, Yola.com and squarespace.com

All these provide a means building your website, whatever your industry for Free.

It means you can design and maintain a website yourself.

If you want a picture for example, you simply upload it to the website and then “drag and drop” it to where you want on a page – which is built for you by the website provider, based on hundreds of templates from creative graphic designers.

And the cost?

Many website providers do it Free. It means therefore that you can have a website done by yourself, and basically free (you typically pay for a domain name (e.g www.inachee.com) and a small annual hosting fee. If you want premier service (e.g customer care) it's when you pay more but the basic services, which are good on their own are free.

How about maintaining and updating the website?

In today's world, the buzz word for developing websites is Content Management System (CMS).

This means that similar to “drag and drop” you simply type what you want or add images you want – format them as you like and then put them where you want – and then click an “update” button – and your changes are live on the website!

How about the overall content of the website?

In *American Beauty* the 1999 Oscar winning movie featuring Kevin Spacey, one of the characters had a memorable mantra:

“In order to be successful, one must portray an image of success at all times”.

This is true in almost all aspects of doing business.

A doctor dresses and carries on like a doctor, and so is trusted to treat disease.

A lawyer dresses and carries on like a lawyer and so is trusted to litigate for their client successfully.

Their image and the way they are perceived therefore give their clients (or patients) the assurance that they are dealing with “the real thing.”

How about a company, when clients first encounter you and your works, what impression do you give?

Business is changing and potential customers are increasingly online. Their first image of your company is therefore from your website. Your website is the professional’s equivalent of dress and business style. Your online strategy is therefore a critical part of your future growth.

How do you expect to have a chance of convincing customers that you are the best at what you do when your website for example:

1. Has spelling errors;
2. Has incomplete sections;
3. Is not up to date;
4. Looks like an amateur’s work;
5. Contains links that do not work; or
6. Gives no indicator of why a client should choose your firm over millions of other similarly looking, and worded websites? E.g via testimonials, evidence of expertise/capability/success, case studies.

A company that strives to be successful should ensure that their website is at the forefront of their marketing strategy and not just relegated to the nerdy IT guy.

The website should continually communicate what sets the company apart from all others.

What next?

A website is really just one part of a company’s overall strategy and therefore before you embark on designing one, you need to think about what you would like to communicate to users about your company.

It means you need to for example think about how you will internally re-align your company to ensure you can meet the needs of additional customers who come to you continually from the internet.

We can help you in crafting not only your internet or marketing strategy but your overall strategy. Speak to us.

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