



A GLOBALSPEC **WHITE PAPER** FOR
ENGINEERING, TECHNICAL AND
INDUSTRIAL MARKETERS

Winning Web Sites for Industrial Marketing:

Practical tips and best practices for a more
effective online presence

Contents

Executive Summary	3
Why Your Company Needs a Winning Web Site.....	4
Four Key Goals for Your Web Strategy	5
Four Ways to Improve Your Web Site	7
Ten Web Site To-Dos.....	8
Search and Discover: How GlobalSpec Can Help.....	10
Conclusion	11
About GlobalSpec	12

Executive Summary

As online destinations become more and more popular for engineering, technical, manufacturing, and industrial professionals to research work-related purchases, industrial suppliers and service providers need to do more than merely be online with a static corporate Web site. To capture the attention of your prospects and stand out from your competitors in a crowded marketplace, you need a Web site that goes above and beyond simply “good” and delivers an exceptional user experience.

A high-quality Web site reflects your corporate identity and is often the first impression a potential customer receives of your company, products and services. With a user-friendly design and clear and concise messaging, your Web site can capture your visitors’ interest in the first few moments that they arrive on your site. That’s about the amount of time you have to make that impression or else that prospect is navigating to another Web site, potentially that of a competitor, to find the answers to their questions.

The rewards can be high if you draw your visitors into your site. First, you must deliver the content they need and make it easy for them to find it. As you build trust with your site visitors that you may be able to help solve their problems, you have the opportunity to develop a more substantial relationship by offering additional research, white papers or Webinars through a registration form. Once you have captured their contact information you can continue the conversation and begin to qualify these visitors as prospects.

Additionally, your Web site should also be the hub of your online presence. Whether you plan to participate on social media platforms, advertise in industry e-newsletters, promote your company and products through a banner ad network, develop listings with online catalogs and directories or optimize your site for search engines, those activities can all link back to your Web site to further engage these potential prospects. Are you prepared? And better yet, are you set up to obtain their contact information and begin a deeper relationship with your Web site visitors? Perhaps this is done through landing pages tied to specific offers or campaigns presented through your other channels.

However you drive traffic to your Web site and engage your visitors, it is also critical to continually review and test your site to remove outdated content, include fresh resources and implement enhancements that improve the visitor experience.

Through these steps you can take your Web site from merely “good enough,” to a winning online destination that successfully engages visitors and converts them into prospects.

Why Your Company Needs a Winning Web Site

Your Audience is Online. More so than Ever Before.

Engineering, technical, manufacturing, and industrial professionals – your target audience – are increasingly using the Internet on the job to research products and services, keep abreast of the latest news and trends and potentially find new suppliers.

Based on years of research, professionals in the industrial sector are migrating away from traditional media and relying more each year on the Internet to perform key aspects of their jobs. The most recent data reveals that 48% of industrial professionals spend six or more hours per week on the Internet for work-related purposes and 28% say their time on the Web for work is more than nine hours a week.¹

Top Source for Engagement

Research also shows that 78% of industrial suppliers indicate that their company Web site is one of their top three sources for connecting with prospects far outpacing other outlets such as tradeshow, direct mail and print advertising.²

Stand Out in a Crowded Marketplace

While industrial professionals are spending more time online, the Internet is a crowded marketplace. With many different options to choose from, you likely have mere moments to capture the attention of your Web site visitors. This is your opportunity to shine. A high-quality Web presence will encourage your visitors to interact with your site and increase that level of engagement.

The Online Face of Your Company

With industrial professionals preferring to use supplier Web sites for engagement, it's critically important that your site is reflective of your corporate identity and brand. Especially for a small business that may not have top-of-mind name recognition in the marketplace, your company Web site may be the first introduction a potential customer experiences with your products, services and brand. Make sure it's a good one.

A Level Playing Field

The Internet also levels the playing field between small companies and large corporations. Small businesses can build terrific Web sites and compete with large companies to capture the attention of industrial professionals and then deliver the useful information they need to do their jobs. The same holds true for larger companies. On the Web, they can't rest on reputation or name recognition alone. A poor Web site will result in a lost engagement and a potential customer moving on to a competitor's site.

From being the face of the company to engaging visitors, there is a tremendous responsibility for your Web site to perform well. A merely average site may not get the job done. You will need to make it great.

¹ Source: 2011 GlobalSpec Economic Outlook Survey

² Source: 2011 GlobalSpec Marketing Trends Survey

Four Key Goals for Your Web Strategy

1. Drive Traffic to Your Web Site

If you've built a great Web site that will do an effective job of engaging your visitors, you still need to get them to pay you a visit. Even if you are marketing a name brand or well-known company in your industry not everyone knows all that you do. You still need to develop online initiatives targeted at your audience to drive them to your site and build exposure.

There are a number of ways to target your initiatives to a certain segment of the industrial sector. Online events and trade shows fall into this category with many geared to a specific industry. Advertising in targeted e-newsletters and implementing a banner ad campaign on industrial Web sites are also effective methods to drive visitors to your site who may have a need for your products and services. Developing a robust presence in online catalogs and directories is a way to build awareness and engagement opportunities with a targeted audience.

Optimizing your Web site for search engines is another key component to building traffic.

2. Engage Your Visitors

Once your target audience has found your site, your next step is to keep them there. As mentioned, your prospects have lots of choices to spend their time on the Web and you only have a few moments, possibly just seconds, to entice them to stay. You don't want those valuable seconds ticking away as your Web page loads. Keep your pages lean and free from large images or complex code that can bog down a Web page as it displays in your visitor's browser.

This makes your Web page designs and messages crucial to success. Remember, depending on how they find you, your visitors may not always land on your home page. Great design and clear and concise messaging must be pervasive throughout your site.

Typically our eyes first go to the top left corner of a Web page. That's a perfect place for your logo and company name. It tells your visitors exactly where they have landed. Our eyes then move a little lower and more to the middle of a page. A key value proposition – part of your clear and concise messaging – is ideal to display here. Now they know what they will get. This process takes just seconds and within that time you need to let your visitors know who you are and how you can help them.

If you've succeeded in delivering a sense a value to your visitor, you want them to remain on your site and discover more of what you can offer. This is where user-friendly navigation takes over. We are all creatures of habit and we expect things to be where we expect them to be. That means horizontal navigation across the top of a Web page, a vertical menu down the side or sometimes both. We like to see a search option and a site map link in the upper right corner. While in these ways visitors are similar, they are also very different. Some visitors may utilize your navigation menus, others will click right to your site map and some will use your search box. You need to be well-prepared for all of these scenarios.

Using drop down menus from a horizontal navigation bar allows users to dive into specific areas of interest on your Web site with just a click. This is not the time to get fancy and name your menu labels with terms that are not relevant or don't make sense to your visitors. A common mistake is to rely on internal jargon when describing products or services. Use the language and terminology that would be familiar to your visitors. Include simple, easy-to-understand categories like "Products," "Services," and "Markets." Show icons to give a visual representation to the category.

Maintaining an updated site map is key to the visitor experience and is also good for your search engine optimization efforts. Some Web site content management systems dynamically update your site map as you add, delete and move pages. Your search functionality will need to deliver clear, relevant results as one would expect from a major search engine.

3. Answer Their Questions. Solve Their Problems.

Your prospects have found you online. They like what they see and can easily move around your site. Now can you deliver what they need to answer their questions and help solve their problems? Again, your visitors have other destinations that are a click away to find the information they seek. Once you have them engaged, you need to deliver useful content that is quick to find. If not, they're off to your competitors' sites.

Remember that your site visitors at this stage don't want to be sold to quite yet. They need to be educated on your products, components and services and how they can solve their problems. Consider providing product specifications, CAD files, technical datasheets, a request for quotation form, searchable product catalogs, product availability, pricing information and part number search. Video content is becoming increasingly popular for industrial suppliers as the cost to produce good videos decreases and, with tools like YouTube, becomes easy to embed on your Web pages. Videos of product demos, how-to guides and interviews with technical or product engineers can be incredibly compelling and, along with your other content assets, help your visitors with their research. Content can also be a list or interactive map of where to find and how to contact your distributors.

It's likely that you already have this content and it's just a matter of repurposing it for the Web. Documents may need to be formatted as PDFs that are easily viewed, downloaded and printed. Video files may need to be converted into a Web-friendly format or, perhaps even better, uploaded to a YouTube channel and embedded on a page.

With this content – that is relevant and easy to find and use – you are educating your visitors, improving their decision-making capabilities and building confidence that you can answer their questions and solve their problems.

4. Connect and Capture

If you have provided clear and concise messaging and great, easy-to-find content, you are helping to develop trust between your visitors and your company, which can be very elusive in online environments. You're filling their information needs.

Now they may be more willing to provide you with their contact information. A “Contact Us” form is an obvious way to capture visitor information. Your Web site should have one that’s a click away from every page on your site. A Request for Quotation (RFQ) form is another method that captures a visitor’s information.

Visitors may also be more compelled to supply their information in exchange for something of value. Industrial professionals have indicated that case studies, white papers and Webinars are useful to them as they research work-related purchases. Offer a white paper or research report through a registration form. You may have a Webinar or archived presentation that could require a sign-up. Another popular way to capture a visitor’s information is through an e-newsletter registration.

Additionally, you can create landing pages that are tied to a specific campaign or offer such as downloading a white paper or registering for a Webinar. Landing pages live on your Web site but can’t be found through your navigation. Typically a visitor will hit your landing page after clicking on a paid search, banner or e-newsletter advertisement that makes a pitch for a specific offer. These pages have a single purpose: to persuade visitors to submit their contact information in exchange for your offer. You need to keep them focused. That is why there is no other navigation on the page that could potentially distract the user from taking your desired action.

In essence, your Web strategy acts like a funnel. You grab the attention of prospects elsewhere on the Web where they look for resources to help them solve a problem, perhaps through an online directory or e-newsletter. Engage them with a Web site that quickly delivers the content they need to make educated decisions. Finally, after establishing trust with your visitors, you are able to capture their contact information by providing something of value.

Four Ways to Improve Your Web Site

You have implemented your Web site strategy by building your online presence in areas relevant to your target audience and have designed a site that meets the recommendations for engagement, content and conversion. Now you need to measure your site’s performance to make sure it’s doing its’ job and fix what may be broken.

1. Analyze

A Web site analytics package will track which pages are getting the most traffic, where visitors leave your site and the paths they take through your site. These tools can give you an almost overwhelming amount of data about your site’s visitors so it’s important to focus on monitoring the information that reflects the usability and design of your site. Are visitors getting to the pages they need? Are they leaving the site too quickly? Are they taking the most efficient paths to find content? Analytics will reveal the answers to these questions and help you make decisions about your site’s design and content.

2. Observe

If you’re wondering if your site works the way you envision it, try testing it with a user group in your target market that is unfamiliar with your Web site. Give them

tasks to perform such as finding information on a particular product, downloading a technical datasheet, watching a product demo video or registering to download a white paper. Observe how well they were able to navigate your site and complete the task. Get their feedback as well on what worked and what didn't meet their expectations. If your user group has difficulty performing the tasks you assign, you'll know that your Web site may need to be modified. Sometimes these changes will be slight but can make a tremendous difference in achieving your Web site goals.

3. Survey

On occasion you may want to conduct usability surveys of the visitors to your Web site to solicit their opinions about the ease of use and the quality of content on your site. You may see certain trends appear in the survey results that can point you to a problem area on your site or to a process that is working well in one section and could be duplicated elsewhere.

4. Test

A/B testing is a simple, scientific way to isolate and test variables in a real-world environment. The testing of different Web site elements – such as content, navigation and design – against alternatives will help you determine a winning “recipe” to converting your site visitors. This type of testing measures what your visitors actually do on the site, not what they say they do, allows for testing in a controlled test environment, helps to reduce changing variables that could sway findings and uses volume to remove biases and to reach statistical reliability.

First, you need to define what a conversion means to you. It could be a download or registration or some other indication that you may have successfully engaged your visitor. Next, you need to choose the priority and potentially segment visitors to your site based on that priority.

For example, let's say your conversion is to have visitors download a research report. What can you change on the sign-up page that could positively impact the number of visitors who provide their information in order to receive the report? Possible modifications could be copy, colors, graphics, design and other elements. You may want to test long copy against short copy. Or how a text link for registering performs against a register button. Or whether the location – top of the page or in the middle – of the call to action (in this case a download) impacts the number of sign-ups.

Unless you are using multivariate testing, remember to change only one variable at a time so you can measure the changes that are effective and those that move you toward your goals.

Ten Web Site To-Dos

Here are 10 items you should be doing with your Web site today.

1. Detailed Product Information

Offer detailed product information such as product specifications, technical data sheets and application notes. Your visitors want these materials in order to make informed purchasing decisions. It's also part of the education process and a way

for you to build trust with your visitors.

2. Consistent Page Design

Provide a consistent page design and navigation throughout your site. A familiar design and navigation will make visitors feel comfortable on your site and help them find what they need. They don't like surprises that can undermine their trust in your company, products or services.

3. Information, Information, Information

Include offers for white papers, research reports, application notes, Webinars and product demos. Build landing pages for your online marketing campaigns that capture contact information in exchange for this content. This will help establish you as a thought leader in your industry and can go a long way to establishing your company as one your visitors would like to engage.

4. More than One Way

Present multiple paths to discover the content on your site through navigation, site search, site maps and hyperlinked text in the body content of your pages. Information such as specification sheets and product data can be presented on a Web page and also offered as a PDF to download. Video is a great way to show product demos and interviews with your product and industry experts.

5. Testing

Continually test the elements (one by one) of your Web site to ensure you are providing the best possible experience for your visitors, receiving a high conversion rate and meeting the goals of your Web site.

6. Easy on the Flash

Flash may help your Web site look fancy but it takes time to load and often doesn't enhance the visitor experience. Prospects are seeking information to answer their questions and bulky Flash presentations often get in the way of that mission. Remember, you only have a few moments to capture your visitors' attention. You don't want to waste that precious time as they wait for your Flash presentation to load. Also, Flash doesn't render on devices like the iPad, leaving your Web site lacking when viewed on these types of mobile devices.

7. Review Your Content Regularly

Another frustration for your visitors is reading out-of-date content. It reflects poorly on your company and erodes any kind of trust you wish to build with your visitors. Make sure you review your site on a regular basis to spot old content that should either be removed or updated. Also, keep a flow of fresh content into your site. Press releases, blog posts and links to relevant news articles are great ways to make your site appear current. Continually add new white papers, research reports and Webinars to keep your prospects coming back for more. This will also help position your company as an authority in your industry and help your visitors feel comfortable doing business with you when the time comes.

8. Spell Check

When adding new content to your site, or reviewing your current information, be sure to carefully proofread all of your pages. Check for spelling mistakes, bad grammar and factual errors. While you are reading through your pages, test all of the hyperlinked text as well to make sure they direct visitors to the correct pages. Spelling mistakes, poor grammar, factual errors and bad links are easy to avoid with a little bit of time and effort. It's worth it as these types of mistakes hamper your credibility and diminish the confidence your visitors have in your company.

9. Keep it Simple

Most of your visitors will quickly scan your Web pages rather than go word-by-word as if they were reading a book. Make good use of headlines and bulleted lists and call attention to important elements in your content with bold or other enhancements. Keep your paragraphs short and write in a clear, straightforward style. There isn't a Pulitzer Prize for Web site copy so leave out flowery or overly descriptive text that get in the way of your main points. Your visitors are seeking information and it's beneficial to deliver it to them quickly and concisely.

10. Keep it Short

When asking for a visitor's contact information in exchange for your offer, keep the registration form short and to the point. Visitors may be turned off by lengthy forms, especially from companies they are simply evaluating. Collect the basics such as name, company and email address. That should be enough information to start qualifying the visitor for follow-up. Or if you further engage this visitor, for example with an e-newsletter sign-up, you can ask for additional information. At this point, you're also building a comfort level with the visitor. If you don't think the length of a registration form matters, try an A/B test.

Search and Discover: How GlobalSpec Can Help

GlobalSpec provides digital media solutions for industrial suppliers, distributors and service providers. GlobalSpec's marketing programs will help drive traffic to your Web site and build your online presence by connecting you to your target audience when they're searching for products and services and also as they discover and build their knowledge about the variety of products in their industry.

Engineering, technical and industrial professionals – your target audience – use GlobalSpec.com to find the components, products, technical information and services they need to perform their jobs. Industrial suppliers and service providers get in front of their target audience through GlobalSpec.com with a searchable supplier profile and parts catalog.

GlobalSpec also offers industry-specific e-newsletters and annual online events and a large banner advertising network across many industrial partner Web sites. Industrial suppliers and service providers utilize these platforms – or a combination of these platforms – to build their brand awareness and introduce new technologies, applications or products to the marketplace. These are also opportunities for industrial professionals to discover products and information that they would unlikely find when searching by keyword phrases.

For more information on GlobalSpec's digital media solutions, visit GlobalSpecMedia.com.

Conclusion

It's clear that your company simply can't get by with a "good enough" Web site. Your prospects are increasingly spending time online to research work-related products and services and your Web site can be your top source for engagement. But to do so, you need to stand above your competitors – large and small – in a crowded marketplace and give a great – and often times first – impression of your company.

A successful Web site:

- Engages visitors with good design, user-friendly navigation and a clear value proposition.
- Answers questions about your products and services and shows visitors how you can solve their problems.
- Captures contact information by offering premier content like white papers, research reports and webinars.

Effective marketers also:

- Update their Web sites through testing and surveying to help improve the user experience and engage visitors.
- Review their Web sites on a regular basis to ensure the quality and accuracy of its information and to add new content to keep the site fresh.
- Utilize an analytics package to track popular and underperforming pages, visitors' paths through the Web site and time spent on the site.
- Create a robust Web presence for their companies through online catalogs and directories, e-newsletter and banner advertisements, exhibiting at online events and search engine optimization to help drive targeted traffic to their Web sites.

If done right, your Web site will help you establish your role as a thought leader and expert in your industry, which can help build trust with your prospects and make them feel more comfortable doing business with you.

About GlobalSpec

GlobalSpec, Inc. is the leading provider of digital media solutions designed to connect industrial marketers with their target audience of engineering, technical, industrial, scientific and manufacturing sector professionals. GlobalSpec provides its registered users with a domain-expert search engine to search more than 50,000 supplier catalogs by specification, a broad range of proprietary and aggregated Web-based content, over 15 annual online events, and more than 70 e-newsletters - helping them search for and locate products and services, learn about suppliers and access comprehensive technical content. For suppliers, GlobalSpec helps generate awareness, demand and engagement opportunities among the professionals they are looking to reach – from inbox to desktop, through networks and via real-time engagement.

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