

# Small Business Website Evaluation

Conducted for  
**SAMPLE COMPANY**  
Jane Doe

(url: <http://www.samplecompany.com>)

by



53 County Clare Crescent, Fairport, NY 14450

**STRATEGIC EBUSINESS – COOK CONSULTING**

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## EVALUATION SUMMARY



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Evaluation for: **Sample Company**

	(%) Evaluation Complete	Points possible	Points awarded	Rating
Standards compliance	100%	85	78	92%
General	100%	355	316	89%
Home Page performance	100%	170	132	78%
Graphics	100%	145	134	92%
Text & Font usage	100%	195	195	100%
Content	100%	90	78	87%
Frames	100%	25	25	100%
Plug-ins	100%	55	54	98%
Commerce	100%	60	60	100%
<b>Overall Evaluation</b>		<b>1040</b>	<b>933</b>	<b>90%</b>

Number of points in evaluation

211

**We start by giving a high level "report card" of your site, so that you can pay particular attention to certain areas on concern.**

**In the above evaluation, the overall site was good, but performance of the homepage was highly suspect. Since this is the place that creates the first impression on a website it is critical this lay a good foundation.**

## STANDARDS COMPLIANCE

Your website was created using XHTML 1.0 Strict XML standard with Cascading Style Sheets which is creating a few errors against the standard.

There are only 7 on the homepage. I say **“WELL DONE”** to your developer. All were minor errors:

- Lines 11 and 65 missing a slash for the end tag.
- ALT attribute is required for an IMG element (also in line 65).
- There are two errors caused by elements permitted for Transitional that are not available in Strict. I suggest changing the DOCTYPE to Transitional.
- Border was used where it should be coming for the CSS.

There is one other problem on your contact screen. In the email contacts you have:

- Sales & Marketing: [Sales Dept](#)

The ampersand (&) is confusing the browser. Two ways of fixing this are:

- 1) Code for the unescaped ampersand, or
- 2) Change the text to read differently, such as “Sales and Marketing” (with hyperlink).

I prefer the second as it is more professional. While you are making this change, take the opportunity to fully spell out “Operations” and “Other Information” in the other two contacts (also with hyperlinks).

Many PC Browsers handle your pages okay at various screen resolutions.

**Next we give an appraisal of your site against the agreed standards. The excerpt above is a highly compliant site: As a result, most browsers will render in an expected manner. Below is an excerpt of a website evaluation that didn't fare as well!**

[Name of developer] created your website using Microsoft FrontPage 4.0 using XHTML 1.0 Strict XML standard which is creating 140 errors against the standard.

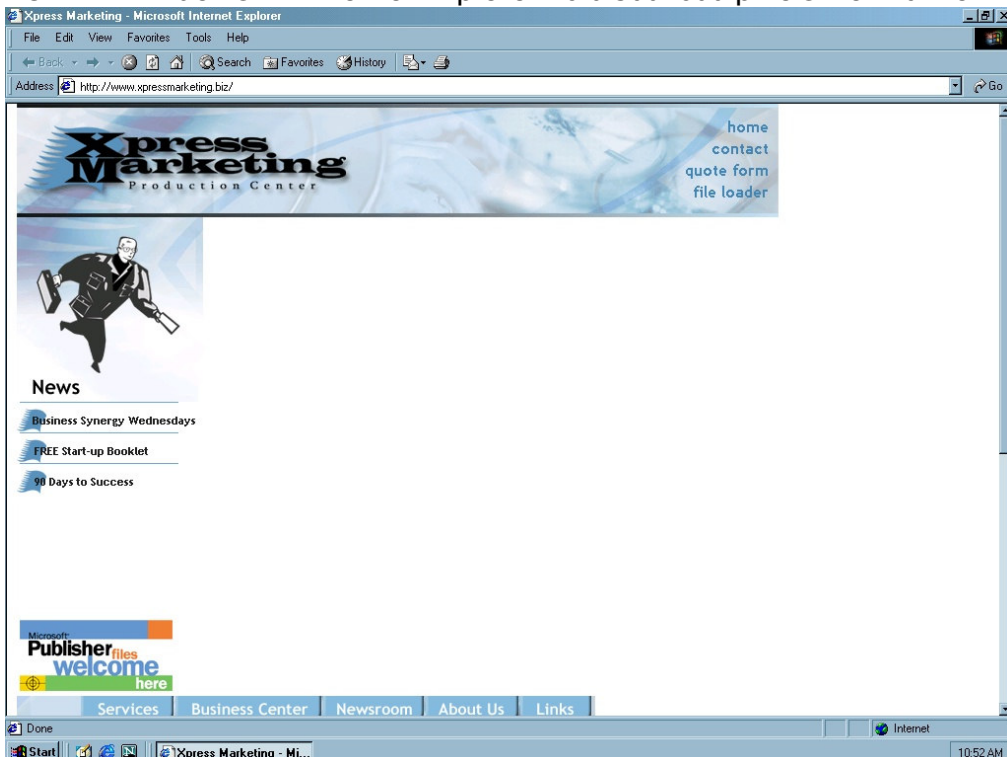
These errors in standards compliance are:

- A DOCTYPE Declaration is mandatory for most current markup languages, including this one.
- For XML documents, you should include an "XML Declaration" even before the DOCTYPE Declaration (though this is not well supported in older browsers).
- Many of the errors are being generated due to “non-standard” Microsoft tags. Use of non-standard tags should be turned off in FrontPage.
- The document has been called “strict” but contains non-strict elements (such as frames). You should declare this as “transitional” instead.
- There are a few syntax errors (close quotes seem to happen often).
- Body tag is found in a context where it is not allowed (in a frame).
- There are some nesting close sequence errors.

We provide digital photographs of your site using various equipment, operating systems, browsers, browsers versions, and screen resolutions. The TOP sample shows how the designer wanted the site to look. In the BOTTOM sample, frames were not being handled correctly making elements sequence down, instead of across, the screen. Only by using a small screen resolution and Normal Font was this problem found. They had experienced user complaints, but didn't know why this was taking place.



PC with Windows XP Internet Explorer v6.0 800x600 pixels Normal Font



PC with Windows 2000 Internet Explorer v5.5 1024x768 pixels Medium Font

**We always find improvement opportunities. This can range the gamut of good web usage; both technical and business related. Here are some sample comments.**

### **GENERAL**

Notes and Recommendations:

- We would consider Sample Company as a Customer Intimate value discipline company. The company website has a strong focus on creating an intimate, personalized relationship with small business owners. Many customer intimate companies use a portal to manage web behavior and flow of information into a central database. This should be a long term goal for you, with full integration with your contact database.
- You should encourage greater utilization of your BLOG. Try to “seed” usage with clients.
- You have an underlined Proactive Guide to Starting a Successful Business - in Rochester in business center page and in the form itself which is not a link. This can confuse your users. On the business page I would convert this to a hyperlink and on the form I would bold the text. While that isn't the convention for referencing books in “the written world”, it is an acceptable alternate practice on the web.
- You should use META tags with keywords. While it is true search engines are using this less, there are still many that use it.
- You should have biographies of the principles and photographs to foster trust and intimacy.
- You should be using customer quotes and testimonials throughout your site. This should cover you as individuals as well as the company.
- I prefer a better use of your left navigation than you currently have. For example, if you look at your services page, the left navigation is just of list of services that are carried in the text of the page. Since the page is relatively short, this doesn't add much value. I would convert this to be focused subsets of your web users (small businesses - broken down into categories, investors, franchisees, etc.).

Notes and Recommendations:

- Frames is causes the wide spacing between images that will be seen at higher resolutions. Consider going from a liquid (variable) to a fixed frame size.
- When used, your Left and Top navigations do the same things. I recommend moving to audiences in left navigation and product lines to top navigation.
- Some product image backgrounds conflict with the white page backgrounds.
- With this amount of content you need to have site sensitive search.
- Consider use of "monthly" email newsletter to bring users back to your homepage.
- Need to use print pages for complex materials.
- Need Biographies of principals to establish trust and confidence.
- You need Customer testimonials.
- Adding WIDTH attributes to your TABLE tags will help browsers display your page quicker.
- Your company profile and mission statement should be merged. Consider only using the customer specific portion of the mission statement.
- You need to remove the horizontal separator bars on some pages. The short text statements should be augmented with pictures relevant to the area being discussed.
- Remove the home page link back. Better to add to footer or left navigation to return to the homepage.

It is critical to understand your user's behaviors. You can expect to lose half your audience if it takes longer than 8 seconds to load your page. But you also need to understand what the expectation is from your target audience! We frequently can spot ways of speeding things up, such as in this instance of improving the graphics

### Load Time by Connection Type/Speed for homepage

Connection Speed	Download Time
14.4Kbps	51.34 seconds
28.8Kbps	26.67 seconds
56Kbps	14.55 seconds
ISDN (128Kbps)	7.55 seconds
Cable (512 Kbps)	3.39 seconds
T1 (1.44 Mbps)	2.49 seconds
SDSL (1.544 Mbps)	2.46 seconds
ADSL (2.0 Mbps)	2.36 seconds

#### Notes and Recommendations:

- Load times are generally good. Goal should be to load all pages in 8 seconds or less. Your target audience of small businesses is probably using mostly 56K dial-up or faster.
- There are two graphics that are driving excessive download times. Unfortunately they are complex and cannot be optimized any more than they already are (without severe degradation of the images) in their current format (GIF).
- They can, however, be converted to JPEG and optimized substantially. On your homepage this would trim about 6 seconds off the 56kbps time (down to 8.55 seconds). This is still a little long, but they probably have come to expect that or even worse on dial-up.

**Your homepage sets the tone for your site. It is where most people make their initial impression of you: Do they care? Are they skilled? Do I want to do business with them? Here are a couple of samples.**

## **HOMEPAGE**

Notes and Recommendations:

- You need to have more links for text in your home page.
- You should have a footer with some standard information:
  - Site map (AKA site guides or table of contents) should be moved from the header to the footer.
  - Copyright. Especially since you have writings available from your pages.
  - Privacy / legal. Improve trust and confidence.
  - Webmaster link.
  - Physical maps, directions, parking information
- Have you considered having a franchise page? How about an Investor page? Though you are not ready for this yet, you can post ideas and collect prospect information. If so, link from your homepage.

## **HOMEPAGE**

Notes and Recommendations:

- There is no header. This is the place for your logo and some universal navigation.
- There is essentially no footer on your pages, except for text (for address), visitor counters, and a safety message.
- You should use a color corporate logo on your header for better identification.
- The footer is missing large amounts of universal information: site map (AKA site guides, table of contents), physical locations, maps, directions, parking information, copyright, and privacy / legal.
- Color on the safety message makes it essentially disappear on the page.
- You should eliminate the visitor counter. It is meaningless information
- There is no single focus point on the page. This is accentuated on higher browser resolutions based on the fluid (variable) page design format.
- Notice that the three product line images have different backgrounds.
- You need to concentrate on Interesting "above the fold" information (with links).
- Use Cascading Style Sheets in your next design.
- When you move to your next web design considering using rotating banners and photographs of employees at work. You can use this only on your homepage or across the header of your site.

## GRAPHICS

There are a few images that are far **too large**. They can be converted to a better format and optimized without substantial reduction in image quality.

[http://www.xpressmarketing.biz/homepage/content\\_collage.gif](http://www.xpressmarketing.biz/homepage/content_collage.gif)



Reduce 52867 byte GIF to 17804 byte JPEG- 75 % reduction [Quality: 50]  
Download would be reduced from 16 seconds to 4 seconds on a 28.8Kbps connection.

[http://www.xpressmarketing.biz/homepage/news\\_header.gif](http://www.xpressmarketing.biz/homepage/news_header.gif)



Reduce 17804 byte GIF to 3469 byte JPEG- 80% reduction [Quality: 40]  
Download would be reduced from 5 seconds to 1 second on a 28.8Kbps connection.

Notes and Recommendations:

- You should consider doing a rotating banner using sections of the content\_collage images.
- There are far too few graphics and photographs on your website. You should offset some of the text with images (clients in your shop, materials you have prepared, giving presentations, etc).
- Your images need to have ALT tags.

**We similarly evaluate TEXT and FONT, CONTENT, FRAMES, PLUG-IN's, COMMERCE on your website and provide suggested corrections and comments.**

**We end with a summary of recommendations and suggested priorities. In some instances we call for pruning shears...**

### **SUMMARY**

Notes and Recommendations:

- Generally the site looks pretty good.
- The most urgent thing to fix is the frame problem that is preventing IE 5.5 from displaying correctly.
- The next would be to convert and clean up the graphics.
- After that you need to change your pages to have a better balance between text and graphics. I suggest you schedule one page every two weeks until all the pages have been converted.
- There are some longer term changes to think about: Portal, linkage to contact management, and left navigation.

**and in others we call for the wrecking ball!**

### **SUMMARY**

Notes and Recommendations:

- The site needs to be revamped entirely. Frankly, I wouldn't spend a great deal of time on cleaning up the current website. Better to spend your time, money, and energy toward a good redesign.
- Look at competitors sites and like industry sites...industrial, B2B, parts, etc. to see what additional elements you should consider.
- If you are not yet ready for this at this time, the highest priority items would be:
  - Graphics clean up.
  - Standards compliance.

**Do you need an independent perspective on your website? Most people do.**

An impartial professional review of your website will provide your business with the following benefits—

It helps keep your website **fresh**.

- Your customers expect to see the most up-to-date features and functions on your website.

It helps keep your website **relevant**.

- They need information that will help them understand your products and services.

It helps keep your business **customer-focused**.

- It will give you a better understanding of your user's experience, improving communications and relationships.

It allows for **mid-course corrections** to your website.

- It is less costly and time consuming to continually tweak a website (making minor improvements) than to design and build one from scratch.

The time will come to **replace your site**.

- You'll know which features you want it to have and why.

*“An independent view will stimulate and challenge your thinking and get your creative juices going! “*

**Contact us today to arrange for an initial input session! - (585) 377-3439  
Or <http://www.strategicebusiness.com/SmallBusiness.html>**