

Why Communications Professionals Should Lead Web Communications Design and Development

By Sam Vigil Jr.

When determining who's in charge of an organization's web site, where's the focus? On the message or on the delivery mechanism? With the web, sometimes we forget what the priority should be.

The World Wide Web is a communications medium and needs to be treated as such.

Because it's easy to become enamored by all the technological bells and whistles, we may become blinded to the fact that effective web communications requires the right professionals to lead web communications efforts. That includes leading design and development, as well as leading the long-term strategies for maintaining the site.

Now, don't misinterpret what I'm saying. Yes, I do believe that technology professionals need to be part of the process.

Consider this: when your company wants to create sales programs or print communications, do you hire a printer first, then ask the printer to design sales materials, company brochures, the company magazine or the annual report?

Of course not. The printer can probably do what you ask. But printers are not usually designers or communications professionals.

Instead, you'll hire professionals who can deliver on their specialties: communicators – editors, writers – designers, and sales and marketing professionals. Then they go out and hire the printer to print the materials once they're developed.

The same goes for web communications. The Information Technology (IT) department is the equivalent of the printer.

Think of it as a three-legged stool: communications, design, and technology.

- Communications determines what needs to be communicated, what the priorities are, how issues and information should be communicated and presented.
- The designer facilitates the communication by creating the presentation.
- The technology experts provide the technological expertise to develop the “back end” and to get that message delivered over the world wide web pipeline.

And the communications professional is the one overseeing the entire process. The key is to develop communications that are effective and will produce the desired results.

Sure, some IT folks will tell you that they can design web sites and that they should be in charge. They often believe that because they see the web as based in the technology.

Don't get me wrong. I like the IT folks. In fact, I *need* them.

But where should the real focus be? On the delivery mechanism or on the messages that are being communicated via the medium?

Communications professionals are trained to focus on the message. IT professionals rarely have that same training.

If communications are a high priority, then a company recognizes the need to hire a communications manager and people specializing in creating effective communications

The web as a communications medium should be given just as much importance.

More and more large and savvy organizations recognize this. Content management consultant and author Gerry McGovern (www.gerrymcgovern.com, *Content Critical* and *The Web Content Style Guide*) writes in an [article](#):

“I spend a lot of my time speaking to managers responsible for large websites. Over the years, the profile of these managers has changed. Whether it is in Europe, North America or Asia, these managers now tend to have a communications background.”

And an intranet development consultant related to me:

“No matter how technically advanced and powerful a system is (Internet/intranet/or other), unless it is aligned with the needs of its audience and communicates in an intuitive manner, you’ve wasted your time and money. Communicators and designers help systems realize their true potential.”

While it may seem like a cost-saving measure to have the IT folks develop your web site, in the long run it’s likely to cost more to fix it.

For more on effective web communications, contact:

Sam Vigil Jr.
Portland, OR
samvjr@gmail.com