



portfolio

Marketing professionals

Trashing the Template

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Trashing the Template

Definition

For the purposes of this report, a “template” is a type of Website which accountants buy that is ready made. All the accountant needs to do is put their logo on and make sure the contact details are correct.

The content is supplied and updated automatically. There is often nothing to pay upfront (in time or money) because it is just a copy.

Disclaimer

This report is not intended to insult any service provider who sells, or any accountant who buys a template Website.

The report is my personal opinion, I could be wrong.

I have written the report in a provocative tone to stimulate debate.

The message of this report is clear; get real about your marketing, get serious about your strategy and start by trashing the template Website. It is negative marketing.

If you do not invest time and energy in your marketing I believe you will suffer. You will experience more and more price pressure and less interest from the market. You will be seen as a commodity provider and there is more competition that ever.

I will set the scene and voice my opinion before leaving you to make your own informed decision.

One reason NOT to do something is usually enough. Jumping off a cliff is a bad idea, it will hurt. I have four good reasons for you to avoid the Abyss of the template website.

One of them should be enough.

The Template Accountant

Have you noticed that the accounting profession seems to be producing clones?

Have a look around you; visit the Websites of firms around you and you often see the same style of design, use of colour, similar names and images as well as the standard boring content, sometimes with exactly the same words!

Do you really want to be seen as a typical accountant, a “me too” firm?

If you do lack passion, ambition and have no personality then it is probably best you stick with a template. Stop reading this report now and go and do some chargeable work - this report is not for you.

The Passionate Accountant

Are you one of those accountants that believe they can help people and make a difference?

Love is an unusual word to use in business, but I really love working with passionate accountants.

A positive marketing mentality is essential to surviving and flourishing. Developing this mentality in a firm of accountants is at the centre of creating a profitable and sustainable practice.

One thing that can act as the catalyst for developing this mentality is your Website. It can bring everything and everyone together behind the practice strategy.

Unfortunately some firms have fallen into the template trap because it is easy to buy a template Website and they appeal to accountants. But, accountants are not who the Website should be designed for.

The design and content of your Website should give readers an insight to what you are about. Working on your Website will give you a chance to really understand who you are and what value you have to offer.

It can be a scary process but one that can set you in a better direction.

Uncommon sense

A lot of marketing is counter-intuitive, let me explain:

To sell effectively you need to listen. To grow you need to narrow your focus. To get financially comfortable you often need to learn to go outside your comfort zone.

It may seem logical to have a template Website. After all, a template Website has all the things you as an accountant want in a Website. The trouble is you are not looking to impress other accountants; the objective is to engage with your market.

If you like your Website there is a good chance your prospects and clients will not. Are they really interested in what you do?

The urge to copy in humans is strong. Copying is how we learn and is a big driver in survival but in marketing copying is a very bad strategy because you will be seen as a commodity.

Be different and position yourself effectively.

In today's over communicated landscape, positioning is the smart way of marketing. You do not compete you out-market with strategy. A template Website is the opposite of what you should be doing.

Here are the four reasons why you should commission your own bespoke Website and populate it with your own content.

ONE - THE “TICK DONE THAT” MENTALITY

Creating a great website means that you have to think hard about ‘WHY’ you are in business, WHAT you stand for, WHO you want to attract as clients and what VALUE you offer.

Positioning and developing compelling value propositions are vital in today’s competitive environment. But, by choosing to subscribe to a template site, you bypass the thought process.

On the other hand, if you develop your own Website you need to think long and hard. And, when it comes to content you can stimulate and motivate your team by getting them involved by publishing.

Content is around you all day every day and there is nothing wrong with buying in research and base content. But, put your own take on issues in your own words.

With a template Website you completely and utterly miss the opportunity to bring the team together to truly define your practice.

Template Websites promote a lazy, ‘quick-fix’ attitude towards marketing. The cost of not thinking is huge; it could seriously compromise the value of the practice, even its sustainability.

TWO – DESIGN

A: Bland design

A key objective of your firm's marketing is to position your firm as unique. First impressions count and more and more buyers of professional services are using the Internet to research before buying.

Even referrals can be put off by your Website. If their current firm has the same type of Website they will naturally think you are the same and stay with the devil they know.

The effect of template Website seems to be to make the firm look like a classic or traditional accountancy practice. The use of images and colour is unimaginative and positions the firm as a commodity.

By looking average you will be perceived as average.

The eventual design and aesthetics will incorporate elements from your strategy. This is why to get good design you need a good strategy.

With a template Website you are not targeting ideal clients; you are just tossing a business card into the mass marketplace and taking what's offered. By not being different, you will be perceived as a commodity and have little leverage for pricing.

B: Dull and needless content

Template solutions have lots of technical information. For example, tax rates and a summary of the budget.

What firms need is content that appeals to the clients with whom they would like to work. Firms should be promoting their uniqueness; the middle line will mildly interest a few.

If you have a specialism, a niche or anything that differentiates you, then your content needs to reflect this. Celebrate who you are and massively excite the percentage of the marketplace that is of actual use to your practice.

On another level, potential clients want to be led by the right person. They have needs that have to be fulfilled to achieve a satisfactory relationship. So why should they have to wade through tax tables to get to you?

Without sounding too Marxist, you own the knowledge and the means to production. The client has the need. Entice them by 'speaking their language' then wow them by dealing with their requirements with style.

Also, what is the goal of your website?

The answer is to excite great clients to get in touch as quickly as possible. It is arguable that reams of dull information delays or even sabotages conversion.

C: Duplicated content

Not good for Search Engines and not good for visitors.

Several of your local competitors could have the same content. How insincere is a duplicated mission statement. Who wins? Probably the firm who has the courage and dares to stand out and reveal their true identity.

All templates are equally good...or equally bad, depending on whether you're a cup half full or half empty type of person.

Remember, you don't even own this content. If you choose to move away from a template site, you take nothing with you.

Part of a great marketing strategy is building an arsenal of powerful marketing content. With a template site, you haven't got a chance to even get started.

THREE- CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Do you want a provider of a key marketing tool to be working with your competition?
Do you want a new player to be able to use the content that you have helped pay for?

Within ten minutes of set-up, a startup will be perceived as good as a firm that has been paying their subscription for years.

And what about this, if you use a template provider and they find out how to do something online, not only will they tell you but they will tell your competitor!

FOUR - DISCONNECTED MARKETING

The idea with a Website is to have your marketing connected.

Your Website should link with your email nurturing programme, PR, strategic relationships and all lead generation campaigns.

Your website is the sea with all marketing rivers flowing into it.

- Your Blog will be insightful and relevant to your client base.
- Your Twitter feed will link to the Blog.
- Your Facebook page will host discussion stimulated by your Blog and website collateral.
- Your LinkedIn account will link to your Blog feed and team profiles and specialism.

Your adverts, directory listings, telemarketing and email marketing will link to bespoke, relevant, valuable downloadable content. All traffic will be encouraged to sign up for your newsletter, which will link back to previous Blog posts.

Or, you can bypass all of this and subscribe to a template website.

What next?

Well, as I see it you have three options:

Option one - stick to the template

Option two - trash the Template

Option three - procrastinate

I am sure there are some firms that will be happy being seen as a Template Accountant. However, I suspect most firms will take option three because thinking means avoids the chance of making a mistake!

If you have a template Website but know in your heart that you are not a template accountant then you have to be big enough and admit you made a mistake.

As soon as you do this you can move on. Get in touch as we can book a telephone consultation.

Yes, I would like you to buy a Website from me, but I am not going to sell you one.



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