Ten Rules for a Successful Financial Advisor's Website

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USA FINANCIAL®

Industry experts call the tested strategies and tactics *best practices* for a reason—it's because they work. Some best practices are as obvious as having flour in a cake, while others are more nuanced. Each time I begin the website design process with an advisor, I always present the three main functions of an advisor's website:

1. Credibility
2. Client Nurturing
3. Lead Generation

While not having a website is one of the biggest digital blunders, thinking a new one is going to bring swarms of million-dollar clients immediately to your front door step the instant your site goes live is an even bigger mistake. Done right, a website is a way to nurture existing clients, lower the barriers to lead conversion, and add credibility in the eyes of prospective clients. Your site should give those who are looking for a financial advisor in *Some City*, USA a way to find you, glean needed information to make a decision, and easily contact you.

In order to achieve these three main objectives within your website, there are a handful of "must follow" rules… in our (my) humble opinion, here are the Top Ten.

Rule # 1: Have a website: I said some of these would be obvious, but you would not believe the number of financial advisors that still do not have a website, many stating that no one will ever visit it. As the old saying goes, "you can't fix stupid." If you don't have a website, and want proof that they are important, ask a colleague to show you their website analytics. Analytics will tell you how many visitors came to a site, the pages they visited, how long people stay on your site, and a myriad of other data. The fact of the matter is that people are using the internet as their main research tool BEFORE making a buying decision. Even my 80 year-old grandmother, whom recently purchased a smart phone, is doing online research—Googling away to find out whatever suits her fancy at the time. In fact, according to a study performed by Google and Ipsos in March of 2013, the internet "is an everyday part of boomer's and seniors' lives and is the top source for gathering information on topics of interest, outpacing TV and print media."

If you have a website, and have not set up the free analytics tool offered by Google, get it done today. The fact that your current website host/designer didn't set it up for you should be a sign that they would prefer to keep you in the dark all while charging you the monthly fee.

Rule # 2: Make sure your name, the firm's name, and what you do are found in the copy (the words on the page): I love to give the example of a friend who runs a bicycle wheel manufacturing shop. They make a great product and have a sharp looking website, but unless you are looking for it, you may never notice that the word bike/bicycle is scarcely found on their website. That *was* the case until I brought it to his attention.

When it comes to financial advisors, your name, your firm's name, what you do, and where you do it must be on the homepage and several other pages of your site. Think like someone looking for your site. What words and phrases is he or she expecting to find and going to use to find you? "Financial planner?"

"Financial advisor?" "Retirement planning?" Another common addition to a search includes a geographic location. "Financial Advisor in Grand Rapids, MI." The more search terms that match the words on a page of your website, the greater the possibility that your site is going to show up on the search engine results page (SERP) of one of the various search engines used by millions of people every day.

You may be thinking, "But my name and firm's name is in my logo, isn't that good enough?" The answer is, "no." Search engine "spiders," the digital creatures that scan the internet to understand what is contained on a site, cannot read images. Therefore, both your name and your firm's name should be in the copy. Replacing a few pronouns on each page with your name and firm name is a good place to start.

Example: Wiley Coyote of Acme Financial Advisors has been providing financial planning and advisory services to the Greater Grand Rapids, MI area since 1990.

Caution: There is a fine line that you want to avoid crossing when it comes to "keyword stuffing." Just remember: Pigs get fed, and hogs get slaughtered.

Rule # 3: Client Account Login: It's the 21st Century. Clients want access to their information. As a matter of fact. They don't just want it, they expect it. For the client that wakes up at 3 a.m. every morning worrying about his or her account balance, a client account login on your website is a great way to ease the concern and nurture the existing relationship. Even if a client isn't always worried, but just periodically wants to know a balance, they no longer have to call you or your office. Account information is available to them even when you are sleeping, meeting with another client, or on vacation. At our firm, USA Financial, we provide a comprehensive account access software that comes as a standard part of our technology package and provides account access to everything processed through our broker/dealer and beyond. There are several add-ons you can choose that offer more complete account aggregation and performance reporting. The beauty is that you can control how much a client gets access to, which can be very valuable if you want to limit how much the "nervous Nellie" sees.

Rule # 4: What Makes You Different? Let me give you an example. At USA Financial this can be answered with our Asset Cycle Portfolio System® that helps advisors collect 100% of clients' investable assets. Another differentiator for us is Portformulas®, our formulaic trending money manager that "bypassed" the 2008 financial crisis gaining 1.68% when the market took a 38.5% dive. Yet another example is our "Plan First, Invest Second" mantra examining a client's complete financial situation and goals before making investment decisions.

For you, this might be a specific client niche market, such as doctors, teachers, or high-level executives. Or it might be the fact that your office is "full service" and also has a CPA and attorney, or that you offer superior customer care and service. Whatever it happens to be, what makes *you* different needs to be clearly called out and easily identified on your website. Let's face it, offering insurance and investments doesn't make you very different from the advisor down the street.

Rule # 5: Give them a reason to come back. The last thing you want is a “one-hit-wonder” website. Unlike in the music industry where the “one-hit-wonder” constantly gets played over and over again, in the website world it means one visit only. You need to provide solid reasons for your clients and prospects to come back to your site. The client login listed in #3 is one such way, but a frequently updated blog with informative articles, featured video, and/or weekly economic updates are other reasons why clients and prospects would want to return to your website. By the way, you should always be driving them BACK to your website through other mechanisms such as email campaigns.

Rule # 6: Contact Info: This is another point I would consider to be obvious, and yet there are advisors that think clients and prospects have mastered mindreading skills. No, an online form to fill out for “More Information” with no mention of your phone number or address is not enough. The financial planning industry is built on relationships, and a warm phone call is a great way to accelerate that relationship. At a minimum, your website “Contact Us” page should have:

Your Name
Your Firm Name
Mailing Address
Email Address
Phone Number

If you have more than one location, multiple advisors, or have assistants, this information and appropriate contact info should be clearly listed on your website as well. You can’t sell investments or get new clients if people can’t reach you.

Rule # 7: Relevant, Recent, and Unique Images and Photographs: Having photographs of you, your office, and the city that you serve adds an aesthetic element to your website, but also a sense of “realness.” “Putting a name to a face” and recognizing a landmark or skyline allows a prospective client to connect with you and know he or she is in the right place.

One of the more than 200 elements of Google’s search algorithm is unique content. As Google scans the web, they are looking at which sites have the same content for both copy and images. Those sites that are just regurgitating the same content generally show up lower in search results than do those sites with unique content. If you don’t believe Google can tell when the same image is used, take a look at Google’s “Reverse Image Search.” You may be surprised to see the power of Google. Google can tell if the picture of the retired couple on your website is the same one splattered on every other financial site, and they’ll penalize you for it. It may cost you more than stock images, but hiring a photographer to take photos of you and your staff, your office building, and you sitting at a table or presenting to someone (in your target market) will pay off in the long run.

Rule # 8: Focus, Focus, Focus-Website Design: In a world where more and more people are trying to triple-task, many people have no patience and cannot sit still or concentrate for more than two minutes. Therefore, your website needs to provide focus and direction and be intuitive to navigate. That means providing good, relevant content and a website design that guides a user where you want them to go and allows the user to easily navigate where they want to go. We read from left to right, top to bottom. The same is true for a website. Therefore, you should place the most important information at the upper left and work your way down from there.

This includes branding the site with your logo – a vital website best practice. The vast majority of websites feature the logo in the upper left. If there is a site login, it is customarily in the upper right sometimes accompanied by a contact phone number and links to your social media profiles. Your site navigation will be across the top below the logo. It should order the pages of your site in a way that makes sense.
For example:

About Us
Our Services
Resources
Events
Financial News
Blog
Contact

Depending on the amount of content you have for each section, you may have drop downs such as "Our Firm" and "Our Team" under "About Us." Each page should provide content that is informative, neatly laid out, and makes sense for the given page.

Below your navigation could be banners that feature important pages of your site or upcoming events, a short "40,000 foot view" of your site, or a personal video introduction. (You are using video, right?) Your site design should be consistent with a similar look and feel on each page. The colors and images should be an extension of your brand and consistent with your logo. If your logo is earth tones with a tree, your site would work well using similar colors and nature-based images.

Rule # 9: Lead Generation System: In order for you to get leads from your website, you need to provide a reason for a potential lead to take an action. If you are posting blog articles to your site, you may want to end your articles by inviting readers to contact you to discuss how they can implement the particular strategy or concept you talked about in the blog post. Also, if you have whitepapers and reports on your website, don't just give them away for "free." That doesn't mean to charge for them, but make the user provide his or her name and contact information so that you can follow up with him or her. You can then add them to a marketing drip campaign. Today might not be the right time, but in six months it might be, and if you don't "drip" on them another advisor will. Internet users are accustomed to giving their information to get something in return, whether it's a free sample, a coupon, or information.

Another way to get people into your office is to make them think, but not too hard. Ask them questions that may unsettle them with their current financial plan. "What if" questions like "What if the stock market crashes," "What if you live to be 105," and "What happens if you were unable to work tomorrow" are all possible things to make a prospective client become an investing client. They want to have an answer to those questions and their current advisor may not be providing the answer–or even raising the question!

Rule # 10: Optimize your site. I talked about this in Rule # 2, but the focus there was "on-page optimization." Another form of optimization is behind the scenes and designed for search engines. It is one of the many website services that we offer to our advisors and includes writing meta titles, descriptions and image tags, ensuring your site is submitted to search engines via Google and BING Webmaster Tools, making sure your site is built correctly and is mobile friendly, ensuring URLs are setup in a search friendly manner – and the list goes on.
There are many more elements that go into a successful website, and each advisor and website is as different from the next, but by following the aforementioned ten rules for a successful website you are on your way to being ahead of the other advisors that are using a purely prepackaged website, don't have one at all, or have a website that looks like it took two minutes to create.

So… are you ready for the big "pitch?"

I'd like to invite you to find out more about USA Financial. Websites and digital marketing are just one piece of the marketing puzzle that we help advisors with. Give one of our Business Development VPs a call today at 888-444-0125 Ext 1 and ask them to schedule a 15 minute phone consultation with me to discuss areas where YOUR website could be improved. If you feel we've created value for you and your practice, then maybe you'll want to take the next step to find out more about what we do and join us at an upcoming Discovery Day, where we'll share with you all the ways in which we help advisors.

I hope to hear from you soon. In the meantime…

Happy Marketing,

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