

8 Tips to make your Website more Effective – Jackrabbit Swim

Simply having a website is not good enough anymore. Your website can be the most cost effective way to communicate to existing and perspective customers. Your website can serve as a powerful round-the-clock marketing tool for your school. I know there are many owners who still view a website as a necessary evil, but if you look at the typical “buyer profile of young children’s activities” – these parents, mostly moms, spend a large amount of time “buying” on the web and want information NOW.

It is important to have these types of strategies in place:

- Drive perspective & existing customers to your website
- Guide perspective customers through the “buying process” in “baby” steps
- Have a simple “call to action” like “schedule your a free trial”, “schedule a free tour”
- Allow existing customers to get to information quickly, they know what they want, let them find it easily

Tip #1 - Drive Traffic to Your Website

Your website address should be on everything including:

- Brochures, flyers & posters
- Refrigerator magnets & window decals
- Yellow Page ad, letters, email signatures
- Voice mail greeting (be sure to visit our website for the latest information)
- Google Search Engine - www.Google.com
- Google Local Search Engine - local.Google.com
- “See website for details”
- “See website for current class calendar & schedule”

Tip #2 - Using Pictures / Graphics to Enhance Your Message

- Put pictures of kids having fun on every page
- Pictures/Graphics are to enhance text (not visa versa)
- Use real photos from your pool
- Do NOT use stock photography
- Send the message: Swimming is SAFE
- Send the message: Swimming is FUN
- Send the message: Swimming is for kids of all ages
- Send the message: Swimming is for kids of all shapes and sizes
- Make sure the pictures are low resolution (around 72 dpi) so that they do not slow down the website
- Be sure to use a variety of ages and equipment
- Make sure you have a “photo release” paragraph on your registration form



Tip #3 - Make it easy on the Search Engines

- Use text on your web pages, not pictures/images of text
- Search engines, like Google, when “crawling” your site cannot see images or pictures of text. It is very important on the home page to put common search criteria in text in the upper portion of the page
- Typical search text examples include: “Swim Lessons in Charlotte”, “Learn to Swim in Charlotte”, “Charlotte Swimming”
- Ask your visitors or non-swimming knowledgeable parents what phrases they would use to search for your facility
- Don’t let a web designer talk you into using “Flash” or cool graphics/images
- Submit your website to Google – it is FREE - www.google.com/webmasters/sitemaps
- Google’s local search capability is gaining huge momentum

Tip #4 - Class Descriptions / Schedules

- Class descriptions are very important when a perspective customer is trying to understand your offerings. It is important for each description contains: activities, benefits and age range.
- Websites tend to focus too much on the activities and not the benefits – remember you are typically competing against non-swimming alternatives and the non-swimming parent usually will not automatically understand the benefits from this great sport.
- **Use Pictures** on this page to enhance your descriptions, especially ones that pertain to the exact class
- **Use Videos** – I believe this is an area that websites do NOT take advantage of. Videos can be a huge selling tool – it can help close a sale without a visit or at least convince someone they should come to visit the facility in person.
- **Call to Action** – Make this really simple and a small step – a couple of examples include: “call or email to *schedule your a free trial*”, “call or email to *schedule a free tour*”, or “call or email to *schedule a free evaluation*”.

Tip #5 – NO Flash introduction

- Many web designers want to do a “Cool Flash” introduction to your site – Don’t do it!
- I personally think this is a waste of time and money and can cause frustration to your frequent visitors by always having to click on “Skip Intro”
- There is a good reason why all the popular sites (e-bay, Amazon, Google) do NOT have introductions
- A “Flash Introduction” looks something like a commercial with lots of motion and graphics

Tip #6 - Testimonials

- Keep a digital camera in the school
- Anytime a customer sings a praise about your business, ask if you can take their picture and put their quote on the website
- Put their quote & picture on the website and use only their first name (do NOT put their full name)
- Testimonials are powerful just like pictures – have these all over your website
- The testimonials page is one of the few pages that can be long – it is amazing how many website visitors will scroll down a long testimonial page and read each of the quotes

Tip #7 - Top Navigation Bar

- An older style of navigation was to have the website “Navigation Bar” (Table of Contents) on the left. The drawback to this left navigation style is that it takes up precious space on each web page.
- Now that websites are growing with more and more information, Top Navigation is better because it can stay the same on all your pages and does not take up as much space.
- If you have a lot of information on your website, it maybe a good idea to have “Pull Down” menus from some of the navigation items
- Navigation design is critical to making it easy for your website visitors to easily find the information they are looking for
- Website Visitors have a very short attention span and your navigation needs to be clear and well thought out

Tip #8 – Ask for the Visitor’s email

- Always have a “Subscribe to Newsletter” item on the home page
- Even if you do not currently publish an e-newsletter, always be gathering emails for announcements
- Odds are you will eventually have an e-newsletter and it is so easy to put this item on the home page and begin gathering perspective customers email addresses
- www.ConstantContact.com is an e-newsletter provider we use and recommend for small businesses