

Online Industry Survey

The web is a wonderful research tool. Many companies use the web to research competitors, vendors and prospective partners. We encourage all of our clients to research competitors by conduction informal, online industry surveys.

The purpose of an online industry survey is to develop an understanding of how competitors or industry leaders are using the web. Understanding current best practices online can provide useful guidance when developing your own internet strategy and website.

The following questions are primers to help you understand current best web practices for your industry. Apply the following questions to each company with an active website.

1. *What type of visitors does their site appear to be designed to service?*
2. *What type of information or services are they providing their visitors?*
3. *What business functions are they attempting to accomplish with their website? ex. Sales, Customer Service, Marketing, Investor Relations, etc.*
4. *What deficiencies are apparent in their website?*
5. *What tangible benefits does the company appear to be receiving from their site? Decreased cost? Increased sales?*
6. *What intangible benefits does the company appear to be receiving from their site? Improved level of customer service? Increased visibility (note competitors with high search engine placement)? Enhanced image or reputation?*

Try to identify trends after completing the survey. The following primers may help clarify industry trends.

1. *What things are being done by most companies surveyed? (standard practices)*
2. *What things are being done by few of the companies surveyed? (leading or lagging practices)*
3. *What things are not being done by any players? (opportunities or bad practices)*

Take the understanding developed from conducting this survey and create a list of possible goals for your website. Prioritize these goals based on anticipated return and level of support for your business plan.