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Race ahead of the pack

Your 10-Second Solution for a More Profitable Pet Website

A Recent Pet Marketing
Audit of Websites Reveals
**Only 1 in 6 Pass the
"First Impression" Test**
for Online Sales

Find out if your website passes the test.

This exclusive pet-industry report will help you *race ahead of the pack* in traffic and sales.

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INTRODUCTION: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The pet industry is still booming — but you're not seeing the results you expected from your website.

Why is that?

You're not alone if you're running a pet business or veterinary practice and you're asking these questions about your online efforts:

- Why doesn't my website show up higher in Google rankings?

- How come my competition always shows up much higher?

- Why isn't my site generating more customers and sales?

- I paid for a good website, so why isn't it working better?

- What's the secret to fixing these problems?

Pet marketers ask us these questions all the time. Even some of the bigger, more sophisticated pet brands are missing the mark.

But take heart. This report will provide answers to these questions.

That's because it's written specifically for pet-industry marketers who want to make the most of their web presence.

We've identified 5 key "First Impression" factors that are part of your 10-Second Solution for a more profitable website.

Let's find out what a 10-Second Solution can mean to your site's first impression success.

As experienced web content consultants, we're constantly looking for ways to help pet and veterinary marketers answer the questions listed above.

Every day, our mission is to help you:

- Take charge of your website,

- Lead the competition in search engine results,

- Impress your visitors so they'll choose to do business with you,

- Boost your online results and

- Keep it going and growing.

Based on this mission, we follow the world's leading web-industry experts to stay on top of what works online.

Two recent groundbreaking findings — based on studies involving thousands of web user tests — tell us what makes (or breaks) a website's success within a mere matter of seconds. First, recent data[1] revealed that website user viewing time is distributed as follows:

- **Above** the Fold (the first screen area viewed on a website):   **80.3%**

- **Below** the Fold (the area that requires scrolling to be seen):   **19.7%**

This means most of your online visitors only look at the first screen of your site before moving on. It's very unlikely that they'll scroll or click to another page if the first screen doesn't grab their attention.

In another extensive study, this show-stopping statistic was revealed:[2]

"The first 10 seconds of the page visit are critical for users' decision to stay or leave. The probability of leaving is very high during these first few seconds, because users are extremely skeptical, having suffered countless poorly-designed web pages in the past."

And, in another recent global study involving 1 million websites, just 9.6 percent of the sites had "all the basic web page elements covered correctly."[3]

Wow. That's a surprisingly low number.

Why do these numbers matter for your pet or veterinary website success?

They indicate opportunity for you.

Your business will have a much better chance of online success if you address what these findings tell you. For example:

- **Your website's Above the Fold area is more important than you ever imagined.**

  If 80.3% of your visitors only look here to consider doing business with you… you can attract more leads and sales by making "best practice" adjustments to your site's Above the Fold area.

- **You've got about 10 seconds (or less) to make an appealing first impression.**

  Those precious seconds either keep your prospects interested… or send them away. What's your first impression? Find out and fix any gaps that hold you back.

- **If you improve your website with the best-practice essentials found in this report, you'll leap ahead of your competition.**

  With such a small portion of websites following the top guidelines, there's plenty of room for you to dominate your market category.

That's what the 10-Second Solution is all about.

To see how those global statistics play out in the pet industry, we recently audited just over 300 websites in the pet and veterinary industry.

We found that a majority of them are missing those crucial "First Impression" elements... The 5 elements we're about to reveal to you.

- Once you know our 10-second First Impression elements, you'll have clues into what you can fix immediately.

- You'll also discover surprising search engine optimization (SEO) findings that are easy to correct… making a big difference in how many people FIND your site via Google, Bing, Yahoo! and other search engines.

- Best of all, know that many of your competitors' websites — if not all of them — are falling short. This means you can easily leap ahead of them in search results and online results.

The insights in our hot-off-the-press report will help you:

- **Evaluate your website with a fresh and knowledgeable perspective on how your target audiences search for solutions in today's online world,**

- **Take steps to improve your site's impression with potential customers now and for the future and**

- *Race ahead of the pack.*

Ready to see what it takes to attract more customers and leap ahead of the competition?

Let's get started.

AUDITED PET AND VETERINARY WEBSITES

In the summer of 2012, we compiled a list of companies to evaluate. Just over 300 websites made our list (303 to be exact) and included:

- Pet companies listed in the SuperZoo Conference Guide and HH Backer's Spring Trade Show Guide

- Pet companies advertising in pet-industry publications (trade and consumer magazines) such as *Pet Product News*, *The Bark*, *Modern Dog* and several others

- Veterinary companies listed in the NAVC Conference *Official Program Guide*

- Veterinary companies advertising in trade publications such as *DVM* magazine, *Veterinary Practice News* and others

We chose these companies because they invest in trade shows and advertising to reach their target audiences. In other words, they spend significant money trying to attract more customers.

- Exhibiting at trade shows can cost $6,000… $10,000… or even upwards to $100,000 and more.[4] When you consider that this investment may drive qualified prospects to their website, what happens on the site? Is it turning those prospects into customers, or turning them away? Does the website undermine all the resources expended in capturing leads at a trade show? Quite possibly. Remember that trade show traffic will end up visiting the company website.

- Advertising in magazines can cost thousands of dollars as well. And if the ads are inviting people to visit the company website to get information or make purchases — what's really happening when they arrive?

In preparing this audit and report, we wanted to see how well the company websites are consistent with trade show and advertising efforts, and also how they stand alone as strong marketing avenues in themselves.

Our list of audited websites is balanced evenly between veterinary-focused companies and pet businesses (retail products, services and others).

It also includes a mix of large, well-known companies, mid-size niche companies, smaller businesses and new start-up companies.

In short, if you're marketing pet products, pet services, veterinary products or veterinary services… this report is written for you.

OUR "FIRST IMPRESSION" CRITERIA

Based on web-industry studies as well as PetCopywriter.com's extensive background in web content consulting and SuccessWorks®-Certified SEO Copywriting —

We chose the following 5 indicators to evaluate the 300+ websites for First Impression success:

1. Quick load time (You've got a split second...)

In a recent issue of *Website Magazine,* we found this web-success statistic that may shock you:

"**When viewing a website, it takes users less than 2/10ths of a second to form their first impression**," according to research at the Missouri University of Science and Technology.

That's literally the blink of an eye when you think about it.

Now, this may seem contradictory to what we already said about your 10-second First Impression… but consider this.

You have a split second to give visitors a feel for your business, and then you have about 10 seconds to help them understand what you offer.

This means load time — the time it takes all components of your web pages to appear on the screen — is INCREDIBLY important. This includes your text, photos, graphics, etc.

You may be shocked to know that many websites take more than 10 seconds to even load.

We'll explain why this matters so much when we tell you about our load-time findings during the audit — and what you can do if your load time is too slow.

2. Clarity (Where am I…?)

The instant your website appears, visitors quickly glance at your logo and primary messages, asking themselves:

• What company is this?

• Where are they located? (Especially critical if it's a local business)

• What do they do?

• Is this relevant or helpful to me?

• Does this look like a quality brand? (Stock photos can undermine branding.)

- What products and services do they sell?

- How do they deliver what I was searching for?

- What can I do here?

The example below is a super-clear website that answers all those questions for the visitor.

You know it's a retail store. You can see where it's located. You know how to browse for products. You even know when they're open and how to contact them.

Everything's completely clear.

Think about your own web use for a moment. We're pretty certain you've experienced moments when you arrived at a website and thought, "This website makes no sense. I'm not even sure who this is, or what to do here."

Chances are, you abandoned that site very quickly… never to visit again.

Imagine if you were paying a sales rep to represent you, and when people met him, they just walked away without listening to him. This is what's happening on an unclear site.

It happens all the time… as evidenced by the 300+ sites we audited.

3. User-friendliness (How do I…?)

This indicates the user-friendliness of your site, answering the question for visitors:
Can I quickly find what I need?

When evaluating a website for its usability strength, we look at these concerns:

- Is the navigation immediately clear and easy to follow… or do I have to waste time

figuring out how this website is organized?

- How do I quickly locate information about the specific solution I was searching for?

- Where do I see how the product or service works?

- How do I find more details without having to waste time hunting for them or clicking again and again?

- How do I make a purchase or make an inquiry?

- How do I contact them if I have a question or concern?

Again, think about your own website experience when you've been looking for something online. How many times have you visited a site and had trouble finding what you need? And after minutes of searching, you finally gave up in disgust. Frustrating, right?

4. Engagement (Why buy here?)

One of the most overlooked aspects of web content is the opportunity to SELL through inviting, customer-focused messages; unique positioning (why choose us?); and trust elements that make it comfortable to do business there.

Unfortunately, many websites, including our audited sites, lack the following message must-haves for content that drives leads and sales:

- Messages are written to the customer, explaining the benefit for them

- Each page has a big, bold promise or solution headline along the lines of, "Your needs are solved here, in this wonderful way…"

- Messages are mainly about "you" and "your needs" (focused on the visitor), not "we" (focused on the company)

- Messages clearly set the website apart from the competition, helping the visitor understand, "Why choose this website's solutions instead of going somewhere else?"

- Messages guide the visitor through a persuasive decision-making path that ends with a conclusion of, "Yes! This is exactly what I need! I'll buy it!"

- Trust elements are plentiful, such as testimonials, endorsements, seals of approval, guarantees, demos, etc., so visitors feel comfortable doing business here.

- Engagement opportunities invite visitors to become involved, such as how-it-works videos, invitations to sign up for a valuable newsletter or report, "Chat with an expert" and "Join the conversation!" social sharing links.

Here's an example of a website that includes several inviting ways to engage with the visitor:
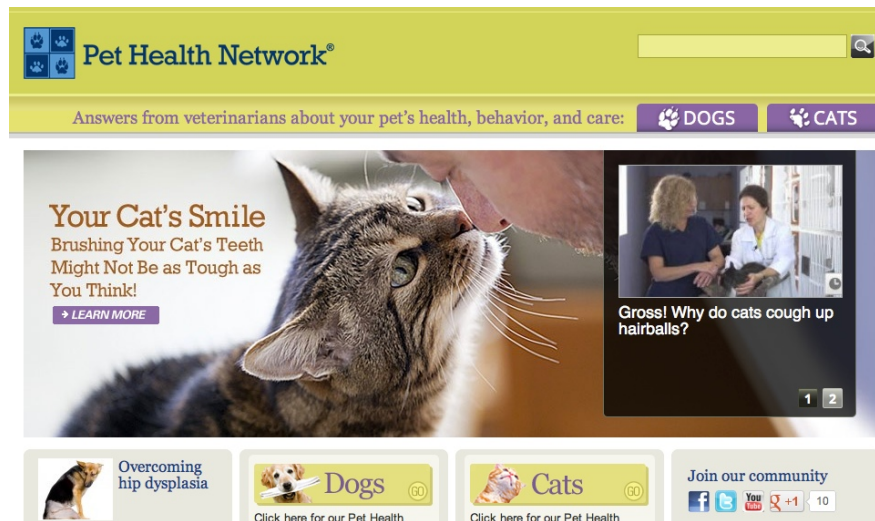
In just seconds, you see that you can learn about brushing your cat's teeth, find out why cats cough up hairballs, get answers on dog and cat health and join a community on Facebook and other social networks.

5. SEO Strength (How did I find your site in the first place?)

Although SEO (search engine optimization) may not seem critical to your website's First Impression success, it's actually **the foundation of your success**. Here's why.

If your website isn't being found in Google, Bing and other search engines, you're missing out on hundreds if not thousands of opportunities to reach more customers.

Plus, if your site happens to appear on page one of Google because you're in a super-niche market — but the description is boring or uninviting — you've lost that opportunity because people won't be motivated to click to your site. Especially if your competition has a fabulous, inviting description that makes their company more appealing.

Here's what an inviting, benefit-focused description looks like:
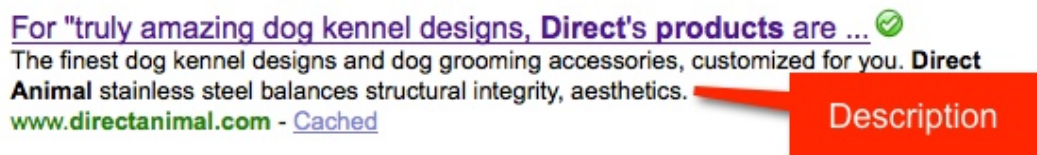
Therefore, the SEO strength of your website is essential for success. At the very least, every page of your site should include the following:

- **Two or three relevant keywords** (search phrases) used throughout the text in smooth (non-spammy) ways. This includes using them in your headlines, subheads, link wording, photo captions, etc. Your primary keywords should be different on each page so it matches that page's content.

- A customer-focused **Page Title tag** that includes keywords in an elegant way, so it appears as an inviting sentence in Google, Bing, etc. results, as well as the top of your web page.

  Here are two snapshots of what we mean by that.

  First, the image below shows you how an optimized, customer-focused page title appears in Bing search results (the title tag is blue or purple, depending on whether or not you've clicked on it before):

  And here's where that tag appears in your browser when you're on the corresponding web page:
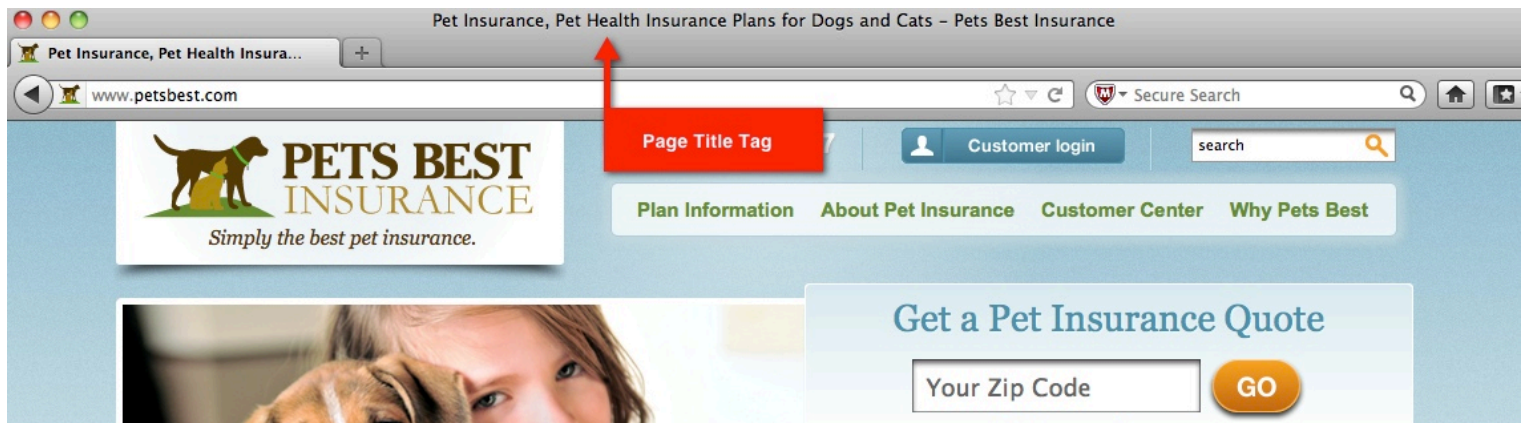
- A customer-focused **Meta Description tag** (in your code) that weaves keywords smoothly into an inviting sentence. This description often appears in Google, Bing, etc. results, as well as the top of your web page.

  In the Pet's Best Insurance example again, below, the Meta Description is the wording below the website address, beginning with: "**Pet insurance plans** for dogs & cats…"

- **Alt. image tags for photos, graphics and other design elements** that search engines can't "read" because they're not text. Your web developer or copywriter can place these tags in the website.

These are the basics of SEO. There's much more you can do… but most websites we audited didn't include even these essentials. This means you can leap ahead if you add these SEO elements and your competition doesn't.

OUR 10-SECOND SCRUTINY

Armed with our criteria outline — and using our list of 300+ websites — we started reviewing each home page for exactly 10 seconds. That is, we *tried* to review each home page for 10 seconds. Unfortunately, the load time of some websites was MORE than 10 seconds, so we gave up on those.

The majority of sites loaded fairly quickly; ready for us to give them a First Impression evaluation.

Once we could see the complete page (text and images), we scanned the content and layout to see how well they measured up against our criteria:

- **Quick load time**

- **Clarity**

- **User-friendliness**

- **Engagement**

- **SEO strength**

We made notes on our findings for each site, and then we created a list of **42 websites that met the First Impression criteria in our first pass.**

We waited two days to take a break, and then we reviewed the list of 42 "got it right" sites to make sure we were correct. We then created a final ranking of these sites, looking for those that truly deserve a perfect score across all 5 criteria.

Several of the First Impression short-list websites met most of the criteria but were missing key elements that drew away from a perfect score.

For example, three of the sites use very common stock photo images that are seen on MANY veterinary websites. This can undermine clarity and brand-recognition because the images look like other companies and may cause confusion for prospects.

We see this all the time — several websites feature the exact same stock image (or variations) of a female veterinarian holding a cat, for example. We urge companies to use their own unique images for a better brand impression.

Websites that were nearly perfect in meeting the First Impression criteria, but were missing a clear tagline or title tag, could not be considered as "100% spot-on" in meeting the criteria.

Websites that ACED the First Impression test in all aspects were placed on our winners list.

OUR FINDINGS AMONG 303 WEBSITES

Once we had completed all of the steps described up to now, we categorized our findings in this way:

- **261 websites** (86.2%) did not meet the First Impression/Above the Fold criteria and have plenty of opportunities to boost their results.

- **42 websites** (13.8%) did meet the First Impression criteria at first pass, but we wanted to take a closer look and evaluate them further. Of those…

  - **22 websites** were still missing a couple of key elements per our criteria. Still very good and worthy of including in this list, but not 100%.

  - **20 websites received our top score because they truly gave a terrific First Impression, meeting all 5 of our criteria.**

We'd like to show you a few different types of websites that met our top First Impression score so you can see how our criteria can make a huge difference in clarity, user-friendliness, competitive positioning and customer-focused messaging.

As you look at the winning websites on the following pages (we encourage you to visit them online to see the full images and user experience)… consider these criteria again:

- **Quality load time:** The sites load quickly (about 3 seconds); no long delays.

- **Clarity**: In mere seconds, you know exactly what they do and offer as solutions.

- **User-friendliness:** The navigation is easy to use so you quickly find what you need.

- **Engagement:** Visitors interact with your business (newsletter, social buttons, video).

- **SEO strength:** Keywords are used in page title tags and the messages throughout.

WINNING WEBSITES (A SAMPLING)

Thundershirt.com

When you arrive at the Thundershirt website, you receive a lot of great information in just seconds, Above the Fold. Through its clean and clear design, messages and navigation, you instantly know all this at a glance:

- What the brand is (Thundershirt)
- What they sell (anxiety solution for dogs)
- What it is/does (you can see the wrap on the dog)
- Why it's great; why you can trust it (recommended by vets, dog owner testimonial)
- A beneficial offering (free shipping)
- How to buy it — where to go next (a large, bright "order now" button)
- How to contact them (telephone number)

Vet-Stem.com

When you arrive at this website, you can quickly scan to find the following information, all Above the Fold:

- What the brand is (VetStem)
- What they sell (regenerative stem cell therapy)
- What it is/does (it offers help for arthritis in dogs, joints in horses, etc.)
- How to get more information — where to go next (Pet and Horse Owners "learn more"; Veterinarians "learn more")
- Plus, they correctly use SEO search words in their Page Title as you can see at the very top of this screen image

SitMeansSit.com
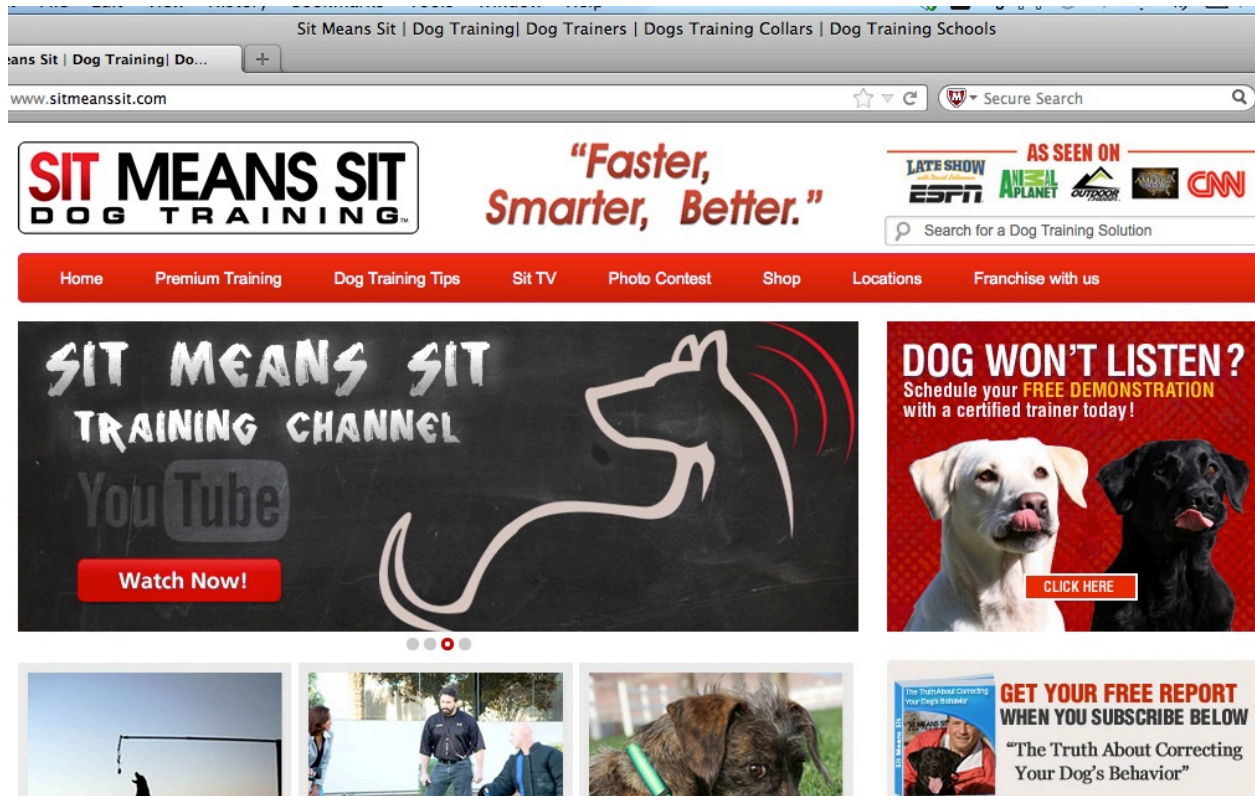
There's no question what this website is about. In an instant you know it offers dog training that's "faster, smarter, better." The copy is written to appeal to the visitor and solving his/her dog training needs.

You also discover these other facts right away, Above the Fold:

- You can watch training videos now on its YouTube channel
- You can access a Free Demonstration of how to get your dog to listen
- If you subscribe to their newsletter, you'll get a Free Behavior Report
- At the very top/right, you can search for a dog training solution within the site
- The navigation also includes a photo contest and franchising information

PetsBestInsurance.com

Most pet insurance websites are very strong when it comes to meeting the First Impression criteria for a clear and helpful user experience. In fact, nearly all that we visited present themselves in a reputable, high-quality way.

We chose this website as an example because:

- In just 3 seconds, you know exactly where you are (Pets Best Insurance)
- Plus you can get a quote immediately, see how it works, and see what's covered
- In addition, this page gives you a number of clear and appealing reasons to consider buying insurance from them… and what to do if you're interested (Simple enough!)

HaloPets.com
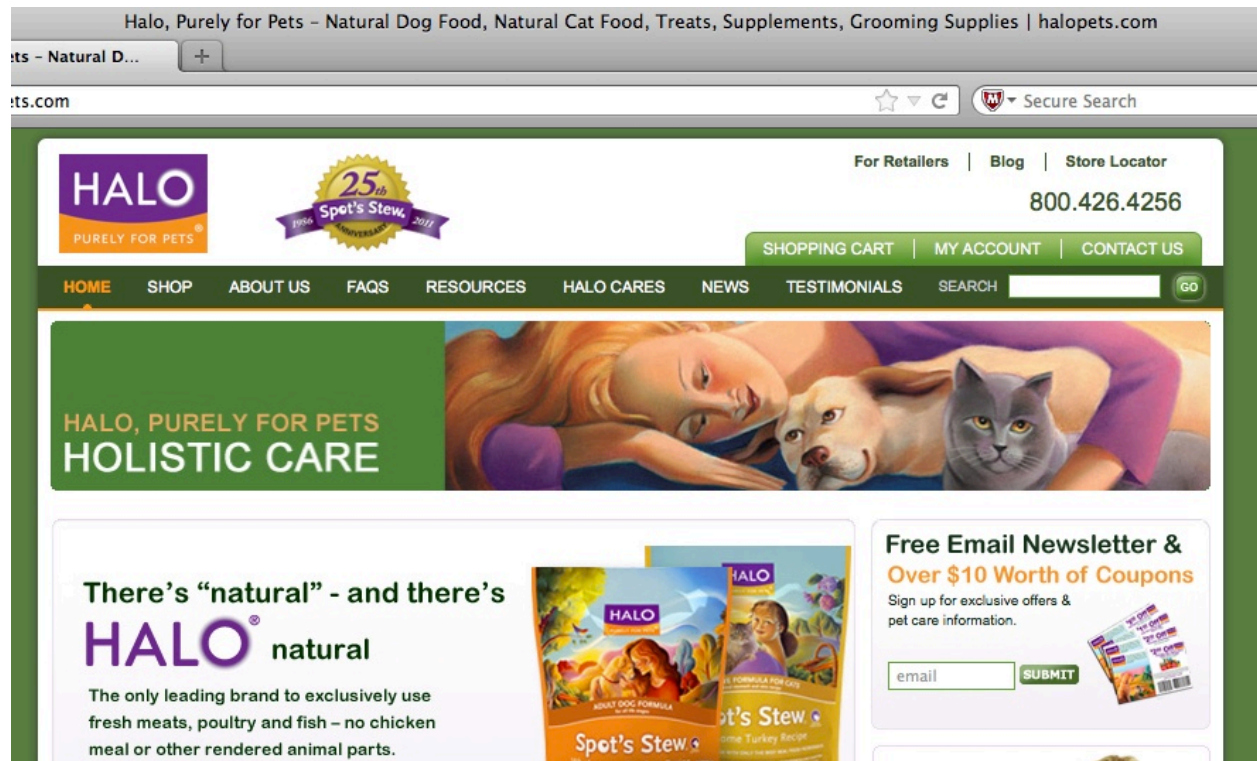
In the highly competitive world of pet foods, treats and health supplements, Halo instantly presents its brand as a provider of pure, natural and holistic products.

- Everything about this home page says "natural," from the simple copy to the graphics, color choices and product photos
- It includes "what's in it for me, the pet-parent" messages and an easy-to-spot offer of $10 worth of coupons
- The brand name is repeated so you know exactly where you are at all times — this may seem obvious to you, but many websites miss the mark in reminding people where they are; what's the brand

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

You only have one chance to make a great first impression with visitors within the first 3-10 seconds of arriving at your website's Above the Fold area.

Therefore, having a clear, user-friendly website is as important as your trade show booth, your magazine ad, your best salesperson, or how your retail store looks and flows.

It's more true today than it ever was — all roads eventually lead to your website.

Now that you've seen what makes a great first impression for more traffic and sales…

We recommend taking a fresh look at your site's layout, content, messages and keyword use, and making an investment in adjustments that will generate more traffic and sales.

Making an excellent first impression doesn't have to be difficult.

We recently redesigned PetCopywriter.com to enhance our first impression for visitors, focusing on the criteria in this report. Visit www.PetCopywriter.com to take a look.

Now it's your turn.

When you apply the information we've presented here, you can clear out any clutter or confusion, add missing elements your visitors need, and make a strong first impression that's focused on solving your visitors' needs.

The result? You'll race ahead of the pack and enjoy a more profitable pet website.

Remember, you have 10 seconds to make a first and lasting impression.

"We had our biggest sales month ever. The work you did has really paid off!" — S.Bryant, **Pet Industry Retailer**

If you're not sure about your website, perhaps it's time for a professional, objective assessment. I can fix your website's First Impression gaps so you'll enjoy steady, lasting results, bringing in more traffic and sales.

Contact Pam Foster at PetCopywriter.com for a free first impression review of your website.

You can also contact us to find out if your website was included in this evaluation.

Email: pam@PetCopywriter.com
Phone: 843-597-6515

Sources:
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