



Bob Roth

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# 5 Things I Learned

about Web Site Development

by Bob Roth, managing partner, Cypress HomeCare Solutions, LLC

## 1. It's all about the message.

This is a lesson I've applied to other aspects of my business, including marketing, business strategy, negotiations and more. Your message has to permeate your entire endeavor. Every word, every tool must consistently reinforce your message across all mediums – especially the Internet.

The message must be concise and must be something the audience can relate to. It must have a call to action, and must promote RECALL.

To develop this you must sit down with your staff and go through a messaging session. Your goal should be to determine your primary message and your methods of distribution. It usually takes about a half-day with key employees and management. At Cypress HomeCare Solutions, we did this back in September 2004, and found our core message: "Compassionate Care in your Home" for marketing and "For a Career in Caring," for our recruiting.

The message of compassion and caring even extends into the audio realm – we use the same soothing, but vibrant music in the background of all of our TV and radio commercials, on the web, and in the background of our on-hold message.

## 2. Online development is fluid – not project-driven like paper-based marketing or recruiting.

Look to mine valuable content and repurpose strategies from other areas of your agency – sales spots/commercials, recruiting videos/copy, educational materials – anything that delivers your message in a creative, compelling way.

Don't assign specific campaign types any longer – flyers, direct mail, etc. Every campaign should have components of all the different media at your fingertips. What's on CD or on paper today should end up on your web site tomorrow – and maybe eventually on YouTube!

For Cypress, we want our web site to become a virtual community for our clients, referral sources and job candidates. So we direct everyone to our web site. For example, in our recruiting, we direct candidates to our web site, asking them to click on a link to see a video so that they can learn more about a "Career in Caring." Virtually their entire first contact with us is through our site – all the way to completing and submitting an application online to our HR department.

# 5

“Enticing visitors is an art: Certain items, like videos, will draw the attention of search engines, while even your best text won’t necessarily generate any interest.”

For prospective clients, we send them to our web site so that they can learn more about the company. We provide a host of different ways for them to do this – from reading about Cypress HomeCare in the News, to questions you should ask a prospective agency (and our answers). We also have a number of online links and resources, as well as our TV commercials.

But the community doesn’t end there. Our TV commercials have been posted on YouTube – extending their reach far beyond a 30-second spot on Channel 8.

This fluidity can be trying, and frustrating for executives who like to finish one project and move onto another – but the web will not allow that. Your site’s development has to be a constant work in progress, with components moving into and out of the online realm.

### 3. Tracking is everything.

You need powerful tracking tools for your site, to tell you what’s happening, and where business is being driven. Without this knowledge, you’re throwing money away on site development.

After 15 years in the consumer products industry (Quaker Oats, Gatorade, Dole Foods), I learned that I had to measure the performance of every dollar that was spent. I brought this same discipline with me into the home care arena, introducing some of the same incredible training on tracking the performance of marketing/advertising dollars.

At Cypress, our online development has only reinforced this tenet of our business. For example, in our online job application, that is the first question we ask – how did you hear about this opportunity? Once we’ve gathered the data we can analyze the revenue dollars or number of hours it took to produce a given result – hiring a new caregiver, obtaining a new client, wooing a new referral source – to see if the spend was actually worth it.

### 4. Luring site visitors is as much an art as it is a science.

Certain items, like videos, will draw the attention of search engines (to bring visitors to your site), while even your best text doesn’t necessarily generate interest from the same search engines.

Every agency that has a web presence should subscribe to a company that performs search engine optimization. Their work will ensure that your company’s name comes up on the first results page, preferably in the top five items on the first page, when certain key words our searched.

But it’s not necessarily an intuitive process – it takes some time to develop a sense of what words and phrases web users are searching for. For example, we identified the somewhat odd phrase of “home care phoenix” as a likely one. It’s one of the most common searches that finds our site, and Cypress comes up as number three under a Google search for those terms.

### 5. Online development is not only fluid, but also in a constant state of flux.

You want to post all your content (news, video, job applications, purchasing/transaction options, promotional pieces, educational materials, brochures, etc.) online.

But you must cull that content regularly – no less than once a month, and hopefully more frequently – to ensure that your site is fresh. Neither search engines nor visitors will tolerate a stale/static web site.

One of the challenges to this process is being able to take negative feedback. To keep your site on the cutting edge (or close to it), you have to ask smart people to analyze your site several times a year. Then you must be open to what they say, even if it contradicts your own thinking about your site – and be flexible enough to make changes on the fly.