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The Cost of Cutting Corners

By Chris DeVito, NOC Technician, TechSolutions

Not too long ago, I had the opportunity to assist one of our clients with setting up a new computer they had recently purchased from Staples. After initial inspection, it was pretty clear the computer was a very inexpensive computer with relatively low power, running an i3 processor, Windows 8, and assorted low-end hardware. It was a cheap computer to be sure, but not a bad computer by any definition. The person who bought the computer had a rough idea what they wanted to do with the computer when they bought it, but they hadn't really done much research beforehand to ensure the one they had purchased was up to the task, and focused purely on the price of the computer at retail.

On closer inspection, it was determined that the computer would require a fair amount of time and labor to get it to a point where it could do what was needed. The computer came without Microsoft Office and Adobe Acrobat. The operating system was only the Windows 8 Standard Edition and wasn't capable of joining a domain like the Professional Edition. The hard drive speed was very slow, and the computer had only the bare minimum amount of memory to operate a 64-bit system. Certainly not what could have been considered "ideal" for the duties this computer was purchased to perform, but fortunately the bulk of the issues related to software could be resolved. The owner had to purchase a new Office 2013 Home and Business license, as well as a new Adobe Acrobat license and a Windows 8 Anytime Upgrade from Standard to Pro.

When all the computer configurations had been completed to achieve the owner's requirements, 4 hours of paid technician time had passed. Furthermore, they had spent hundreds of dollars just purchasing the extra software they needed. The result was a computer that booted and logged in only marginally faster than their previous computer which was well passed end-of-life. After running rough calculations, they had spent at least $1500 on this computer in time, additional software and the original retail price of the machine. With a bit more research and knowledge, they could have purchased a very good machine with all the software they wanted installed by the manufacturer. The better computer would have run much faster and only required about a third of the time to setup, and all for the same price if not slightly cheaper. After focusing primarily on "cheap" they had a computer that did not even match up to a "good" computer that would have cost exactly the same amount. The moral of this story is that while you get what you pay for, sometimes what you pay for isn't as good as what you could have got. Knowledge, expertise and research can go a long way to making sure you make a good purchase when it comes to buying almost anything, especially in the case of computers.

We assist clients with purchasing computers all the time, performing the research and bringing to bear our expertise to ensure they get machines that are up to the task, at a very competitive price. So if you need assistance in making a purchase, we'll be glad help and make sure you cut the right corners.

Importance of Website Footers
By: Tanya Jones

Website footers are one of the most ignored elements of a site. Not many site owners give a lot of importance to them. The footer is placed at the bottom of the page and will be seen last by anyone who visits your site. This also means that it gives you one last opportunity to make people visiting your site take some action that will be beneficial to your business before they leave the page. How your footer looks is not the only thing that is important. What is also important is what it contains and how it can add to your site's performance. Let's look at some of the various elements of a website footer.

Site Map

One of the most crucial things that you should include in your website footer is links to all the important pages of your site. If your site has a form based navigational structure, then the links given in the footer can become the main navigational links for different search engines. It would be best if all of these links contain keywords that link back to the respective pages. Most sites use the footer like a small sitemap. The footer can not only have links to product and service pages but also links to other pages as well. If the footer cannot be used as a sitemap, then the site owner can at least place an HTML link to the sitemap in the footer.

Content

One of the latest trends in web design is to add a feed of the newest content of the site on the footer. It could be in the form of a blog feed, tweets, new articles added to the site or any other kind of content. Adding content on the footer has many plus points. Since it is added in the footer, it will not take away from the focus of the page and will keep the visitor's attention on the main content of the page until they get down to the footer. The other advantage is that fresh content will get added to the page if the feed is added to the footer. This will help your site from the SEO point of view.

Social Media Buttons

The world is moving towards social media and it has become very important for business and personal websites to take social media seriously. You may include your social media profile on the footer of your site. This will let your visitors share the content from your site to their other contacts.

Call to Action

A visitor to the site reaches the footer after going through all the other content of the page. At such a time, if the website does not guide the visitor, it may lose out on a potential customer. The footer will be like the user's last chance to take any kind of action. Action could be in the form of signing forms, transactions, buying products or sending an inquiry. The call to action button can be placed on the footer.

Credibility

The footer can also be used to gain the trust of your visitor and build credibility. Any BBB Accreditation safety certificates, membership to industry bodies, testimonials, awards and any other such things can be placed there. If these are put in the footer, it will help your visitors make a decision about your site if they have any doubts.

Contact Information

Your contact information is another vital thing that can be placed in the footer. The contact information will help to convince your visitor that the website is real and not a hoax.

Legal Information

A good footer will also have any legal information about the company. Things like the disclaimer, privacy policy, legal declaration, information regarding copyright can all be placed in the footer of the site.

A footer is a very important part of a website that not only contains legal information regarding the site, but can also be used to highlight any other important aspects of the site. Ignoring the footer of the site can take away a lot of value from it. Similarly there are many other areas of web design that cannot be ignored. As a business owner or site owner you may not have the time or ability to address all the critical elements that are important to making an effective website. That is why it can help to hire a competent, professional web design company who has experience in designing various websites and will make sure all areas are designed for maximum effectiveness.

Tanya Jones is a staff writer for Flying Cow Design, a company that provides quality medical web design services.
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3D Printing: A Cautiously Optimistic Revolution in Manufacturing

(NewsUSA) - Amid excitement over 3D printing, there is caution. According to experts, safety and reliability standards and mandates will need to be developed and implemented for products that can be churned out on a whim. Technical education and training will likely be impacted. Legal issues pertaining to ownership, patent protection, trademarks and copyrights and credentials for individuals using the technology will need to be resolved before 3D printing reaches new levels and new frontiers.

In the U.S. and elsewhere, the 3D printer is enabling a "maker movement," as an increasing number of people apply the technology to their daily lives.

In the business world, 3D printers are used at dental labs to make custom crowns in less than one hour and at NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center to fabricate a new type of fuel injector. Future industrial applications include food production and the printing of human bone and tissue. What's more, 3D printers are showing up in basements and garages of U.S. households as the do-it-yourself community embraces the powerful tool to make everything from model trains and translucent chess pieces to circuitry and musical instruments.

Three-dimensional printers make products by following instructions from a computer and stacking raw material -- plastic, metal or other substance -- into layers. Whereas, in conventional design and manufacturing, computer-based models are developed and then adapted to machining. "Among the many advantages of 3D printing is the capability of the system to print on demand when an object is needed," said Hod Lipson, co-author (with Melba Kurman) of the book "Fabricated: The New World of 3D Printing," who recently addressed a special session on advanced manufacturing arranged by the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME).

Many of the consumer 3D printers on the market are "selective deposition" types that squirt, squeeze or spray liquid, paste or powdered raw material through a nozzle. Found today in many homes and schools, the selective deposition models are also a favorite of food-loving enthusiasts, who use the printers to create dough, frosting and other culinary treats.

At its recent 2013 International Mechanical Engineering Congress, ASME brought together the manufacturing community to discuss these issues, and the experts concurred that 3D printing will enjoy a promising future. For more information, visit www.asme.org.

The New World of Light Switches, Controls and Dimmers

(NewsUSA) - A lighting switch is just a switch, right? As it turns out, not really. Technology is changing the smallest details in your home -- switches, controls and dimmers -- to make daily life more beautiful and more functional. The American Lighting Association (ALA) details advances in lighting switches.

New Bulbs Equal New Switches

If you have decided to embrace the energy-smart world that is LED or CFL light bulbs, there is something that might be hindering your use of them: your traditional lighting controls. "Traditional lighting controls don't work very well with the new bulbs," says Erik Anderson, national sales manager, residential construction for Lutron Electronics Co., Inc. The reason is that the physics of the new bulbs is much different than that of incandescent bulbs. "With LEDs and CFLs, the way the light is emitted is driven by a driver or ballast, and those don't naturally dim."

Say you have a fixture with four bulbs; one burns out, and you decide to replace it with an LED-equivalent version. The old traditional dimmer does not know how to control that mixed load of bulbs, but new specialized dimmers are engineered and designed to work in that situation.

Wireless Lighting Controls

One thing that often stops homeowners from improving the efficiency of lighting controls is wiring. Older systems used to require wires from one control to another. Now, wireless controllers allow control from spots around the room or even another room. Apps, used on either a tablet or smartphone, are also an integral part of modern-day lighting control systems. The bonus is that they also can control window treatments and in-home temperature. "It's just a matter of swapping out existing controls for wireless versions that can communicate with each other," says Anderson.

The Next Generation of Light Bulbs

Many homeowners still see LED as the wave of the future, and to a certain extent it is. But light bulbs in development will integrate control technologies in new ways. "These are smart light bulbs that can fit into any kind of a standard socket," says Terry McGowan, director of engineering and technology for ALA. "They connect to the Internet, and you can adjust them so they dim up and down, come on at appropriate times, change color, even flash in time with music." As these new bulbs and controls make their way into wider acceptance in the marketplace, consumers are going to have a shift in how they think about lighting.

Visit your local ALA-member retail showroom to see the newest lighting products and switches. To find your closest ALA-member lighting showroom, visit AmericanLightingAssoc.com.