Websites: Attracting Small-Business Customers

By Karen Tunks, Director Marketing/Communications, *Clarity Advantage*

Bankers love to ask business owners, "What keeps you up at night?"—a shopworn question, for sure. And yet, many issues do keep business owners or want-to-be business owners from sleeping soundly.

Getting started—writing a business plan? That's a good one. Figuring out how to generate more sales? Yup, a lot of lost winks on that. How to manage cash flow better? Yup. Price products? Yup. Minimize taxes? Yup.

And where do they turn first for information? The Web. According to Social Media Today, *online search is the leading way people discover new information*. We search for content more than 21 billion times each month in the United States alone! And where on the Web do business owners go? Maybe a bank's website; after all, financial institutions are the experts on money and financial matters, right?

And, what percentage of banks' small-business websites falls flat for this purpose? An alarming 84 percent, as determined by a study of bank websites recently conducted by Clarity Advantage. The reason: a lack of content.

Content is *king* in today's marketing world. We've all heard that before. Content attracts, engages and educates potential customers. It establishes credibility and strengthens brand. It can even move potential customers along the buying path. According to the Custom Content Council, 61 percent of consumers say they feel better about, and are more likely to buy from, a company that delivers custom content.

Think about your bank's website for a moment. What kind of content are you offering? Is it product focused? How many visitors is your site attracting weekly? Monthly? How many of those are repeat visitors? What pages are they visiting? What percentage of visitors converts to business?

Whatever your answers, several things are for sure: The right content can increase your search engine ranking, elevate your website traffic, drive potential customers to key pages, keep them on your site and keep them coming back in the future. In short, the right content can help your bank sell more.

Consider that there are 23 million small businesses in the United States, all with banking needs. Do you have an area of your website dedicated to the needs of small-business owners? Is your site providing them with the kinds of information and resources they are looking for online? Are you helping them build profitable businesses? Or are you merely advertising your products?

Now is the time to rethink your small-business website strategy—an effective website is about more than product features and benefits, banner ads and lead-generating forms. Through our research, we've determined that there are six actions you can take now to improve your bank's small-business website content. Let's take a look at each of them along with some real-life examples of good execution and poor execution that we discovered during our research. Here are action steps you can take.

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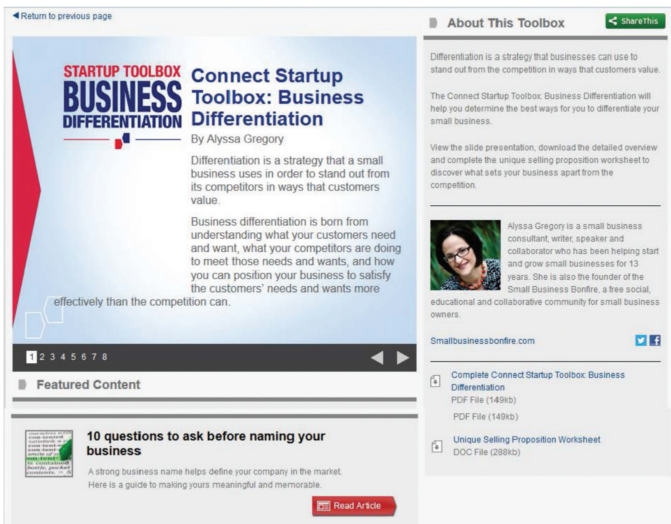
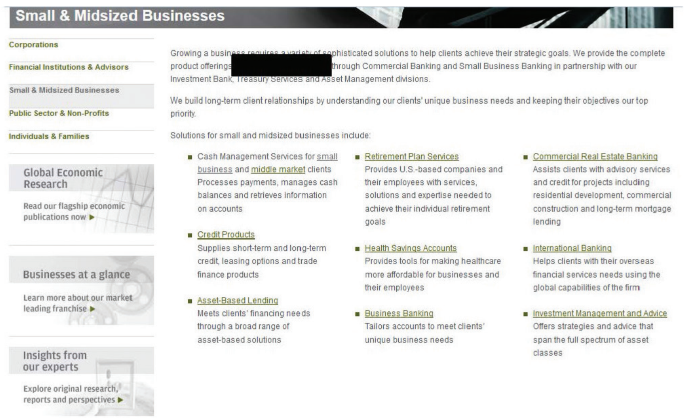
Action 1: Develop and offer content that captures, engages, educates and supports small-business owners.

Of the 85 percent of U.S. consumers who use the Internet for banking, 78 percent say they do so to find information about a bank product or service they are thinking about buying (Pew Internet and American Life Project). Like most consumers, small-business owners increasingly turn to the Web to find information. They search about all aspects of their businesses—from starting them, to growing them profitably, to running them efficiently. In fact, there were 800 million Google searches for small-business information just last year!

Your website should be a resource small-business owners can rely on for help in managing their businesses better. Content should focus on solving business owners' pain points at each stage of their business development—not merely promoting banking products. Content should include issues such as how to forecast cash flow, how to calculate break-even points, and how to reduce costs and drive sales, as well as pain points that bank products can address.



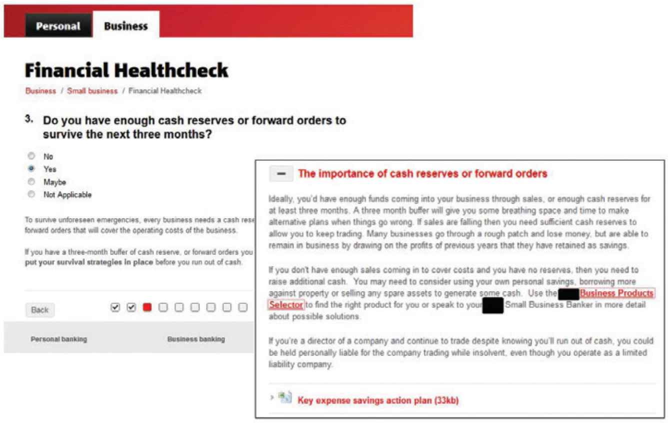
Good execution: by offering a variety of relevant, helpful resources organized into "toolboxes," this bank's small business website is educational and it solves specific small business owner pain points. This toolbox helps visitors differentiate their small business from the competition.



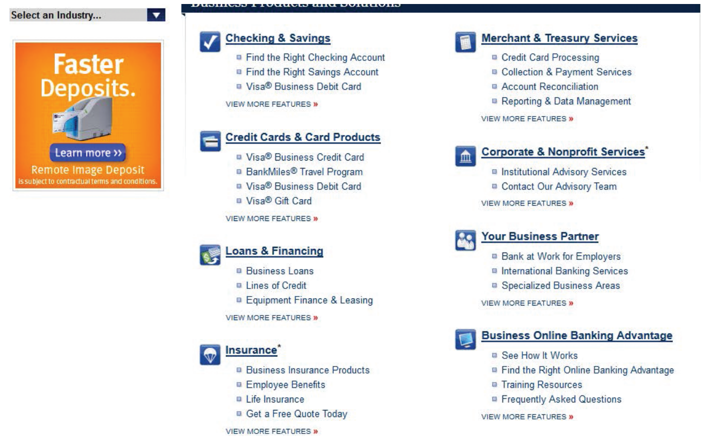
Poor execution: this bank's small business website is completely product focused, offering no tools to help small business owners manage their businesses better.

Action 2: Position your content so that it moves small-business owners along the buying path.

A great way to build awareness of and relevancy for your bank's products is to pair them with engaging content that discusses the business issue the product addresses or solves. Include a form to capture key information about your website's visitors. You'll quickly build up your lead database and will have relevant information to pass on to your bank's small-business sales team.



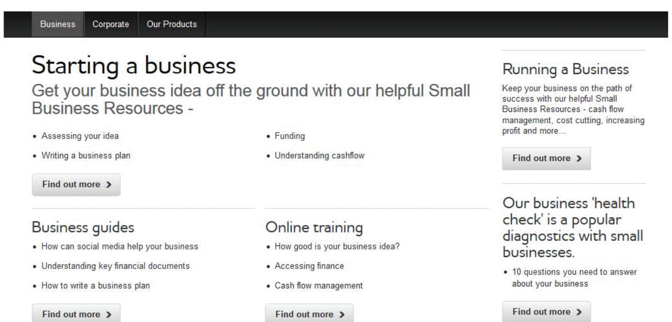
Good execution: This bank offers a financial healthcheck—an engaging, interactive tool that helps business owners plan their business growth. At the end of the healthcheck, business owners understand what steps they need to take and can click on links that lead to relevant products.



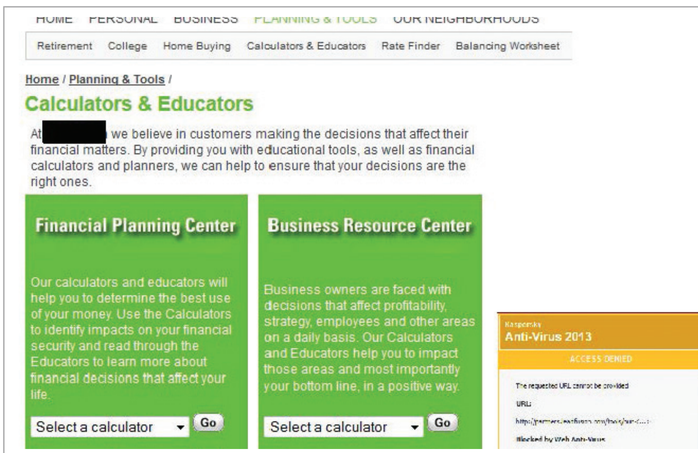
Poor execution: This bank's "catalog" approach doesn't help small business owners understand why they need these products and services. There is no mention of issues small business owners are facing and how these products and services relate to them.

Action 3: Have a clear editorial strategy, and offer a variety of content types organized around business-owner pain points.

Develop a content strategy and curriculum that's based on a deep understanding of small-business owners' pain points—the questions they're seeking to answer through Web search. Then, map the content you create to the curriculum, and deploy it in a variety of ways including articles, videos, business guides, e-newsletters, infographics, case studies of real businesses, diagnostic health checks and e-learning. The more variety, the more interesting your site will come across to small-business owners. The more tools you offer, the more time small-business owners will spend exploring them on your site.



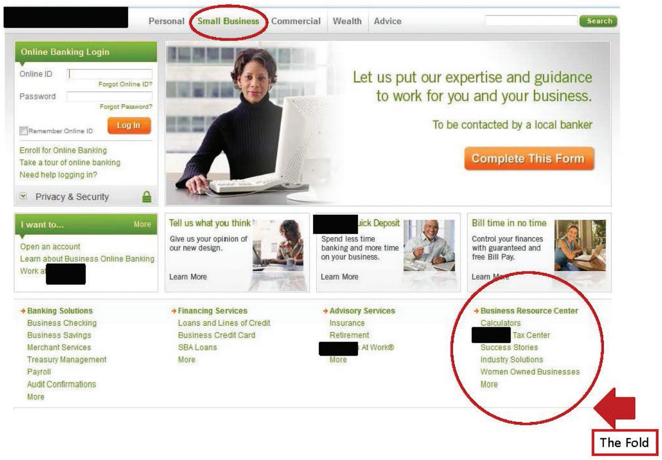
Good execution: There's a clear editorial strategy here centered on a particular small business owner pain point—starting a business. There is also a nice variety of content offered—business guides, online training, and a business healthcheck—to keep small business owners interested and on the site.



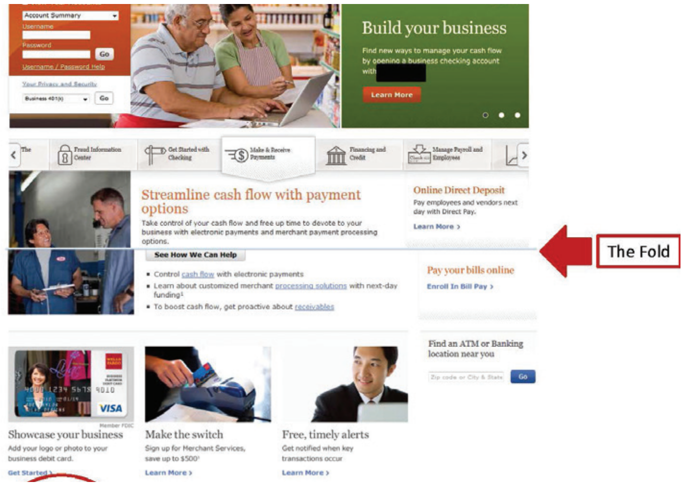
Poor execution: This site's resources aren't organized around business owner pain points and there's no clear editorial strategy. The links to the calculators take visitors off of the bank's website and aren't functional, triggering anti-virus protection.

Action 4: Make your content visible so that it's easy to find, and keep it clutter free so that it's easy to navigate.

You have mere seconds to capture small-business owners' attention once they land on your website, so don't make them hunt for what they are looking for. They have to immediately see what they need or else they are likely to click away and not return in the future. Organize your site's content so that it's easy for business owners to find what they're looking for the moment they land on your site.



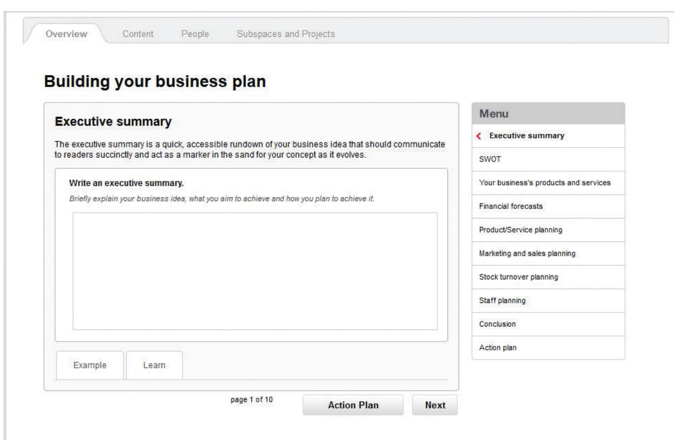
Good execution: This is a clean, clutter-free small business site! A tab in the top navigation clearly indicates where small business owners should go. In the bottom right corner, the Business Resource Center is prominent (located above the fold) and easily navigated via a list of links.



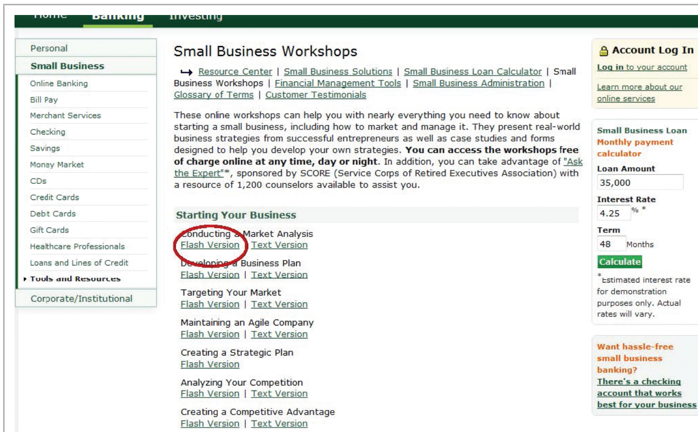
Poor execution: This is a clutter-full site! With only seconds to grab a small business owner's attention, there is too much information presented here and the Resource Center is too far down the page (way below the fold) and hard to find.

Action 5: Make it mobile friendly.

This point is important yet often overlooked by marketers and Web developers. Like most of us, small-business owners aren't always on a computer when they're searching the Web for information. They're on smart-phones, iPads and other tablets and devices. Keep this in mind as you're developing your website content. Be sure to develop HTML-based content rather than Flash-based so that it can be accessed on all devices, everywhere and anywhere.



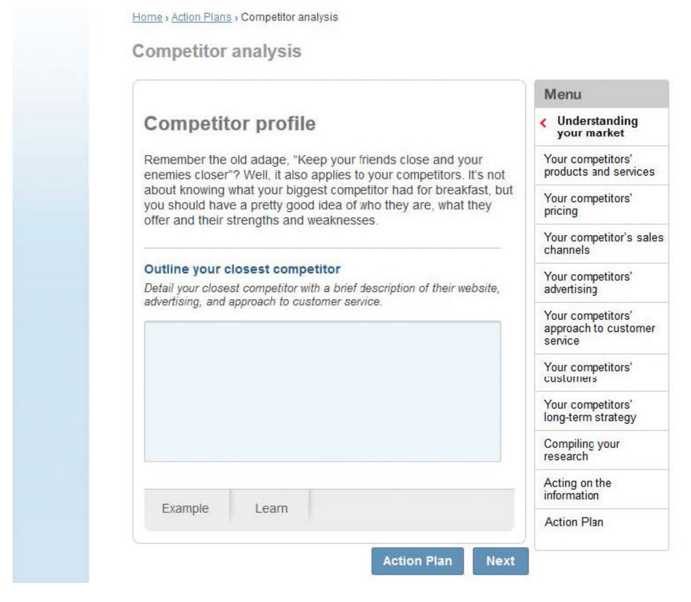
Good execution: This is a great example of an online lesson on how to build a business plan. The lesson is HTML-based, enabling small business owners to access it on any computer or mobile device.



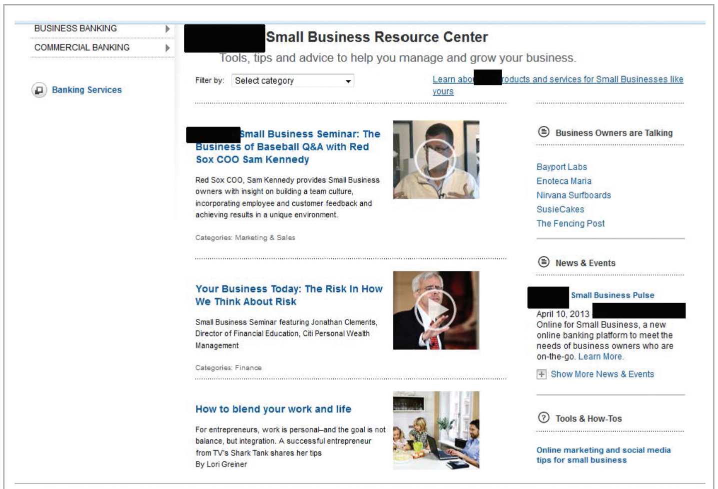
Poor execution: The recorded workshops offered on this bank's small business website are Flash-based. A small business owner using an iPad cannot access these.

Action 6: Make it interactive.

Small-business owners are likely to be more engaged and stay on your site longer when they are actively participating with your content. Articles, how-to guides, case studies and other static material (if written with the needs of small-business owners in mind) can be quite useful, but combining them with interactive tools such as calculators, quizzes and financial health checks where small-business owners can input their own data and participate in a unique user experience will help your website become more of an interactive destination.



Good execution: This interactive tool for understanding a small business's competition enables a small business owner to input his own data, develop ideas, and create outcomes unique to his business.



Poor execution: This small business website offers a mix of articles and videos—static content that requires no action from small business owners. Without any interactive tools, there's little to keep a small business owner engaged on this site.

The value of small-business website content

Small-business owners crave information that can help them start their businesses as well as run and grow them more efficiently and profitably. Your bank can capitalize on their cravings and offer resources that are wanted, needed and useful. Not only will small-business owners benefit, your bank will benefit too with greater Web visibility, higher credibility and increased sales.

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