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Reading Eagle: Susan L. Angstadt | Steve Fabian, director of creative systems for Quarter Note Systems, has been working on mobile-friendly systems.

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Local tech industry experts weigh in on latest trends and shifts in Web design and social media

By Courtney H. Diener-Stokes

Tuesday December 15, 2015 12:01 AM

Curtis Johnson, vice president of creative services and a founding member of Weidenhammer Creative, formerly 401 Creative, was a creative director for 10 years before taking on his current role one year ago.

The creative division of Wyomissing-based Weidenhammer, the technology solutions provider that has seven offices across the U.S., offers everything from tactical print for catalogues to branding and video production.

"We (401 Creative) were acquired in 2013 as part of the Weidenhammer family," Johnson said, adding he was the co-owner of 401.

FYI

Weidenhammer Creative

Locations: 935 Berkshire Blvd., Wyomissing; 951 Marcon Blvd., Allentown

Phone: 610-317-4000

Websites:
www.hammer.net,

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With a background in video production, Johnson eventually diversified into Web.

"It is a little bit recession-proof, and we grew into that," he said. "I have a design and fine arts background, and I naturally gravitated toward designing for the Web."

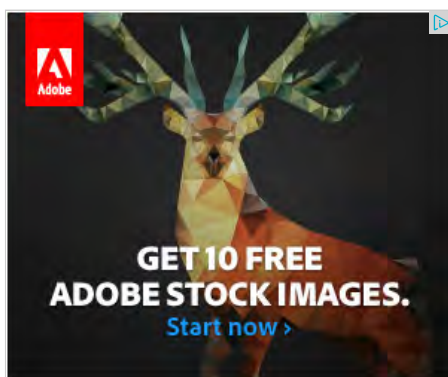
Industry trends

When it comes to trends in the industry, Johnson drew attention to the fact that just because things are constantly changing in the medium of the Web, that doesn't necessarily mean it's good for your business.

"You have to understand the trends, but don't necessarily play to them," he said, citing an example to encourage businesses to err on the side of caution.

"Four to five years ago, it was social media, social media," he said. "A lot of businesses went into that and didn't have a plan. It can be more harm than good."

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Johnson has a number one rule he discusses with potential clients.

"Do what feels comfortable to you" versus what trends are dictating, he said.

Johnson and his team manage a number of social media accounts, creating content and imagery prep.

"Look at your consumers, look at your clients to see where they are going to interact," he said. "It's a part of your bigger marketing strategy. It's not that there can't be business generated from it, but it can't be your full plan. You still need a website, direct mail; you have to create touch points for them to come back and position yourself in whatever you want them to do to engage."

Expectation of content

Johnson discussed the biggest issue he is seeing with website design these days.

"Unfortunately, there is a large portion of smaller websites, where their method is to engage you to do a website by going to an inspiration gallery blog," he said. "They will try to force your company into that style of design."

For a small company, he said a brochure site, where the content doesn't change, might work for that approach, but for others, it won't.

Johnson cited a no-no when it comes to portraying your content on a website.

www.weidenhammercreati

Quarter Note Systems

Location: 2917 Windmill Road, SpringTownship

Phone: 610-621-5716

Website:

www.QuarterNote Sys.com

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"If you don't have the bandwidth to do a blog, don't do it," he said. "You never want to create the expectation of recurring content when you don't have the budget to outsource the bandwidth or create it yourself."

Centerpiece of a brand

Johnson said he considers the website to be the centerpiece of a brand and marketing.

"For small businesses, there are a number of good freelance companies where you can spend two thousand to five thousand dollars and get it at a high level," he said, adding they can be the one to navigate and capitalize on a do-it-yourself building route such as Squarespace. "My strongest suggestion is to find someone with design and marketing experience to be able to craft the imagery and message you want to deliver."

He discussed the importance of crafting navigation and structuring content and how lack of doing that can have an impact.

"People see right away it is a low investment in your image," he said. "If you don't invest in the quality of your brand, in my opinion, that permeates the image of your prospects that you don't take the quality of your work or product as seriously as you should."

Content diversity

Johnson addressed the importance of offering diverse content on your website, such as using video. Illustrating the importance of it, Weidenhammer recently invested in the addition of a manager of video and photography position.

"If you are really trying to get yourself on top of the search engines, content is what is going to get you there," he said. "They love seeing video, short video 60 seconds or less. Anything over 60 seconds is a lifetime. Video is great, but you have to keep it short."

Johnson suggested an approach businesses should take when considering investing in various content options.

"They need to stop looking at it on a project-by-project basis and create an annual spend marketing budget," he said. "Determine what are their business objectives and what are going to be the strategic and tactical resources and tools to be able to help reach those business goals. As you progress as a company, you start to realize more things need to be more planned and thought out."

Device strategy vs. mobile strategy

When it comes to the mobile compatibility of websites, Johnson suggests there is more hype centered on mobile strategy than should be merited.

"The year's buzzword is mobilegeddon," he said. "It's a bit exaggerated, and again, this is the biggest buzzword that has permeated the industry in the last two years, and it is mobile strategy."

Johnson offers another strategic approach versus banking everything on mobile.

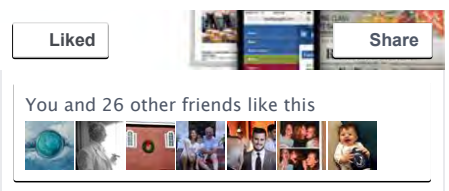
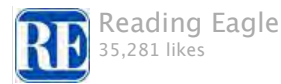
"Real businesses and companies need to think about device strategy and get away from mobile strategy," he said. "You never want to go mobile first with a strategy; it's device strategy. You have to look at where your consumer is coming from."

"In (business to business) businesses, it is still 85 percent traffic from a tablet to a laptop to a desktop," he said. "You still have 85 percent traffic coming from those as opposed to a phone. It is very important to realize that when I throw out that 85 percent, that is for 'B to B' website traffic. Purchasing decisions for 'B to B' businesses are still heavily skewed toward desktop devices."

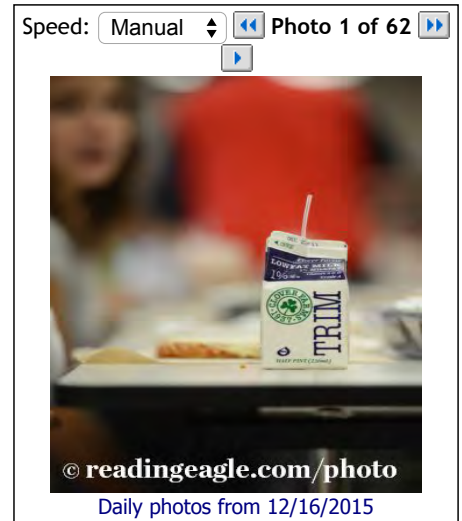
Johnson said it's important to look at your analytics.

"Know where your users are coming from and create a device strategy based on that," he said.

Quarter Note approach



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Steve Fabian, director of creative systems at Quarter Note Systems, Spring Township, said a current focus of the business as a full-service information technology provider has been on making websites mobile-friendly.

"Back in April, Google changed their algorithm based on whether they are mobile-friendly or not," he said, resulting, in most cases, in complete redesigns of websites to make them mobile-friendly and responsive.

One of three partners at the 10-year-old company, Fabian said Google offers a website where you can see if your website is mobile-friendly.

"If it's not, they actually won't even list you in their mobile list results," he said. "You will not show up in their index at all."

Fabian said as mobile becomes more important, it becomes a bigger deal for anyone on the Web to consider it as a means for generating leads or income.

"I think they are slowly getting it," he said of business owners acknowledging the value. "There are some that have been really on top of that. Others are a little slower to come along."

Imagery and

parallax design

When it comes to a Web design approach, Fabian discussed current trends that are resonating with users.

"Visual-wise, imagery is huge," he said. "The big picture is a real big design trend. High-quality images plastered all over the page, parallax design, that is the new design trend. The website is one page rather than clicking on individual pages."

He noted another aspect of design that is taking precedent.

"A more flat design is definitely trendy," he said. "In Apple's new operating system, they have that. That is probably the best example of that. Rather than having the graphic look dimensional, now everything is going more flat and very graphic."

He said using icons, such as an email icon that is the shape of an envelope, is a thing of the past.

"As people are getting more and more comfortable with an electronic interface, they don't need that in-your-face analogue symbology," he said.

Quarter Note Systems works with a lot of startups, in addition to established businesses.

"We tend to do a lot more data-driven, higher-end websites," Fabian said. "Almost all websites we do now include a content management system. It is a big thing these days. Rather than coming back to us to make changes on their websites, they can add to it and delete pages, update photos and videos. It all works through a Web browser."

First piece of puzzle

Limarys Rodriguez, owner and lead developer at LMG Web Design, 580 Willow St., which offers Web design, branding and social media marketing services, has also been spending a bulk of her business' efforts as of late on redesigns for mobile compatibility.

Rodriguez said that despite the growing emphasis on social media, the value of having a website should not be underrated.

"I think the website is kind of the first piece of the puzzle when it comes to marketing a business," she said. "After the website is done is really when we get into marketing your business, not only online, but different avenue of marketing your business, as well."

Rodriguez said having a solid group of developers working with her at LMG works to her advantage

in staying on top of her game, in addition to efforts she puts forth to remain current in her field.

"There was a WordPress Camp this weekend in Philadelphia," she said. "I try to do things like that."

She also finds that socializing with others in her industry is a perk.

"When you get together, it's almost like a networking opportunity," she said. "When we sit down and talk with people in my field, it's almost like going to a network/learning event. That is the best way to keep updated is to bounce things off of each other with people in your field." n

Contact Courtney Diener-Stokes: money@readingeagle.com.



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