

## FROM THE FIELD

## Web presence and social media

BY DAN FOLEY CONTRIBUTING WRITER

I started my company in April of 2002, and one of the first orders of business was to figure out how to finance my new enterprise. I had a pretty solid cash reserve for personal expenses that would hold me over for a year or more. I did not have enough to finance the start-up on top of this.

I decided to meet with my banker to negotiate a business loan. I made an appointment and met with the branch manager in her office. The conversation went something like this:

Me: "I would like to get a loan for my mechanical contracting business."

Banker: "That is great Mr. Foley. We would love to help you out. How long have you been in business?"

Me: "About three weeks."

Banker:

Me: "Is there a problem?"

Banker: "No problem, Mr. Foley. Come back in about two years and we'll see where you are."

Me: "Thank you for your time. I won't need the loan in two years."

I realized that this would be a self-financed venture and some things would be done on a shoestring budget. We grew pretty quickly but very little was spent on marketing as I relied heavily on my business contacts and word of mouth. At a minimum, I felt like a Web presence was required, so I had acquired domain names. I then had a friend of an old high school friend put together a website. It was done on a tight budget, and it looked like it.

I disliked it so much that I reverted to just a static page with my company contact information. After a couple of years or so, the web hosting company disappeared along with our page. It didn't seem to affect business, so I just left it alone for the next several years.

I have now been in business for almost a decade. I never did go back to see that banker about the loan, and my penny-pinching ways have evolved into setting reasonable budgets that allow for doing things the right way.

Last fall, a series of events led me to conclude that it was time for Foley Mechanical to freshen up its image and brand. I now provide mechanical work for an internationally prominent architect, David Jameson, and his direct but constructive critique of my logo led to a new logo design, truck design, and shirt design. I have to say, I thought liked the old logo well enough, but I absolutely love the clean look of the new design.

Over lunch while sketching out ideas on the proverbial napkin, Jameson even suggested jobsite signs for me (and for his jobsites) that would be made using reflective street-sign steel and stainless steel piping.

I also decided to revive my website. I still owned the domain names but had learned my lesson regarding doing things on the cheap. I wanted it done right, so this time I hired a professional public relations and online marketing consultant, Laura Duran of Laura Duran & Associates ([www.lauraduranPR.com](http://www.lauraduranPR.com)). I had worked with Laura a couple of years ago on a trade press feature article and admired her writing style and professionalism. And I

knew that she was up on all the latest online marketing practices. She was the very first person, several years ago, to convince me to even have a personal Facebook page.

We met to go over my website design, and we even took up architect Jameson's generous offer to join us and provide some design suggestions. It was a collaborative effort. Laura took Jameson's conceptual sketches and my vision on our corporate philosophy and expertly crafted a website that achieved exactly what I was looking for.

After discussing our goals and design ideas for the website, Laura developed a website for me on a Wordpress platform. (See [www.foleymechnical.com](http://www.foleymechnical.com).) It was designed so that at first glance, architects and owners can see the types of projects that we work on and know they're in the right place. This kind of website is search-engine friendly and easy to make changes to without the ongoing support of website code experts, like websites of the past. And, it allows me to have a blog and my Facebook business page integrated right onto the site (more on that in a moment).

That day, after we wrapped up the goals and conceptual design of our website, the topic of discussion shifted to newer forms of media and communication, such as that blog and Facebook business page I just mentioned. My initial assumption was that social media is for teenagers, and I told Laura that I would listen, but I wanted no part of it. This was not the image I wanted for Foley Mechanical.

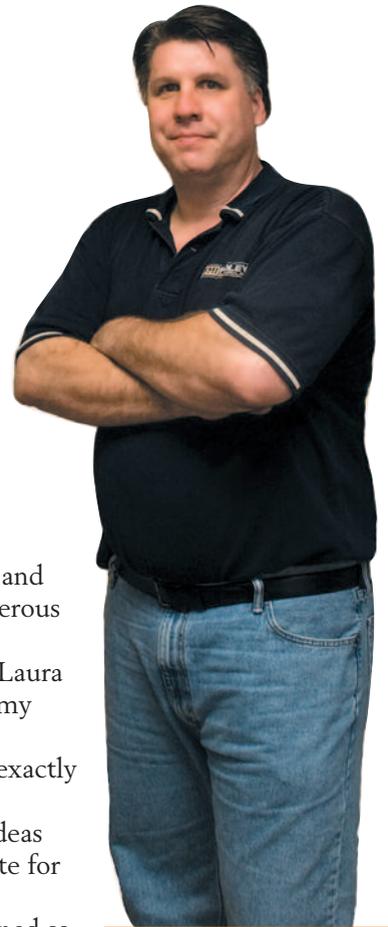
Laura looked at me and, for a second, she hesitated. Looking back, I'm thinking she probably had two thoughts: 1. I have an idiot for a client. 2. Get me out of here!

Instead, over a beer, Laura broke out her laptop, opened up her Social Media Marketing 101 presentation, and patiently guided me through the basics of how communication has changed with the convergence of technology, communication, and social collaboration, and how, on several levels, it could really benefit my company.

Laura put things in perspective for me. Marketing through a website or through social media is not magic and not done with smoke and mirrors. It is the same relationship marketing that I have done since I started my company, only now it is even more efficient and powerful. It is conveying the exact same messages and value to a greater audience through the power of technology and the viral nature of the newer social layer that now stretches across that internet.

I'm still a novice when it comes to online marketing. I am just learning about search engine optimization, website metrics, and increasing our web traffic. The names of new social media channels fly around in conversation, and I can't even recall what they are.

I'm sharing this story not to present myself as an expert



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on the topic — I'm at the opposite end of the spectrum. Instead I wanted to show you how and why I became a willing student and participant, and how even an amateur can have a professional web presence by partnering with the right people and right company.

You will know they are the right partner if they make it easier, not more confusing.

I have been exposed to marketing companies that obfuscate all of the recent web marketing topics and practices and make it all appear to be a big convoluted mystery, just so they hook you and you hire them. They throw around obscure terms without ever really starting from a basic level of understanding, and I truly believe they do this to leverage your lack of expertise on the subject.

Authentic online marketing professionals will be very successful at it themselves, and they will start from where you are and help you understand why all of it is so important and has so much potential. Look at their website and social media channels. How many Twitter followers do they have? Do they share helpful information with their communities via a blog? Are they someone you can feel like you would like to get to know and do business with? Are they building trust and relationships and contributing in a collaborative way? If so,

they get how the new digital world of marketing and the old "real life" world of trust and relationship building come together.

While I am new to Web marketing and social media, many of you have been there for years and are market leaders. Several of my contractor friends have websites I admire:

- Jeffrey "Heatboy" Young, Climatec:  
[www.climateadvanced.com](http://www.climateadvanced.com)
- John Abularrage, Advanced Radiant Design:  
[www.radiant-design.com](http://www.radiant-design.com)
- Paul Polletts, Advanced Radiant Technology:  
[www.advancedradiant.com](http://www.advancedradiant.com)
- Bob Dudley, Harris-Dudley:  
[www.radiantfloor.com](http://www.radiantfloor.com)

These guys are old pros when it comes to online marketing. I hope you'll take a moment to look at their sites. And please send me a link to your site if you are proud of your work. I would love to check it out. ●

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