

5 Things Your Small Business Website Needs to Engage Your Customers

by Eryn Willard

You have eight seconds to capture a visitor's attention on the web once they arrive at your site. Creating a website that keeps viewers' interest may sound daunting, but it doesn't have to be if you keep these tips in mind.

1. First and foremost, an **inviting interface** is key. A ton of bells and whistles aren't necessary – a clean, well-planned layout will help your potential client decide what to do after landing on your home page. Be sure that your site's navigation is obvious to the viewer.

For example, [37signals](#) – a small, but well-known business – places the bulk of its navigation in the main body area of its home page in the form of large buttons with explanations. The company's secondary navigation items appear at the top of the page, while other relevant items appear "below the fold."

The screenshot shows the 37signals website home page. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links: "About 37signals", "Why web-based software?", "Tech/Design Job Board", "Extras & Add-ons", and "Sign in". The 37signals logo is on the right. Below the navigation bar, there are several product cards:

- Basecamp**: "Manage Projects and Collaborate with Your Team & Clients." Description: "Share files, meet deadlines, assign tasks and centralize feedback." Icon: A green checkmark in a blue circle.
- Highrise**: "Track Your Contacts, Leads, and Deals. Always Be Prepared." Description: "Keep track of past conversations, calls, and emails. Never forget to follow-up." Icon: A blue building with a green checkmark.
- Backpack**: "Organize and Share Information Across Your Business." Description: "The quickest way to create and share information with your whole team." Icon: A green backpack with a white checkmark.
- Campfire**: "Real-Time Chat, File & Code Sharing for Remote Teams." Description: "Campfire is like instant messaging, but designed specifically for groups." Icon: A blue circle with a yellow flame.

On the left side, there is a large black box with white text: "A Better Way To Work. Over 3 million people use our web-based apps to get things done the simple way." Below this are bullet points: "Nothing to download", "Safe, secure, backed-up", "Access from anywhere", "Works on Mac, PC, Linux", "No 'IT Guy' required", "Always up-to-date", and a link to "More reasons why web-based is better." Below this is a section for "REWORK, our new business book, is available now." with a small image of the book and a description: "REWORK is our fresh take on business. How to start one, build one, and grow – or not grow – one. It's about getting back to the basics, making things easier not harder, and focusing on what really matters. 288 concise pages." Below this is a section titled "HEAR WHAT OUR CUSTOMERS HAVE TO SAY" with two video thumbnails: "Threadless" (Online T-shirt retailer) and "Elsewares" (Independent art retailer). Below the videos is a section titled "ABOUT 37SIGNALS" with the text: "We believe most software is too complex. Too many features, too many promises. Instead, we build simpler web-based software with". To the right of this is a quote: "Mar 12 New father: 'Backpack has changed my life and made the work/family/life stuff so much easier to manage'."

2. In doing this, the **call to action** is clear to the visitor. You want to encourage your potential client to do something—call you for more information, explore your product or service offerings, download a white paper. Think of your home page like a magazine cover, and draw them in. Our example shows several calls to action (A is an invitation to learn more, and B & C link to products).
3. **Your story** also plays a substantial role in engaging people on the web. This should be obvious not only in your copy, but in the accompanying visuals. *What makes your business unique? What do you do better than anyone else? What is the culture of your company?* Use your story to set your business apart from your competitors. Remember, you have eight seconds before a visitor decides to leave—they can't read very far in that short amount of time.
4. Your small business site needn't be too deep, so long as your **site map** includes the following pages: Home, About Us, FAQ (or advantages of your product or service), Testimonials or Client List (see D in the example) and Contact Us. An extra page you may consider adding is a “gimme” page, sometimes called Resources or Downloads, where you offer your visitor a take-away such as a white paper.
5. Lastly, every page on your site should have a **footer**. A basic footer, which runs in small type along the bottom of your page content, contains your business' contact information (address, phone number, generic email) and copyright details. An expanded footer can include links to your privacy notice, disclaimer, terms of use, site map, or social media sites.

About the Author

Eryn Willard is the founder and design Sherpa of [Studio 22](#), an award-winning graphic design firm that opened in Frederick County, MD in 2005. The studio works on projects ranging from small business brand identity to corporate annual reports. Her work has been recognized regionally and nationally in design books, publications and competitions, and in sustainability reporting awards.