



# 12 things you shouldn't publish on your site

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By [Christopher Elliott](#)

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There's plenty of advice out there about what items to post on your Web site. You know, everything from "Don't forget the 'About Us' page" to "Remember to have a contact form."

But what kinds of information should you never publish?

Posting inappropriate, confidential, or incomplete information on your site can have negative and potentially embarrassing results. You could lose clients, employees—even your business.

In my days as an investigative reporter, I used to count on companies carelessly posting information that could be used in a story. My favorite: I once unearthed a confidential PowerPoint presentation on computer security that detailed how to hack into a laptop computer wirelessly. You don't need to own a laptop to appreciate the irony in that.

Here are 12 things you should never put on your site.

1. **Your private contact information.** "[There are] two things I would never publish on a Web site," says Pat O'Bryan, author of "Your Portable Empire: How to Make Money Anywhere While Doing What You Love" (Wiley, 2007). "My personal e-mail and phone number."

Why not? You want to keep your business and personal information separate. That way, as your company grows, you don't have to go through the tedious process of separating your accounts. Same thing with your phone. It's best to keep them separated.

2. **Usernames or passwords.** Obvious, right? Not really. "Some small businesses have a place online that they *think* isn't public, where they post all their instructions for accessing online accounts," says Robert Rose, a vice president at CrownPeak Technology, a content-management system provider. "Not a good idea."

Why not? You'll be more vulnerable to hackers. Rose warns small-business owners to avoid posting this information in any format, including an Excel file, because even that can easily be found with a simple online search.

3. **Detailed contact information for your employees.** "Don't post employee lists with titles, e-mail addresses, and phone numbers," says James Gardner, who oversees digital marketing for the marketing firm Aquent.

Why not? That information can encourage recruiters to poach from you. It also simplifies competitive intelligence-gathering.

4. **Anything long enough for a book.** "Don't post anything that takes more than two minutes to read," says Richard Laermer, co-author of "Punk Marketing: Get Off Your Ass and Join the Revolution" (Collins, 2007).

Why not? It's your Web site, not a dissertation. Besides, your customers probably don't have the time to read something as long as "War

and Peace" online.

5. **Any information or images you don't own or don't have permission to use.** "This includes other people's names and information about them that is being posted without their permission," says Tom Underhill, co-author of "Lock the Boogie Man Out of Your Computer" (Identity Crisis, 2006).

Why not? You could get sued by them. And you could lose. (See "[5 ways to guard against Web site content theft](#)" for what to do if you are a victim of copyright infringement or content theft.)

6. **Invisible text or any other SEO tricks.** "Don't try to trick search engines by posting invisible text, exchanging links with sites that are not relevant to your industry, or beefing your content inappropriately with keywords," advises Lisa Calhoun, president of the Web content firm Write2Market.

Why not? Search engines are getting more advanced every day, and SEO—shorthand for search engine optimization—is evolving quickly. It's easier to write strong, meaningful content than risk getting blacklisted by a search engine.

7. **Case studies with confidential information.** "Never publish sensitive client information on your firm's Web site," says Dumont, N.J.-based communications consultant Bob Zeitlinger. Pay close attention to case studies, which can include information that a client wouldn't want to become public.

Why not? It makes your customer—and you—look bad. Ask for permission before posting.

8. **Unchecked comments from strangers.** "Never allow anyone complete access to post comments on your site," says Kenneth Wisniewski, president of VendorSeek.com, a business-to-business e-commerce company.

Why not? A disgruntled customer could post a negative or malicious comment on your site. Even if you remove the message quickly, it could cost you a sale. While it may be difficult for you to quickly review every comment, you should require your respondents to register, and you should regularly monitor what they are saying in the discussion forums.

9. **Information that's incomplete or difficult to access.** "The way to attract new customers and serve existing ones using the Web is by providing them information and easy access to it," says Kevin Stirtz, author of "Marketing for Smart People" (Lulu.com, 2006). "So, for new customers, you give them everything that will help them find you, trust you, and make an informed decision to become your customer."

Why? Because information that can't be found or that's not complete will drive away potential customers.

10. **Data that isn't relevant to your business.** That could be a turn-off to new customers, says Peter Koeppel, president of the media buying company Koeppel Direct.

Why? Because customers could be misled as to what your business is all about. Koeppel recommends having a colleague review content before it's posted on your site, to make sure it's relevant to your company and customers.

11. **An "under construction" page.** "No, it's not better to have something up than nothing if visitors to your site can't access key portions of your company information," says Brian Dempsey, principal at Bright Tribe, a Web design company.

Why not? It's unprofessional. "And it's the butt of endless jokes about how long something can be 'under construction,'" he adds. "Leave that to your local department of transportation."

12. **Anything that you don't want to world the see.** "Not only today, but in the future," says Jeff Stibel, president of Web.com. "It's easy to forget that it may not just be your target audience that visits your Web site. The Internet is public domain that literally makes information accessible to everyone."

Why not? There's no telling what a competitor might do with the information you post. For example, say you post something about how your product is better than a competitor's. Be careful about what you say. That could be a future business partner, or they might one day want to buy your business. The blog posting could throw a wrench in the spokes of a promising deal.

Of course, there are other things you should never post on your site. And many of them depend on the type of business you run. For example, certain businesses should never publish negotiable prices for products or services; others should always post their prices.

But if companies concerned themselves as much about what not to publish as what they do publish, they might not have to worry as much about their bottom line.



**About the author** Christopher Elliott is an Orlando, Fla., writer and independent producer who specializes in technology, travel, and mobile computing. His work has appeared in numerous newspapers, magazines, and online. You can find out more about him on his [Web site](#) or sign up for his [free weekly newsletter](#).

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