

## Guide to choosing a website design

### Why Does Your Business Need A Website?

Some web design companies will try to convince anyone and everyone that they need a website. It's what they do, and if no one buys what they're selling, they're out of a job. They'll tell you that everyone needs a "presence" on the web. But before you listen to the salesmen, you should ask some questions about the way you do business to help you decide not only if you need a website, but what type you need.

#### Do your competitors have a website?

This is a big one. If all your competitors are doing business on the web, and you aren't, you're cutting down your slice of the market pie by not reaching out to those people who might be looking to compare prices and services. So if your competitors have a website, your customers will expect you to have one too, and building this part of your image will help build credibility and trust.

#### Are your sales local, national, or international?

If you advertise in your local yellow pages, you probably have the type of business that could make good use of a website. More and more people go to search engines to find local services as much if not more than they reach for the yellow pages or local press.

If your intention is to reach national or even international audiences, then a website is a definite must have! Nothing reaches beyond borders like the internet.

The internet is a great equaliser. A small business can compete against the big companies, just by having the right website for their products and services.

#### Do customers and prospects frequently ask you the same questions?

Questions such as "What are your opening hours?", "Do you offer this service?", or "Where are you located?" as well as offering customer support for products, this type of information can easily be put on a website, making it much quicker and easier for your customers to find them. Most people would much rather have this information available 24 hours a day / 7 days a week than have to make a phone call during office hours. Easier is better!

#### So having decided that you DO need a website, what type of site is it to be?

Before you begin you should ask yourself these questions:

- Will I need to update the site frequently?
- Will I sell products from the website?
- Will I use the website to attract new customers?
- Will the website simply be a brochure for the company?
- How large will the site be?
- What will my website visitors expect to see?

Don't be mistaken that the flashiest, coolest looking web site is the best. Quite often these types of site will only work in the latest browsers or are difficult to navigate, or take along time to download.

Sites with lots of animation are not always the best. They may take some time to download. Remember the average attention span of most Internet users is 8 seconds. As soon visitors see a loading sign for a web site, 98% of the time they will immediately go to the next site.

## The single page 'Business Card' website

This is the most basic of web site design packages. This type of site makes it affordable for a small company to get their business online. This is ideal for those who do not need a full website with product or services pages. It can be used as an 'Online Business Card' It is also ideal as a 'Lead Capture' Page. (for more information on lead capture and autoresponders, see our 'Autoresponder' page under the 'Services heading on our website) Other uses could be a simple 1 item sales page with a short sales piece and a 'Buy it now' button

## The 5 page 'Brochure' website

A bit like a combination of an entry in the telephone book and a brochure, and is a pure marketing device.

The home page will provide a brief introduction to the products or services the company offers, and other pages will give details of the company's background and history, location and contact details, and a more detailed outline of the services or products it offers (generally with some great pictures of successful past projects). Its basic purpose is to provide a point of contact on the internet, and to give basic information about your company, its history and products or services. As a bare minimum, your business Website should include the following pages:

- **Home Page,**
- **About Us**
- **Our Products/Services:** This is a listing of the different services or products you provide, along with a short description of each. If your products or services require more in-depth descriptions, link to separate pages for more information.
- **Contact Us:** This can range from a simple listing of your contact information to a more complex "enquiry form," with a range of questions. You could also include a map for directions etc

## The 10 page 'Full' Website

10 web pages is a good start for some moderate search engine placements and is definitely a good start to seriously promote your business online. With this type of site you can include anything you want. In addition to the above essential pages, you may like to consider...

Service vs product based businesses

In addition to the basic pages, you may wish to include other pages. Service and product based businesses require different types of pages. If your company performs services for others I.E. Electrician, Plumber, etc your site should include these pages:

- **Previous Customers**
- **Testimonials:** These can be on a single page, listed on the customer page, or distributed throughout the site.
- **Request a Quote, or How to Get Started with Our Service.**

In service-based businesses, it's important to ground your claims with a demonstration of your capabilities or skills. You can do so with these types of pages:

- **References:** These are more formal and longer than standard testimonials.
- **Portfolio:** These are for artists, designers, writers, and other creative professions.
- **Sound or video Clips:** These are for entertainers, bands, DJs, and speakers.

- **Samples of Our Work:** These are for other professions, as appropriate.

If your company sells products, your business is a product-based business. To provide your customers with quick and easy access to your products, your site should include:

- **Product Description(s):** Include photos, details, pricing, and "Add to Cart" capabilities as appropriate.
- **View Your Shopping Cart.**
- **Check Out.**
- **Pricing:** If you sell products, your pricing should be listed in your shopping cart. For service-based businesses, whether or not you list your pricing depends upon the standards in your industry; you don't want to price your services on your site if you don't have to.

You should also consider whether your business falls into both categories such a photographer who not only provides a *service*, but may well wish to *sell* his or her pictures online as well.

Once you have these basic pages, the next step is to add credibility and information to your site. PR, news, and information pages can do this for you, providing visitors an incentive to return time and time again.

- **News:** Include current as well as past articles on your company.
- **Press Room:** This is for press releases produced by your company.
- **Newsletters or Articles:** These provide you with "expert" status, as opposed to articles written by outside sources.
- **Media or Press Kit.**
- **Recommended Books:** Linking these to a reseller account through Amazon.com can generate extra revenue.
- **Resources:** This is for other services that are compatible with yours, or links to places online for more information. Exchanging quality links with other sites can be a good way to increase your search engine rankings.
- **Audio clips:** These would be sound clips of you talking about your business making your Website more personable. You could also provide audio testimonials for more punch.

- **Video Clips:** According to Web trend forecasters, a video testimonial is quickly becoming the next hot item for building credibility.
- **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)** Putting these on your site can save a lot of time that might otherwise be spent answering questions by email or telephone.
- **Downloads Page:** If your business provides printed material, why not turn it in to an electronic version and allow visitors to download it from you. An example is this very guide you are reading!

Those are some ideas for your website content, the best way to research how your web site should look and be structured is to spend a few hours or days looking around the Internet at other web sites.

Look partially at your competitor's web sites or web sites on the same thing as yours is going to be.

See if you can get any ideas you can use and improve on.

See if there are things about other sites that you don't like or find hard to use so you can avoid making the same mistake in your web site.

Remember though, don't be mistaken that the flashest coolest looking web site is the best. Quite often these sorts of sites will only work in the latest browsers or are difficult to navigate, or take along time to download.

Reaching a wider audience is always better, and selling on the internet is much cheaper than a bricks-and-mortar shop, and can be a fantastic way to supplement an already established offline business.

Thank you for considering Viable Web Design for your new website project. We hope that this has been helpful in helping you plan the content for your website, but if you do have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.