

## An effective site



An effective site is one that does its job. It has a clear message and purpose that any visitor understands immediately. It also looks professional and welcoming helping visitors to remember your brand and bookmark the site.

An effective site provides the information and interaction required by visitors. It encourages them to take the desired actions, making online ordering or other actions fast, easy and secure with clear feedback.

An effective site grabs visitors' attention with quality images, graphics, headlines and navigation that makes it easy for them to travel.

An effective site downloads fast, works in the major browsers and has good search engine optimization so it can easily be found.

### A poor site

A poor site has no clear message or purpose. Visitors can't easily determine what it is all about.

A poor site has content that never changes, broken links and out of date out of date price sheets and other information.

A poor site has bad spelling, grammar, punctuation, graphics and images and won't work in the major browsers.

### Building an effective site

Building an effective site can be easily described, but like many things in life is frequently easier said than done!

The key steps are:

**Define the purpose and layout of the site.** Too many sites are designed 'inside out' and reflect the internal structure and politics of the organisation. But customers don't care about departments and functions; they just want to achieve their goals.



So understand their goals first and then work with them to achieve yours whether that is to expand your customer base, provide information to existing customers, support other marketing activities or sell goods or services from the site. Determine what your customers are looking

for, what they want to know, what they want to do, and what actions you wish them to perform.

Draw a flow chart to help visualize the layout of the site and their journey through it. Use wireframes to understand each page 'on paper' first. NOT clearly defining the objectives for your site is similar to beginning to build a house without an architectural plan. You will not even be able to dig the foundation correctly.

**Build and test the site.** Make sure that you have provided your visitors the opportunity to interact with you, whether through an email, a live web chat, a product order form, an application, etc. Test surf the site and all forms to make sure customers can find information easily and contact you with orders and questions.



**Make the site easy to use your company easy to contact.** For example placing an order should be simple and straightforward. Customers should be told exactly what they can expect after their order is placed, such as how to print a receipt or track the order. They should always be reminded that their transaction is secure, that you will not sell or share their information, and that you appreciate their business.

You should always provide a physical address and a phone number. If you don't tell customers who and where you are, why should they trust you to complete an order or want to contact you? Hiding things like your address and phone number creates a feeling that you have something to hide and that is something that visitors and customers dislike.

**Manage the content.** As your site evolves, pages will be added and removed and regularly updating the site and adding new information is essential. By refreshing your content on a weekly or monthly basis you will attract regular visitors who will check to see what's new. The more relevant pages you have on your site the more exposure you will have in the search engines and the more potential you have for attracting visitors who use different search terms.

**Market the site.** Search engine optimization, should be planned and integrated into the design of the site and don't forget the simple basics such as putting your site address on your business cards, letterhead, brochures, advertising and all other marketing material.

**Avoid the.....**

**Busy site:** Busy graphics, animated gifs, blinking text, silly icons and hit counters just put people off. Example: <http://www.dokimos.org/ajff/>

**Designer site:** The 'designers dream' site that defies conventional standards. Actually it is just poor in terms of usability, clarity, and content. Example: <http://www.matthewmahon.com/>

**Flash site:** Just because it's 'cool'. Example:  
<http://spaceflight.nasa.gov/shuttle/archives/sts-108/flash/sts108.swf>

**Illegal site:** Stealing copyright. It's illegal. There are plenty of good quality royalty free images and media. Also many end up putting spyware and malware on your PC. See:  
<http://www.stopbadware.org/>



**Scrolling site:** Sites that require horizontal scroll bars to view the page are generally hated. Example(s): <http://www.thehorizontalway.com/>