

How to build a good business website

The UK has the most active online population of any country in Europe with around 21 million logging on every day and 72% using the Internet to make purchases.

According to the Office of National Statistics between 2005-2006 consumers spent £103 billion in online purchases in the UK alone

But a recent survey has shown that for UK SMEs:

- o 23% of websites have not been updated launch
- o The average age of a website is four years
- o Only 8% of respondents had an e-commerce element to their sites
- o 25% of companies had no way of tracking their site
- o 38% had no budget at all for website updates
- o For those with a budget the annual spend was around £250



So, if you have built a web site and you find that your site hasn't been generating much relevant traffic and no significant sales the temptation may be to start "the blame game" but that isn't going to help. You see building a web site is one thing; building one that will bring in business is another.

Far too often building a website is seen as a design or technical issue and confusion is the norm with no one being really clear why it's there, who it is aimed at or what it is supposed to do.

Too frequently 'getting the website up' is the main objective and the site reflects the organisation and its departments. But users don't care about 'producers', they just want a site that is easy for them to understand and use.

Here are some thoughts you can use to make sure your website is effective and working for you.

1. Have you researched websites in your industry and looked at your competitors and what kind of websites they have? Did you find out whose is 'doing the biz'? In many businesses you really can find out how well they are doing from that grapevine and that will help you to start to see what works for your industry and what does not. It's gritty, it's boring, it needs someone who understands your business – that's not likely to be designers and developers, but engineers, sales people and marketers. They are the ones that will notice the 'little things' that can make it come together.

2. Can your site be found? Why did you build it unless you promote it? If it can't be found it won't bring business. Q E D. Prepare a website marketing plan. "Pretend" (at the very least pretend and preferably understand) that your site is (or may be) your most important product or service. How would you market that? How much would you spend on it? It is critical that your website is search engine friendly and registered with key directories; after that there are many things you can do – pay per click, banner ads, email, viral campaigns, social bookmarking, social networking and more.
3. Target, target, target. Who are your target audience? What will motivate them? Most visitors want information. Let's say that again. Most visitors want information. It is information about products, services and prices that helps them to make a decision. And that is what you want – a decision.
4. Does your website provide easy navigation? Preferably one click from anywhere to anywhere on the site with no more than 7 top level links – more tends to confuse people, but it's a guideline not a rule! Talk with people from target audience about how they want site structured and what will make them buy – yes it is obvious but many don't do it.
5. Does your website have the right content? This is critical. Not only for customers but also for Search Engine Optimization (SEO) to drive higher rankings in organic listings in the search engines which is how over 80% of sites are reached – even, frequently, if they are book marked because people love Googling. So..... make sure your site has relevant and useful content that helps your particular audience achieve their particular objectives on your website.
6. Is the users' experience pleasant and convenient? Does the site keep their details and preferences? If you want customers to visit your website frequently and make regular purchases, you must securely store their personal details so don't have to fill-out the same details every time they make a transaction or contribution. Also, get their consent for future marketing.



7. Do users leave happy? Are there appropriate cues and auto e-mails to inform customers of what happens next? You'll soon know. How? When you get unnecessary emails and phone calls from customers and have to spend more time dealing with them off-line.
8. Trust. Make sure users can contact your company? Why should I trust you unless you provide sufficient details for users to be able to get in

touch with you? Provide your company details including phone numbers and address. Does your site provide information about policies and terms



and conditions to instil further trust and confidence? Customers want to know. Hiding things makes them suspicious if not downright angry.

9. Who writes the copy? Believe it or not good copywriters are worth their weight in gold and know how to structure information so the most important message is conveyed clearly. It is very easy to skim. It is frequently a false economy.
10. Does your website have the right look? First impressions are important. Don't be flashy and make sure your target audience has the sure feeling they have come to the right place.
11. The site has to be hosted. It is far too frequently the case that one is waiting around for a site to load – even with broadband. Having a first class hosting company is essential. If the site doesn't come up in milliseconds then people lose interest and go elsewhere.
12. Can your website be viewed? Sound simple but while your website may appear fine on one browser that doesn't necessarily mean that it will display the same way on other browsers. It certainly has to work in Microsoft's internet Explorer and in Firefox – the two account for over 95% of browsers but that does not mean you can ignore the others.
13. Tracking. Measure success or failure. Anywhere other than your website that you don't do that?? The conversion rates from the traffic on your website show the effectiveness of your site marketing and show you where you need to improve. Your web stats provide information about visitors and referrers, most popular pages, where they come from, how long they spend on your site, where they go from your site, etc. This information is absolutely essential particularly if you rely on your site for a significant part of your business.
14. Maintenance and updates. Do you keep updating your site with new content? Are the products in stock? How would you feel about a supermarket where everything is beyond its sell by date? Would you use it? Yet there are plenty of sites that are expected to perform without maintenance – bizarre!