

## Website trust – statements of the ‘bleedin obvious’?

If you live in the UK, you may have heard or seen (outdoor, radio, press, online) adverts recently from the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA), aimed at raising awareness of the fact that its remit is being extended to cover marketing on websites from 1 March 2011.

From then, marketing communications on companies’ own websites and in other third party space under their control, such as Facebook and Twitter, will have to adhere to the non-broadcast advertising rules as set out in the CAP Codes.

Exactly how effective this will be, given the global nature of the web, is debatable but no genuine organisation would wish to be anything other than legal, decent, honest and truthful.



Trust and safety are not, of course, new elements when it comes to websites. Twitter had to introduce detection and prevention filters for spam and phishing and Facebook has much about safety on its site– though not everyone feels it is doing enough. Trust questions for a site when it comes to ecommerce are as old as the web.

If you or anyone you know is concerned about protecting children’s online safety then The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) works across the UK tackling child sex abuse and providing advice for parents, young people and children about internet safety and online safety.

So, when it comes to your website how does it measure up?

Way back in 1999, Stanford University compiled a list of guidelines for building the credibility of a website. Although the information is not new, it is still very important if you want to be successful with your online business. Some of the points they made are:

### Look and Design

People really do judge “a book by its cover”. Many people use visual cues when assessing a site’s credibility. Your site layout, typography, images, consistency and style all affect how users perceive your website business.

### Ease of Use

Sites that are easy to navigate are seen as being more trustworthy. So consistent navigation is essential and things like missing pages, pages that don't display correctly, broken links or ineffective search are not helpful. Check regularly for errors.

### Ease of Contact

If I can’t easily find (on every page?):

- who you are

- how to contact you (address, phone number and email)
- what your terms are, how you treat privacy
- what your prices are (have you never had to click on 'buy' to find a price? terrible practice)

and more – such as the basic legal requirements in the UK (set out in The Electronic Commerce Regulations (EC Directive) Regulations 2002 and The Companies Act 2006 and the Business Names Act 1985) which include all the above plus and more, including:

- registered office
- company and VAT numbers
- supervisory authorities

then why would I trust you or do business with you?

## What else?

So, that's all very well, but it's a bit legalistic isn't it? Hmm, well yes, but wouldn't you be the first to complain about a 'cowboy builder' or similar? The web is no different and it's perhaps even more important when you don't actually meet people to show that you can be trusted.



Some other things to think about are:

- Make it easy to verify information on your site by providing third-party support - link to the evidence and even if people don't follow the links, you've shown you are 'upright' and can be trusted.
  - Show photos of your offices and staff with employee biographies that include work background family and hobbies plus video testimonials as well as written ones from customers.
- If you must have ads, clearly distinguish the sponsored content from your own. Avoid pop-up ads.
  - If you have an ecommerce site make sure you offer a secure connection for transactions. That's HTTPS rather than HTTP and you will see a lock icon picture in the address bar.
  - Get verified with an Internet trust organization a third party company that:
    - Provides an independent way to register and resolve complaints
    - Verifies that a website has a privacy statement

- Verifies that the website gives you a choice of how they use your information
- Make sure that you have a good Privacy Policy and Privacy Statement.

OK so all the above really are "statements of the 'bleedin obvious'", but, how many websites do you know that don't 'comply'?

Oh and if you don't then the ASA has sanctions it can apply. These include:

- Removal of paid-for search advertising – ads that link to the page hosting the non-compliant marketing communication may be removed with the agreement of the search engines.
- ASA paid-for search advertisements - the ASA could place advertisements online highlighting an advertiser's continued non-compliance.

or going even further:

- They can ask Code of Advertising Practice (CAP) member bodies to intervene when one of their members is not playing by the rules. Usually an informal intervention is enough to secure future compliance but if that's not successful the relevant CAP member body could threaten the withdrawal of membership privileges or recognition.
- The ASA is recognised by the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) as the established means for regulating misleading and comparative ads in the UK. If, having failed to secure an advertiser's agreement to co-operate with the self-regulatory system, it can ask the OFT to consider taking action under the Consumer Protection Regulations or the Business Protection Regulations. The OFT can seek undertakings from a company that it will change its ads; it can also seek injunctions from the Courts to prevent companies from making misleading claims in their ads.