
Putting your site where everyone can see...



Planning Your On-Line Success

Planning

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Planning a Successful Website

“All truths are easy to understand once they are discovered; the point is to discover them.” – Galileo Galilei

So how do you start to plan your own website? The first step is to establish exactly what you are trying to achieve. We have touched on the reasons for wanting a website, but now you need to be specific. The main considerations are:

- Your objectives,
- Your target market and their requirements, and
- Which products and/or services you are going to offer.

Each of these three areas is vitally important when planning a successful website. Graphics and technology will be part of the final plan, but should not be considered until you have established these main considerations.

So let's look at each of these in a little more detail.

What Do You Want From Your Website?

Your Objectives - Only you can decide your website's objectives, as you know how your business operates and what your business strategy is. As mentioned previously a successful website should retain existing customers, generate new customers, reduce costs and increase profits, but you will need to break this down into smaller areas. The following list contains some of the most common objectives:

- Selling
- Advertising
- Service / Product Support
- Creating Company Brand and ID

Selling – This is by far the most common objective. Whether you are selling product or service it is extremely important to make the process simple. People will not tolerate a website that does not make the process as simple and painless as possible.

Advertising – This is a less common objective, but is often used by media companies to create a buzz about a new product that is about to be released.

Support – You may wish to provide a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) area or downloads to ensure customers feel that the support is there 24/7. This needs to be closely considered with the next section, the customer's requirements.

Branding – Though this will rarely be the sole objective, it should always be considered. The site should be an extension of your business.

Don't be afraid to talk to other members of staff. Brainstorm. You probably wouldn't consider building a new office without their input, why not involve them in building the website. Not only are you likely to receive some valuable input, but if they feel it is part of 'their' business, they are more likely to promote its existence.

Other things you should consider at the early planning stage are:

- Making the site Search Engine Friendly (detailed later)
- Encouraging Repeat traffic
- Encouraging Recommendation
- Encouraging permission to email

- Establishing Customer Loyalty
- Stickiness
- Affiliate Programs

Search Engine Friendly – This is discussed in detail later, but if your site is not registered with the search engines it will not appear in their results list, and if it has not been optimised it will probably appear so far down the list that it is never actually seen.

Repeat Traffic – If a visitor leaves the site without feeling it worth a second visit, then you have potentially failed to gain a customer, or more importantly you may have failed to turn a customer into a long term client. If a visitor does return, they should not face the same information or processes again. Provide them with new information, keep encouraging them to return. How many times would you purchase a newspaper if it contained the same news every time?

Recommendation – Unbiased third party exposure is the best advertising any business can get. Don't just rely on the products or the site graphics to achieve this though, think further. Add a 'Tell a Friend' button or allow them to forward information or product details to their friends. Let your customers market for you.

Permission to Mail – We will look at this further later on, but if you want to use customer details for future contact, then get their permission.

Customer Loyalty – Encourage visitors to become members. Give them an incentive to do so, whether it's discounts or free downloads. Be creative.

Stickiness – Again, we will look at this further, but you should look at ways to get visitors to stay and browse your website.

Affiliate Programs – Why not encourage others to sell your services /products on their websites as well? It can create an extremely cost efficient sales force.

What Does Your Target Market Want From Your Website?

Your target market and their requirements - When considering your website you should never lose sight of who the target market is. Try to consider as many factors as possible. If you have the information, try to calculate their:

- Demographics (physical characteristics such as age & gender),
- Lifestyles & budgets,
- Geodemographics (where do your clients live), and
- Psychographics (their attitude and tastes).

And where possible try and create a WOW factor for each of the different target markets.

A simple example is a website selling toys. The obvious target market is children, and so the site requires colour, graphics and possibly movement, but it should also consider an area to attract the people who are buying gifts for children. After all, it is far more likely that the person spending the money is going to be an adult. For the adult target market, they could provide an area that provides gift ideas and highlights the most popular toys at the moment. They should probably think about putting the 'children's play area' & the 'gift ideas for children' area a step down from the initial welcome page. But at the same time they will need to make both target audiences aware that this website should appeal to them, no matter which route the visitor enters the site.

The other thing to be conscious of is that existing customers will probably want different things to a potential new customer. Make sure that existing customer do not have to work their way through six pages of company background before being able to select a product or service. If they are an existing customer, they already know about you. They will want to see new information and be able to reach the place where business is done via the quickest possible route. Consider personalising the site for existing customers or members.

Also try to consider the technology your target audience are likely to have. If you are trying to appeal to the young executive, then flash and java are less likely to be a problem, than if you are targeting retired people.

In a nutshell, try to consider what each of your target audience groups expects, what they want and what they need. While not losing sight of what they don't want, don't expect and don't need.

What are you going to offer?

Which products and/or services you are going to offer - Sometimes it is not always appropriate to sell all your product lines via your website. There again, it is sometimes possible to sell far more products, as the shopper is not going to be as overwhelmed as they would be if they had just step through a shop door.

I call this area of consideration 'Clicks v Bricks'. A shopper on the internet has come to expect far more than a customer entering a shop. Internet shoppers more often than not expect their purchases to be shipped anywhere in the world. They are also more likely to expect gift wrapping, auctioning, demo's, multi-currency, multi-lingual or video tours.

Try to step back from your daily business and ask 'What would my client expect from me if I was purely a web based business?' The beauty of the internet is the ability to test the market with smaller or new product lines. Start with an idea of exactly what you are going to offer, but always be ready to change. Ensure you have considered the ability to be flexible. A website that has not been thought through will become unusable very quickly.

Check Out The Competition!

If you want customers to utilise your website, you need to ensure that you match or beat your competition in all the aspects that fit your objectives. When looking at your competition - Don't Assume You Know Who They Are! This may sound like a strange statement, as you probably come across your competition every time you walk down the main street. But, your competition on the internet can be very different to those you pass on a daily basis. Look at both types of competitor.

One of the greatest assets a website offers is the anonymity of size. The internet offers a level playing field. Obviously, businesses with a huge brand name will always have an advantage, but they do not often utilise this on the internet. A recent survey showed that only 7% of the top 100 companies in the world optimise their websites. You are as large as your target audience perceives you to be, so think big!

How do you find your competition? Well, the obvious places to look are the on-line yellow pages, search engines and on-line directories. When using these tools, try to think how a customer would look for your business, rather than using the search terms that you use. Often in business we use terminology that a potential customer would not. If you are not sure how a new customer would look for your business, then ask a client to define your business using one, two or three word phrases. Never be afraid to ask!

So what are you actually looking for? When looking at the competition you need to create an analysis sheet. A simple tick list or scoring system will suffice. Look at:

- The websites visual appeal
- The content
- The ease of use (navigation)
- The search engine friendliness (did they appear high on Google etc)
- Interactivity – Do they encourage a potential client to take actions, do they offer membership, newsletters, updates etc
- The stickiness – How do they keep people there! And what changes if you visit a second time.

Once you have created a list, go back and do it again. This time try and identify what you feel is essential to have, what would be nice to have if affordable and what you don't need or don't want. Remember, a competitor may have a website that does not work!

Storyboard Your Site

By this stage you will have begun to create a basic picture of your website. It is purely functional at this stage, as we have not looked at content or graphics. We have just looked at what it is we want the site to achieve. So the next stage is to storyboard the site.

Ridiculous as it may sound the best way to do this is using post-it notes. Write down the name or function of each area you have defined on separate post-its. You can then put these on a wall and steadily build up an image of how the site will work; a storyboard. You want to try to ensure that a customer does not need to pass through more than 3 pages to get to important information or to make a purchase.

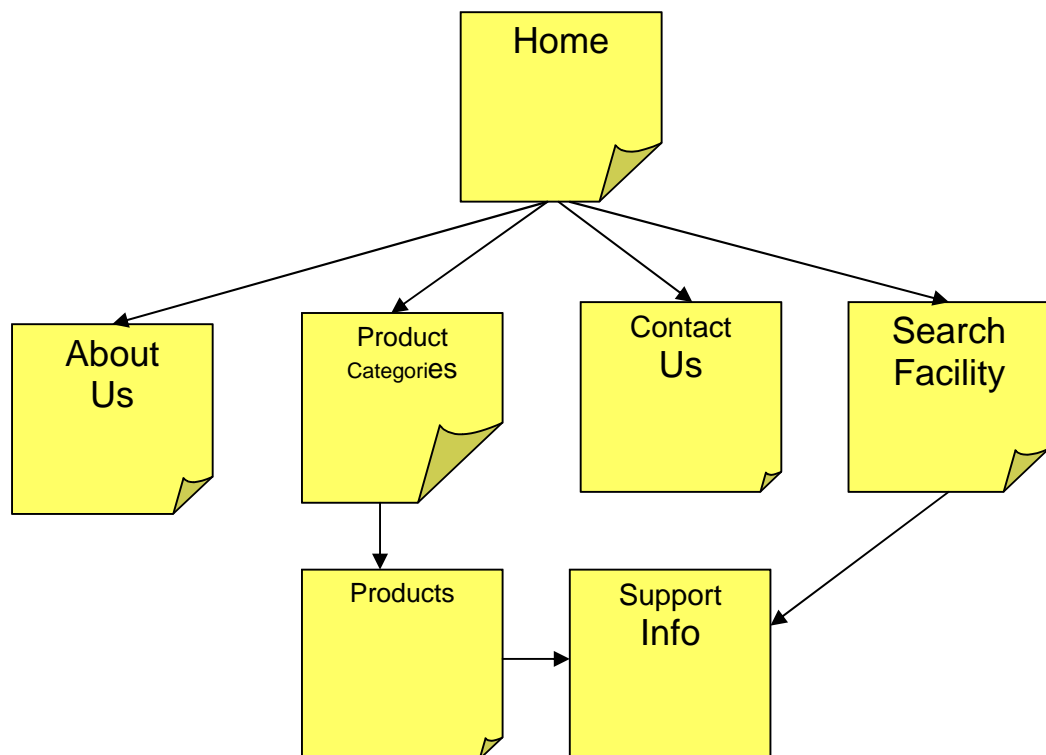


Figure 1 - A simple Product Support Website

The beauty of a post-it note is you can simply move it's position if it isn't working. You can add or remove pages simply and you will build up a 'feel' for the site.

Once you have a storyboard that you are happy with then review it against your objectives, your wow factors, your products/services and your competitor analysis. If you are not happy with something then change it now. It is far cheaper to change a design at this stage than it is once the site has been developed.

Asking For Help

“A ship in port is safe, but that’s not what ships are built for.” –
Grace Murray Hooper

IF you would like us to help you access the full potential of the internet, or you would like us to advice you on what to do next, then feel free to contact us. We are great believers in education, rather than using the technical myths surrounding the internet to generate business.

intheopen are a UK based internet marketing company, who are dedicated to helping small to medium-sized business succeed via the internet.

Contact Us

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Our Mission Statement

Service

We will always remember that we are a service company. Each and every customer is valued as a part of who we are today, and who we'll be tomorrow.

We will work hard to earn our customers' trust and loyalty. And more than simply responding to customer needs, we will work to anticipate and exceed them.

With unquestionable honesty, fairness and respect.

Technology & Innovation

Our products are grounded in technology and innovation. We believe that research, development, quality and performance are key to our future. We have earned, and will continually strive to retain, our leadership in this industry.

Our dedication to technology and innovation is motivated by the desire to provide services and products which contribute to the growth of our customers.

And we share in the responsibility of providing the world with new advancements.

Success

We will work for the success of our customers, our company and each other.

We understand and respect the value, the contributions, and the achievements of each colleague. We will support personal growth through education, training, and new opportunities. We will never be content with who we are, or what we have accomplished.

We are inspired by what is yet to come.

intheopen	Project Considerations		
	Task	Required	In House Task
Determine Objectives	✓	✓	
Target Audience Analysis			
Competitor Analysis			
Site Storyboarding			
Site Graphics			
Site Content			
Site development			
Viral Marketing Strategy			
Permission Based Marketing Strategy			
Off-Line Marketing Strategy			
Site optimisation – Keyword analysis			
Site optimisation – Development			
Site optimisation – Affiliate Program			
Site optimisation – Pay-Per-Click Campaign			
Communication & Staff Training			
Site Launch Process Definitions			
Newsletter Design			

