

# Getting your new website right

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There are some things you've just got to get right. Getting married and your tax return for a start. I can't help with either of those (but I can recommend a good divorce lawyer and an accountant).

Now don't get me wrong, I'm not a techy or a website expert (although I can also put you in touch with someone who is) but I can help with your website: from whether you need one, which one to choose, right down to planning some of the detail. They're the back bone of your business, so let's get them and the planning of them, right...from the start

### **Deciding whether to build a new website**

It can often start a bit like this.

**SCENE:** Management team meeting, agenda a bit vague. Cross/bored manager begins familiar rant.

"Our website's crap. We write a random blog every month about our company barbecue or our latest work experience placement, but we don't even explain what we do. At least, not in a way that our customers can understand. The home page is way too busy, you can't find anything. And Bob's picture is STILL up on our team page, and he left in 2012 after stealing the company car."

Other folk start to chip in.

"Yeah. It is SO out of date. We haven't changed the pictures for over a year, we don't even *have* an office in London any more, and the telephone number is still in the old format. (Winchester 236, may we be of assistance?)."

Then there's around 10 minutes of a general free-for-all insulting everything about the website. Including the fact that productization was spelt with a z. And isn't a word at all, according to Lizzie in accounts.

And then....

Hopefully, someone starts talking about what can actually be DONE about it. The end result is that a poor, unsuspecting (and often quite junior) 'volunteer' is pointed at and asked to take the project on.

### **Three things to do *before* you commission a new website**

The first – and most important – thing to do about it is to consider your website in the

context of your whole business, and not as a stand-alone tool.

There are very few businesses nowadays for whom a brochure-style website is a valuable outcome. By brochure-style, I mean a website that purely explains to your audiences what you do, where you do it and how to contact you.

But this is what you might end up with, if you don't think about three vital things before you start.

### **1. First – get your positioning sorted**

You know your positioning is on the right track when everyone in your company can agree and articulate these five things.

1. **Who** your ideal customers and prospects are
2. **How** those prospects are grouped
3. **What** value you can bring to each of those groups
4. **How** and why you are (truly) different from your competitors
5. **Why** you don't offer certain services – or sell certain products – that your competitors do...

The fifth point is really all about finding your niche.

Without a niche, you can't really have true positioning – because this article is for SMEs, and if you're small, you can't do everything for everyone. (Or at least, you can't do it well. On top of that, people won't believe you.)

So, if you're about to start planning your website and can't agree on those 5, it's time to go back to your positioning and work on that first with the help of my free guide.

### **2. Next, dust off your marketing or new business strategy**

If you have a marketing strategy, but haven't seen it for months (years?), then get it out and give it a thorough going over.

Make it fit for purpose, then think very carefully about the role your website can and should be playing in that bigger picture.

If you haven't got any new business or marketing strategy – slam on the brakes and don't take another step 'til you've downloaded and read my "The real way and the right

to get new business" eBook. It's free and you really can't plan a website without a new business strategy.

But when you're finally ready, here are some useful questions to get you started alongside your planning:

- i. What is the main purpose of your website? Is it providing information and advice, offering useful tools and resources, or enabling transactions?
- ii. How many audience groups – with different needs – are there? Perhaps you have a service or products that cater to beginners, intermediates and experts. Each group will have separate wants and needs.
- iii. What do we want these people to do once they reach your website? Do you want them to download your eBook, sign-up to your promotions and newsletters, or buy products? Different audiences may have very different pathways around your site.
- iv. How will you be help your audiences? Actually this one should have been put at the beginning. Think carefully about what value your website will bring to your customers. Not just what you want them to do, but what *they* would appreciate from *you*. If in doubt, ask your customers.

### **3. Then: choose a web designer/developer carefully**

This is actually the hardest bit. Because there are millions out there. In fact, the number of web designers may now have surpassed the gazillions mark.

And despite all my advice (would you believe it), very few of them are well positioned or have a clear niche – so you (the buyer) cannot tell the difference between them.

#### **A few pointers for this:**

- Don't just rely on referrals, but get one or two from a friend with high business standards
- Look carefully at what they've done most of – and think how that truly fits with you
- If you find one who has a niche positioning in your sector/size/industry, include them in your shortlist.
- They will almost all say '*yes, we can do that*' to absolutely anything you ask.

It is quite possible they have never done that thing before. But they are sure they can. (While it's nice that they're so confident, it's not always very reassuring.) So, if you find one that says no to something or is completely open about **not** having done something before, dig deeper. Their honesty may be just what you need.

- There are people whose sole job it is to help set you up with – and then manage – the right web designer/agency for you.

So, that's three things to get sorted before you start building a website. Once you've decided to start, please take the responsibility away from that poor, unsuspecting junior marketing co-ordinator.

Give them the project co-ordination, that's fine, but take away the responsibility. You need a senior manager or board member to make the real decisions, otherwise each stage of the project will sit for ages in the 'It's gone to the management team, but they can't agree' category..

### **Investing in a project manager**

If you're a larger SME and have never commissioned a website before – and your website is an important part of your marketing strategy – then investing in a (high quality, experienced) project manager is very likely to pay for itself.

It would mean that:

- You have confidence in the quality and clarity of your brief to the agency
- You are confident that the scope won't creep (90% of web projects suffer from this)
- You will stick to your budget and are confident it won't run away with you – ditto 90%
- Your project will go live when it's planned to – ditto 90%
- You maintain a good relationship with your designer
- You get what you wanted – because of all the above

Or alternatively... forget all that. Just get a web designer in and build it. This is the other approach.

It can feel really quick and agile, like you're getting stuff done. And it can't be that hard, can it? Surely you don't need that much planning just to get a website built? After all, pretty much every business in the world has a website of some sort, doesn't it...?

You can give this a go. But any web designer/developer worth their salt will start asking questions. They have to. In order to get the answers from you that will create their brief.

**NOTE: If your web agency doesn't ask any of these questions, do NOT use them. They'll just be building the website they think you should have, and not the one you need.**

### **Information architecture is your friend**

Right, you've got your web agency and you've thought carefully about your positioning and your market strategy. So now it's just a case of getting it built, right?

Wrong. A bit of careful thinking up front can make all the difference between having a website your customers love - and the one you thought you wanted.

To help you out, here's a quick and handy guide so you can easily understand what you need to think about, to commission the right website:

### **Information architecture - what is it?**

It's the science of working out what you want your site to do, then making an outline before you start doing detail. It's important.

It saves a lot of time and money by defining where you're going. You'll then make fewer mistakes en route. Here are the steps.

#### **1. First, bring people together to define your site's goals**

That means collecting customers' and your opinions, and listing them in a weighted order of importance. An objective facilitator, business-head or marketer can be invaluable here.

#### **2. Next, work out who your site must talk with: your audiences**

They'll each need different messages - messages which show how you can improve their lives. First you just wave a flag to say "Hi! You!". Then they know to search for detail. You will need to list and describe those audiences.

Then list pages and functions, with brief notes about content, and how they'll connect

That can be written up as a skeleton of blocks connected with lines. Some folks call this the wire-frames, some the user-journey. They're often the same thing.

#### **4. Then you get creative**

Your 'brief notes' turn into words. Lines turn into navigation systems. Pictures or media add further meaning.

Layout grids, design sketches, and mock-ups are fiddled with to work out what goes where on each page. Designers work with fonts, colours, headings and space to ensure key points come across clearly.

#### **5. Then you'll build it.**

This is where a developer writes code to turn your grids, pictures, words and colours into an actual online structure that is a website.

It will probably have a CMS (content management system) that makes it really easy for non-techies like me to change any of the words and pictures on the site. Within reason.

#### **6. Then it's time to test the model, and work out how to fix mistakes**

You'll need to check back with your customer audiences to make sure it still does what they wanted it to do. Ideally, you'll use real customers for this.

#### **7. Finally, you should assess the site over time, and work out how to improve it**

This is subject to the law of diminishing returns. Or continuous improvement, depending on your levels of optimism.

So there you have it. Your marriage may be in tatters. But your website should be a thing of great pride and efficiency, making life easier and bringing in clients.

Like I said at the start, I'm not a website expert but I do know about planning. So get out there, find a really good web designer / project manager and take their advice. Good luck.

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I help determined SMEs acquire the right new clients