

Why Do I Need a Website & How Important is Good Design?

A website is a further extension to your marketing campaign: it is a salesperson working 24/7 for your business and if you don't have one, or your site is unprofessional or ineffective, you are losing out on valuable sales opportunities.

The internet is increasingly the first port of call for people looking for a product or service. They are able to type in a couple of keywords and are presented with page after page of websites, all offering what they are looking for. People like to take their time researching and comparing the offerings of different companies and online they can browse day or night, ordering products and services without even leaving their home or office.

A business needs an online presence to compete in today's market – even if it is a simple one page, 'business card' type website. As long as you have effective copy, all of your contact details and preferably a contact form, you will have the potential to reach a wider audience than any of your other marketing put together!

Websites are also a very cost effective form of marketing: there is no printing involved, no delivery costs (aside from what you sell of course!) and no limit to the amount of information you can put on them. Unlike an expensive ad in a magazine where you will be limited as to the amount of content you can include, on your website you can include as much as you like.

In another article, [How to Write Great Copy](#), we discuss the use of longer copy over short copy: longer copy is always more successful as it caters for everyone – those who just read the headlines AND those who want all the details. As far as websites are concerned, the more copy and pages your website contains, the more keywords it has which ultimately makes it easier to find.

Pay per Click Advertising

A website is essential if you want to take advantage of Pay per Click advertising or PPC. If you don't already know, PPC is a marketing revolution where you pay a small fee each time someone actually clicks on your advert, NOT for just having it shown. These adverts can be seen alongside the 'natural' listings on search engines: on Google, the natural listings are the main list of results, while the PPC adverts are shown to the right and sometimes at the top as *Sponsored Links*. Achieving a high ranking in the natural listings can take months if not years, but with PPC this can be achieved in weeks (or even seconds for keywords with little competition!).

Even if you only have landing pages for your individual PPC adverts and not an actual website per se, you still need some sort of online presence in order to fully benefit.

So What Makes a Good Website?

There are a number of factors that make up a good website, but most importantly it

must be designed with Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) in mind. A good web designer will know the tricks needed to help your site be found by the search engines. Without wanting to get too technical, this would include, among other things:

- Proper use of the *title* tag.
- Proper use of *meta* tags.
- Correct use of *p*, *h1*, *h2*, *h3*, etc (paragraph and heading/subheading tags. For example *h1* would be the main heading, *h2* a sub heading, etc).
- Inclusion of *alt* tags for images (i.e. an image description).

This list is not exhaustive, but it is the bare minimum that needs to be done to make your site not only seen by the search engines, but also accessible to all users.

A website should be well structured with simple, clear navigation so that users can easily find their way around. Unfortunately, some people get carried away with their design and, without realising it, are losing customers because they just can't find their way around the website. Users simply hit the back button and go to a site that is far easier to get around – even if the product or service you are offering is better.

As a rule, you have 8 seconds to keep someone on your site. If your site is slow to load or the user can't find what they are looking for or can't even find their way to the next page, they *will* hit the back button and you'll have lost a customer. You can still have great design, though: a good designer will be able to create an eye-catching design that is fast loading.

Which brings us neatly onto the design itself: the design should enhance the usability and visibility of your site. As well as this, the design is a powerful tool that helps with that all important first impression. Your branding should be imprinted onto your website design just as it would on any other marketing material and a good design can really make the difference between success and failure. It sends a message about your professionalism and the type of business that you are.

Use Flash Sparingly

Websites that rely heavily on flash should be avoided, as they are slow loading (who really wants to stare at a 'loading' sign for ages?), have poor SEO support and are hard for your analytics system to track visitor usage of your site. That does not mean to say that flash should be avoided all together. Simple animations can liven up your site and flash is really a must when it comes to creating slideshows and image galleries. Always discuss your requirements with your designer.

In Conclusion

In order for your business to flourish, you need to grab hold of every marketing opportunity available to you and using a website to promote or sell your product or service is one of the most cost effective. A good website should be well structured and well designed to maximise its visibility, accessibility and usability.

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