

Mr Site's top tips for web success

1. Design it right

Making sure you have a great looking and easy to use site is no mean feat. There are lots of issues to consider. Below are some of the key things you should remember when designing your site:

- Use consistent colours with good contrast on a solid background ideally. Red text on a green background for example is a big no no. Remember that 10% of the population is colour blind and even more with reading difficulties so clean, simple colours are essential.
- Make sure text size isn't any smaller than size 12 (the default MS Word text size). Anything smaller and reading glasses and eye strain will become order of the day for your visitors.
- Keep the animations to a minimum. The days when people were impressed by an opening animation or a spinning logo are long gone. If people want moving pictures they'll watch the telly.
- Don't use introduction animations (normally with an irritating "please wait... loading" message!) Remember you've got just seven seconds to capture a new visitor's interest. Research suggests that an introduction animation will LOSE you 50% of your visitors before they even get to your main site.

2. Keep your web name simple

www.sandra-oconnorhandmadejewelry.com

It may be a temptation to have a very descriptive website address, but it goes without saying, shorter names are far more memorable. Despite the simplicity of this statement it is still far too common to find names that are over 30 or 40 letters long. This is totally impractical. Rules of thumb are:

- Keep it short – up to 15 letters is around the maximum. A lot of the shortest names are already taken, but try a bit of creativity and you'll find the one you want.
- Avoid hyphens – names like www.fashion-is-great.com read nicely but don't translate

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well over the phone or for memorability. Some people don't even know what a hyphen is.

- Avoid hard to spell words – jewellery (or jewelry) is spelt different ways in the US and UK. It's also notoriously difficult to spell. Words like this are best avoided if you possibly can.
- If you're a UK only company, it will pay dividends to use a .UK website name (eg. www.fashionrocks.co.uk) as this tells potential visitors that you are based in the UK. If you deal internationally a .COM or .NET name is better.

3. Put contact details on your site

The cardinal sin of website design is not displaying contact information including landline telephone, email and address details. Simply putting your email address or a contact form is not going to cut the mustard. Putting a postal address says a lot about your business, leaving it off says even more.

- Would you buy from someone who didn't put ANY contact information on their site? Well based on hundreds of websites out there, a lot of you would!
- Are you serious about your business? Not putting a contact address says that you are 'unsure' about the feasibility of the business and you're not prepared for it to cross over into your normal line of work. You're either in business or not. So make that statement by being open.
- You're likely to lose up to 70% of potential business by not including contact details (so that makes 30% of us very trusting indeed!).
- Scammers and frausters don't put legitimate contact details on their websites. Do you really want to be in the same bracket as them?
- Put as much information up there as you can including phone, email and address details. If you absolutely must, buy a PO Box number, or better still use a virtual address service that will give your company a prestigious address at very little cost.

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4. Don't write reams and reams

Try to avoid writing lots and lots of copy on your website. If you must then it isn't necessarily a bad thing, but make sure you keep the copy on your home page minimal. The following are rules of thumb for your homepage:

- Write no more than one paragraph of content on your homepage.
- People browse websites, they don't read them.
- Remember K.I.S.S. – Keep It Simple Stupid! Overcomplicating and over wording is a real turn off. Say it as concisely and accurately as possible.
- Writing copy heavy pages is fine, but only once the visitor is interested. Keep heavy content deeper within the website.

5. Start with your head not your heart

Have a clear idea of what you want your site to achieve, its purpose and its structure. Delving head first into building your website will cause frustration and if outsourced will start becoming very expensive. Any small amend or change will end up costing you consultancy fees.

- Produce a site map on the back of a napkin, outlining the title of each page and what it will contain.
- Think about colours and layout. Find sites that you like the look of and adapt accordingly (but don't copy them verbatim! See point 10).
- Badly thought out sites are often clumsy, unfocused and unpleasant to visit. Making changes to them after the first version has been built will be costly too. It'll be cheaper in the long run to invest time in planning early on.
- Think about what your customers want, not what you want. What you may think is deeply creative, other may find off-putting or misleading. Try not to reinvent the wheel. Only large established brands can get away with risqué and obscure marketing tactics.

6. Think about your audience before you start

Think about where your audience are coming from, what ages they will be and what you think they are looking for. Tailor the look and feel of your site accordingly.

- What age are your visitors likely to be?
- Are they going to be buying products from your site or just browsing your site for information?
- Where are they coming from? UK, International, Regional? Tailoring site content for different countries yields more positive results in terms of repeat visitors and sales.
- Do you need to have your site in different languages? English isn't the only language the world speaks!

7. Keep your website up to date

Websites that never change, especially those that you like to visit often, are a real let down. Not only will it kill off repeat visitors but you'll also be penalised by Google and other major search engines for having stale content. It isn't difficult to keep your site up to date, the more regular the better. Follow these guidelines and you'll be coming up with fresh engaging content in no time:

- Update as regularly as possible, but every two weeks should be just fine.
- Add a news page to your site, documenting the latest news and events. Not everyone will read this but it will be good for your search engine listing.
- Regularly updated websites are rewarded with higher positions on Google and other key search engines. So if you want to get better listings, keep the content fresh.
- You'll get more repeat visitors if you keep your content fresh.

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a good start. Remember though if you are using a small web design company and they start presenting sites for very big brands that they have worked on, it is probably because they worked as part of a team on these sites. Be cautious, they may not have been the head graphic designer, more likely the web monkey.

- Spec out the job in the minutest of detail and get a fixed project price NOT an hourly price.
- Try to stick to the spec otherwise the designer is entitled to charge extra for work outside the spec. This is known in the trade as 'scope creep' and you'll be penalised financially for not thinking it through properly.
- Are there any ongoing costs for updates? If so, get an hourly rate and exactly what can be achieved in that hour. Alternatively, arrange a monthly retainer.
- An industry standard price is around £150 per day for a decent designer and developer. For small websites, expect to pay around £300-£500.
- Or... Do it yourself! There are many tools out there to build your own site, for example our very own Mr Site has won loads of awards and created even more enemies in the web design world because it is so easy to use and cost effective. Plus you're in control of future changes to your site without the maintenance fees.

10. Don't plagiarise

If you steal images off the web or text, you WILL be found out and sued. This sounds harsh agreed, but it happens to website owners all the time. And it could very well be a simple single image that sends your business down the tubes. Follow these tips to avoid litigation:

- Write your own copy. It'll take time and is certainly more work than a quick copy/paste job, but you'll be safe in the knowledge you're 100% legit. Besides, it'll come across better and be far more convincing than rehashing someone else's work. Go to www.copyscape.com and see how easy it is to find content thieves!
- Never use images you find on the web. Many of these have been licensed or stolen from elsewhere. Unless you want a license summons from stock libraries for several thousands of pounds per image, then stick to licence free sources such as Stock

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Exchange (www.sxc.hu). Or try iStockPhoto (www.istockphoto.com) where you can buy images starting from £1.

- Take your own photos. If you have a decent camera and some photo editing software, why not take your own pictures. It can be difficult to get that professional look, but with some practice and good lighting, you'll be turning out quality images in no time.
- Don't put copyrighted music on your site. Just having a music jukebox on your web page rattling out your favourite Dolly Parton track is enough to get you in hot water. Only use license free music, or music you own the copyright to.

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