

WEBSITE DESIGN – DOS & DONTs

Nowadays people expect you to have a website. Before they decide to buy from you they will try to check you out on the internet. Not having a good website may jeopardize your chance of success.

DO make sure your homepage gives a clear message of exactly what you are offering (ie selling - if you are selling something), how to find out more, how much it costs, and how to buy. (Sorry if this sounds basic, but I am constantly being amazed by sites - even of large and prestigious companies who have clearly spent a lot of money on their site - who have forgotten to make clear exactly what they are offering and to whom.)

DO think about your site from your client's point of view: what are they looking for, what will attract them, and are you giving it to them?

DO make your site **navigation** clear and foolproof - menus down the left-hand side, header across the top, and always a link to the "home" and "contact us" pages.

DO "layer" information intelligently: concise and punchy on your homepage, with clear links to more detailed pages for those who are eager for information (and don't forget, as even the fustiest museum knows, to "lead them out via the shop").

DO remember that the internet is primarily a *reading* medium and your readers are looking for specific content to read. Unless you are selling pictures, your site's images should add to and support your copy, not be used for cheap decoration. So many sites take up lots of space with bought-in stock photos which look pretty but are irrelevant or confusing to the message.

DO keep your site simple. Remember its purpose: just because you can add a gimmick (and you always can), it does not mean that you should.

DO keep checking your search engine ranking by doing searches and seeing where you come - and let your web people know if you are not happy with the results!

DO get unbiased, critical people whose judgement you trust to look at your site and tell you honestly what they think. And be brave - and grateful!

DO think about the most likely search words your chosen audience would use, and ensure your site's "meta-tags" are based on these (your web designer will know the technicalities). If your clients are searching for "cheap calls", don't use "inexpensive telecommunications services".

DO promote your site with a well-planned emarketing campaign. Just having a great store is no good if nobody enters!

DON'T sign up with a company offering to automatically submit your site to hundreds of search engines. Most of these are so-called "link farms" and using them may actually harm your search engine ranking with the major search engines.

DON'T be tempted to indulge in a slick, "flash" animation page before your homepage: most people skip them, they slow down websurfers with a dialup connection, and they can hide your site from search engines, so reducing your ranking.

DON'T use small, unreadable type, put type over images or "reverse" type in white out of a dark background: all these actively discourage readership.

DON'T waffle, overuse cliches or "pad out" your copy: use concise, readable and relevant copy, to convey your message with clarity.

DON'T let web designers or agencies confuse you or blind you with science: make sure their work is simply enabling and reinforcing your powerful sales message. Science should follow salesmanship, not the other way round!

DON'T SHOUT when I'm right next to you: don't fill your site with neon colours, flashing banners, animation and exclamation marks. Once your reader is there, the attention-seeking can stop: they want content.

DON'T talk about yourself and your business, talk about your client and the benefits you can offer them.

DON'T try to give your site mass appeal if you are after a tiny band of enthusiasts or cognoscenti - there is no value in alienating your buyers by attracting non-buyers. Focus on your purpose!

DON'T boast, make overblown claims or exaggerate: your readers are intelligent, remember - just like you.

DON'T use slang, bad grammar or mis-spellings: your readers will not want to do business with you if you lose their respect.

Finally, rules are made to be broken and the above list simplifies and generalises. Discuss YOUR requirements with a sensible and knowledgeable web designer, but never forget: you are their client, and salesmanship must come before science!

Legal Notice

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