



Website – Design Options

Introduction

Producing or coding the website is only a small part of the whole process. The most important part is the website design. And the functions you include (or exclude) determine how easy the site is to use.

What are the options and why are they important?

1 Designed for your business

For many companies, especially small specialised service suppliers the website is their shop window. And for many of these companies the amount of business is often broadly in line with the number of enquires, which in turn is a function of the number of visitors. In simple terms the marketing funnel: 100 visitors ► 10 enquiries ► 3 clients.

There are many standard website templates available and these can be a good starting point. However for minimal extra cost a good web designer can produce a customised and unique site specifically for your business. Your business is unique and it is important to use the website to show your unique selling points and this means more than displaying product or service information in a standard template website. And invariably the standard template that you use will also be used by other similar businesses and you will lose that all-important competitive edge.

2 Resize text – Browser function

All of the main browsers have a function that allows the user to change the size of the text. This is selected via the menu option View ► Text Size ► Smallest Smaller Medium Larger Largest. However many sites have been badly designed and this function has been overridden.

A large part of the population has difficulty in reading small type and by not allowing this function to operate people will be excluded from the site. In many countries there is also a legal obligation to provide accessibility for all, and re-sizable text is step one of this process.

3 Resize text – Selectable option

The main problem with just having a text re-size function that is selected by the Browser function is that many people do not know about the function. (This is compounded by the fact that many sites do not support the function and so confuses the users).

In addition to the browser based option the website should have a prominently placed button to increase the text size.

4 Email – via Default client

Probably the most common function on a website is to allow a user to email the company and request more information. Using the default email client is easy and acceptable when the user is accessing the site from their office or home computer.



As an aid to ease of use the email can be pre-configured so that for example a request for information from the 'New PC Games page' will indicate that the client wants to receive 'games' information – rather than expecting the client to type in the request for information.

5 Email – via a 'Form'

Using the default email client is normally acceptable when the user is accessing the site from their office or home computer, but can be more problematic if the user is at an Internet café or public library.

Allowing an additional option to request information via a 'form' ensures that the user can always send in the request.

6 Search facilities

The provision of search facilities is less important on a small site but people generally assume that the facility will be available. And every website grows in size – they never get smaller.

7 Optimised photos and graphics

Pictures can be useful in providing information and improving the 'look and feel' of a website. However it is important that these graphic files are optimised to provide the right level of quality at the fastest download speed.

Sixteen percent of people in the UK (who have access to the Internet) do not have broadband, ie they have a dial-up connection. Also in an office environment the broadband access will be shared between a number of users and additional capacity or bandwidth can only be obtained at additional cost. Bandwidth will also be shared in a public library, Internet café and in many cases even the home.

8 Link status highlights

The most common convention is to use blue underlined text to indicate a 'link' to another page or website. However for aesthetic design reasons many website links have had the underline removed. Also to ensure the overall design is consistent (from a design perspective, not a user perspective) there is often

Summary

The company's website can be its shop window; a place where people can come to browse, to be educated, to be informed ... and eventually they may even buy something or contract for a service. You just need to make your site visible and search engine friendly.

About the author

John Hookham is a director of management consulting and marketing services company Adrelia. Tel: 020 7286 7073 Website: www.adrelia.com