

Planning your Website

The easiest way to get started is to grab pen and paper and look at WHY you need a website, what will be its purpose and what outcomes would you like from it. Also look at WHO the customer is, who will be visiting your website and what expectations will they have. Always remember that customers and potential customers will view your website as a reflection of your business and will use what they see as an indication of the type of customer experience they will have as 'your customer'. Therefore the better the site reflects your levels of customer service, commitment and quality, the greater your chance you have of a successful website.

Below are the main areas for consideration:

Site Structure

This is the most important part of the website as it has a large impact on the site's ease of navigation, or the ease to which the customer can move around the site and get the information that they're looking for. If the customer can't easily get to the information they need, they won't come back.

Put pen to paper and draw a rough diagram or sketch of how you see the website structure, what pages come off the home page, and what pages if any will come off those and so on. Even a list of ideal 'pages' is enough to get this started. Please also consider if your site needs any pages describing any legalities – ie. Terms & Conditions, Delivery, Returns, Privacy Policy, Disclaimers.

Functionality

A list of the 'things' the customer will be able to do on your site or that you'd like them to be able to do. For instance, email to contact you, subscribe to a newsletter, download a document and so forth. It is important that the functionality is relevant to your customer base as anything unnecessary or overly-complicated will send customers away. It can be useful to look at relevant types of interaction that competitor websites are offering.

Optimisation

A list of keywords and/or phrases that you think customers will type into a search engine to find your business – at least 20 (these can be different for each page). These can be location

specific, for instance 'deli beverley' 'sandwiches beverley' and so on. Make sure you include your company name or the name you're known best by your customers as. Also, this requires a two sentence description of your business, making sure this includes at least two of your main keywords.

Content

Start planning a document(s) containing all the text and/or images for your web pages, preferably a word document and/or electronic versions of existing marketing material. Also any logos, images, (photos) and/or graphics, downloads or other media that you may have that you'd like on the site.

It's really important to incorporate your main keywords or key phrases, particularly on your main pages (as naturally as possible), into your web content to help elevate your search engine rankings. Generally its been suggested that text content on the home page should be at least 250 words with your main keywords/key phrase appearing in some form at least 3-4 times.

Your own design ideas

This can help to develop the design style of your website so that customers will easily be able to recognise this website as your website. For example, existing logos, company colours, style of existing brochures and other marketing materials, shop banners, uniforms and so on.

It also helps to think about competitor websites that you like and dislike? Whether there are any other general websites that you like the look or functionality of? And whether there are any design aspects that should be completely avoided, like a certain colour?