

Websites – The Ascent of the Website

Doesn't time fly? It seems only yesterday that the world was trying to convince you for the first time that you needed an online presence. At that point the most common manifestation of a website was an online version of your company brochure, pretty static, pretty uninspiring and really pretty dull. Nevertheless most companies complied.

This was closely followed by the "Flash Age", a time when the designers ruled. Seeing the website as the perfect vehicle for demonstrating their talents and seemingly limitless imaginations, you couldn't move for whizzing and spinning sites with fantastic animations that demanded an age to load but were well worth the wait once you got there. Unless your site was a homage to design talent and creativity you were nowhere on the evolutionary scale of Webtime.

The Flash Age straddled the great Dial Up / Broadband transition which put paid to any moans we might have had about speed but really didn't address the fact that many organisations just wanted to get through to the information and indeed that some couldn't (by dint of the good offices of the IT Overlords) see the lovely pictures anyway. Besides, if your cool innovative website doesn't generate enough revenue to cover costs, let alone make a profit, then it's not a route to market, it's art!

But to end all this foppery, in came the technocrats, they brought with them both Content Management Solutions, to release us from the avaricious grasp of the design fraternity and Search Engine optimisation.

And that's where we are today. For the last two years or more we've been bludgeoned with "robots", "Google Rankings", "Pay per clicks" and "Webstats".

This is a terrifying age where there's a stigma about appearing on "page two" and you can lose your job for not appearing at all. This is an age in which seemingly sensible people are persuaded to pour ever greater sums into out-bidding the bigger guy to reach the number one spot. And in a "fad diet" like fashion, we become globally obsessed and driven by optimisation and measurement and the promise of ultimately unachievable perfect figures.

And of course the fastest way to haemorrhage cash from your business? Go for an expensive pay-per-click option and let your competition know about it. It won't take them long to realise a day's worth of intensive link-clicking will soon put pay to your marketing budget and your ambitions of owning the top spot.

So what does the future look like for the beleaguered web marketer?

I predict the age of "Customer Engagement", the reader, the visitor, the clicker, the person, who just wants to find what they want in the quickest, easiest fashion and enjoy the process en route.

It's no longer about just design – we're all now a beautiful blend of HTML and Flash that's pleasing to eye and still flattering to the designer. Many have taken control of their own destiny and have invested in some form of Content Management Solution, and most of us can be found now by following some really pretty simple rules and processes, laid out free of charge by people like Google on their website.

So now it's time to find the balance and to settle down to the original intention of engaging with our prospects and clients with the objective of doing business, profitably.

It seems incredible to me that sensible businesses will throw inordinate amounts of money at optimisation and Google rankings and spare no thought or spend a bean on the visitor's experience once they've taken the step to "click through". Imagine paying £20 per "click" (or often a great deal more) and then losing your expensive potential new customer on the first page of your site simply because you didn't engage them!

What should we be doing then?

Well let's look at a how retail works. Let's take a leaf out of someone like Tesco's book - and I mean the supermarket stores not the online site.

Why do people shop at Tesco's?

They are easy to find.

They are easy to access (usually lots of parking).

They make everyone feel welcome, regardless of your likely spend or purchasing objectives.

They make it quick and easy to find what you're looking for.

They give you other ideas and hints on your journey through.

They make it easy for those who know what they want, to get in and out.

They're happy for you to take your time and wander through the logically laid out aisles of products.

They make it quick and easy for you to pay.

They offer complementary services to capitalise on your brand loyalty.

They encourage you to come back by rewarding you for coming in the first place.

And they're doing pretty well aren't they?!

Guess what. The very people who shop in supermarkets at the evenings or weekends are exactly the same as those who may buy from organisations like yours from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday, every week of the year.

So how do we engage them, hold onto them and capitalise on their willingness to click onto our sites?

This document forms part of a series – the others can be accessed via the Documents page of our website or by clicking below.

1. Websites - The Ascent of the Website
2. [Customer Engagement](#)
3. [Websites, eMarketing - all hyped out or coming of age?](#)

Best practice is something that should be shared, not sold.

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