

## *Designing Your Website*

First impressions have always been important in business, and in today's age of the World Wide Web more people are receiving these first impressions from a company's website.

As search engines have a clear majority in how people search for products and services, web designers are faced with the challenge of maintaining a user friendly site which is also search engine friendly.

There are two simple goals in creating a user friendly site, ease of navigation and providing the information that the end-user needs.

The goal for search engine friendliness is even simpler, to be found in the number 1 spot for a particular keyword phrase, or at least on the first page of results.

Many designers are under the impression that to rank in the search engines they have to sacrifice the end user, their very own client, or prospective clients. Nothing could be further from the truth, in fact it is important to always keep one idea clear, your website is being created for the end user, not the search engines. Always design and market your website for your client base, search engines are not going to buy your products or services; and they certainly will not pay your bills.

With that in mind let me give you some basic ingredients in pleasing both the client and the search engines, starting with your end user.

### **Architecture**

Architecture is the structure or organization of information in your website. The majority of research available indicates the most user-friendly architecture is a tree structure. Begin with a single page of information; this is your home page. The homepage will then have links to lead users to a number of other pages, and these pages may then in turn have links to other pages. As you design the architecture remember to do it from the end users point of view, what is important to your client and how easily can it be found. Users do not want to spend time searching for information that is buried too deep into your site.

### **Page Design**

How will the information on your page be displayed? Try to keep several things in mind here. First, you need a good navigation system. Depending on the architecture of your site, users can easily lose their place and become confused as to how they got to where they are, what the information they are looking at now relates to their search, or how to find their way back to your homepage or other vital information.

When you design your page you should keep in mind that navigation and content should be written with the end user in mind. Keeping this in mind, you must focus on who your target audience is and what message it is that you wish to convey to them.

Your page design should reflect the image and identity of your company, consider developing a series of templates, which will allow pages at similar levels in your structure to have similar looks.

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## Content

Writing for a website is totally different than writing for printed material. We tend to scan the content on the web, hunting for the information we're after, as opposed to reading it word-for-word. When we find the information we are after, it is common for users to print larger articles to read and refer to later.

With that in mind, try to keep the information on your webpages 'skim able' using the points below as a guide.

- Use clear and simple language (English, not jargon, and small words where possible).
- Limit each paragraph to one idea.
- Put the conclusion first (also known as front loading).
- Use descriptive sub-headings.
- Help users locate information quickly and easily by bolding important words.
- Use lists describing products key features.

If more detail information is required; i.e. product specifications, upload the files in PDF format, which will allow the users to download the required information without cluttering up your site.

Again, it is extremely important that the content is written with the end user in mind. Have you discovered your target market? Is your target market

- Business Owners
- Sales Manager
- Inventory Controllers

Describe your service or product in as many ways as possible, aimed at the end user who are now your prospects and who may become your client.

While a search engine does not recognize how pleasing or displeasing your site is to the eye, it does scan the content of your site in order to understand its subject and in doing so it covers all of the possible word combinations (keywords) that refer to your product or service, so you do want to be as informative as possible.

## Speed

Ensure you have a fast loading website, images should be kept to a minimum size without changing the quality of the images. If a site is slow to load, users will become frustrated and click away.

Next month we will talk about how to take your website which is designed for the end user and optimize it for the Search Engines.

Kind Regards;

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