



Keeping pace with the web evolution

By Jane Johnson, Head of Digital, The Partnership Agency

Website creation continues to evolve. Long gone are the days when website development was the preserve of the geek and the technician. Now the marketer, the designer and the social media exponent are the driving force behind a medium that is now not only fully integrated into the marketing mix, but is often the key driver of the brand.

That doesn't mean to say that for someone that's looking to update their online presence that it's any easier to get it right. For a start, there's still a rich flow of jargon that's second nature to web designers, but isn't immediately understood by the man in the street. So it's certainly useful to understand some of the essential terminology such as 'social media', 'SEO', 'analytics' and 'web 2.0' to name a few (of course, you can Google them!).

Another key development in recent years to consider is just where your website will now be viewed. The desktop personal computer is only one of a wide selection of platforms from which to broadcast your corporate message. Laptops, tablets, smartphones and even the family television play host to the web these days. Particularly in terms of hand-held devices, some additional work will be required to make your site viewer friendly for this increasingly popular device.

Content is king

People are less patient these days. Now the focus is on delivering the information they want as efficiently and effectively as possible. So the days of the five-minute animated introduction are over (unless there is a good business reason to showcase your work in this way). Thinking clearly about layout and how good planning can allow your customers to get the information they need quickly is a good place to start.

Relevant and regularly updated content is also the way to get your site highly ranked on the search engines. This is a really important aspect if your future customers are likely to use Google (there

are other search engines, but googling has now become synonymous with online searches) to find a solution to their commercial needs. Google has continued to evolve too and in particular has become much more sophisticated in filtering out 'tricks' that would allow web developers to artificially promote sites above their natural rankings. This means that having relevant and regularly updated information presented in a way that the search engines can easily digest has never been more important. This can also mean sacrificing elegant prose for relevant headings and bullet-pointed headlines.

Building a site isn't the start and finish of the job. It's critical that you are regularly adding new information to the site, giving customers a reason to come back to the site and to maintain high positions with search engines. This often raises the question of who should be responsible for managing and updating new content for the site. Increasingly we are requested to provide a content management system (CMS) for clients. Regrettably this is often driven by bad experiences where the time and cost for changes and updates having to be made by the web agency has left a feeling of having their fingers burnt. In the great majority of cases CMS is a really valuable feature as it means that whether you choose to do this yourself or have your agency (or PR people) update content, a good CMS will make that process quicker and less costly.

The build debate

One of the most difficult decisions when it comes to website build is deciding on the best programming solution. The fact is that many factors need to be considered in choosing the best solution, which will include the need to host video or other media, whether ecommerce is central to the site and the nature of the content management system you require. For most people, the investment in their online presence is a significant one and choosing the wrong option here can have costly repercussions. That's why we always explain the options that are available and



don't have a 'one size fits all' approach, or just offer the solution our programmers are most comfortable with.

In particular for more substantial businesses the idea of having a 'bespoke' solution from a web agency may seem attractive on the basis that it can be tailor made for you. However, this can often mean that you are committing to a system that can't be easily transferred to another provider if you fall out of love with your web agency. While instinctively many companies shy away from 'open source' programming solutions, these can often be more reliable and flexible than the 'closed source' alternative.

Ten key considerations

- Make sure you know what you want your website to achieve for you
- Choose a web partner that demonstrates an understanding of your business
- Your online presence should be dictated by marketing considerations, not technical issues
- Ensure you consider new and emerging technologies in which your site may be viewed
- Make sure you give customers reasons to revisit your site
- If Google rankings are important to you, make sure you have an SEO strategy and budget for it
- Do some homework on the current trends and jargon and ask prospective partners to explain their views
- Keep repeating to yourself 'content is king'
- Work out if social media has a part to play in your web strategy and think about how you use it
- Make sure your web strategy is totally aligned with your business and marketing strategies

.com .net .org .tv
.co .info .me .biz ...we join the dots

Stand out online. Find out more at tpagency.com

IPA

THE PARTNERSHIP
ADVERTISING & MARKETING