

This is a printer-friendly version of a page from Iceberg Internet's website. The full website can be viewed at <http://www.iceberginternet.co.uk>. Iceberg Internet's contact details are at the bottom of this page.

Articles

Planning Your New Website - How To Avoid The Most Common Mistakes

Author: Jeremy Flight, Iceberg Internet Ltd - 22 February 2006

*This article is **printer-friendly**. You can also **subscribe to receive our articles by email**.*

Successful websites don't happen accidentally. A business that runs an effective website thinks carefully about the website's role, plans the website's design and content, and closely monitors the website's activity.

Conversely, those businesses that fail to undertake any planning are, inevitably, planning to fail.

Don't let your new website become a disappointment to your business. Some careful planning will ensure that you:

- know what you want your website to achieve and who it is for
- can undertake appropriate actions to generate visitors to your site
- have reliable, regular methods of measuring your website's performance

Mistake 1 - Most Website Owners Don't Know What They Want Their Website To Achieve

Producing a successful website starts with understanding what you want your website to achieve and, as the business owner, you know your business best. Despite this, having decided to start work on a new website, many business owners immediately phone their website designer.

When you can define clearly the overall aim of your website, you are ready to present your thoughts to your website designer. Their role is to develop a website that achieves your aim; your role is to decide what that aim is.

Do not feel that you need to develop an aim that is radical or unique. Many business websites exist to generate sales enquiries from prospective customers. Just because this is the most common *raison d'être*, it can be your aim too. As long as you have thought through your objectives and understand what you want your website to achieve, you have made the first step towards a successful business website.

Mistake 2 - Most Website Owners Don't Know Who Their Website Is For

You have given your new website some thought and developed an insight into its purpose. Closely allied to this is the matter of who your website is for: who is your website's target audience?

The usual answer is "customers" but this is too vague. Is your website aimed at existing

customers, with whom you already have a relationship, or prospective customers who don't know your business?

If your website is focused on prospective customers, is its role to attract their initial attention or is the website involved at a later point in the sales process?

Many businesses use their websites successfully to generate initial interest from prospective customers. This is particularly evident in industries where customers use the Internet as part of their research into sourcing a supplier. Other businesses will generate initial interest through different means and will then refer prospective customers to their website, either to demonstrate credibility or to provide more detailed information.

In both instances, the target audience is "potential customers" but the approaches are different.

Mistake 3 - Most Business Websites Have A Poorly Defined "Call-To-Action"

The most beautifully-designed website is, in itself, entirely useless unless it encourages visitors to take some specific action. That action will vary with the nature of the website but common examples are to:

- complete an online enquiry form
- register on the website
- purchase a product
- sign up for a newsletter
- progress deeper into the website to read more about products and services

Each of these is a measurable action which should correlate with the website objectives you defined earlier.

Once you understand the particular call-to-action that you want visitors to follow, you can address your website's content, design and navigation. Without a well-defined call-to-action, your new website is only going to produce disappointing results.

Mistake 4 - Most Business Owners Don't Work Hard Enough To Generate Visitors To Their Website

The "build it and they will come" philosophy rarely works for websites, especially for business websites. All businesses exist alongside competitors that offer broadly the same products or services. The notion that you can launch your new website on the Internet and wait for a stampede of visitors is optimistic, at best.

Instead, owners of successful business websites work hard to attract visitors.

The specific way you approach this will depend on the nature of your website. The most common visitor-generating initiatives involve:

Connect to site from	
Origin	
Direct address / Bookmarks	
Links from a NewsGroup	
Links from an Internet Search Engine - Full list	
- Google	87 87
- Yahoo	8 8
- MSN	7 7
- AOL	2 2
- Ask Jeeves UK	2 2
- Lycos	2 2
- Overture	2 2
- Tiscali	1 1
- Mamma	1 1
- Mirago	1 1
- Others	2 2
Links from an external page (other web sites except search engines) - Full list	
- http://www.regiochannel.co.uk/nottingham/websites/web-design-and...	16 16
- http://www.searcheurope.com/cgi-bin/links/search.cgi	7 7
- http://www.trafficparking.com/parking.php	6 6
- http://www.einternetdirectory.co.uk/Website-Design.php	4 4
- http://www.ukrecruiter.co.uk/suppliers/resweb.htm	4 4
- http://www.ffinto.org	2 2
- http://flduk.com/news/1,27	2 2
- http://www.applegate.co.uk/it/company/co_1121393.htm	2 2
- http://flduk.com/content_management_systems_derby.php	2 2
- http://www.erolonline.co.uk/home/midlands.asp	2 2
- Others	42 58

- **search engine optimisation** - encourages search engines such as Google to position your website prominently for keyword searches relevant to your business
- **search engine advertising** - enables you to pay search engines such as Google to position your website prominently for keyword searches relevant to your business
- **online PR** - generates interest in your business as well as links to your website
- **email marketing** - you can market directly to a defined target audience and encourage them to visit your site
- **off-line marketing** - using your website address on company literature, clothing, vehicle livery etc. will raise awareness of your site and encourage visits

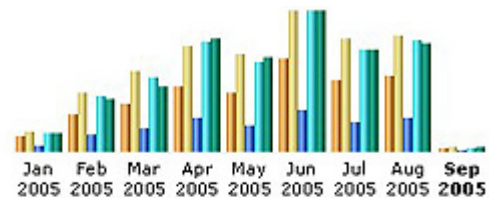
Marketing the website to generate a consistent, reliable stream of visitors is the most overlooked aspect of running a successful business website. Careful thought about which methods of generating visitors will be most effective for your website is vital if your site is going to produce the results you want.

Mistake 5 - Most Business Owners Don't Measure Their Website's Success

Your website will require an investment of both time and money and, as a business owner, you should expect a return on your investment. Unless you measure what your website achieves, you will not know how much difference it makes to your business. If you do not know what affect your website has on your business, how will you know whether continued investment of time and money is justified?

Your website's success can be measured in three ways:

- **qualitative feedback** from website visitors will give you a feeling about how well your website performs. Do you get positive comments about how easy it is to navigate or about how useful someone found its content? Do you get enquiries from prospective customers via your website? Are you and your staff proud of the website?
- you can set up your own **key performance indicators** to measure your websites' success. Monitoring the number of enquiry forms completed by visitors each month, for example, or the average order value from online shoppers, are important website metrics that you can track.
- **website statistics** provide details about your site's overall activity, including the number of visitors it receives, how those visitors found your website and which pages of your site they look at most. (*Our article covers [website statistics](#) in more detail.*) Website analytics is a step on from website statistics, providing more detailed information about visitors' behaviour, such as the particular sequence of pages viewed during each visit.



Month	Unique visitors	Number of visits	Hits
Jan 2005	247	334	14218
Feb 2005	622	998	42808
Mar 2005	801	1359	57075
Apr 2005	1103	1770	83487
May 2005	986	1653	68409
Jun 2005	1559	2366	107338
Jul 2005	1207	1912	78134
Aug 2005	1287	1969	85210
Sep 2005	44	56	2288
Oct 2005	0	0	0
Nov 2005	0	0	0
Dec 2005	0	0	0
Total	7856	12417	538967

Mistake 6 - Most Business Owners Don't Keep Their Website's Content Fresh

The work involved in developing a successful business website does not stop at the moment

you launch your new site on the Internet. A website that is allowed to age, without new content being added, will become increasingly out-of-date and offers few reasons for visitors to pay a return visit. The best websites are not allowed to fade away because new content is added regularly, keeping the site alive.

Not only does fresh content give visitors a reason to return, it encourages greater attention from search engines as well. Google, Yahoo and others will happily follow links to new pages on your site and index the content they find. More exposure in search engines generates more visitors, which further increases the chances of your website achieving its objectives.

New content, particularly press releases, announcements, articles and case studies, gives you a reason to contact people and encourage them to visit the site. For instance, many businesses distribute a regular newsletter which refers to recent additions to their website and this helps them to generate return visits.

A facility that enables you to add new content to your site is important. (*Our article about the **benefits of a Content Management System** may be of interest.*)

Many websites fail to live up to initial expectations and are regarded by the business owner as "a waste of money". Planning your site's objectives and understanding what action you want your target audience to take is critical preparation. Developing a strategy for generating visitors and ensuring that you have the means to measure your website's activity will help you to assess how well your site meets its objectives. And, once your site begins to produce the results you want, regularly adding new, informative content will encourage return visits and enable you to build a website that is highly valued by your target audience.

*Iceberg Internet develops successful websites for businesses in a variety of industries. Why not **look at some examples of our business websites** or **contact us** to discuss your website plans?*

*If you found this article useful, why not **subscribe to receive our articles by email**?*

Show all articles...

Planning Your New Website - How To Avoid The Most Common Mistakes - another useful article from Iceberg Internet - contact Iceberg Internet on 01332 331332 for further information