

Warthog Web Design

Guidelines for Owners of Business Websites

1. The purpose of a website is to make you money, either directly or indirectly. A well designed and thought-out website will pay for itself very quickly and represents effective yet inexpensive advertising.

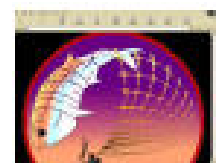
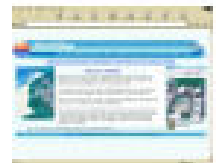
Poor websites (at least half of all sites) not only create a poor impression of your business, they redirect potential clients to your competition, only because he may have a better website – not necessarily a better business.

2. Decide firstly whether you need a web site and whether other forms of advertising might be more appropriate. Talk to web professionals and others with web sites in your field and then make your own mind up. How many others in your field have web sites?
3. A mistake many owners make is to 'nickel and dime' their website design. The almost inevitable poor design and implementation will lose them far more than they saved. Those who want a web site should consider what a good web site is worth to their business when they consider their budget for it.

If you already have a web site that you consider to be below standard, rather remove it from the Internet either permanently or until you replace it. As long as it is available, it may well be costing you money in hosting fees and business rather than making it for you.

Whether you want a full, persuasive, marketing web site or simply an 'Internet presence', both have to be professional. The latter is relatively easy to create but a marketing web site requires more work.

4. A website makes you money by generating trust between you (through your website) and your visitor who often knows nothing about you. How does it do this?
5. It has to create an '*enjoyable visitor experience*'. This experience consists of a number of complementary features of the site . . .
 - a. The site has to **download quickly**. A site that takes more than 10 seconds for the first page to download has already lost half it's visitors. Every element of every page must earn its place on the site.
 - b. Its appearance must be **neat and uncluttered**. The use of pastel colours enables vivid colours to be used in small amounts to guide the visitor's eye to areas of



interest. Cluttered pages confuse visitors – further, there has to be absolute consistency across the site. At no time must the visitor feel lost.

- c. The content is the key to the site's success. It must be easy to read with **short paragraphs and short bulleted lists**. The body text must be edited down to the absolute minimum whilst still getting your message across. The tone should be informal to engage the visitor and make him welcome to your site. Testimonials, pictures of the workplace and employees help to create this link.
- d. The content must also be **topical**. New products/services and any other items should always be on the home page either as full articles or as links to the articles.
- e. **Search words and phrases should be integrated** into the page content to enhance search engine indexing. I advise clients before they do anything on the site to think of all the keywords and phrases a visitor might use to find you, rank them and then integrate them into the page content – particularly the home page.
- f. The **navigation should be easy to use**, well labeled and logical. This is because when printed, all the content must be visible and also because it is ergonomically more efficient to put the menu on the right. Your visitor should be able to get where he wants to go within three mouse clicks.
- g. The **page layout must be easy to read** – no less than 10 and no more than 14 words across a line. There should be adequate contrast between the font used and the background. The font should be of sufficient size for older people to read it and to pose no problems for those with colour blindness. All graphics should be of top quality.
- h. The site should also be **interactive** and invite the visitor to enquire about the products/services and inform the site owner of any other considerations/suggestions.

There should be an option to subscribe to a newsletter. This can be published as frequently or as infrequently as you wish but should contain content that is of interest, not just marketing information. A link to your email should be on every page.

- 6. A website is very useful for harvesting user information through forms. Most visitors dislike filling out forms so there should be an incentive – raffle, monthly draw or similar – to complete the form. It should not in any way be intrusive and



be as short as possible. There should be a privacy statement to allay any fears of loose personal information.

7. The more traffic that passes through your website, the more business you will tend to get.

A way of increasing that traffic is to add a 'Resource' area to your site. Create a 'reference' area in your field – a list of useful links, a glossary of terms, a history of the business, frequently asked questions, description of acronyms, frequently used terms etc. etc.

A good resource area on your speciality may create links back to your site just for that reason. These 'reciprocal' links have a huge and beneficial effect on your search ranking.

8. The web server on which your site is hosted will generate a log file each day of all the pages and pictures it has served and to whom. These 'server logs' should be checked periodically because there is much useful information there.

Amongst this is 'what search terms users used to find you'. Look carefully at these entries and see whether you are providing the services/product. Also of interest is 'where the visitor was immediately before he visited your page' called the 'referrer'.

9. Keep your eye on the competition's web sites, particularly if they rank above you in Google. Find out why. Is it the content? The keywords they use? Any incentives they offer visitors? Go to 'View' and then 'Source' in your browser and look at their code in Notepad. Do they stuff it with keywords you can't see on the web page? What do they put in their META tags at the very top of each page?

10. Finally, do not forget about your site. Always be thinking of ways to improve it. It is a tool and as such should be kept in top operating condition. A stale website will inevitably fail.

If the guidelines above are put into practice, your website will without a doubt be successful.

