

THOUGHTS ON DEVELOPING WEBSITES FOR INDUSTRIAL SMEs

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So you have decided to have a website – why? Perhaps you are very clear about why, and what you want - in which case these thoughts may resonate with you and hopefully be of some value if only to support your approach. For others perhaps they can assist in your task and along the way help you to understand why you really do need a website and all the other online publishing that is available.

Let us work from the base that whatever the reasons you are starting on the path of creating a website or perhaps upgrading one that is no longer an appropriate representation of your company – then the first hurdle is a significant one – but one that cannot be avoided unless you are a web designer yourself – so please *ensure that you have a professional website – think of it as an online brochure*. Find a web designer that you get on with and spend a fair bit of time working with him/her so they understand your products and your company - be hands on in its production to ensure the end result is suitable.

A big thing for me in designing a website is to *keep it simple – with a main landing page (home page) that is relevant to visitors* – perhaps the best place to begin is with the product catalogue or a page that serves as an introduction to the catalogue..

A big thing for everybody is that you *ensure it is quick loading* – otherwise your visitors will simply not wait and go elsewhere - however fancy the graphics – they simply will not wait to see them.

Like any presentation you should respect your visitor's time constraints and boredom threshold, so *stay focused on your product or service* – few people can sustain interest in a long rambling presentation – how is your website any different?

Once you have a site you are happy with *do not forget to maintain it – that is keep it up to date* – this is simple courtesy and good business sense – it is also considered important by search engines who are reluctant to present out of date material in their search reports – wouldn't you be also?

It can be really helpful to *have a news page with news on it about your product or service* – just a simple listing with photos, of new products that you have not yet included in your main catalogue or that you are pre-launching prior to availability. Put corporate news elsewhere on its own page few people outside your company are likely to be interested and if they are then they will happily search a little deeper for it.

We believe *it is important that companies run a blog – ideally separate from your website – with posts at least weekly*. So this means that now you will have 2 websites – but really the blog is more like an informal sales presentation while the main site compares with the doorstop manual – hardly light reading but absolutely essential to everybody since it serves as your brochure and your manual – make it your product/service reference for prospective customers, existing customers, your own sales staff – aim to include ultimately all the information you would like to have generally publicly available.

As part of this process you should *put all your datasheets on your website as PDF downloads* – only ask for visitor registrations if your downloads are really valuable or restricted. This will endear you to anybody with your product and seeking to install it, troubleshoot it etc. out of office hours – it will also take a load off your sales staff who would otherwise defacto serve as your free helpline.

At an early stage it makes sense to *install a search facility on your site* – on large sites or sites covering large product ranges this can be hugely helpful.

If you are likely to have non-English speaking customers but are not in a position to have everything translated into multiple languages then a good intermediate step is to *use a translation service like Google on your site*.

These days it is industry practice to *use a content management system (CMS) to build your site* – this will also make it easier for you to get involved and ideally to bring the updating process in-house so that small changes and even new pages can be added quickly and inexpensively – without reverting to the original design house for every little change.

In the early stages it is a simple matter to *ensure your site is search engine optimized (SEO)* so please ensure that the designer is fully briefed with your keyword list then be sure to include your keywords in text content as well.

Of increasing importance is the use of photos and videos on your site with adequate descriptions, tags etc. since Google for example is putting more and more emphasis on these visual aspects – and it is the accompanying text which enables them to search the images and so present them in search reports.

Finally – have you ever tried to navigate your website? No – then please do and *take time at least once a year to visit your site as a customer – review how it may be improved – maintain your investment*.