



Getting your website noticed and measuring its success

Having an attractive and potentially useful website is not enough if no-one knows it's there. Nor can you guarantee the continuing success of your website if you don't continually review its content. These notes are intended to act as a checklist of things you should do to make your website as visible as possible and to ensure it stays that way.

How to get noticed

Your potential audience should be able to find you easily through keywords in a search engine, if not through a URL that is memorable and easy to guess. Therefore, you need to put as much information into your website as possible:

- Ensure all pages have titles.
- Register your website with search engines as people do not search for your URL only.
- Update that registration on a regular basis (usually monthly).

Plan your strategy

Evaluate where you currently rank within a search engine. This is your baseline measure for success. Make a comparison with a key competitor, try and establish what they do better and adopt best practice where you find it.

Research a target list of keywords or phrases. What are the likeliest words someone would use if they were looking for you? This is not necessarily as obvious as you might think! Try getting someone you know to come up with a list of words.

You might want to buy pertinent domain names, e.g. .org, .org.uk, .co.uk, or variations on a name, e.g., mediatrust, media-trust, themediatrust. In other words, anything obvious that you think might be used to guess your website address.

Site submission

Search engines will not necessarily find you automatically. Therefore, you should actively go out and register your site. Submission services are available but they can be expensive - 72% of submitters do it manually. Using an automated service is only really suitable for the many 'smaller' engines.

Each engine has a different submission process. For example, Yahoo screen each submission for individual merit. The time it takes for your site to get registered can vary significantly between search engines, ranging from a few days to four weeks plus.

Persistence is key. Keep monitoring where your site appears on search engines. If drastic changes occur, try to find out why. Try to keep abreast of developments in the strategies search engines use when listing sites.

Meta tags

Meta tags contain information about a web page which is hidden when viewed with a web browser. They contain keywords and descriptions of the content of a page. This information is used by search engines to rank sites.



In the early days of the Internet they were crucial, now some search engines don't support them. However, it is still important to identify relevant key words for each page on your site, and a succinct description.

Linking strategy

The number of links to your site is particularly important to 'popularity' engines such as Google and Northern Light. Major search engines count the number of visible links to your site as a measure of its 'popularity' and adjust its ranking accordingly. Developing a linking strategy is vital to ensure a higher ranking. Look to link with relevant sites - but be creative. Return the favour by adding their link to your site.

Keywords

The placement of keywords is important in page titles and in the first paragraph. Search engine needs differ. Some engines like keywords to be mentioned four or five times. Others look for keywords up to eight times. Some prefer keywords to be in the last paragraph.

Search engine characteristics

Don't be tempted to cheat! Increasingly people try and cheat search engines through a number of methods: page cloaking, keyword cloaking, or false use of keywords. However, search engines are catching up with this and discovery could lead to search engines removing you from their listings.

Handy resources

There are companies out there who help with search engine optimisation:

www.netbooster.co.uk
www.stickyeyes.com
www.bcentral.com
www.submitexpress.com

Maintaining your site

Users expect new and up-to-date information each time they visit your website. They don't care about your resourcing issues. They expect everything to work: no broken links, no missing images, and no typos. You want them to leave the site having had a positive experience and therefore you need a level of dedicated resource. The extent of this clearly depends on the size of your organisation and the resources available to you.

A quick guide to managing your site

- Plan a monthly and annual content schedule.
- Identify key tasks and responsibilities.
- Write, design and build new content.
- Establish quality assurance guidelines (see below).
- Establish a sign-off process.

Planning a content schedule

Identify 'dynamic' content - that is, material which needs to be updated regularly. Think about content areas that you might use:

- Micro-content - short headlines and links.
- News - remember to link to other relevant pages of your site.



- Campaigns.
- Fundraising.

'Static' content is that which only needs to be updated as and when necessary, such as 'About us' or 'Contact us' sections.

Make it readable

When you write, design and build content, it is important to remember that users read about 50% less online. Break up the text using sub-headings and bold text - both make text easier to read. Make sure new content links to old content and vice versa. Keep layout consistent using templates.

Quality assurance

- Users are turned off by spelling mistakes and broken links.
- Ask someone else to check your work thoroughly.
- Don't let 'un-checked' work go live.
- Set an editorial style guide as you would for printed materials.

But problems will crop up...

As content grows, navigation issues occur and you may need to introduce a search facility:

- The labelling of buttons may become incorrect or inappropriate and will need to be reviewed.
- Levels of hierarchy may become insufficient.
- Certain areas may become more popular than others.
- Old links may become broken.
- Information may become obsolete or misleading.

In other words, you need constantly to measure success, and plan the next step. Websites should be dynamic and flexible. A static website will not get repeat visits or sustain interest.

Measuring success

Web statistics

Successful sites employ 'log file analysis' to track how well your site is working. This is done using a file on the web server which keeps track of every file request made by users. Analysis of this data is used to track usage of the site. You can buy software products help to process the data, e.g. WebTrends, WebAbacus, Microsoft Site Server, I/PRO, RedEye.

'Hits' and 'page impressions'

Reports produced by the software will analyse all activity on the website including hits and impressions. Hits are irrelevant: pages with more images get more hits per user. Page impressions are important for advertising-driven sites, but are largely irrelevant for charities. So, what is important? Visitors.

How can you add real value?

Improve the proportion of new and repeat visitors. Repeat visitors are most valued - if people are returning, they must be getting something useful from your site. However, your statistics can be skewed by the same person returning many times.



Look at 'drop off' points - problem pages where people leave the site. For example, analysis may show that the donations page causes people to leave.

Consider creating 'user journeys' if your analysis indicates that popular sequences of pages are used. These can be determined by the average length of visit and number of pages per visit.

Respond to the facts

Analysis of the data leads to recommendations:

- Areas to re-design - problem pages.
- Areas to focus on - successful content.
- Areas to get rid of - unsuccessful content.

Re-designed areas can be tracked to assess efficacy.