



# 10 Point Checklist for a Successful Website

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## Why do you need a website?

It's important to establish why you need a website and its purpose.

Not everybody needs a website. If you think that you do then you should clarify what you want your website to achieve and the business case for it. If you are in business a website of some description will most likely be of benefit to you; what you need to clarify is why. Your purpose for having a site might fall into one of the broad categories below:

- Build brand collateral.
- Generate leads.
- Sell online.
- Offer business to business services such as order processing and tracking.
- Develop a unique internet application.



## Do you have a plan?

Put a simple internet strategy in place before you start. If you don't have a plan to start with you have little chance of knowing how, or even when, you will meet your goals. Even a one page high-level plan will focus the mind on the direction you are taking. With time this will crystallise into a firm course of action.

A well defined internet strategy can help define how your site is going to compete online. Remember that the advantage of the internet is that it can be a great leveller, allowing you to compete in a global marketplace. Unfortunately the reverse is also true, allowing global brands to sell in your back yard.

Your internet strategy will clarify the tactics you will use to help you build your online brand, generate traffic and convert a portion of that traffic to sales. Building a successful online business is more akin to opening a branch office in a foreign country than it is to printing a brochure; it's important to be aware of the cost to your business in terms of the time you will have to dedicate to making your site a success.



## Do you have a budget?

To create a successful website you will need a budget. The budget is not just about money but about the resources that your project will need. The following resources are required for any website:

- Cash
- Time
- Expertise
- Enthusiasm

Generally a mix of all these resources are required. However, if you are lacking in time or expertise you can always add more cash to the mix or alternatively, with enough time and enthusiasm you can probably get by with a small amount of cash.



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### Have you researched the online market for your product or service?

There are just a couple of other pertinent questions you need to answer before you start to build your website. Specifically these questions will help to solidify the business case relating to your online offering. Each of these questions feeds into the next.

#### What is the scale of the market?

Are you sure there are enough people out there who want to buy pet rocks? (Most definitely!). Finding this out can be difficult but a good estimate can be drawn from identifying the key search terms that are being used by online consumers in your niche. There's no point in creating a site geared to sell "sunglasses" if 99% of the market is searching for "shades". Keyword identification tools can help with this.

#### What are the costs of transaction processing?

It's a little bit obvious but there's no point selling if you're not going to make a profit from it. Think about the actual costs of processing a transaction to your business. This includes development, hosting, credit card processing, customer support, delivery costs, returns etc. Having done all this, re-calculate your net profit. Is it still worthwhile?

#### Are you competitive?

Price is the key driver for online sales. Because of the transparency inherent in the internet it facilitates ease of comparison shopping. In addition to price competitiveness many companies support their offering through creating a credible brand with some stand out natural differentiator. What's yours?

Having answered these questions we usually find we need to go back to Step 2 and update the internet strategy to reflect the findings.

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### Do you have a good website design?

This can often be a contentious question. Design can be subjective and everybody has an opinion on it. Some people like yellow, some people pink and quite a lot of people like black. The answer to the question however is slightly more scientific. Your website is aimed at (i) your potential customers and (ii) search engines (it's a circular relationship as the search engines will bring your potential customers to your site!).

For your customers you need to build a site which is simple and usable. It's no accident the most successful site on the internet has one search box, two buttons and only three lines of text (Google.com). There are many factors which can influence the usability of a site such as simplicity and good navigation.

The second equally important client for your website is the major search engines. Your site must be findable. If it isn't then a large amount of your potential visitors are never going to find you. When constructing your website there are a number steps you can do to help enhance your sites 'findability'.

As a starting point, you should ensure your site is web standards compliant. You can check it here – [www.w3c.org](http://www.w3c.org). Web standards compliance is important in helping your site to be indexed by the search engines.

Include text on your website and design the site so that the most important text gets the most important position. Images look great and flash animations can give your site the 'wow' factor however they are of little value to the search engines that index sites based upon the text they contain.

Contact us for more information on findability.





## Do you publish regular relevant content?

Search Engines<sup>1</sup> are the key to generating traffic to your website and it is important to understand what they are looking for from you. The goal of a search engine is to provide its own customers with *up to date* and accurate search results in a timely manner. For this reason, if the content on your site is regularly updated it will be more frequently updated within the search engine index. This means it is more likely that your site is going to appear in the search engine's results for relevant searches.

By providing regular, up to date, relevant information you are allowing the search engines to achieve their goal. If you regularly update your site with relevant content related to a particular area, search engines will more easily rate you as a reliable source and refer to you. If you help Google they'll help you!



## Do many other websites link to your site?

Links from other sites are an important tool to help your site get a good Google Page Rank<sup>2</sup>. There's no definite consensus on exactly how important the Google Page Rank index is however it is pretty unanimous that it does help. In its simplest terms the Page Rank system is like a popularity contest. The more popular the site is the more important Page Rank it will get. The gauge of popularity is estimated by how many people are linking to your site. It gets a lot more complicated, but that's the simple version.

If you want to see who is linking to your site go to [http://www.google.ie/advanced\\_search](http://www.google.ie/advanced_search) and put the address of your website into the 'Links' box.

It is nice to think that people will find your site, find it useful to them and then link to you because they like you. However it doesn't hurt to be pro-active on this either. It is a good idea to try and find sites which complement yours and to email them to ask them to link to you.

This will generally only work if you can offer something interesting or useful to that site's visitors.

Also with so many websites out there now looking for links many people now don't even respond to such requests so don't be disheartened if it takes a while to establish links.



## Are you marketing your website?

It's important to have an integrated approach to the marketing of your website. You should include both online and offline marketing efforts to support it. If you go to the trouble of having a website you should include the address of the site on all your brand collateral such as business cards, packaging, stationary and email signature files. Try to tie your existing offline customers into your online efforts. One idea is to offer a newsletter to existing clients who have email, perhaps one which would notify them of special offers which then pushes them back to your website.

Online marketing is also an important source of qualified traffic. Use advertising channels such as Google AdWords<sup>3</sup> which give you access to people who are searching for your product. You pay for this service and generally it's quite an effective tool.



