

## The Phase 2

### 10 point starters guide to getting a website

#### **Have you thought of a domain?**

Is it going to be a dot-com or dot-co.uk or something else? A dot-com name is usually the best to go for, because that's what people usually associate with the web. All the best names with a dot-com have already gone so you will need to be a bit creative when thinking of what to use. Alternatively go for a dot-co.uk, all the others are best avoided for commercial websites. Generally shorter names that are easy to remember and less prone to typing errors are preferable, but as with phone numbers these days they are often held in favourites folders or directories and may not often be actually typed in.

#### **Do you have a Business name, logo or 'corporate style' that the website must adhere to?**

It is a good idea to develop a uniform appearance on stationery and advertising, and this extends to your website as well. Web pages can be constructed in many different ways, for example column layout, horizontal menu, image blocks etc. Look at several sites and analyse why you like them, or not, and tell your designer. It will help enormously.

#### **Who will the website be aimed at?**

You must try to identify who your target audience is and focus the content accordingly. The average website visit lasts only a few seconds, which means that you have to make an impression very quickly. Content that is wrongly targeted is just wasted. Music, animations and colour can be powerful tools in the right place, but mouse pointer trailers and cute cartoon animations can look amateurish if used inappropriately. Think what your users will be looking for and give it to them quickly without any fuss.

#### **What is the purpose of your website?**

Whatever the purpose of your website, whether it is to sell your products, provide information or simply entertainment, you need to be clearly focussed on it. Lot of websites try to cover too much and end up losing the viewer through an impenetrable array of options and links, quite often all on the home page.

#### **How often will the content of your pages change?**

Quite often a significant amount of the content of a website will remain fixed. In other cases information can change on a regular basis, often daily. In these cases it is impractical to rely on the website builder to make the necessary updates so some sort of content management system (CMS) will be required so that you can do this. There are different types of CMS available all of which will add to the initial cost of the website. But if the site is fairly static it may be more cost effective to enter into a support agreement with the web designer.

### **Will you write all the content and provide the pictures?**

Quite often you know what you want to say and what you want to illustrate, but it can be hard to put it into useable English and often photographs don't look quite as good as you thought. It is useful to get an independent person to look at what you have produced to see if it makes sense to them. If you need help with this, the services of a copywriter can be a worthwhile investment. As far as images are concerned there is a plentiful supply of copyright free material available on the internet at a reasonable cost.

### **Do you want to include rich media such as sound, animations or video?**

Only include this if it is relevant to the website content. Animations and video can add a great deal to a website, but can take a while to download over a slow connection and may require special software to play. Always give the user the ability to control such media, and remember that in many corporate situations PCs do not have sound playing facilities.

### **Do you intend to sell products on-line?**

On-line shopping facilities range from simple Paypal® linked Buy Now buttons through to sophisticated ecommerce shopping carts. There are Wizard driven systems that you can set up on your own which are managed and hosted by a company on a pay as you go basis, and there are others that you pay a one-time licence for and configure to yourself. It is important to ensure that the shopping cart provides all the product options and other specifications for your particular needs.

### **Do you have a budget?**

Be realistic about this. If someone offers to build you a website for £47, there has to be a catch. It is often hard to price a project precisely even when presented with a tight brief, even more so if you are not sure about exactly what you want, and projects can be subject to 'mission creep'. A good idea is to set a ceiling on how much you want to spend and make sure that your website designer is aware of this.

### **Are you aiming for a specific launch date?**

Plan ahead. If in the last week of November, you start thinking about getting a website to cash in on the Christmas market, you will be disappointed. Although it may be possible to actually build the site and launch it in a few weeks, it will take a huge amount of promotion to ensure that people can find it. Websites take months rather than weeks to reach any sort of ranking in search engines, although there are pay per click options which can help to get you started. Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) is a specialist area that really needs constant monitoring and there are plenty of companies offering to help you so this.