



# Affordable Websites @ Just Ask Sue

Professional, Affordable and Effective



## Website tip – How to get your website right the first time

One of the most important things when designing a new website is to be clear about what the website is for, and who it is aimed at. This might sound like fairly basic stuff, but it's absolutely foundational and often doesn't get thought about too much. I'd like to take a moment to address why this is so important, and why getting really clear about these two things can save you an enormous amount of both time and money in getting your new website up and running...

In our first few meetings with clients, where we define the project, we ask a series of questions.

### Website goals

The first and most basic question we ask is – what are the goals of the website? Without being clear on what you want to do, it's very hard to achieve it. Mostly, you will know the answer to this, but writing it down can bring a new degree of clarity. Here are some of the questions that can help you think about that:

- What do I want the website to do, in general terms?
- What is/are the goal(s) of the website?
- What are the major functions that the website will achieve?
- How do you prioritize those goals and functions, especially if they compete in any way?

### Target Audience for the website

The second major question we ask is – who is the website audience? Without knowing who the audience is, it's impossible to get the right mix of ease-of-use, technology, and visual appearance right. Some more detailed questions to help you work this out are:

- Who is the website aimed at? (may be multiple groups)
- Who do you want to be looking at the website?
- Which of those groups are key to your business aims?
- What do you want to achieve with each of those groups?
- Are any of the groups higher priority?

It's also useful to draw up a basic outline of your website sitemap when trying to work out what sort of website you want. Once you have some ideas on what you want to see in your website, you should look at your goals and your target audiences and review whether the content you have worked out so far is going to be effective in reaching those groups and achieving those goals. However, your website developers should be able to help you refine this – an approximate idea is enough, to start with.

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## **You can and should evolve your website over time**

Perhaps one of the most important points to make here is that it just isn't always obvious how a new website should look and feel to work well. In fact, there are many solutions to any particular website need that could work, and finding the one that will work best for your business is often a matter of trial and error. In fact, even the big companies and their marketing experts do just that when developing their own concepts – they run “focus” groups of people from their target markets to assess the effectiveness of various marketing ideas, and often test and measure new website ideas very carefully before committing to them. Google Analytics provides one very useful tool for just this, called split testing, which makes it possible to have a few versions of your website presented randomly and allows you to measure the statistics to see which version worked better with your clients.

One of the biggest mistakes with a website is in trying to get a website “right” the first time, as this can make it very hard to get anything up on the website at all! Instead, aim to get it approximately right, or to get a good start in the right direction, and then you can evolve and edit and fine tune as you go. Sometimes, once you have a basic website up, it becomes much clearer how you want to further develop your ideas and it's often very difficult to get that understanding until you do have something up and running.

Most web development these days is done with a “CMS” or “Content Management System”, that allow you to edit the pages easily over the internet without needing any understanding of how the details work behind the scenes. or relying on a designer to make the changes. This is a valuable shift in the paradigm of website development, as it means the average person can do most of their web work without needing to involve (and pay for) experts to make minor changes. And of course, the more hands a change passes through, the more chance mistakes will be made! Changing your website yourself means you stay in control and can fix any wording issues quickly and easily.

## **It has to look good to the customer – not you**

Once the website is up, you can ask representative people from your target groups whether the website worked effectively for them. It's important that you aim the website at your target groups, and not at yourself. Although your website should be something you are happy with in terms of quality and presentation, it's far more crucial that your website works effectively with your target group, or it simply won't achieve what you want it to achieve. It's completely useless to produce a website that you love and that your audience hates. Many experts estimate that you have only 5-10 seconds to capture the attention of someone searching the web casually before they move on to the next site – so your website has to be aimed firmly at the people you want to attract!