

I am going to propose four axioms to a successful website:

1. Achieving users goals / your business goals
2. Design
3. Quality of the development
4. Marketing (and in this I lump search engine ranking, online advertising and social media marketing)

I will take you through a bit of a journey covering each of these elements hopefully such that you will walk out of here with a basic understanding of what goes into making a successful website.

Just before I do launch into things I just want to make one point. Throughout this presentation and indeed most discussions involving the web we talk about users. I just want to remind you that users are people too! Keep in mind that a user is simply a human being - an average Joe on the street; they might be a tech-savvy digital generation teenager or an elderly lady that's only just starting out using a computer.

Now, I have put the above four axioms in the order for a reason - I believe that these are indeed stages in web development. Unfortunately, most website designers are too quick to power up their Photoshop programme without any real regard to the logic behind the website. We are not talking about technical logic here, but rather how will the website be used. Really the question is about what is the *raison d'être* of the website - why does the website exist, what do you want the user to do?

Perhaps you want them to be entertained, maybe you want them to share information, or maybe heaven forbid you want to sell them something!

I like to start by asking my clients "What is the key thing a user will be looking for or expect of the website?" And here I am going to provide you with an example of a project I am working on currently: The NZ Cycleways Project. After many alliterations the answer was:

"The most important thing for a user is to research easily the details of a ride including such things as accommodation and transport, which can then be booked for that ride. Therefore: SEARCH + GATHER INFORMATION + BOOK"

I then ask what are the key revenue generating elements?

[Note: crowd participation - one person to volunteer their business and list the key things a user will be looking for on their website and the key revenue generating elements]

This gives us the most important elements of the website - and from then we can start designing the website. Well not really, we actually start doing what we call wire framing. It is natural to want to start with the home page. So we start listing the key elements we would like on the home page bearing in mind our revenue generating elements.

[Note: design a home page with the same volunteers business - main elements and rough wireframe]

So, then we continue through the website designing pages like this. There is one important addition, however that I do before I start wire-framing an internal page - I list all the places that I could have come from to get to this page and therefore the elements of information that the user is expecting to see; what are they looking for? This also helps me to think about navigation - are the users getting to the most important information quickly and efficiently or is that info locked away around layers and layers of clicks.

Once you have built up all this you are ready for your designers - they have the easy job.

One of the key things that comes out of this design exercise is that it will focus your attention to your content. What are the most important parts of your content that your users want to see?

[Note: from the main elements we came up with in the above example - list the key content]

In writing content I believe there are six golden rules:

1. Use of headings: Users don't read websites - they scan them. The use of headings will help your readers quickly identify with your content and product. Ideally, start your site with a "big fat claim" that will immediately grab the attention of your visitors - such as lose weight in 21 days, or this is one of my favourite from clients "the pick of the backpacker hostels - Lonely Planet.
2. Use headings to create visual order: use fonts, colours and weighting that tells your users the relative importance of your content
3. Know your audience: Youth in particular read web content differently and far more graphically than older audiences (read Understanding Digital Kids by Ian Jukes, Ted McCain and Lee Crockett)
4. Your introduction is very important: as users read that to decide whether to read on
5. Keep it simple stupid: it's cool that your tour company has 24-seat Mitsubishi Fuso Buses - but no one really cares. Ignore the technical aspects and focus on the benefits. At Kiwi Experience the brochure used to read "our buses have big windows to look out and big stereos to cruise to."
6. Me, I and We. It is great to tell your users what your company does, but marketing 101 says there are only two questions they are interested in - what is in it for me and how do I get it? Focus on the benefits of your product to produce a written visualisation - that is help your customers see themselves with your product. A very important point that is often overlooked is that websites should be written in the first person. Like emails, websites are very rarely read by more than one person at a time and therefore you should market to the visitor as if you were talking to them directly. So, rather than saying "Our Clients enjoy the year round sunshine" you should say "you will..." There is an interesting tool that you can use to test how customer centric your content is. The we-we test analyses content for words such as "we" or your company name relative to customer centric-terms.

<http://www.futurenowinc.com/wewe.htm>

Unfortunately there are two readers of content - your web visitors and the search engines. There is one thing that is undeniable in your marketing strategy. The low cost of search for the user is undermining brand loyalty - it is easier to search for something than return to a specific site; search engines are increasing the way we shop around the Internet. Not doing well in search engines severely handicaps your likelihood of selling much on the web.

I like to conceptualise a search engine algorithm as a basket of 10 or so factors each with an importance grading say out of 10 combined to make a total rating out of say 100. We don't know exactly what that group factors are nor their importance but we have a pretty fair idea. These include:

1. Title Tag: The title tag is like the title of a book - it is the thing a reader (in this case search engines) judge a website on. The title tag should explain your website using the keywords you are targeting for the search engine. It should not be your company name. For example, this is one I worked on. Instead of Fletcher Living at Jack's Point, Queenstown (the company name) I wrote "Your next home at Jack's Point Queenstown - houses for sale". I wanted to tell Google that the site was about Queenstown houses for sale and Jack's Point houses for sale - terms much more important than the company name. I have already said that brand loyalty is very low on the web. The title tag also appears as the heading in your "listing" in search results pages. In a search results page of blue links a user will scan the page looking for the heading that catches their attention. In my example, "Your next home.." is pretty catchy, as opposed to the boring old company name. In this way, also the number of times your result is clicked becomes important. It is not necessarily a matter of where you rank once you reach that top half a dozen of websites it is a matter of how many times your listing is clicked relative to your competitor. Being at number one and generating no clicks is useless. We can use tools to ascertain what percentage of search volume we are receiving through to a website we are marketing. For example at one stage I was doing a site that was receiving 7% of all web traffic that searched for Tongariro Crossing.
2. Headings: In my six Golden Rules for writing web content I said that you should use headings to create visual order. The same applies to content for search engines. Search engines use headings to determine the relative importance of content and to help structure the data to be stored. The most important heading is heading one and this should only appear once of every page. Heading two will appears a few times a page and so on. We can create up to six levels of heading content.
3. The content itself: The determination of keywords make up the basis for writing content for search engines. Keywords are the words that search engines extract from your content to determine when to display your website in search results. Quite obviously then the key is to make the search engines recognise your website for the keywords you want to come up well for. A few tips for including keywords in your content:
 - a. Concentrate on only 5 to 8 relevant keywords
 - b. Use the keywords in headings
 - c. Position your keywords at the front and end of paragraphs and pages
 - d. Bold them if appropriate
 - e. Link your keywords to other parts of the website; and
 - f. Make your content readable by people - search engines don't buy stuff
4. Descriptive tags on images etc: Search engines can not see images and so alt text and title text should be added to describe to the search engines that actual image - including your keywords
5. The quality of the website: An extremely important factor is the code to content ratio. A poorly coded website will have a lot of code relevant to content. This is an old style of coding which is fortunately less popular, but still around.

6. AND LINKS

Most internet marketers will tell you that links are the most important element in achieving good search engine rankings. To understand the rules of linking you should understand the history of the Internet. Sir Tim Beners Lee invented the Internet as a means of sharing scientific documents at CERN (which is the European Organisation for Nuclear Research) where he worked. Each document was in effect a web page. Search engine algorithms are rooted in the premise of

documents being shared; basically, when an academic paper is published say in a Scientific Journal it is published for consideration by others experienced in the appropriate field. Other articles are subsequently published with references back to the original article. The more references in subsequent articles the more we consider the important article to be of importance. Therein lies the premise of the Page Rank algorithm - the more links a web page has the more important it must be.

Unfortunately, that works well until the geeks cheat the system. Reciprocal links for example - I'll link to you if you link to me. Not what the Page Rank algorithm had in mind, so Google now deprecates reciprocal links. How about I buy a link then? Google now has the ability in webmaster tools to do a site that is buying links. Links are essential but they are also harder to get AND search engines have got much better at analysing the quality of a link. For example, I have a web design company and you have a fashion directory and you link to me - Google sees right through that and says hang on, this is not a vote for this website because they are relevant to your visitors - they don't count the link. In fact, Google has a thing called the "bad neighbourhood" - if you have a link from a website that is considered spammy, or banned from Google etc., Google won't just not count the link they will penalise you in the rankings too. If you get listed on one of these sites - it could be bloody hard to get off it too!

Clearly the idea of links is that it is a vote of confidence from one website of another. In this way in early 2009 the growth of social media has become more important in the Google algorithm in evaluating the strength of a website based on the number of times it's URL is shared (or voted in confidence) with sites such as Twitter and Facebook. Search engines recognised that web users are making their recommendations and voting for each others sites by sharing links and thus begun to make calculations that counted these links.

So what is social media? You hear about it every day.

If you think about the original Internet that spurned from the work of Sir Tim Bernes Lee it was about pages being published for others to read - it was a one way system. The major differences between this Internet and the Internet we now refer to as Web 2.0 is that it has become a two way system - everyone has the ability to easily publish content. From writing a blog, to leaving a review, to selling your products on Trade Me, uploading videos to You Tube or writing messages on Facebook the ability of anyone to be an author of content has spurned a whole new SOCIAL direction in the Internet.

How big has social media got? Let me show you this: <http://xebidy.com/social-media-stats.html>

Maybe I explain social media by taking the time to explain some the things we do in social media either on behalf of a client or on behalf of ourselves.

Firstly, probably the easiest one to understand is Twitter. Twitter came to the fore in 2007 and began to be picked up in the mainstream in mid 2008. I describe it as SMS on speed - it is in fact based on the ideas that SMS texts are limited to 140 characters and originally Twitter was expected to be primarily phone based. In this way it is really like sending and receiving lots of texts to and from lots of people. To that end that is pretty much all there is to it.

I use Twitter everyday for myself and for a number of clients. Firstly, I think there are two fundamental principles to social media marketing: relevancy and trust. I like the Seth Godin concept of permission marketing - that is, people sign up to be marketed to through newsletters, becoming fans of community groups and pages, becoming friends on Twitter or receiving an RSS feed. However, they give you permission to market to them on the explicit social contract that you will send them only information that is relevant to them. These "followers" for want of a better word trust that you will share content that is

relevant. The quickest way to fail in permission marketing is to lose your users trust through spamming them, through getting the message wrong, through pushing your user base messages that are not relevant to them.

I try and tweet regularly throughout the day - not too many at once because I don't want to appear spammy. I am trying to build up a relationship with my followers even though I do not know them. The primary goal is to generate page views for my sites. I try and share relevant links with the idea that by sharing good quality content all the time when I share one of my websites I will get lots of clicks through to them. There is also the etiquette of retweeting, which is when someone shares something you have already shared thereby increasing the network of possible exposure of your link. By retweeting periodically key peoples content and certainly by thanking them anyone that shares your content you build up what we call social currency such that when it is your turn to need a link shared it happens. A link that I share usually generates me around 200 - 500 page views.

A different Twitter strategy is that of listening to the stream. Many companies that first ventured into Twitter met with absolute disaster. The old methods of blasting out promotional information down Twitter were met with a backlash from users. Users were not going to follow someone who spammed them with ill-considered marketing messages. I have a great personal experience of such a story with Vodafone NZ. I was in the middle of a week long argument with Vodafone over my eligibility for an iPhone - so when I saw them arrive on Twitter I talked them publicly. The verbal intercourse is amusing.

Telstra Big Pond in Australia suffered similar indignation when they first entered Twitter. People simply do not want to be messaged at. Social media is not an opportunity to ram traditional marketing messages down people's throats. Recall it is an opportunity to make existing customers happy, engaging them in a more loyal relationship - at the same time as generating new customers. The Telstra Big Pond story is a very interesting example of a Twitter success story. Firstly, after a slaughtering at the hands of the public on Twitter, Big Pond retreated and using their corporate blog they asked the community what they expected of them within the social media environment. The feedback was surprisingly positive - and despite not being what we call a loved brand they were able to get support from bloggers and Twitterers for their efforts, essentially turning a PR disaster into a success by engaging those nay sayers to help them. I like the saying - "failing forward".

From this effort Telstra launched @bigpondteam made up of a few individuals that personally identified themselves in Twitter. That was point number 1, they were not a company face but in fact real people. Secondly, they adopted a strategy of listening to the chatter - not marketing, but listening. The Big Pond team watch the Twitter stream listening for conversations where they might be able to jump in and add value. If someone is complaining about Telstra they offer support - they try and take on the persons problems personally, getting their mobile number and sort out the issues. In this way it is not about numbers of followers at all - there is no marketing message. I like to think of it as going out and looking for your customers and helping them in their own environment without obviously force marketing.

Another example happened recently when I tweeted that I had book my flights from Manchester to Geneva for the weekend to meet a mate. Almost immediately I received a tweet from Hotel Bristol in Geneva asking if I had booked accommodation and would I like help. They would have been running a search against people who mentioned Geneva.

The most well known social media website however is Facebook. Facebook recently overtook Google as the number one website in the US. The biggest difference between Facebook and other social media is that in Facebook there is reciprocity in who you follow or are friends with. In order to view another's profile you need to communicate and be friends with each other. In Twitter however the following only needs to be one way. In Twitter anyone can follow anyone else - and that

means that your Tweets are being listened to by complete strangers. You don't have to accept a follower and although many do, you don't have to follow them back. In Facebook the equivalent is a company page where people become your fan and receive your updates on their wall like they would with any friends. The alternative is a group. A Groups gives you more functionality, you can create message boards and forums - but I prefer a page for exactly the reason that the information you share shows up on your fans walls. A group necessitates that a person will return to the group to receive the information and I challenge that this is not a frequent occurrence. The same rules apply in maintaining a Facebook page - share only relevant information to your fans, and don't share too often - the last thing someone wants is their wall crammed with your messages.

Personally, I think that Facebook provides it's own challenges in that in many ways users view Facebook as their own personal space in the same way as they view their emails. Marketing to someone on Facebook can therefore risk being viewed as interruptive marketing or spam.

Clearly this form of marketing is quite different to traditional marketing. It is much more focussed on marketing to what we call the long-tail, that is to your niche. I conceptualise it as actually going out, identifying the people you want to view your message and targeting that message to suit them. Cliche: fish where the fish are. It is also about actually creating a relationship with your customers - getting to know them and communicating directly with them

This leads to an interesting point of view on social media marketing and is the perfectly place for me to sum up actually - unlike search engines effort above it is not about what is the competition doing. Rather it is about meeting the expectations of your customers. Rather ask yourself "what do my customers expect for my businesses websites in terms of Web 2.0?" Different customers are demanding different information and methods of receiving it, the younger market is in tune with blogs and forums, other markets are well versed in RSS feeds (now in standard practice on newspaper websites), females prefer social networks such as Facebook and males age 35+ prefer Twitter. So it is not what your competitor is doing, but rather what your customers are demanding.

This brings me back very nicely to my opening discussion on designing a website - first question: what do your customers want to get from you?