



Deciding on your website's objectives

Bruce Boddington

There are lots and lots of websites, all of which are intended by their owners to attract your attention and promote products and services of some type or other.

While there is a huge number of designs and layouts, there are two broad categories that most websites can be classified into. It is very important that early in the design phase of your website a decision is made about which one of these categories you wish your website to fall into. The decision will have a huge impact on the way your designer approaches the task of developing your website.

Whilst there are many sub-categories, I believe all websites fall into one of two broad groups.

- Brochure Style – normally used for organizations where the sale of goods or services is secondary to the need to promote the organization itself. An example might be a website for a management consultancy which would aim to promote the competencies of the staff and their previous successes with other clients.
- Commerce Style – used where online trading of some sort is needed. An example might be a website for a retailer who may or may not have an existing retail shop, where the primary aim would be to sell items on a completely online basis.

Brochure Style websites generally have these sorts of properties:

- “Professional” look and feel, not overtly commercial in look and tone.
- No ability to make purchases online.
- Customer contact is limited to an email/telephone/mail area.
- Written material is of a quiet, responsible nature, detailing the overall capabilities of the business and its staff.
- The use of images is kept to a minimum.

Commerce Style websites are generally the complete opposite:

- The overall look is commercial and product orientated.
- Purchases can be made online
- Customer contact is encouraged, sometimes with “live-chat” facilities to contact company staff.
- Written material is direct and overtly commercial, with many references to product features and benefits.
- Images are used extensively to illustrate products. Most product lists, including images, pricing and descriptions are generated from a database to allow easy maintenance by the shopkeeper.

It is your decision about which broad style best suits the way you want to present your business. It can be very useful to browse a wide range of existing websites to see how other organisations, both in similar and different fields to you, have handled their website development. You can get a feel for the aspects that you like or dislike and these can be conveyed to your designer. If you have a clear vision of what you are expecting your website to look and feel like and convey that vision to your designer you are far more likely to be happy with the outcome.

It is also important that your website reflects the look and feel of any brochures, pamphlets or other types of literature and promotional items that are already in use by your company. Your website is only one element in the total array of methods that a customer can use to relate to you. All of these elements should give a consistent message, both from the visual point of view and the word content. If you have a logo, use it in a consistent manner. Don't confuse customers by using a number of different logos for the same subject matter. If you have a slogan, use it in a consistent manner, and don't use several different ones. If you have a brochure containing text passages which are clear and accurate about your business, use the same text in appropriate place in the website. In this way your message will be reinforced if customers access more than one element of your promotional material. Using a multitude of different stories and messages across your promotional material fragments your message and can leave customers confused.