

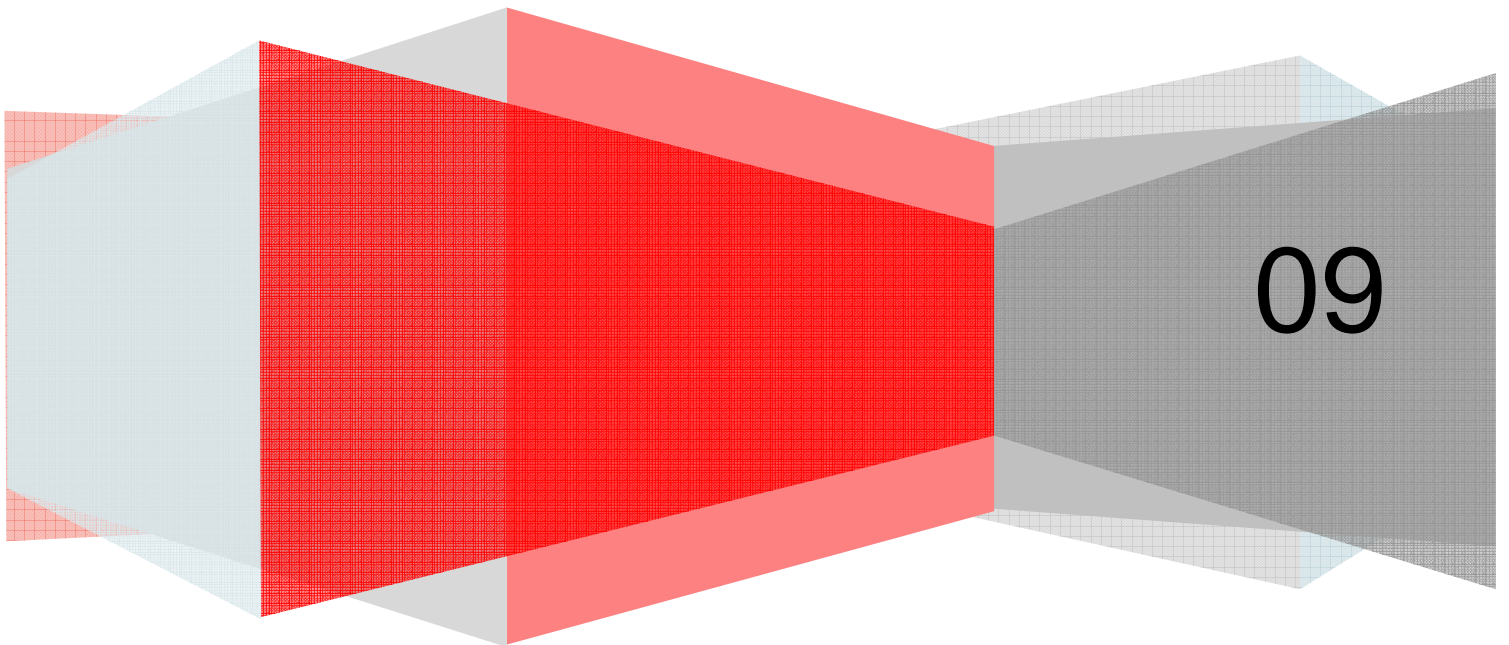


Effective Websites

The Importance of your Homepage

June 2009

Version 1.1



Introduction

Think hard about your website.

Is it really working effectively for you? How do you know?

Some Statistics:

- **On average, you have around 8 seconds in which to grab the attention of a visitor to your website...8 seconds!**
- **On average, a staggering 99% of all your website visitors will leave your website without bothering to contact you.**

(Statistics from Chris Cardell, Cardell Media)

These statistics are frightening, and it is important to remember that the way people use the internet has changed considerably over the past two years or so:

- There is a generation of potential customers coming through who have only ever used the internet to source products and services. I don't think my grown-up children have ever looked at Yellow Pages or Thomsons!
- Internet users are now accustomed to speed. They are used to slick websites that deliver information quickly, respond to searches and cut to the chase.

The days when it was acceptable for a business simply to have a website are long gone, and you now have to ask:

Is your website an asset or a liability?

This document is going to concentrate on the Homepage of your website. If you get the homepage right, you can achieve a huge amount without relying on your potential customer even visiting the other pages.

What do you want your Website to do?

This is the first question I ask all my website clients, and it is fundamental.

- **Are you looking for a website that will generate leads to be converted by your sales team?**
- **Are you looking for a website that will sell your products on-line?**
- **Are you simply looking for an increase in enquiries from primed potential clients?**

Whatever your objectives, make sure you have a clear aim and always refer to that aim when you plan your site. If your potential client cannot clearly identify your objectives, they will be one of the 99% who click off your site and onto the sites of your competitors.

Tell Your Story

Think of your Homepage as your shop window. Most websites these days are designed to fit a screen resolution of 1024 x 768 pixels; 93% of all internet browsers are set to this resolution or higher. This probably won't mean a great deal to most of you, but even though screens are getting larger and wider, there is still a limited amount of space in which to **tell your story**.

Bear in mind that, as screen resolutions have increased, so too has the lack of willingness in the website visitor to click and scroll, so make sure the most vital information is visible and easy to access.

When we look at the content of your website, we revert back to the basic principles of sound marketing:

A – Attention

I – Interest

D- Desire

A – Action

Firstly, your homepage must grab the attention of the visitor, preferably within the first 8 seconds.

Second, make sure there is content on the page that is **of interest** to your target market. If 60% of your target market are plumbers, it probably doesn't make sense to highlight electric lighting on your homepage too prominently.

Thirdly, make your products and services **desirable**. The response you want to illicit is one of "I MUST have one of those." If the response is a lukewarm "That might be nice, but I haven't got the budget at the moment..." you have lost that client.

Finally, if you achieve the above DON'T LET THE CLIENT OFF THE HOOK. Make it very clear what they must do to contact you. DO NOT expect them to have to look around for a page with your contact details; shove the details under their nose.

Let us look at these four factors in greater detail. I am not going to go into On-line Sales in this document so much, but will concentrate more on ensuring your website generates leads and enquiries:

Attention

Well written content is a vital ingredient of your website, as this helps you to get good rankings in the Search Engines. Paradoxically, the human user doesn't particularly want to read lots of text unless they absolutely have to.

For your homepage, try to keep text to a minimum. Think about the following:

- What are your Unique Selling Points?
- Who is your Target Market?
- Why would a customer come to you as opposed to one of your competitors?
- What do you want from this customer? A qualified lead or an on-line sale?

If you are able to provide the answers using the homepage content, then you are half way there.

Now, use that content to grab the customer's attention.

Movement

By adding a little bit of Flash into your homepage, you can achieve a lot of the above. Movement instantly grabs the attention of the website visitor. It draws the eye; it provides a valuable couple of seconds during which the user can relax into your site and you can tell your story. It allows you to overlay strong visual images with pertinent text that can highlight, in an instant, your Unique Selling Points.

Bullet Points

List your core products and services in a bullet-point format. This is much easier for the potential customer to digest. If you look at any website analytically, ask yourself which of the elements grab your attention? The pictures? Movement? Navigation bars? You will find that the paragraph of dull text that may start with "Welcome to the website of..." is the last thing to which your eye is drawn, and even then it is highly unlikely that you will bother to read it.

Images

Use images that create DESIRE. Look at successful holiday company websites. They will use large images of the most beautiful locations that evoke an emotion – the website visitor will think "I wish I was there..." The number of Estate Agents I used to see who insisted on putting a photo of their office on the homepage. Why? They are not selling their office! And unless the offices were particularly photogenic, it was unlikely that the image ever prompted

a potential client to pick up the phone to instruct that agent to sell their most valuable commodity: their home.

Interest

If you are running a successful business, then you probably love every aspect of it and, a bit like me, could waffle on ad infinitum about every aspect. Restrain yourself. Concentrate on information that will be **of interest** to your clients.

News

Having changing information on your homepage relevant to your business makes your website interesting. You can add your own company news, or stream in news from external sources. Having news items on your homepage demonstrates that you have your finger in the pulse and that you care enough about your clients to furnish them with constant updates that may affect them.

Testimonials

Don't be shy. Most of you will appreciate the importance of word-of-mouth recommendations and referrals. If you get positive feedback from a valued customer, add it to your website so that prospective customers can see it. A line on your homepage from a customer stating how great you are speaks volumes.

Offers and Promotions

Rotate your stock. This is one of the basic premises behind successful retail. Analyse the sales figures, see what has been selling best, move it to a more prominent position and then you will sell more. If you have a top selling item, a Special Offer or a New Product, highlight it on your Homepage. Draw the visitor's attention to it to prompt them to buy or enquire.

Desire

Successful marketing is all about creating NEED. If a customer has an "I can take it or leave it" ambivalence, they are more likely to leave it, thanks. Combine images and text to make your product or service essential. Knowing your market, ensuring you use the right images and compulsive text will help you create that feeling of need.

Newsletters

You have got fairly far along the right path if you have managed to create desire. Before we get to the final stage, bear in mind the 99% statistic. You have a customer who has been impressed by your website, but they might genuinely not have a need at this precise moment in time. Give them a reason to contact you nonetheless.

A Newsletter Sign-Up is a great way of achieving this. Remember, the visitor has been impressed by the website, so encourage them to start a relationship with you. Ask them to leave their contact details, but **MAKE IT WORTH THEIR WHILE**. Offer them access to Special Offers only available to Newsletter Subscribers, for example. If the potential customer can see the benefits of providing their email address, they will do so. Data is valuable!

Action

Lastly, you have managed to get that customer to the point of no return – almost! Your website has done all that hard work, and now you have got to make it easy for the customer to take the final step. Make sure your main telephone number is right in front of them; provide them with a simple enquiry form so they fill in basic details (such as Name and email address); just make sure they are able to contact you.

Imagine what you could achieve if, instead of 99% of your website visitors disappearing without trace, you only let 95% off the hook; or 90%. How many potential customers are you able to convert into customers once you get them on the telephone? How much more business could you do if the numbers of leads and enquiries increased?

Get your website working effectively.

Ian Rutter
Director
Argent Ram Media Limited

Our Services include

- Website design and development
- Search Engine Marketing
- Email design and development
- Micro-site marketing
- E-commerce
- Internet Start-Ups
- Marketing Consultancy

Please contact us to discuss any aspect of your website design and marketing strategy.

Telephone: 0845 009 5396

ian@argentrammedia.com

www.argentrammedia.com