Chapter 10.5

Website design

This chapter includes:

- Introduction: The importance of website design
- Aligning website design with marketing strategy
- User-centred web design
- Usability
- Accessibility
- Search engine optimisation
- Information architecture
- Principles of effective website design
- Persuasive design and copywriting
- Selecting a web design agency

About this chapter

- An effective website design is important to support buyer behaviour and marketing communications objectives for a range of audiences. It should deliver an effective branded customer experience.

- Websites must be aligned with marketing objectives and continuously monitored and reviewed so that their contribution to the organisation improves. Persuasion approaches should be used to engage customers and convert them to the outcomes required by site owners.

- User-centred website design is a key approach to ensure the website meets visitors’ needs. Research to identify appropriate personas, customer journeys and relevant content is an essential activity.

- Usability should be integrated into the process of designing and building websites. A usable site is one where visitors can find the information they are seeking and complete actions efficiently.
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- **Accessibility** should be built into all websites since this is a legal requirement under main disability and discrimination law. An accessible design supports visually impaired site users and users accessing the site with a range of different web browsers using different devices and assists search engines’ robots in navigating the site as part of search engine optimisation (SEO).

- Analysis and design to create a sound **information architecture** underpins the creation of user-centred, usable websites.

- To produce an effective website, particularly important design principles include **page template layouts** for different page types and **navigation**.

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**Dr Dave Chaffey**

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He has run training courses on internet marketing since 1997 for the Chartered Institute of Marketing, Institute of Direct Marketing and e-consultancy. In-company training workshop clients include 3M, BP, Euroffice, Foviance, HBOS, HSBC, Orange, Siebel and Tektronix. He is also an e-marketing consultant in the Customer Engagement Unit for CScape Strategic Internet Services (www.cscape.com).

He is proud to have been recognised by the CIM as one of 50 marketing gurus worldwide who have shaped the future of marketing and by the Department of Trade and Industry as one of the leading individuals who have provided input and influence on the development and growth of e-commerce and the internet in the UK over the last 10 years.

Dave’s books include: E-marketing Excellence; Total Email Marketing and Internet Marketing: Strategy, Implementation and Practice. He is also the author of E-consultancy Best Practice Guides to search engine optimisation and paid search marketing.

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Chapter 10.5

Website design

**Introduction – the importance of website design**

A grounding in website design is today relevant for many marketers since an organisation’s website should be integrated with all customer communications, regardless of medium.

This chapter takes an approach that can be applied to both new sites and redesigns where we can learn from what has gone before. We will also have to remember that radically different design approaches are required by different
types of site. For example a transactional e-commerce site (e.g. Tesco.com), will be quite different in design from a B2B services-orientated relationship-building website (e.g. Accenture.com) as will a brand-building site (e.g. Heinz.com) and finally a portal or media site (e.g. BBC.co.uk).

Let’s start by taking a look at why a website is so important to today’s organisation and what an effective website design needs to deliver:

1. **Your website is an integrated communications channel**

   Company websites are now a primary customer communications channel – both through the main company site and through microsites or landing pages set up as direct response vehicles from other communications tools such as print, direct mail and email.

2. **Your website is a key part of customer buyer behaviour**

   Many online searches for specific products or inspiration to purchase now begin with a search engine. To be successful online you need to be visible for relevant searches completed by your audience and your sites need to answer searcher’s questions and inspire searchers such that you are a constant companion through the buying process from initial consideration, comparison and purchase to ongoing relationships.

3. **Your website delivers a branded customer experience**

   But the website is much more than a communications channel; it also is a crucial part of the customer’s brand experience. Research published in 2006 in Nature showed that the average user takes just 20 milliseconds to decide on whether (s)he likes a site or not – so design is crucial to that. Of course, there’s much more to the visuals in delivering an effective website design. Figure 10.5.1 suggests the elements of a successful online brand experience. This is based on a diagram by de Chernatony (2001) who suggested that delivering the online experience promised by a brand requires delivering rational values, emotional values and promised experience.

**Figure 10.5.1 The online customer experience pyramid – success factors**
4. **Your website delivers a dynamic personalised experience**

Or rather it should: it is still too common to see static brochureware sites with little interactivity and no personalisation of content. In fact when we talk about personalised content and recommendations, Amazon.com is still the most widely mentioned example – few others have achieved this.

With the right technology and business rules behind it, the website can act as a virtual salesperson which delivers sense and respond marketing. This involves delivering timely, relevant communications to customers via the website, email or traditional direct communications like post or phone, as part of a contact strategy based on tracking specific interactions with a company’s website, emails and staff, together with assessment of a customer’s position in the lifecycle.

5. **Your website has to be customer-centric**

So bringing together these five characteristics of websites, the customer or user must be placed at the heart of the website design process. In this chapter we will show different elements of user-centred design which assist in facilitating the customer journey.

An indication of the effort required to produce a customer-centric online presence is given by Alison Lancaster, head of marketing and catalogues at John Lewis Direct, who says:

“A good site should always begin with the user. Understand who the customer is, how they use the channel to shop, and understand how the marketplace works in that category. This includes understanding who your competitors are and how they operate online. You need continuous research, feedback and usability testing to continue to monitor and evolve the customer experience online. Customers want convenience and ease of ordering. They want a site that is quick to download, well-structured and easy to navigate.”

**Aligning website design with marketing strategy**

Many websites still fail to deliver the best results for their owners because they are not aligned with business goals. So a key success factor in designing or redesigning any website is that the design fits in with a broader marketing plan in order to support business goals. This prevents these common problems:

- No specific website objectives are set and results delivered through digital marketing are not measured or reviewed adequately
- The needs of different audiences of a website are not met
- New online value propositions for customers are not developed – the internet is treated as ‘just another channel to market’ without review of opportunities to offer improved, differentiated online services and content
- The website is not integrated with on- and offline promotional activity

In Figure 10.5.2 I suggest a process showing the main activities needed to develop and implement an integrated web marketing plan.
The main activities that are required to develop a balanced web marketing plan are:

**A. Defining the opportunity**

Setting objectives to define the potential is the core of this phase of strategy development. Key activities are:

- 1. Set e-marketing objectives: Companies need to set specific numerical objectives for their online channels and then resource to deliver these objectives. These objectives should be informed by and influence the business objectives and also the following activities:

- 1a. Evaluate e-marketing performance: This is vital, but often missed. It involves applying web analytics tools to measure what the website is delivering through the contribution of leads, sales and brand involvement. An example of the types of insights available from a web analytics system used by companies such as eBay, Lastminute.com and Ford is shown in figure 10.5.3. Key performance indicators that need to be reviewed through web analytics include unique visitors, conversion rates to outcomes and returns achieved through the website in conjunction with different online communications such as search engine marketing, online advertising and email marketing.

- 1b. Assess online marketplace: Situation analysis reviewing the micro-environment (customers, competitors, intermediaries, suppliers and internal capabilities/resources) and the broader macro-environment which influences strategy such as legal requirements and technology innovation. Particularly important for web design are understanding customer needs and benchmarking against competitors.
Definition: Web analytics tools

Techniques used to assess and improve the contribution of e-marketing to a business including reviewing traffic volume, referrals, clickstreams, online reach data, customer satisfaction surveys, leads and sales.

Figure 10.5.3 Web analytics system showing popularity of different content on a site (www.davechaffey.com)

B. Selecting the strategic approach

- 2. Define e-marketing strategy: Select appropriate strategies to achieve the objectives set at stage 1.

- 2a. Define customer value proposition: Define the value proposition available through the website and other online channels and how it relates to the core proposition delivered by the company. Review the marketing mix and brand values to evaluate how they can be improved online.

- 2b. Define e-communications mix: Select the offline and online communications tools to encourage usage of an organisation’s online services and to generate leads and sales. Develop new outbound communications and event-triggered touch strategies to support customers through their relationship with the company.

C. Delivering results online

- 3. Implement e-marketing plan: This details the implementation of the strategy.
3a. Implement customer experience: Build the website, provide the content and create the email marketing communications which form the online interactions customers make with a company. Create online customer relationship management capabilities to understand customers’ characteristics, needs and behaviours and to deliver targeted, personalised value.

3b. Execute e-communications: Managing the continuous online marketing communications such as search engine marketing, partnerships, sponsorships and affiliate arrangements and campaign-based e-marketing communications such as online advertising, email marketing and microsites to encourage usage of the online service and to support customer acquisition and retention campaigns.

4. Customer profiling plus monitoring and enhancing the site: The website must be designed to capture the right profile information, and product and communications preferences to allow follow-up direct marketing campaigns through web and email. Disseminate reports and alerts about performance compared with objectives to drive performance improvement.

User-centred web design

User-centred design is not a new concept; Nigel Bevan of Serco Usability stressed the importance of user-centred web design way back when he said:

“Unless a website meets the needs of the intended users it will not meet the needs of the organisation providing the website. Website development should be user-centred, evaluating the evolving design against user requirements”. Nigel Bevan (1999)

He goes on to explain that user-centred design answers these types of questions which should be asked when researching any website:

- Who are the important users?
- What is their purpose for accessing the site?
- How frequently will they visit the site?
- What experience and expertise do they have?
- What nationality are they? Can they read your language?
- What type of information are they looking for?
- How will they want to use the information: read it on the screen, print it or download it?
- What type of browsers will they use? How fast will their communication links be?
- How large a screen or window will they use, with how many colours?
Case study – A user-centred web redesign for CIPD

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) is the professional body for those involved in the management and development of people. The CIPD has over 125,000 individual members and additional guest members of their online services. The broad aims of the website are to develop and promote good practice in the management and development of people and also to promote services such as qualifications, training and conferences.

The redesign of the CIPD site (www.cipd.co.uk) used the process shown in figures 10.5.4 and 10.5.5. Many of these techniques are explained later in this chapter.

Figure 10.5.4 A user-centred website design process

![User-centred design process](source: cScape (www.cscape.com))

Figure 10.5.5 Site wireframe based on research project phase

![Site wireframe](source: cScape (www.cscape.com))
Visitor segmentation – researching variation in site visitors

User-centred design requires an understanding of differences in site visitors in order to:

- Create content and messaging to appeal to particular audiences

- Assign visitors to different segments in real time and target messages and offers to individuals when they arrive and return

- Personalisation and mass customisation – if an individual visitor can be categorised as belonging to a particular group then specific messages and content can be provided

- Assess conversion rates and satisfaction for different segments

Definition – mass customisation

Mass customisation is the creation of tailored marketing messages or products for individual customers or a group of customers typically using technology to retain the economies of scale and the capacity of mass marketing or production.

Definition – personalisation

Web-based personalisation involves delivering customised content for the individual, through web pages, email or push-technology.
Here are five important ways of grouping or segmenting site audiences:

1. **Visitor characteristics**

Website designers need to identify different audiences with different characteristics in the same way that marketers identify groups of customers as part of segmentation.

2. **Visitor needs and wants**

We should survey customer preferences through surveys and direct web analytics observations. Preferences include:

- Product preferences
- Content (information and service) preferences
- Channel preferences (email preferred channel or not)

3. **Visitor online buyer behaviour**

Specific behavioural traits from directed to undirected are evident in searching or browsing for information on the internet. For E-consultancy (2004) a useful classification of online shopping behaviour was defined to test how well the website design matched the different behaviours.

**Tracker:** ‘Knows exactly which product he/she wishes to buy and uses an online shopping site to track it down and check its price, availability, delivery time, delivery charges or after-sales support’.

**Hunter:** ‘Doesn’t have a specific product in mind but knows what type of product he/she is looking for (e.g. digital camera or cooker) and probably has one or more product features in mind. The hunter uses an online shopping site to find a range of suitable products, compare them and decide which one to buy’.

**Explorer:** ‘Such people don’t even have a particular type of product in mind. They may have a well-defined shopping objective (buying a present for someone or treating themselves), a less-resolved shopping objective (buying something to ‘brighten up’ the lounge) or no shopping objective at all (they like the high street store and thought they would have a look at the online site)’.

4. **Visitor relationship with site**

Web analytics can identify these types of customer behavioural segments:

- Referrer – where the visitor came from – for example, which search engine, which email, which offline communication
- Entry point
- First time or repeat visitor
- Site subscriber or non-subscriber
- Location – different country or domain (company site is possible)
5. **Visitor relationship with organisation**

The final type of segmentation is based on the visitor’s relationship with the site. Possible relationships include:

- Customer versus non customer
- Purchase intent (low, medium or high)
- Stage of buying cycle (pre-purchase, purchase or post-purchase)

For a summary of this section, see table 10.5.1 (each column shows a different form of segmentation):

**Table 10.5.1 Alternative methods of segmenting website audiences**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Customer type</th>
<th>Segment B2C</th>
<th>Segment B2B</th>
<th>Other audiences</th>
<th>Online behaviour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Existing/new</td>
<td>Age/sex</td>
<td>Company size</td>
<td>* Staff/recruits</td>
<td>+ Referrer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>Geography</td>
<td>Company sector</td>
<td>Media</td>
<td>Entry point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase history</td>
<td>Lifestyle</td>
<td>Geography</td>
<td>Investors</td>
<td>+ Pages visited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase intent/status</td>
<td>Value</td>
<td>Individual DMU</td>
<td>* Search robots</td>
<td>+ First-time/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Channel preferences</td>
<td>Situational: need/usage</td>
<td>Reseller size/tier</td>
<td>Students</td>
<td>returning visitors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information preferences</td>
<td>Value</td>
<td></td>
<td>E-procurement</td>
<td>+ Location:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>work or home</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Customer personas and scenarios**

Modelling personas of site visitors is a powerful technique for helping increase the usability and customer-centricity of a website. Personas are essentially a ‘thumbnail’ description of a type of person. It is useful to define a primary persona:

“Your primary persona needs to be a common user type who is both important to the business success of the product and needy from a design point of view — in other words, a beginner-user or a technologically challenged one.”

*Wadthe (2002)*

Different scenarios or customer journeys can be developed for each persona – for example, an information-seeking scenario (leads to site registration) and a purchase scenario for a new customer (leads to sale).
Developing personas – Dulux case study

We will illustrate the development of personas through a case study available through the IAB (www.iabuk.net). The objectives of this project were:

Positioning statement:

- ‘Dulux.co.uk – the online destination for colour scheming and visualisation to help you achieve your individual style from the comfort of your home’

Objectives:

- To increase the number of unique visitors from 1 million p.a. in 2003 to 3.5 million p.a. in 2006
- To drive 12 per cent of visitors to a desired outcome (e.g. ordering swatches)

Target audience based on research for user-centred design:

- Would be adventurous 25 to 44 women, online
- Lack of confidence
- Gap between inspiration (TV, magazines, advertising) and lived experience (sheds nervous discomfort)
- No guidance or reassurance is available currently on their journey
- Colours and colour combining is key
- Online is a well-used channel for help and guidance on other topics
- 12-month decorating cycle
- Propensity to socialise
- Quality, technical innovation and scientific proficiency of Dulux is a given

Examples of personas developed:

First-time buyer Penny Edwards, age: 27, partner: Ben, location: North London, occupation: sales assistant

Part-time mum Jane Lawrence, age: 37, husband: Joe, location: Manchester, occupation: part-time PR consultant

Single mum Rachel Wilson, age: 40, location: Reading, occupation: business analyst

Each has a different approach to interacting with the brand; for Penny it is summarised by the statement:

“I’ve got loads of ideas and enthusiasm; I just don’t know where to start.”

A storyboard was developed which illustrates the typical ‘customer journey’ for each persona (figure 10.5.7) and these informed the final design (figure 10.5.8).
Figure 10.5.7  Example storyboard for persona

Figure 10.5.8  Dulux brand site (www.dulux.co.uk) supporting different personas

Source: Agency.com IAB case study
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Usability

In Jakob Nielsen’s classic book, Designing Web Usability, he describes usability as follows:

“An engineering approach to website design to ensure the user interface of the site is learnable, memorable, error-free, efficient and gives user satisfaction. It incorporates testing and evaluation to ensure the best use of navigation and links to access information in the shortest possible time; a companion process to information architecture.”

For a site to be successful, the tasks or actions will need to be completed:

- **Effectively** – web usability specialists measure task completion: for example, only three out of 10 visitors to a website may be able to find a telephone number of other piece of information.

- **Efficiently** – web usability specialists also measure how long it takes to complete a task onsite, or the number of clicks it takes.

- **To achieve satisfaction** – assessing usability of existing websites should be partly based on feedback received from website users.

The reason why usability is important to website design is obvious. Jakob Nielsen puts it best in his ‘Usability 101’ (http://www.useit.com/alertbox/20030825.html). He says:

“On the web, usability is a necessary condition for survival. If a website is difficult to use, people leave. If the home page fails to clearly state what a company offers and what users can do on the site, people leave. If users get lost on a website, they leave. If a website’s information is hard to read or doesn’t answer users’ key questions, they leave. Note a pattern here?”

For these reasons, Nielsen suggests that around 10 per cent of a design project budget should be spent on usability, but often actual spend is significantly less.

Usability techniques

Usability is achieved through a structured approach to website design as shown in figure 10.5.4, which starts with understanding the needs of the users. Specific techniques include:

**Expert reviews**

These are performed at the beginning of a redesign project as a way of identifying problems with a previous design.
Usability testing

This involves:

1. **Identifying** representative users of the site
2. **Asking** them to perform typical tasks
3. **Observing** what they do and how they succeed through a range of techniques such as simple observation, eye tracking and clickstream analysis

E-consultancy (2004) explains a typical usability testing session as follows:

‘Tests are typically conducted with between five and ten participants as diminishing returns occur with a sample larger than this size. Sites with multiple audience segments and differing needs may require that a large number of participants are recruited for testing’.

Test participants are given a list of tasks (or scenarios) and while attempting the tasks are asked to provide a running commentary of their activities and thoughts. A usability specialist/analyst is usually on hand to probe with questions throughout the tests to identify where usability issues are occurring. Conducting a usability test is a skilled endeavour and the specialist is trained to ensure that he/she does not lead the participant and quickly recognises when the participant has encountered a usability problem.

Client representatives are often permitted to view the tests in action either through a one-way mirror or via a video link. This in itself can be a real eye-opening experience.

Richard Sedley, Director of the cScape Customer Engagement Unit comments:

“It is essential that great care is taken when writing the tasks and choosing subjects for usability testing. I have seen many occasions when even experienced testers have led the subjects, but specifying tasks openly can avoid this. In some cases, specific tasks such as ‘find the Da Vinci Code and purchase it’ are helpful, but more open tasks such as ‘here is £20; here is our website’ may reveal different insights.”

Accessibility

**Web accessibility** is about allowing all users of a website to interact with it regardless of disabilities they may have or the web browser or platform they are using to access the site. The visually impaired or blind are the main audience that designing an accessible website can help.

This quote shows the importance of accessibility to a visually impaired user of a website who uses a screen reader which reads out the navigation options and content on a website:
"For me being online is everything. It's my hi-fi, it's my source of income, it's my supermarket and it's my telephone. It's my way in."

Lynn Holdsworth, screen reader user, web developer and programmer. Source: RNIB.

**Definition – web accessibility**

Designing websites so that they can be used by people with visual impairment or whatever browser/access platform they use.

There are very strong reasons for ensuring you take accessibility into account when designing a new site:

1. **Number of visually impaired people**

   In many countries there are millions of visually impaired people varying from ‘colour blind’ (one in seven males) to partial sighted to blind.

   You should check colour contrast as this is one of the most common mistakes. Useful tools include:


2. **Number of users of less popular browsers**

   Microsoft Internet Explorer is the dominant browser, but the visually impaired use screen readers, and other browsers like Mozilla Firefox and Apple Safari are used by well over 10 per cent of web users.

   New access platforms such as PDAs and mobile phones are surprisingly important: over 40 per cent of people who use the eBay site don’t access it through a standard web browser.

3. **More visitors from natural listings of search engines**

   Accessibility assists with search engines optimisation (SEO) which we cover in the next section, through clearer navigation, alternative text for images and site maps.

4. **Improvements in usability**

   Delivered through clearer headlines, labelling, contract and navigation.

5. **Legal requirements**

   In many countries it is a legal requirement to make websites accessible. For example, the UK has a Disability Discrimination Act that requires this. The requirements of these laws are described in more detail later in this topic.

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Accessibility guidelines

Internet standards organisations such as the Worldwide Web consortium have been active in promoting guidelines for web accessibility through its Website Accessibility Initiative (See www.w3.org/WAI). It describes common accessibility problems as:

‘Images without alternative text; lack of alternative text for image map hot-spots; misleading use of structural elements on pages; uncaptioned audio or undescribed video; lack of alternative information for users who cannot access frames or scripts; tables that are difficult to decipher when linearised; or sites with poor colour contrast.’

There are three different priority levels but it is not usually a legal requirement, or desirable from a marketing point of view to meet all.

Some of the most important Priority 1 elements are indicated by these ‘quick tips’ from the WAI:

- **Images and animations.** Use alt tags to describe the function of each visual.
- **Image maps.** Use the client-side map and text for hotspots.
- **Multi-media.** Provide captioning and transcripts of audio, and descriptions of video.
- **Hypertext links.** Use text that makes sense when read out of context. For example, avoid ‘click here’.
- **Page organisation.** Use headings, lists, and consistent structure. Use CSS for layout and style where possible.
- **Graphs and charts.** Summarise or use the longest attribute.
- **Scripts, applets and plug-ins.** Provide alternative content in case active features are inaccessible or unsupported.
- **Frames.** Use the no frames element and meaningful titles.
- **Tables.** Make line-by-line reading sensible. Summarise.
- **Check your work.** Validate. Use tools, checklist and guidelines at http://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG.

Alt tags
Alt tags appear after an image tag and contain a phrase associated with that image.

For example:

```html
<img src="logo.gif" ALT="Company name, company products">
```

The Guide to Good Practice in Commissioning Accessible Websites is available for download from The Disability Rights Commission².

² [www.drc.org.uk/pas](http://www.drc.org.uk/pas)
Search engine optimisation

Search engine optimisation (SEO) should be built into your plan for a new or refined site from the outset. SEO is all about gaining a good position in the natural or organic listings of a search engine for a keyphrase likely to be typed by your target audience, so ‘online banking’ for a bank and ‘cheap laptops’ for a computer retailer etc. This subject is covered in considerable detail in chapter 5.8 (best practice search engine marketing), which those unfamiliar with this topic should refer to first; here we merely outline a number of success factors for integrating SEO into the website. These are also defined in much more detail in the E-consultancy (2006) Best Practice Guide to SEO.

SEO success factor 1. Goal setting and keyphrase analysis

You should use demand or gap analysis to set goals for realistic number of clicks and with a site conversion model, leads or sales. Many free tools are available (see http://www.davechaffey.com/seo-keyword-tools) to enable you to identify the popularity of each search term, its relevance to the products or services qualified by the ‘intent of the searcher’ indicated by the phrase and the competition on it.

SEO success factor 2. Site inclusion

Work on site inclusion is needed to improve your index coverage which is the proportion of your pages which are included within the index of each search engine.

The worst inclusion problem is if search robots cannot crawl all your pages because of an unfriendly content management system – this is frustratingly common. This may occur if page identifiers have the letters ‘id’ in them since Google may ignore these pages.

You can assess your index coverage using the Google ‘site’ syntax; for example, ‘site:www.davechaffey.com’ returns several thousand pages.

SEO success factor 3. Document meta data best practice

The three most important types of meta data which must be targeted to the audience by page designers and content owners are:

i. The document title

The <title> tag is arguably the most important type of meta data since each search engine places significant weighting on the keyphrases contained within it and it is the call-to-action hyperlink on the search engine results page. If it contains powerful, relevant copy you will get more clicks and the search engine will increase position in the listing accordingly relative to other pages which are getting fewer clicks.
ii. The ‘description’ meta tag

A meta tag is an attribute of the page within the HTML section which can be set by the content owner. The description meta tag denotes the information which will typically be displayed in the search engine results page when a web page is found if relevant ‘snippets’ cannot be used from within the body copy.

To see how relevant your title tag and meta description are, use the Google ‘site’ syntax with a keyphrase referring to your services – this will return all the pages on your site about a particular topic.

iii. The ‘keywords’ meta tag

The keywords meta tag is used to summarise the content of a document based on keywords. Today the keywords meta tag is relatively unimportant as a ranking factor since it has been exploited by SEO spammers in the past and the search engines tend to ignore it.

E-consultancy (2006) recommends that ‘on-page optimisation is vital to achieving good results through SEO’. The most basic test of relevance by the search engines is the number of times the search phrase appears on the page (headlines and subheading that include a search term are particularly powerful). Other factors include the position of the words on the page, the document structure and the use of hyperlinks containing the keywords linking to the page; indeed in many competitive sectors it is the quality of the links from pages linking to it that are most important in achieving good results.

**SEO success factor 4 External and internal link building**

The developers of Google realised that the number of links into a page and the quality of the links were a great way of determining the relevance of a page to searchers, especially when combined with the keyphrases on that page. A quality link is one that has the right context for the phrase that is being optimised, i.e. it references the phrase in the page <title>, body copy and within the anchor text of the hyperlinks. Link analysis was really the key factor that helped Google deliver more relevant results than its competitors when it launched in the late 1990s and it is vital to success online. External link building is a key web marketing activity and internal link building is an important part of website design in order to produce a flat or interlinked mesh structure which performs better than a hierarchical site.
**Information architecture**

“It is important to recognise that every information system, be it a book or an intranet, has an information architecture. ‘Well developed’ is the key here, as most sites don't have a planned information architecture at all. They are analogous to buildings that weren't architected in advance. Design decisions reflect the personal biases of designers; the space doesn't scale over time; technologies drive the design and not the other way around.”

_Rosenfeld and Morville (2002)_

It is inconceivable that a large building could be designed without a well planned architecture, but the quote shows that many websites lack an equivalent ‘information architecture’.

Rosenfeld and Morville give alternative definitions of an information architecture:

1. The combination of organisation, labelling and navigation schemes within an information system.
2. The structural design of an information space to facilitate task completion and intuitive access to content.
3. The art and science of structuring and classifying websites and intranets to help people find and manage information.
4. An emerging discipline and community of practice focused on bringing principles of design and architecture to the digital landscape.”

_Rosenfeld and Morville (2002)_

**Techniques for creating an information architecture**

These are techniques used to develop an appropriate information architecture:

1. **Card sorting**

A technique to group, categorise and develop a hierarchy for different types of information which will eventually translate into the site structure and navigation. Selected groups of users are given index cards to sort which may refer to types of documents, organisational key words and concepts, document titles, descriptions of documents or navigation labels.

2. **Blueprints**

According to Rosenfeld and Morville (2002) blueprints:

“Show the relationships between pages and other content components, and can be used to portray organisation, navigation and labelling systems.”
They are often thought of, and referred to, as site maps or site structure diagrams and have much in common with these, except that they are used as a design device clearly showing grouping of information and linkages between pages, rather than a page on the website to assist navigation.

Refer to Figure 10.5.9 for an example of a site structure diagram for a toy manufacturer’s website which shows the groupings of content and an indication of the process of task completion also.

Figure 10.5.9  **Site structure diagram (blueprint) showing layout and relationship between pages**

### 3. URL strategy

This specifies how different types of content will be placed in different folders. It is related to a concept called Design for Analysis (DFA) and is an approach to website design, originally borrowed from the manufacturing industry, which helps us to understand visitor behaviour in order to continuously improve site outcomes. DFA involves defining choices for users of a website which reveals something about the characteristics of a user of a website.

A URL policy is useful to recommend defined entry pages for printed material:

- [www.dell.com/uk](http://www.dell.com/uk)
- [www.dell.com/uk/laptops](http://www.dell.com/uk/laptops)
- [www.dell.com/uk/home-user](http://www.dell.com/uk/home-user)
Principles of effective website design

In this section we review best practice for:

- Home page design
- Landing pages
- Navigation
- Page template design
- Content design

Best practice for designing the home page

The home page is crucial to your brand online – it is usually the most popular page on a site, but remember that if you check your web analytics, more site visitors are likely to enter on other pages deep-linking in from search engines and partner sites. So many of the principles in this section also apply to other sections like that on landing pages.

Home page issues to consider

1. Are you recognisable and credible? The first time visitor may take an instant dislike to you if you're not. If you're a well-known brand, make sure your brand identity is to the fore. If not, show you are trustworthy and substantial. You should clearly explain your core proposition (who you are, what you do, where you do it, what makes you different and your online value proposition (your online USP – i.e. what visitors can get from your site that they can't get through other channels or from rivals online).

2. To splash or not to splash? In most cases it is best practice not to use a ‘splash page’ which you will know as one of those pages which often has an animation which you have to skip over before getting to the home page. A splash page may be useful for segmenting visitors on a first visit although no annoying animation is required. For example, on the first visit to www.easyjet.com, the browser is presented with a choice of countries to select.

2. To flash or not to flash? Animations often require a plug-in such as Macromedia Flash or Shockwave. If this is the main method for delivering content on the home page, then this can cause problems. Many brand and campaign sites sparingly use Flash hybrid sites to good effect. For example, see www.birdseye.co.uk (B2C) and www.microstrategy.com (B2B).

3. Clean or cluttered (information-rich)? A common debate among designers and clients is the balance between white space and text content. You should test for this effect through usability studies and through web analytics A/B testing. An example of a relatively ‘cluttered’ site is Amazon.com. But, Amazon’s Director of Personalisation, Matt Pound, speaking at the 2004 E-metrics summit says “data trumps intuition.” Amazon’s A/B tests showed a higher average order value from an information-rich site version which appeared to be more able to connect with the different needs of an audience.
4. **Prioritising screen ‘real estate’**. A key issue with the home page is deciding on the prominence of different content. In his book, *Home Page Usability: 50 Websites Deconstructed*, Jakob Nielsen evaluates sites for the priority of different types of content. Taking the example of the Citigroup Corporate page ([www.citigroup.com](http://www.citigroup.com)) you can see how the site has been updated to contain less filler and more self-promotional content:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Screen element</th>
<th>Original</th>
<th>Update</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Welcome and site identity</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>&gt;10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-promotional</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>&gt;15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising/sponsorship (third-party)</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filler (background graphics)</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>&lt;5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content of interest</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>&gt;15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navigation</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>&lt;10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unused</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>&lt;30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operating and browser system controls</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When prioritising real estate remember that too many areas will be difficult for visitors to scan, so limit these to a manageable number. Here we have said ‘focus on five’ since it scans, but you will see this pattern on many websites. This is consistent with eye tracking studies that show that visitors’ eyes:

- Start in the centre (area 1)
- Move to top left (area 2)
- Move to top centre (area 3)
- Move down the right column or navigation if present (area 4)
- Move to the bottom of the page (area 5)

The Argos site ([www.argos.co.uk](http://www.argos.co.uk)) was an example of a site that groups home page content into a limited number of areas at the time of writing.

5. **Remember persuasion – get visitors on their journeys**. Often you will have preferred routes that you want visitors to follow so the design should emphasise these. Examples include search boxes on retail sites and permission incentives on relationship-building and media sites. For example, for Huggies nappies ([www.huggies.com](http://www.huggies.com)) the main emphasis of the home page is to achieve this, and all other content is shielded, although it can be accessed at the bottom of the screen.

**Some home page guidelines**

To complete this brief discussion of the home page, we summarise some established guidelines of usability specialist Jakob Nielsen ([www.useit.com](http://www.useit.com)) who gives these 10 practical guidelines for the home page. But remember, you should try to achieve these for other pages also as visitors deep-link into your site.
A good example of a site that meets most of these guidelines is House (www.house.co.uk).

1. Include a one-sentence tagline – make the site's purpose clear: explain who you are, what you do and where you do it

2. Write a window title (title tag) with good visibility in search engines and bookmark lists

3. Group all corporate information in one distinct area

4. Emphasise the site's top high-priority tasks

5. Include a search input box

6. Show examples of real site content

7. Begin link names with the most important keyword

8. Offer easy access to recent home page features

9. Don’t over-format critical content, such as navigation areas

10. Use meaningful graphics

**Landing page (or microsites) best practice**

Landing pages, or microsites, are special online direct response pages built to engage with a brand or maximise conversion to lead or sale when visitors are directed from on- or offline promotions. An example of a landing page that holds to many of these guidelines is http://www.norwichunion.com/travel-insurance. My 10 landing page success factors are:

1. **Deliver relevance.** A clear headline and content should show relevance and also engage the visitor to scan down the page.

2. **Integrate with referral source(s).** The customer journey to your website started elsewhere. To deliver relevance also requires consistency with what they have already read and seen to meet their expectation.

3. **Provide sufficient detail** to support the response decision.

4. **Start the user on their journey.** The design should make the next step clear and minimise the number of clicks required for response since every extra click required in response will generally reduce response by 10 per cent.

5. **Use the right page length.** This is a difficult one to give guidelines on. The right copy/page length is one that minimises the knowledge gap between what the users want to know and what you want to tell them. Tabs can help with this.

6. **Use meaningful graphics.** Graphics must be consistent with the campaign and generate empathy from the audience. Don’t underestimate the importance of quality graphics – stock graphics rarely work. It is difficult to assess how graphics influence conversion rate, so the implication is test.
7. **Remove menu options?** Another guideline that causes disagreement. Removing menu options will often increase conversion rate since less choice of where to click is offered, but for those who don't respond will give a poor experience and prevent them browsing other parts of the site. Often a compromise is best with a reduction in menu options to top-level options only.

8. **Consider using a ‘flowable’ or liquid layout design.** This maximises real estate at a given resolution – Amazon do this; Orange don’t.

9. **Remember search marketing.** There are two aspects of this. Make sure you are using paid search to direct visitors to the relevant pages particularly during the campaign. Don’t create it on a separate standalone domain which the search engines may not index immediately.

10. **Remember the non-responders.** Provide a choice for those who don’t respond despite your carefully crafted landing pages. Provide a reasonably prominent (trackable) phone number or perhaps a call-back/live-chat option. Also provide some options for them to browse or search elsewhere on the site. Explain your proposition.

**Navigation**

Navigation is about connecting visitors to the information and services they need and showing their position in the overall structure, i.e. it should be clear for users when they arrive on any page of the site and as they move around the site:

- Where they are
- What they can do
- Where they can go

An effective navigation should deliver:

1. **Consistency.** The site will be easier to navigate if the user is presented with a consistent user interface when viewing the different parts of the site.

2. **Simplicity.** Sites are easier to navigate if there are a limited number of options, or navigation options are grouped logically together. It is usually suggested that two or possibly three levels of menu are the most that are desirable.

3. **Context.** Context is the use of ‘signposts’ to indicate to users where they are located within the site – in other words to reassure users that they are not ‘lost’. To achieve context, each part of the site and label should have a clear label – the BBC site www.bbc.co.uk has outstandingly clear labels. To help with context, the website designer can also use changes in colour or style to indicate to users which part of the site they are currently using.

Creative types will certainly disagree with this statement, but in the majority of cases, sites will be easier to use and will deliver more value to the customer and business if they follow convention. The exceptions to this rule are brand sites, campaign microsites and sites that need to push the limit of the technology to appeal to youth or technical audiences. In these cases, it is important to stand out from the crowd, or to mirror offline brand creative or to get interactions through rich media such as Flash.
From static Web 1.0 to dynamic Web 2.0 site designs

Relatively static web designs are increasingly being replaced by rich internet applications (RIA) which are part of Web 2.0. Richard Sedley, Director of the cScape Customer Engagement Unit notes that:

“Much web usability best practice has focused on the rules of continuity, orientation and consistency in order to overcome the disorientating effect of linear page reads and refreshes. The use of RIA technologies like Flash and Ajax can overcome this dilemma and in the future usability is likely to concentrate as much on fast moving engaging interaction as it is on slow static continuity.”

Types of navigation

Most websites have several types of navigation. These include:

- **Global navigation** – These are site-wide navigation schemes. Examples for a B2B site are: products, solutions, client and support. They often occur at the top or bottom of a site, but may occur down the side.

- **Local navigation** – More detailed navigation to find elements in an immediate area – for example, products may be broken down further.

- **Contextual navigation** – Navigation specific to a page or group of pages which may be in the body copy or in slots such as related products.

- **Breadcrumbs** – Used to indicate where the visitor is on the site. For an example see: www.davechaffey.com/Internet-marketing. As you navigate around this site you will see, just below the top menu, a list of pages showing where you are and allowing you to easily visit a higher point in the structure. These are so named from the trail of breadcrumbs Hansel and Gretel left in the forest to go back to their house.

- **On-site search engines** – Don’t neglect these since Nielsen’s research shows that 50 per cent of users are “search dominant” (i.e. they make use of a search tool), while 20 per cent prefer to use links (the remainder are not predictable). Search results lists should eliminate duplicates and prioritise the list to help conversion – retailers invest a lot in optimising their sales from on-site searches.

- **Sitemaps** are another type of navigation system where a specific page is set up to navigate to major pages, showing the hierarchy of pages if appropriate.

Consider Millers Law of Seven Plus or Minus Two. This originated from studies in the 1950s which showed that we only had a capacity to remember or act on seven items in a list. This informs much website design, but many of the successful sites have realised this principle can be broken – think of the Amazon, Cisco and Yahoo sites.

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Different marketing-led approaches to navigation

On a customer-facing website, there are a number of alternative approaches to navigation:

- Product-based
- Organisation-structure based
- Visit-based: first time/repeat visitor
- Task-based or need related
- Relationship-based
- Customer/non-customer
- Customer type-based
- Company need
  - Calls-to-action
  - Campaign related
  - Branding

Many companies only adopt one or two of these, with the product-centric or organisation structure common. Often alternative navigation approaches that fit visitors’ behaviours may be missed, such as task-based, relationship-based or customer type-based. It’s a balance between accommodating a range of audience needs and confusing visitors through too many navigation options.

Page template design

The page template design refers to creating an appropriate layout for each page with content grouped into different areas.

From a usability standpoint, for most applications it is important that the main elements of each page, in particular headers, footers and navigation systems such as left, top or right navigation are consistent on each page. Designers use a page template to create this consistency. Most content management systems are based on a defined page template for the whole site, or parts of the site. In the final part of this chapter we see how cascading style sheets are used to enforce this consistency.

When creating the design, wireframes (figure 10.5.5) are used by web designers to indicate the eventual layout of a webpage.

Specific issues that should be assessed when reviewing a proposed page template with an agency are:

- **The use of frames.** This is generally discouraged since it makes search engine visibility more difficult and makes printing and bookmarking more difficult for visitors.

- **Browser resizing and screen resolutions.** A good page layout design should allow for the user to change the size of the browser window or
readily work with different monitor resolutions. This is also known as a fluid or flowable design. It should also work well for the most common screen resolution which is currently 1024 by 768.  

- **Consistency.** Page layout should be similar for all areas of the site unless more space is required; for example, for a discussion forum or product demonstration. Standards of colour and typography can be enforced through cascading style sheets.  

- **Printing.** Layout should allow for printing or provide an alternative ‘printer friendly’ format.

### Content design

Content design refers to the information and services that are available on each page of the site.  

The home page content is particularly important in achieving marketing actions – if the customers do not understand or do not buy into the proposition of the site, then they will leave. Content of high quality is typically:

- Relevant  
- Detailed  
- Clear  
- Accurate  
- Up to date  
- Timely  
- Easy to find  
- Personalised as appropriate

These information characteristics might be boring, but you can have the best design in the world but it will fail the users without the right content. A survey showed that around 70 per cent of consumers who have visited an online store to make a purchase but have left without buying do so due to inadequate information.  

Steve Krug, author of the classic Don’t Make Me Think! reminds us that we must take typical users’ behaviour into account when designing pages:  

1. **We don’t read pages. We scan them.**

**Recommendations:** In navigation bars and headings, use keywords that refer to tasks the visitor needs to do. Use trigger words such as ‘free’, ‘save’ and ‘information’.  

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4 See [http://www.davechaffey.com/Internet-Marketing/C7-Service-Quality/Website-design-usability/Screen-resolutions](http://www.davechaffey.com/Internet-Marketing/C7-Service-Quality/Website-design-usability/Screen-resolutions) for a compilation.  
2. **We don't make optimal choices. We ‘satisfice’**.

In other words, most time-pressed visitors don’t carefully evaluate the options, they choose the first reasonable item – this is satisficing.

**Recommendations:** Feature the actions you want, which will appeal to the user, higher up the content of the page or in menu position.

3. **We don't figure out how things work. We muddle through.**

We don’t scan pages in a particular logical order, so a clear structure will help enforce a logical selection of options.

**Recommendations:** Create a clear visual hierarchy on each page. Take advantage of conventions, break pages up into clearly designed areas, make it obvious what’s clickable and minimise noise.

**User-generated content and participation**

Remember that it’s not just your content that’s important. Richard Sedley, Director of the cScape Customer Engagement Unit notes:

> “Many marketers are so focused on doing their own job that they often forget that their best salespeople are their own customers. Providing a mechanism for allowing your site visitors to recommend something to a friend or even print out a poster to be put up at work can be invaluable when building customer loyalty and site visits.”

So provide ways for users to interact with your site through polls, surveys, RSS feeds and forums as best fits your brand.

**Site style**

The style of a website presents another dilemma for website designers. An appropriate style is difficult to judge for different types of website. Often, fundamental principles of graphic design do not apply, or do they?

I once listened to a consumer on an online panel about banking websites say:

> “We don’t want any pretty pictures – just give us the information.”

Of course, this is at variance with traditional branding for banks which often uses imagery as part of branding. And of course, panellists may ask for one thing, but subconsciously respond to the imagery.

**A brief introduction to web design standards**

A coverage of how websites are built is beyond the scope of this Guide. However, it is worth brief reference since it highlights two key issues of selecting an appropriate solution – cascading style sheets and content management systems. Website content uses different media forming different digital assets. Text information standards include HTML, XML and CSS. These are tag-based markup languages: they reference graphical information standards such as GIF and JPEG and multi-media standards such as Shockwave, Flash and streaming audio and video.
Text information – Hypertext Markup Language

The HTML (Hypertext Markup Language) source code used to construct pages has codes or instruction tags such as <TITLE> to indicate to the browser what is displayed. The <TITLE> tag indicates what appears at the top of the web browser window. Here is a simple HTML snippet:

**HTML code**

```html
<P> This text is <B>bold</B></P>
<P>This text is <I>italic</I></P><BR>
This text is <U>underlined</U>
```

**Browser display**

This text is bold
This text is italic
This text is underlined

Cascading style sheets

Cascading style sheets (CSS) are part of the HTML family and are a powerful tool now used by all professional web designers since they separate the formatting of a website from the content.

For example, when a designer uses a font tag in HTML to change font, they must specify a new set of qualities for the text. CSS typically stores the formatting, like font, size and colour, in a separate place from the content text – the stylesheet file (.css). For example, the HTML code:

```html
<p><font colour="#FF0000" size="2" face="Verdana, Arial, Helvetica, sans-serif">Welcome to our site</font></p>
```

is defined like this within CSS:

```css
p {
  font-family: Verdana, Arial, Helvetica, sans-serif;
  font-size: 12px;
  colour: #FF0000;
}
```

To see what this means in practice visit CSS Zen Garden (http://www.csszengarden.com).

Check how your site designers will use CSS. Careful use of CSS will make it easier to update site style and branding changes.
Creating web pages with content management systems

Selection of content management systems (CMS) used to manage the workflow of edit, review and authorise of web content by staff inside a company is very important if the power of the web is to be fully utilised by that company.

When selecting an agency to redesign a site it is essential that the capabilities of the CMS are part of this review. Trivial content modifications on some websites are still completed by web agencies or by IT departments. This can lead to delays in updating content and also cost more for modifications to be made. It is best if content owners can be empowered to update and review the results of their own content through a CMS.

Persuasive design and copywriting

It can be argued that the user-centred design techniques forming the disciplines of usability and accessibility can sometimes cause us to lose sight of the commercial goals of our site. Simplistically, if we give site visitors free rein, then they are less likely to convert to the outcomes the site owner requires such as registrations, leads or sales. Website design is a substantial investment and we must get our returns from our investments in sites; indeed they are now vital to the sustainability of many businesses.

Persuasive design

This approach to website design popularised by Bryan Eisenberg, a ‘conversion guru’ in his book Call-to-Action has now become more widespread and is now integrated into the services offered by many usability, accessibility and web design agencies.

This approach is important to take your website to the next level. It is important since research shows that conversion rates to sale for new visitors to e-commerce sites are usually sub 10 per cent.

Persuasive design techniques include optimising different aspects of a website design to convert more visitors to outcomes:

- Home page optimisation
- Customer persona and journey optimisation
- Landing page optimisation
- Shopping basket optimisation
- On-site search optimisation
Principles of effective communications

A classic piece of research by Jakob Nielsen (www.useit.com), one of the leading authorities on web usability, showed how we should communicate online when his studies showed that:

- We read 25 per cent more slowly online
- We scan (79 per cent) rather than read (16 per cent)

The implications of this research are to make your copy:

- **Succinct** – cut copy by 50 per cent from print
- **Scanable** – make it easy to see the main headlines when a reader is assessing whether it is worthwhile reading more
- **Skimable** – make it easy to read key parts of the copy such as the start of each element in a bulleted list or the introduction or end of a paragraph
- **Hyperlink** to more detailed copy

Nielsen, and many other commentators, also recommends structuring your copy as an inverse pyramid. This starts with the most important message or conclusion which is often left to the end in formal, scholarly writing.

Hyperlinks stand out! Yet many web designers are averse to using them in body copy since it may spoil the aesthetics of the page. Two practical guidelines on hyperlinks are (1) use action verbs like ‘download’ or ‘register now’, rather than ‘click here’, which is skimmed over; (2) make them longer: ‘I am easier to click’ than ‘me!’ and (3) include target keyphrases in the anchor text for SEO purposes.

We can also use the tried and tested approaches of direct marketing for effective messaging as summarised in the table below:

| Attention | • Which devices are used to attract the prospect's attention?  
|           | • What is the benefit?  
|           | • Is the benefit clear?  
|           | • Does the title (headline) bear any news?  
|           | • To who is the content addressed? |
| Interest | • How many entry points/hooks are there?  
|          | • To what extent is interest achieved by secondary (graphical) elements?  
|          | • Is the price prominent (if relevant)? |
| Desire  | • Is interest synonymous with desire?  
|         | • Does the copy add to the prospect's desire?  
|         | • What role is the copy performing? |
| Conviction | • If the role of the copy is conviction and reassurance, what questions does it answer?  
|           | • What is the main credibility/reassurance device?  
|           | • What part does 'tone of voice' play in the credibility?  
|           | • How does the name of the company affect credibility?  
|           | • What other reassuring elements are there? |
Chapter 10.5: Website design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does the web page follow the AIDCA sequence?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is it easy for prospects to respond?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What payment options are available?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offer</th>
<th>Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is the offer?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the offer strengthened in any way, i.e. incentives?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the guarantee an important component of the offer?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the product proposition strong enough to not require a supporting offer?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positioning</th>
<th>Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How is the product's market positioning conveyed?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is it in the headline or body copy?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is it in the design and font?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Selecting a web design agency

When selecting your website designer(s) you need to match your requirements as defined in the brief to the experience of the designer. For example, not all designers will have experience of building effective e-commerce websites, incorporating marketing advanced functionality or search engine optimisation. Here is our recommendation of an approach:

1) Assemble a list of prospective designers (five to ten) from full-service or specialist web agencies.

2) Always view the designer’s work online. Reputable designers should have links from their site to their portfolio. Does the agency have experience of your type of market?

3) Design a questionnaire asking, for example, how long the designer has been in business; which web services are on offer (graphic design/page layout, copywriting, HTML programming, CGI script, Java/Shockwave, database programming, search other programmes and site updates); banner ad design; site update policy; site performance testing (which browsers, versions and platforms); site verification (links, codes and spelling etc.); promotional services such as search engine optimisation (fees, included in the cost); contact details; working processes (reviews and testing); availability: hosting arrangements; pricing and estimates and, if relevant, multi-media, special features and transaction experience.

4) Request references from previous clients.

5) Ask for bids from approximately three finalists.

6) Meet the prospective designers in their offices to deliver a detailed brief on which a bid for your project can be based.

7) Request a sample contract and confirm your company will own the copyright and the physical ownership (backup disk or hard copy) of the programming code documentation (known as ‘commented’ code because it should include explanatory notes) for the site so you can move the site to another supplier if necessary. See: [http://www.nmk.co.uk/article/2004/02/10/model-contract](http://www.nmk.co.uk/article/2004/02/10/model-contract) for an example.
A detailed website briefing checklist which also covers aspects of digital marketing is shown below:

### Website design and digital marketing agency selection checklist

This checklist summarises the key issues to consider when choosing an agency to deliver digital marketing services. The first three parts of the checklist refer to website design capabilities; section four summarises e-communications issues to consider and section five is overall budgeting.

1. **Meeting the organisation’s objectives**
   To meet the organisation’s objectives, the agency will need to demonstrate:
   - **Understanding of objectives and marketing outcomes**
   - **Creative and communications strategies proposed**
   - **Agency responsive to managing changes**
   - **Previous relevant experience in market or design approaches**

2. **Agency website design expertise**
   These are the main design capabilities for an effective user-centric site:
   - **Clear process**
   - **Information architecture** (quality of site structure maps, search engine optimisation (SEO))
   - **Usability** (quality of prototype wireframes and navigation systems provided, expert review of existing and prototype designs, ability to work with specialist usability partners)
   - **Accessibility** (recognition of importance of accessibility in proposal)
   - **Creativity and branding** (quality of creative examples and portfolio)
   - **Positioning**
   - **Permission marketing**
   - **Persuasion marketing**
   - **Demonstrate measured approach**

3. **Agency technical implementation expertise**
   Evaluation of the infrastructure of website content and interactions:
   - **Quality of content management system (CMS)**
   - **Customer data profiling, data management and database integration**
   - **Creating sites effective for search engine optimisation**
   - **Experience in interpreting, reporting on and acting on web analytics**
1. Experience in creating **transactional e-commerce sites**
   and specific capabilities required, e.g. merchandising, shopping cart
   systems, personalisation and payment gateway systems

2. Process for **monitoring and correcting site hosting** –
   availability and performance

4. **Agency e-communications expertise**

   E-communications are the online marketing tools such as online advertising, search marketing and
   email marketing. The following may not all be important depending on the scope of the digital
   marketing job, but search engine optimisation is a prerequisite for all web design agencies,
   although not all possess this skill:

   **(a) Match of requirements in e-communications proposal to brief:**
   - **Understanding of main objectives and marketing outcomes**
     to be achieved through e-communications
   - **Understanding of subsidiary objectives**, e.g. customer profiling,
     testing and learning
   - **Capability to deliver results** within the timeframe and budget
   - **Attention to detail** in measurement, testing, analysis and improvement

   **(b) Campaign implementation proposal:**
   - **Campaign targeting strategy.** Approaches used to reach target
     audiences with relevant messages
   - **Creative concept and ability to deliver.** Strength of idea and
     how it complements offline executions
   - **Strength of offer and ability of messaging strategy** to
     deliver results
   - **Media selection and scheduling.** Timing and integration of
     different media; reach/frequency balance for interactive advertising
   - **Other issues.** **Testing and research, customer profiling/research
     and compliance with legal requirements.** Ability to partner with
     specialist providers

   **(c) Specific campaign-related e-communications capabilities**

   Usage of the media selected to form the different waves of the campaign:
   - **Interactive advertising.** Specific online experience of online creative,
     media planning and media buying capabilities or ability to partner
     with specialists
   - **Email marketing.** Tools and experience for creating email templates/
     creative, e-couponing, tracking and analysis, broadcasting, managing
     house lists and buying rented lists
   - **Online PR.** Knowledge of online press releases, linking building and
     editorial to build buzz online (if this experience doesn’t exist with
     incumbent PR agency)
   - **Capability to manage or work with partners for traditional
     communications** for integrated campaigns, e.g. print advertising,
     direct mail and in-store
   - **Wireless messaging.** Direct or partnering experience for mobile
     marketing, e.g. SMS text messaging if relevant
   - **Interactive TV.** Direct or partnering experience, if relevant
   - **Digital radio.** Direct or partnering experience, if relevant
(d) Continuous e-communications capabilities:
If the campaign requires a microsite or integration into an existing site, the following capabilities, which are independent of the waves of the campaign, may be important:

**Search engine optimisation experience** (keyphrase analysis, link building and site optimisation)
- **Pay per click search marketing experience** (campaign sizes and networks – Google Adwords, Espotting, Overture). Also use of bid management tools (e.g. Atlas One Point, WSPS)
- **Email marketing.** Continuous email activities are e-newsletters and triggered or event email.
- **Sponsorship.** Ability to create creative or editorial suitable for sponsorship
- **Affiliate marketing.** Experience of working with main networks
- **Viral marketing.** Pedigree from viral campaigns
- **Familiarity with data protection and privacy legislation** governing e-communications

5. **Project management:**
- **Meeting budget requirements.** Are there any costs which are uncontained?
- **Realism of timescales and project timelines**
- **What are the costs for different scales of design or content updates?**
- **What are the fixed monthly costs** for hosting, reporting and search marketing etc?