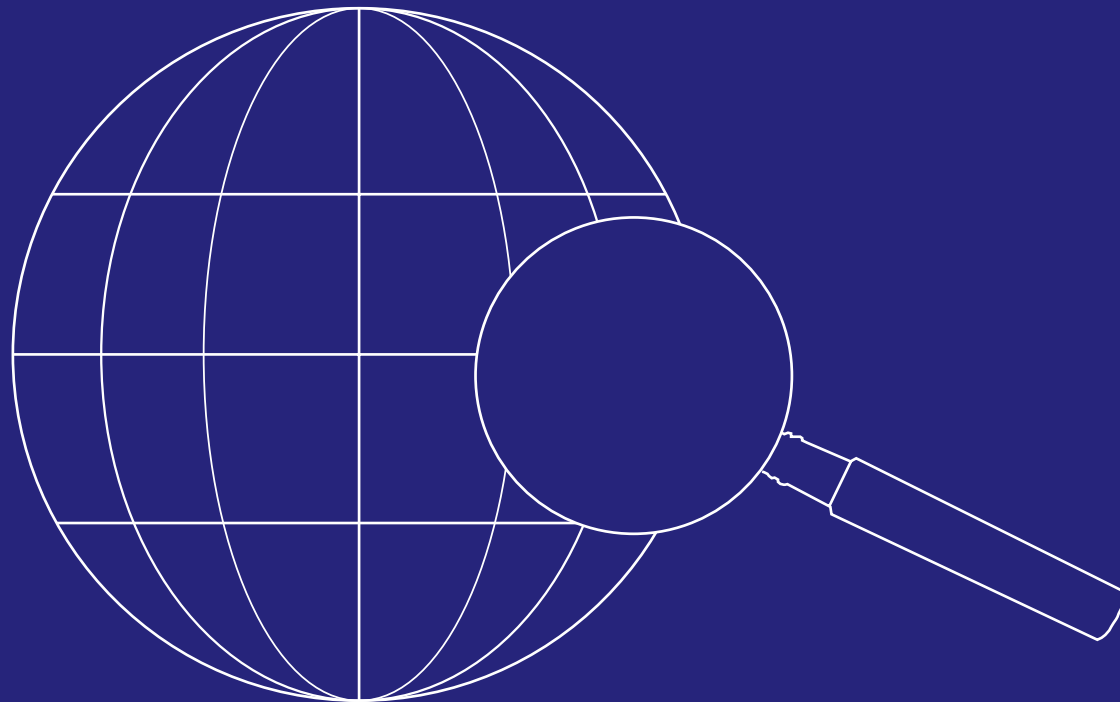


A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO WEBSITES



VISIT
LONDON
[VISITLONDON.COM](https://www.visitlondon.com)

INTRODUCTION

This is one of a series of Beginners' Guidance Notes produced for cultural services officers working in the London Boroughs.

It is part of a programme - run by Visit London with London Cultural Improvement Programme, and funded by Capital Ambition - to develop the marketing skills of non-marketers working in London's local authority cultural services.

For all the guides in this series, case studies and other local tourism resources [click here](#), or click on the coloured boxes opposite.



**VISIT
LONDON**
VISITLONDON.COM

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A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO
**CUSTOMER
RELATIONSHIP
MANAGEMENT**

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO
SOCIAL MEDIA

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO
**MARKETING
EVALUATION**

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO
**PROACTIVE
MEDIA WORK**

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1 UNDERSTANDING WEBSITES

The basics

A website is a versatile, interactive and cost-effective marketing tool with the potential to attract and engage customers from all over the world.

It provides an immediate and interactive platform for publicity, promotions and sales, and can play host to online communication applications such as e-communications, blogs, and social networking.

Successful websites give customers what they need quickly, easily and efficiently. They are the next best thing to connecting with customers in-person.

To make that connection, a website relies on a clever mix of content, imagery, layout, navigation and usability so that customers will feel engaged, motivated and inspired enough to take that next step of reading, searching, recommending, referring, sharing, downloading, commenting, or buying.

The design and functionality of websites is constantly adapting to meet users' needs. More and more people are searching the net via mobile applications as well as using social media channels for their online interaction. It's the sites that keep up with these changes that will continue to deliver the ultimate in website 'user experience'.



Most people use a search engine, e.g. Google, Yahoo, MSN, to help them find what they're looking for. A website has to be well optimised, i.e. good use of key words, terms and phrases throughout the site, in headers and in HTML (design) coding, so that, when users search using a particular word or phrase, e.g. museum events in London, cultural activities East London, sport for kids South London, it will rank within the left-hand natural search results. A high ranking is important as most users tend not to look beyond the first page of results.

You can also invest in search advertising or sponsored links. These ads/links appear on the right-hand side of the search results. They are known as Google AdWords and are only paid for when someone clicks on the ad rather than having to pay for the placing of the ad itself. This can be done for a limited cost: you decide how much you want to allocate to the chosen words.



Websites as powerful marketing tools

'Ten years ago there were just four million broadband subscribers. In 2009, 400 million people are connected, to high-speed internet'. (www.bbc.co.uk/news)

More and more people are using the web to search for leisure activities, what's on, and arts and culture information, e.g. 'the number of searches for *events in London* rose by 750% in 2009' (Google webtrends).



Once created, a website is a cost-effective and interactive way of communicating with customers - and one that can always be current and up-to-date. Powerful images and dynamic web content (that stimulates the user to respond) keep users interested and engaged, and online communications increase customer loyalty and help spread the word to new customers.

Spending online 'could more than double by 2011' (Paypal, Feb 2010) with '60% of online shoppers saying that they will keep returning to a website to buy more if they have a good first experience' (wikipedia).

With the revolution in social media 'word of mouth' marketing, and the rise in sophisticated web applications and ever-more portable ways of interacting with the web via mobiles, iphones and ipads, many businesses are adding Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Flickr apps to their websites to maximise on the 'two thirds of the world's internet population that currently visit social networking or blogging sites' - a trend that is 'growing more than three times the rate of overall internet growth' (Nielsen Wire, March 09).

And, as these social media channels develop, users will seek out more and more opportunities to communicate via the web, e.g. commenting, sharing, posting and blogging.

QUICK REFERENCE

- BBC News - The Web: Vital Statistics <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/8552415.stm>
- Google Webtrends www.google.com/trends
- Wikipedia www.wikipedia.org
- Nielsen Web Trends & Insights <http://en-us.nielsen.com>
- Common Craft - product explanation made easy www.commoncraft.com



2 THE ESSENTIALS OF A GOOD WEBSITE

Who looks after a website?

It depends on the size and structure of an organisation. It could be a full-time web editor or web content manager, or marketing or information officers who feed through content updates and marketing campaigns to internal or external web teams.



A web editor or web content manager plays a vital communication role between the web designers and the marketers.

A web editor:

- Looks after the day-to-day functionality and appearance of a site
- Uploads content & imagery via a content management system
- Uploads e-communications
- Keeps up-to-date with online selling functionality
- Keeps up-to-date with web trends and multimedia application
- Monitors web stats to keep up with visitor hits and customer interaction following online campaigns and promotions.



Many local authorities operate strict corporate communications and corporate design guidelines. They tend to be cautious when it comes to taking on board the latest web trends and applications.

So you may be limited personally in terms of how much of a 'say' you have in the development of online marketing tools and techniques.

But by keeping up with the latest trends, finding and learning from examples of best practice, and thinking through the communications benefits and risks, you should be able to influence and support your corporate communications / website team.

How to get it right

A well-designed website doesn't have to be complicated or high-cost.

Work with web designers on creating a clean, stylish and user-friendly design that gives the right first impression and focuses on key branding elements (content and imagery) that help a user visualise your product.

Here are some basic principles:

- Keep a simple background - white or light colours work best
- Create an easy-to-use navigation structure - important information should be no more than 2 clicks away. Test links daily and in every direction
- 'Don't make me think!' - keep content to a minimum and keep it simple. Readers glance at pages and scan content in an 'F' shape looking for words or phrases that catch their eye
- The top-left hand space is where readers look first - place key information here

- Write for your target audience, not for yourself
- Focus on eye-catching headings and sub-headings, break content up with bullets
- Create content that's compelling, that drives users to explore the site further, and that has a 'call to action'



- Use a conversational style - the web is interactive and involves two people not just one
- A website is your online 'shop window' - focus on well-chosen, professional and quality imagery



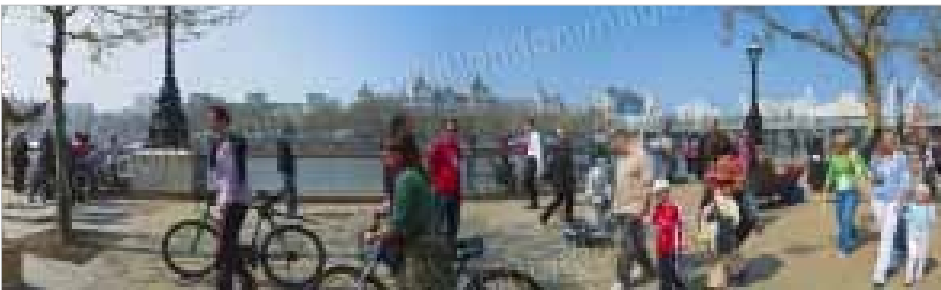
- Make links visible - the visitor should be able to recognise what is clickable and what is not, easily
- Include links on anchor text, e.g. 'You can **book tickets** online' instead of '**click here to book tickets**' - this gives users a clearer message about the link and where it will take them

- Include keywords and phrases for optimisation so that users can find your site quickly and easily. Invest in Google AdWords if budgets allow
- Work on keeping the site 'sticky' - build up customer loyalty with regular e-news that link to updated pages within the site, incorporate a blog and other social media activities, and think about special offers and competitions (see CRM Guide in this series)
- Engage users with podcasts, video and film - link to YouTube as a host service or incorporate professional video-streaming into your site
- Use an Analytics programme to monitor your visitor hits, e.g. Google Analytics
- Keep contact details prominent and easily accessible.



What to avoid

- Aggressive pop-ups, banners, and flash ads - they annoy visitors, can increase the load time of a website, and make the site difficult to use
- Hyperlinks / functionality that doesn't work or leads to the wrong place. Also, out-of-date content - visitors will get frustrated, lose trust in your site and go elsewhere
- Grammatical and spelling errors - readers are thrown by inconsistencies in terminology, spelling and presentation
- Jargon and slang - it makes readers feel excluded
- Failing to tell users when they're downloading a pdf file, it breaks their flow
- Opening new browser windows - it disables the Back button, which is the normal way users return to previous sites
- Not answering users' questions: they are highly goal-driven on the web and the ultimate failure is to fail to provide the information users are looking for.



Invest in some user-testing

Critique your website yourself in 30 seconds (see box), set up a user-testing group of colleagues, or - if budget allows - invest in professional usability services. This allows others to 'critique' the site and looks at it from a potential customer's point of view.



QUICK REFERENCE

- Chambers Desktop Guides - Writing for the Web www.chambers.co.uk
- Don't Make Me Think! - A Common Sense Approach to Web Usability by Steve Krug www.amazon.co.uk
- Jakob Nielsen's website (the 'king of usability') www.useit.com
- Web Accessibility Guidelines on Wikipedia <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Webaccessibility>
- Critique a page in 30 seconds or less www.zurb.com/article/356/critique-a-web-page-in-30-seconds-or-less

3 PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Best practice examples

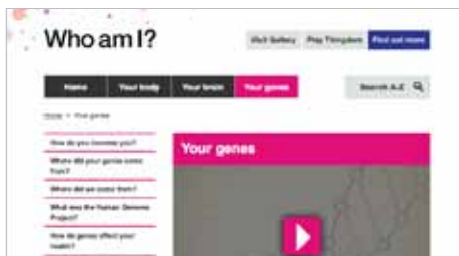
www.sciencemuseum.org.uk

Home page

An uncluttered home page with simple eye-catching main headings so users know instantly where to go next and where they can find what they're looking for

Key visitor information, i.e. opening times and admission information (in its own dedicated box) and main header 'visit the museum' is in prime position in the top left-hand corner where the eye falls naturally first

Colourful, eye-catching imagery (it doesn't have to be big)



Minimum content

Great main headers that all audiences can relate to e.g. 'online stuff', 'visit the museum', 'shop online'

Easy anchor links that change colour when scrolled over

A clear 'sign up for newsletter' message

Headings that immediately call for action, e.g. 'play launchball', 'shop online', 'visit the museum'

Other pages

• 'Stories from the stores' (our collections blog) header and link from the home page leads to the Science Museum blog about the museum's collections. A great way of generating audience interaction and interest

• 'Online Stuff' main page uses easy alphabetical headings and eye-catching images for each museum category

• The 'visit the museum' section incorporates clearly visible black-on-white left-hand menu headings for all essential information, e.g. museum map, getting here, events, special exhibitions etc

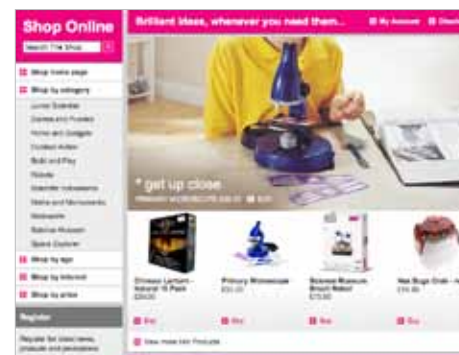
• The main 'Educators' home page heading is an easy link through to more information for teachers

• Shop Online section incorporates an easy to use left-hand menu navigation, i.e. 'shop by category', 'shop by age', 'shop by interest', 'shop by price'

• Minimal text throughout as well as excellent use of quality imagery

• Content uses a conversational tone

• There's a phone number, email address and postal address on the Contact Us page.



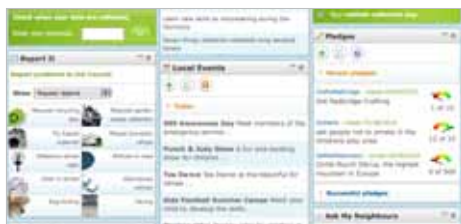
A local authority budget

www.redbridge.gov.uk

Local Government Chronicle award-winning site for website innovation

Home page

- Alphabetical list of council services in top left-hand corner of homepage for easy search by residents
- Distinctive colour-coded areas on the homepage for maximum user-awareness and interaction, e.g. 'check when your bins are collected', 'customise my neighbourhood to show information about your area', and 'find your elected councillors'



- Users can customise these colour-coded areas on the homepage to tailor the information to their needs



- Short, clear headers guide users quickly and easily to the information they need, e.g. 'my councillors', 'my neighbourhood', 'report it', 'ask my neighbours'
- Lots of content 'anchor links' on home page that are highlighted when scrolled over so users can see immediately what information they will be taken to on the site

Minimal content on home page and main pages that guide users quickly to where they need to go

Excellent 'hierarchy' of headings on the homepage for maximum usability

Easy functionality buttons that highlight an instruction immediately when scrolled over, e.g. 'submit your own news', 'view all news', 'upload a picture', 'create a pledge', etc

Uncluttered homepage with lots of white space that help the headings, interactive messages and instructions stand out even more for users.



www.leics.gov.uk/index/community/libraries.htm

Library pages within a larger site

- Distinctive use of colour for main headers on library home page - no extra content to confuse the reader, just clear links to take them to where they want to go next
- Easy to follow main headings, i.e. Your Library, Reading & Writing, News & Events, Children's Zone, Internet & Computing



- Easy navigation on home page, i.e. light background, 'you are here' in top left-hand corner, good use of anchor links
- Minimal content throughout

- Eye-catching 'call to action' main headers/graphics at the top of the page, e.g. 'join the library', 'enquire - ask a librarian', 'read the blog'

- Good placement of 'accessibility' header - see an easy read version of this page - in top-left hand section



- Easy to read blog using excellent headers e.g. 'Whodunnit? - Elementary, my dear listener!' and 'Jane Eyre - Tales behind the tale'
- Lots of customer interaction that helps to keep the site 'sticky', i.e. faces to click on for 'feedback on this page', facebook, twitter and delicious applications, 'bookmark this page' application, and a blog

www.seedysunday.org

A local community event that is spreading throughout the country

- Plain and neutral background colours
- Clear, easy to read main headers and left-hand menu headers on Home Page
- Minimal content on the About Us page with clear headers, e.g. How Seedy Sunday works, Why Swap Seeds?, that link through to more information
- The pages that involve more content, e.g. How Seedy Sunday works, use clear sub-headers so that readers can scan to what they want to read



- Content keeps readers engaged, e.g. 'Where can you find a District Nurse, A Nun's Belly Button, a Lazy Housewife, a Fat Lazy Blonde and a Drunken Woman all in the same room?'
- Colourful imagery throughout.



4 TOP TEN TIPS

1. Keep text short. Remember, 'Get rid of half the words on each page, then get rid of half of what's left' (Steve Krug - Don't Make Me Think!).
2. Check out the 'How to Get it Right' and 'What to Avoid' section in this Guide and apply to your pages/site.



3. How do customers find your pages/site? Do you need to think about optimisation? Or is this handled by a centralised 'web' team - and if so, are you working with them?



4. Ask yourself what you want your customers to do when they visit your web pages/web site, e.g. access events listings, read a blog, become a Twitter follower, download a document. Does the content/navigation make it easy for them to do this?
5. Make sure users can contact you easily. Keep 'Contact Us' information prominent and accessible and include a contact telephone number.

6. Work with web designers on an easy navigational structure so that users know exactly where they are within your pages / website at all times, and so that the navigation doesn't take them away from the site.
7. Work on making a site 'sticky' so that customers will keep coming back. Start collecting your customer data, set up an e-news, incorporate film or video, and think about social media applications that make it easy to interact with user generated content (for more info on Social Media and Customer Relationship Management see the other guides in this series).



8. Consider using testing for feedback on your current web pages/website or if you're re-launching a new site.

9. Are there key branding elements throughout the site that users will recognise and relate back to your organisation or service?

10. Keep an eye on your web stats, they are a good indicator of what's working and what's not.



5

GLOSSARY

Above the fold	What you see on your screen without scrolling
Browser	A web browser, e.g. Internet Explorer, Firefox, Safari, translates web coding into words and images that we recognise
CMS	Content management system - software that allows web editors and administrators to edit, update and publish copy and imagery directly on to a website
Domain name	An official website address
FTP	File Transfer Protocol allows the transfer of files from one computer to another.



HTML	Hyper Text Markup Language - a computer language (coding) used to tag various parts of a web document so that the browsing software picks it up and converts it back to words and images
Hyperlink	A connection between one element of website content and another
IP address	An Internet Protocol address. Every computer has a unique IP address that acts as its name and allows it to communicate with other computers
JPEG	Joint Photographic Experts Group - is an image compression format used to transfer images across computer networks
Keyword	A word or phrase that you type in when searching for information in the search engines
Meta tag	An HTML tag that is used to specify information about a web page and is picked up by search engines
PDF	Portable Document Format - a file format created by Adobe Systems that retains the original layout of a document and allows for easy-sharing and easy-printing



Search engine

An internet service that searches and catalogues online content and helps users to locate and access the content, e.g. Google, Yahoo, MSN

SEO

Search Engine Optimisation helps to drive traffic to a website by selecting and using carefully chosen words & phrases within web content, to be picked up by spiders (see below)

Server

A computer connected to the internet that stores web addresses and pages and delivers (serves) them to other computers that request them

Spiders

Software robots that search engines use to pick up lists of words found on websites

URL

Universal Resource Locator - the address of a webpage that appears in the space at the top of an Internet browser window

Web host

A business that looks after things like registering domain names, storing websites on servers, and making them available to other internet users

Wireframes

Blue prints that show a web page's content & functionality

