

Review your site's content

Overview:

The quality of the content in your site will make more difference to your visitor numbers than any other single factor. Invest as much time as you can afford in researching and generating content.

First check that you have all the essential content in place:

- Products and services: describe them in detail and, if you are in a price sensitive market, make sure all prices (including any delivery costs) are easy to find, not buried on the last page of a long ordering sequence.
- Contact information: email address, enquiry forms, telephone and fax numbers as well as postal addresses are all essential for reassuring new customers.
- About us: company background, memberships, associations and anything else that will reassure visitors that you are a genuine and trustworthy business.

Then review your site for:

- Accessibility
- Freshness
- Personal relevance
- Richness
- Value
- Credibility

Accessibility:

The information is up front and free of marketing blurb and jargon. Your visitors are often under time pressure - some will be paying for internet access and many will be skimming through several sites trying to assess which one meets their needs. Most will make their decision to stay or leave a page within 20 seconds. Make it clear from the outset what is in your site and make information easy to find. Consider offering a search facility if your site grows beyond 100 pages. Remember to allow for users with disabilities - make sure that visually impaired users can access your site.

Freshness:

The information is current and at least some of it is updated regularly - visitors will be encouraged to come back if they can see evidence that there will be new content in the future. Consider putting dates on your pages to show how current they are. The frequency of updates will depend on your users expectations - investors may expect to see updates to a financial site every 15 minutes whilst a site aimed at gardening enthusiasts may need to be updated monthly. Consider having facilities built in to the site to enable you to update the content easily through a standard web browser. Also look at 'renting' content from other companies, for example, Reuters can feed up to the minute news articles into one of your web pages, for a fee.

Personal relevance:

Visitors can influence the site's content to reflect their own interests. There are a variety of techniques for doing this including customisable home pages which show local news and weather reports, online opinion polls, message boards, chat rooms, and space for visitors comments.

Richness:

This means that there is some depth to the information on offer - your site is more than simply a collection of links to other web sites, or marketing blurb. If you don't have the skills in house then consider hiring an expert to write articles or reviews relevant to your users. Consider topics that would appeal to your market such as product reviews, recipes, buying advice, 'how-to' pages or solutions to common problems.

Value: some of the content is useful and may even enable your visitors to save money in some way. This could mean giving away a taster of something that you might normally charge for - a piece of advice, a trade secret, a free sample product or a discount voucher. If you are selling products through your site then remember that it is easy for visitors to shop around on the web - make sure that you are offering a good deal and as good as, if not better than any traditional outlets that you have.

Credibility:

Reassure visitors that your content is reliable. Consider adding customer testimonials, official endorsements, and details of membership of trade associations or quality standards schemes. In a small site simply including a contact name, address and telephone number helps to reassure visitors that the site belongs to a real business.

Improve your content and not only will visitors stay longer but other sites will be more likely to link to yours. This has a knock on effect of improving your site's ranking in search engine results - particularly with Google.