

Warthog Web Design

A Short Guide to Website Development

A successful website is not simply an attractive one. In fact, the appearance of a site has little to do with its success. There are several other factors that are more important than aesthetics.

Never forget that the aim of a visitor is to find your site easily (search optimization), get to your site quickly (short download time), digest the information there (relevant, topical content and good layout/navigation) quickly, make a decision and then get out. He may not do business with you but he will appreciate your site!

1. Content

'Content is King' is a common cliché but is critical to web sites. Content is the reason the site exists in the first place. Visitors hate reading web pages so although the temptation may be there to throw the kitchen sink at every page, resist it and follow Mark Twain's doctrine – 'the only good word is a deleted one'.

Write your copy, relevant to each page and then cut, cut and cut until only what's absolutely necessary to get your message across remains. Don't cut until its meaningless or not persuasive but remove all un-needed words. Every single thing on every web page has to earn its place.

Before you start, make a comprehensive list of key phrases that visitors to whom you are unknown might use to find you. If you have access to web stats, look in there for search terms that people have used to find you. You might be surprised. Divide the list into phrases that you might put on most pages and those that are specific to individual pages and then weave the phrases into the body text.

Use short paragraphs of around 50 words. Wherever possible, use bulleted lists as these are easy to read on a computer screen – again of no more than 7 items (visitors cannot remember more). If it's a long list, write another paragraph in between lists.

Remember that the usual order in which a visitor views a web page is firstly to scan it without reading it, for keywords that he is looking for. Only if these 'pop' out at him, will he actually read the page.

A Resource Area is something we recommend strongly and is basically from one to many pages on your website devoted not to your business directly but to aspects related closely to it in more general ways. It may just be a page of selected useful links or a dissertation on aspects of your discipline.

It has two direct benefits – firstly it shows that you are enthusiastic and care about your trade and secondly, if its good enough, it brings visitors back to your site for general information, which in turn boosts your search rankings.

2. **Graphics**

While text doesn't have any real effect on download time, graphics certainly do. 'A picture is worth a thousand words' is really 'ten thousand words' on the Internet for even a small picture.

In the opposite of print media like newspapers, Internet visitors look first at the body text and only then at the graphics. In any event, its usually text that arrives on the screen first.

Warthog Web Design will design a banner for you that is appropriate, functional and speedy. The body graphics, mainly photographs, is up to you. Choose them carefully and make sure they display aspects of your business in the best light.

Make sure they have adequate contrast – not too much – and good colour. Photos taken against the sun are culprits here. We will crop extraneous detail from the photos where necessary to cut down file size. We also need good size photos as raw material although this is not normally a problem. We will scan and return them to you if you use standard photos. If you have digital photos and are able to reduce their size to around 500 pixels wide please do so and send them as uncompressed .jpgs or .tiffs.

As per point 1), only include those photos that are of adequate standard and that are necessary. If you need to take outside photos, try and take several that can be stitched together into a panorama. We can do this for you or give you instructions. Panoramas tell a much better story than single photos (see www.minivillas.co.za).

Within 100kms of Durban, we are quite happy to come to your site and take whatever photos are necessary for a fixed fee (currently R600.00) plus expenses.

3. **Logos**

A logo will add additional branding to your business and make it easily identifiable. If you do not have a logo, we can design one for you for a small fee.

All our logos are tasteful, professionally done and add a uniqueness to your site. They are designed to be easily identifiable in monochrome as well as colour and able to be reduced to business card size. We create them in vector format that you can give to your printer.

4. **Hosting and Maintenance**

Topicality is one of the reasons people return to websites and its also one of the keys to search engine ranking. 'Last updated in 2001' is not what visitors want to see. If a site is not touched for months, search engines think its been abandoned and stop indexing it.

Whilst the designer can create the basics, the success or failure of a website is largely up to the site owner. Poor content, regardless of any other consideration, turns people away. A website is like a plant – nurture it and it will grow. Stale content turns visitors away.

We offer a plan that includes the following:

- Hosting on either a local or fast German server
- Web statistics on demand including number of visitors, search terms they used to find you, popular/unpopular pages, busy times, etc. etc.
- Set up your own email account
- Automatically forward mail
- Webmail that can be accessed through your browser
- Search word tuning on a monthly basis to improve ranking
- Small updates up to one hour of our time

. . . all from R200.00 monthly.

5. What We Expect from You

We believe that websites can easily make money for you and that the quicker they do that, the better. Accordingly, we expect you to be timeous with the content and graphics. Weeks between communications make it difficult both for ourselves and yourselves.

We also expect you to be interested in your site, offering suggestions and asking questions, not only during it's development but also after. We regard our collaboration with our clients as a long term association, not particularly for our benefit but for their site's and ultimately for them.

6. Our Procedure

- We produce rough layouts, perhaps just in pencil. Hopefully, one or two will be suitable and are then developed into rough colour graphics.
- A final layout is chosen and developed further. It doesn't have to be finished at this point, but nearly so.
- Once the client is happy with this, it is coded into a sample page and placed in a temporary location on the Internet so that you and your colleagues can comment on the site as it proceeds.
- Once download speed has been tested and found to be acceptable and after additional functionality has been added to the banner, real content is added.

- Whilst the above points have been underway, the client establishes what content goes on each page and chooses the photos for each page.
- All the pages are then populated with content and the site is largely complete. Once the client is happy with the interface and the content, we add search cues to the code and complete the META tags.
- We code site initially for Internet Explorer versions 5+ which is over 90% of the browsers used. Our final step is to produce a style sheet for Netscape Navigator 6+ and Opera 6+, which takes care of a further 7% of the market. Should clients wish sites to be fully functional in minority browsers like Konqueror/Safari etc. we will be happy to provide such functionality for additional cost.
- At this point, the site is ready for publishing and we ask that all outstanding fees be paid. Within 24 hours of receipt, your site will be posted to its final location and become 'live' (we shall need all 'ftp details' before this from your present hoster.
- There are always minor teething problems – often with the functionality of forms, which cannot be tested until the site is live – but these are usually sorted out within a few days. Should there be further small changes that occur to you over the next few months, we are more than happy to oblige.

So, there you are. A modicum of application over a few weeks and you can have an effective web presence. Thereafter, a little regular attention and it can grow into something impressive.