

The following is a list of questions we have compiled to help produce a business website that will have a better chance of meeting your requirements and a better chance of gaining good Search Engine rankings.

It is important that all questions are dealt with in order BEFORE construction of your website begins.

1. What will be the main functions of your proposed web site, in order of importance? For example, name branding, information, e-commerce, on-line brochure, newsletter, etc?
2. What are your main objectives for it? For example, to increase efficiency, compete with businesses already on-line, build new customer base, increase geographical area of trading, provide information to customers, etc.
3. Consider the products / services to be provided, then consider your chosen target audience's demographics? For example – business people, consumers, age group, sex, primary spoken language, where are they located geographically, etc.  

This is one of the most important questions in this questionnaire and it is vital that it is carefully considered. Do not proceed further until this has been dealt with.
4. Where and how do you intend to reach your target customers? For example – will people be sent to the website from advertising, customer support, mailing lists, etc. or will you be relying on people finding the site from Search Engines?
5. How many products / services will the website be used for? How will they be paid for and delivered?
6. Are your products / services diverse? If the answer to this question is yes and you intend to use Search Engines for promotion it can be better to have separate websites for each product / service in order to be more successful. Search Engine marketing is extremely targeted.
7. Is there a slogan or catch phrase for your business?
8. What is your USP (unique selling point)?
9. How do you and your products benefit your target audience? Prepare a clear bullet list of benefits. This should form the basis of your homepage.
10. Who are the top competitors websites in the same category as your proposed site?  

These should be studied carefully, especially for their use of keywords.

Carry out keyword searches on the top Search Engines (Google, Yahoo, Bing) and view the results.

Bear in mind that your website is effectively next door to theirs so you should not under any circumstances copy a competitors site style or content.
11. Using all the information you have listed from the foregoing questions, consider 5 main single keywords your customers will use to search for your products. It is better to consider a phrase if possible.  

The more research that is done, the better and that could include carrying out research using your existing customer database and / or general market research. It could also include research of most popularly used keywords on Search Engines, if applicable.

These words / phrase MUST be used throughout the text of your web pages, in graphic tags, page titles and metatags.

**NOTE: THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS CANNOT BE OVERSTRESSED, as it will almost inevitably mean the difference between success and failure on Search Engines.**
12. Write a 5-word description of your business that will be displayed as the main title and used in search engine submissions. This must contain your two main keywords at the start. (This should also be done for each page on your website.)
13. Write a 25-word description of your business that will be displayed as the main description - this may be used by Search Engines. This must contain your five main keywords. No word to be used more than twice. (This should also be done for each page on your website.)
14. What are the targets for your website to achieve over the first 24 months? If you do not set realistic targets your have nothing to measure success or failure against. Your expectations may not be achievable – without planning you will not find this out.
15. Define the criteria that will determine if the web site is a success (i.e. Internet orders of a certain volume, decrease in customer service costs, increase in productivity). There should be a method to track and determine success. This planning will determine the number of visitors you need to your website and will determine the measures needed to promote it. This must be considered over a period of at least one year in most cases.
16. Simply putting up a web site and submitting to Search Engines is not marketing. It should only be one part of an overall campaign.
17. Have you determined any specific short-term goals for the web site? Bear in mind that using normal submission, it can take a few months before new websites start to appear on Search Engines and usually longer before a reasonable amount of traffic is established. You should prepare a short-term promotion plan if required. This could include pay-per-click advertising, local advertising, etc.
18. Are there any specialist directories or sites you want to submit to that are specific to your business or industry?
19. Do you have a domain name (s)? It can be beneficial for your domain name to include your main chosen keyword if Search Engine promotion is required. Therefore your business name is not always best for this purpose unless it includes this main keyword.

NOTE: The purchase of a domain name can be a minefield and professional advice should be sought. Avoid using a domain name for Search Engine promotion that is set up as a "click through" domain to a website address.

Always ensure the domain is pointed directly a name server.

ALWAYS ENSURE YOUR DETAILS ARE USED DURING THE REGISTRATION PROCESS.

20. How many times per year do you anticipate updating the web site? (Your site should always have up to date information.)
21. Prepare a site map for your website and when considering page names, make sure they contain keywords, if possible. A site map web page can help with Search Engine ranking as well as being useful for customers.
22. When preparing the marketing text for your website pages make sure it spells out benefits to customers and contains your main keywords. This is particularly important on the home page. Do not be tempted to include misspellings to fool Search Engines - it doesn't work and looks highly unprofessional.
23. When considering the layout of your website pages bear in mind that graphics should be used sparingly on the home page. All graphics must be optimised for speed of loading - some Search Engines may not list slow loading websites highly and visitors don't like them.
24. Do not consider an all graphics or Flash homepage if the site is to be promoted on Search Engines. High quality marketing text containing your main chosen keywords should always be included. Do not under any circumstances consider a "splash page" that says .... "Welcome to our website - click here ...." These are completely useless for Search Engine promotion and serve no purpose for customers either.
25. Consider how you want the site to look and how visitors will navigate through it. It should act like a funnel to get customers to a contact or purchase page. Choose a simple color scheme - a white page background with dark surround and black or very dark colour Arial or Verdana font text is best for most business sites as it is easiest to read (don't use large fonts, all bold or all uppercase except to highlight). Your website must be easy for visitors to read and navigate - always consider this ahead of fancy layouts. Avoid background graphics and watermarks if possible - they can slow down page loading and sometimes look poor.
26. For all images (and other materials) to be used you must own the copyright or have written permission to use the materials on the web site? You should check with the owners to avoid copyright violations. Companies regularly use Search Engines to check if anyone is using their copyrighted material and you could be sued if you use material without written permission.
27. What level of hosting and features will be required? For example if forms are required a CGI facility is needed.
- Choice of web host is very important - check the type and location of servers. The best hosts offer server uptime of 99.5% or better (remember 1% downtime per year = 3.65 days your site may be off-line). Remember - if a Search Engine visits your website and it is off-line it could be dropped from their index until they visit again.
- Good, graphical statistic packages are also important.
- In our opinion free hosting services are not suitable for a business website and with very cheap services you may not get the facilities required.
28. If you have an existing web site what are the problem areas with it (if any) - poor performance, graphics, load time, design, etc.?
29. List and gather any existing materials and information to be used (including but not limited to):
1. Photos
  2. Text
  3. Brochures
  4. Business cards
  5. Flyers
  6. Product photos
  7. Press releases
  8. Price and part lists
  9. Frequently Asked Questions
  10. Shipping and handling charges and constraints (essential)
  11. Warranty policy (essential)
  12. Privacy policy (essential) - every site that gathers information from visitors must have this.
  13. Terms of business policy (essential)
  14. Guarantees (essential)
  15. Customer testimonials and endorsements (Very important)
  16. Certifications
  17. Awards and Industry recognition
  18. Membership of professional organizations
  19. VAT number (UK sites)
  20. Case studies
  21. Map and directions from major airports, recommended places to stay nearby (if people visit your business)
30. What contact details will be displayed on your website. Note - Your business name and address should be clearly displayed on the front page of your site.
1. Name:
  2. Address:
  3. Phone:
  4. Fax:
  5. Free phone:
  6. E-mail addresses:
  7. International office:
31. What are your hours of operation, and days closed?
32. Do you want a survey form to gather information from your customers or website visitors? If so, consider questions to ask?
33. Do you require a newsletter or blog to keep your customers up to date?
34. Do your customers have buying seasons? Does the site need to be changed for each season? What will you do to entice customers in off seasons?
35. Define the process by which the web site will be integrated into the business on a daily, monthly, quarterly and yearly basis. Appoint someone to be responsible for managing each aspect of the web site once it is complete - for example e-mail management, system maintenance, new content, testing forms and shopping carts regularly, marketing, etc. This is very important.

**You are now in a position to start designing the actual content of your website!**