



**Fáilte Ireland**

National Tourism Development Authority

# **GETTING THE MOST FROM YOUR WEBSITE**

Best practices and tips on building and running an effective website

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# Introduction

This guide is about how to ensure your website is designed in the best way possible to ensure you get relevant traffic to the site and visitors are doing what you want them to do (e.g. book a hotel room).

## Skill Level

**Basic**
**Inter**

The majority of the topics in this guide are suitable for anyone who has basic PC knowledge. Towards the end of the guide there are a few more advanced topics that are more suitable for intermediate users.

## Terminology

You will come across the following terminology in this guide which you need to be familiar with:

Term	Explanation
Onsite SEO	Onsite SEO (Search Engine Optimisation) is a process of optimising your website to ensure you have the best chance of it being indexed correctly on search engines such as Google.
Landing Page	A landing page is a page on your website where visitors land.
Opt-In Page	An Opt-in Page also known as a squeeze page is a landing page designed to collect user details on a voluntary basis. For example, getting users to sign up for a newsletter.
Navigation Breadcrumbs	For a website when you talk about breadcrumbs you are talking about the navigation. When you are on a page you can see what pages you visited to get to this page. This helps with navigation.
URL	A URL stands for Universal Resource Locator which is basically the address of a web page.

## Video Tutorials



Indicates a video tutorial. Click on the icon to watch the video. These videos demonstrate how to carry out a particular task. In order to watch the video tutorials in this guide, you will need to have Adobe Flash Player v9.0.28 or above installed on your computer.

**Note:** When you go to watch the video, a check is done to make sure you have the correct software installed. If you do not have the correct version installed you will be provided with a prompt to download and install the correct version.

## Overview

How websites are being designed now are a lot different than several years ago and this is mainly related to how Internet user behaviour has changed. Internet users are less patient, have very little time and are not interested in you broadcasting your message in a promotional style. How you communicate has fundamentally changed as a result of the growth of social media and this needs to be reflected in your website design. You don't necessarily have to completely redesign your website but you do need to be aware of the significant changes online.

This guide goes through the following sections to outline what has changed and how you can take advantage of these changes.

- Design of your Website — simplicity is key for your website, it needs to be easy to navigate, very good content, visually appealing and engaging.
- Calls to Action — all the pages on your website and in particular your home page need to have clear calls to action which clearly outline what you want a visitor to do. You want them to take action, for example, book a hotel room. The design of your website needs to take these into account.
- Advertisements & Landing Pages — when you advertise online and you direct visitors to your website it's important that you direct them to a page which is very relevant to the advertisement they clicked on. This is known as a landing page.
- Measuring /Testing your Website — before you start making any changes to your website you first need to know how it is performing at the moment, so that if you do make changes you can measure how the changes have improved the website's performance.
- Social Media – the way we communicate to people online has changed and social media needs to be considered in how we deliver content, how we encourage sharing and discussion and how we take advantage of this.
- Maintaining your Website — keeping the content on your website up to date and fresh is vital to the success of your website. Using a content management system on your website can make this process much easier.
- Domain Name and Hosting — quite often the domain name you choose (.ie, .com) and the location of the company you choose to host your website can have an effect on the success of your site

## Basics of Good Website Design

All the pages on your website, and in particular your home page, contributes to the visitor's first impressions of you and your company, so you need to make a good one. Your overall design, the colours, the layout and any images you use should all help to get across the impression you want to make.

You also need to make sure your website is quick to load as people are impatient and if your website takes more than a couple of seconds to load then they will lose interest and go off to another site. For example, a gorgeous looking website that has too many high quality images takes a longer time to load than one with less images, especially for those with slower internet connections.

So if your home page loads fast and looks good to 99% of your visitors, more of them will stay and browse around, and you are already well ahead of many of your competitors.

Following the tips and suggestions in this section will help you keep more visitors on your site longer, which in turn will give you more opportunities to convert them into customers.

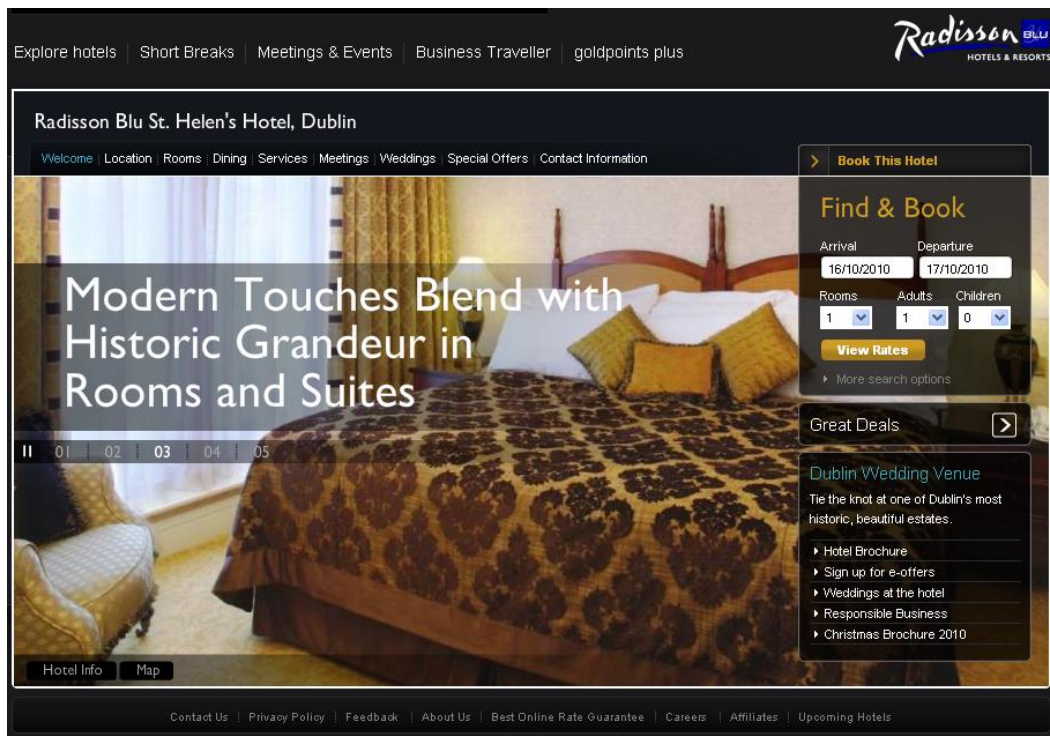
### Create an Effective and Attractive Homepage

Even though visitors can enter your website from any page, the majority of visitors will access your website via the homepage. Your homepage therefore plays a critical role in giving that first impression, and helps them decide whether they want to stay or leave your website.

If your home page does not catch the user's attention, your other pages will never be seen, so it's worth spending some extra time on the design and layout of your home page.

Your homepage should not have too much information cluttered together; making it difficult to read and know what is happening. You would not want to "scare" away any potential visitor the moment they enter your homepage and are bombarded with tons and tons of information. The key is simplicity.

The Radisson Blu website is a good example of a simplistic website. The homepage for each hotel is simple and all the information you need is within easy reach, via the menus at the top and the bottom. The main background photo rotates between various images of the hotel letting me know what they do and giving me an immediate feel for the style and facilities of the hotel. And if you want to book the right hand menu enables you to view rates or look at the latest deals, and so on.



A typical user will spend, on average, about 5 to 6 seconds on any web page so you quickly have to capture their attention. What you typically want them to see is:

- Company Identity (Logo & Headline) - top left is the standard position for this.
- Tag line explicitly summarizing what you do
- What you offer that is of value to them
- How your product/service is different
- How to dig deeper to find specific items
- Special offers, promotions and more benefits

**TIP:** One good way for getting ideas when creating or improving your homepage would be to visit other websites that are similar to your own: put yourself in the shoes of potential visitors; would the manner in which the information is displayed (layout) on these websites help you achieve your objective?

There are a few key goals you need to think about when deciding what to put on your home page.

**Goal 1: What is this website about?**

This is the most important job of any home page. If you fail to answer this question within 3 seconds you will leave new visitors in the dark. If you don't do a good job of answering it, the user will feel dumb, leave, and never come back. Don't be afraid to use good old fashioned text to say: "This is who we are, and this is what we're about."

**Goal 2: Get them to take action**

Once the visitor has figured out what you do and are interested enough to have a further look then you need to get them to take some action. These are referred to as "Calls to Action". For more information, see "Use Calls to Action" on page 18.

**Goal 3: Show them what's new**

Your homepage also needs to cater for the familiar visitor, that is, the users who already know what they're doing. They have been to your website before and already know what you do and are only interested in what's new. Once a user has discovered what you do, and then comes back to your website you need to make it worth their while and give them something new. Maybe you could suggest places on your site to visit, galleries, pictures of recent events held at the hotel, up and coming special offers or events that may be of interest. Blogs are especially good for this as it is constant fresh content and the newest articles are always displayed first.

**Goal 4: Provide consistent, reliable navigation**

This is a site-wide goal, but it's important to list here because the expectations you set on the home page will carry forward to every page on your site. It's the little things that count here. If a link is in the global navigation on the home page, it should be in about the same place everywhere. If there are six links in the footer, those six links should appear in every footer.

**TIP:** Provide a link to your home page from every page of your website, and from the home page provide a link to every section of your website. You don't need to link to every page from the home page, that may be impractical or even impossible.



## Easy to Use Navigation

Website navigation should be so user-friendly that it takes only a few seconds to figure out how to get from here to there. Give them previews and basic good navigation.

Navigation should be easy for any visitor to your site; it helps them know where to look for what they want with just a simple glance. For example, common links to pages within your website such as "About Us", "Contact Us", "Help", "FAQs", "Terms and Conditions", should be placed in such a manner and position that is easy to locate.

The three things your visitors need to know are:

- Where am I?
- Where have I been?
- Where can I go now?

For the home page, that means you should be providing a preview of your service or product, with text links to encourage exploration. Once they start to browse around here are some techniques you can use:

- Use headers or breadcrumb links to show the current page. Breadcrumb links are just a collection of links which show you the path you followed to get to the page you are on.
- Use color to distinguish between visited and unvisited links.
- Provide logical, consistent navigation. Whether you decide to have a menu on the top or on the left, make sure it is the same on all of your pages. Don't make your potential customer have to figure out your navigation scheme more than once.

***Keep them on your website - Don't send them away with links that go off to another website. Text ads and link exchanges on your home page often help others far more than they help you.***

## Make Text Easy to Read

When people are searching for information online they tend to skim over a page quickly to see if the page contains what they want. So make your pages easy to skim with small paragraphs, putting the most important idea at the beginning of the paragraph.

Other tips include:

- High contrast — black text on a white background is easiest to read. But in general any dark coloured text on a light background is better and much easier to read than light coloured text on a dark background.
- Short paragraphs — use short paragraphs with approximately 3 or 4 sentences in each. Use bold or different coloured headings for each paragraph to make it easier for people to see at a glance what the paragraph contains.
- Spacing — don't be afraid to use blank space (also known as white space) between sections and paragraphs of text. White space provides a balance between your sections and other design elements and makes your web pages easier on the eye.
- Columns — use columns because they are easier to read than text that flows across the entire screen. 2 or 3 column designs are the most common.
- Use bulleted lists where it's appropriate.
- Use Headings where appropriate. A heading on the page stands out a bit more and is also used by the search engines to work out what the page is about.

The following are some examples of how the text on websites can look.

This website provides a lot of information, however, it is difficult to read and doesn't help me to decide where to go next. The text is also small and the coloured backgrounds don't aid readability.



The screenshot shows the 'manoradventure' website. The header features a navigation bar with links for Family Holidays, School Trips, Adventure Jobs, and Contact Us. Below this is a large banner for 'Activity Holidays in England, Wales, Scotland and France' with images of children participating in various activities. The main content area is divided into two columns. The left column is for 'Culmington Manor, Shropshire, England', and the right column is for 'Le Château du Broutel, Somme, France'. Both columns provide detailed descriptions of the facilities and activities offered, including residential school activity holidays, family activity holidays, and various outdoor sports like climbing, canoeing, and archery.

Whereas this website makes better use of white space and shows quite clearly where to click and what will happen if you do click. Because of this you can skim the page quickly and find exactly what you are looking for.



The screenshot shows the 'Rock UK' website. The header includes a navigation bar with links for ABOUT US, ROCK STARS, DIRECTORS, JOBS, VOLUNTEER, PARTNERS, and NEWS. Below this is a large banner image of a child climbing a rock wall. The main content area is divided into three columns. The left column is for 'CHOOSE A LOCATION' and features a map of the United Kingdom. The middle column is for 'ROCK UK LAUNCHES 5TH CENTRE!' and features a photo of a child climbing. The right column is for 'BURSARY PLACES' and features a photo of children in a canoe. The website is designed with a clean, modern layout and clear navigation.

## Help them find what they want...quickly

People expect to be able to quickly and easily find the information that they want. If your website has more than a dozen or so pages, then you should provide a search function that they can easily find and use. There is no need to label your search box, as an empty field and a button that says 'Search' is clear. It is also very useful to find out what people are interested in and based on this you can change your website to reflect this.

**Search Tools:** *Google provides a search facility that you can add for just searching your site. The big advantage of this tool is that you can track what people are searching on within Google Analytics.*

## Consistent Layout & Colour Scheme

If your visitor clicks a link and goes to a page that looks like it belongs to another website they may get confused or irritated. They may even assume that they have left your website and not even bother to read the content to see if they did or not. If you're lucky, they will click 'back' and try again, if you're not they will click 'close' and you'll never see them again.

Try and use pleasant colour combinations that are appropriate for the type of website you are building. It is generally a good idea to keep a website to about 3 colours, and these colours should "work" together. You should also look at the colours you are already using in your existing marketing material, such as, business cards, brochures, and so on. Your website is a huge part of your brand identity.

**Research:** *Visit other sites in your industry and observe how they have used colours on their site, once there, ask yourself how you feel about the site; is it attractive, fresh, pleasant, overbearing, dull, what would improve the site, what changes would you make if it were your site and so on.*

## Links to Content

Throughout your website you will have many links to other content to help the visitor find what they are looking for. For example, on your dining page you may mention the various restaurants and bars where your guests can eat and provide a link to each for more information.

Most websites use what are called "link cues" to draw the reader's attention to the fact it is a link to something else. For example, the most used link cue is underlining and colours (e.g. blue text for links and dark blue or purple for a visited link), to let people know it is a link. Other websites use actual text, such as "click here" to indicate a link.

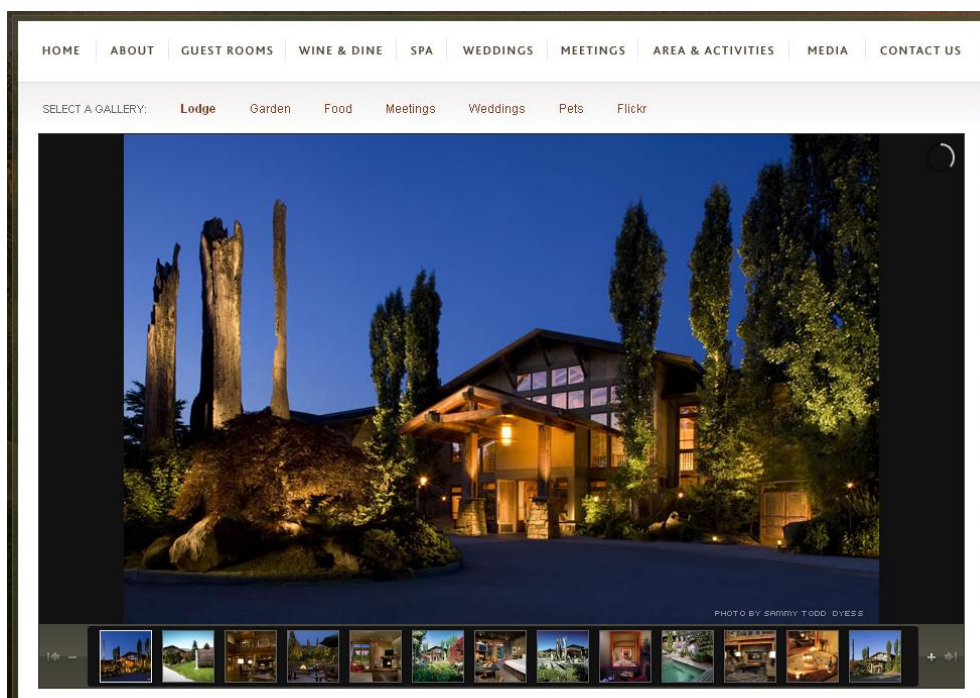
Whether you choose these more conventional link cues or if you use a different scheme altogether, make sure that it is still easy to identify as a link and use the same scheme throughout your website.

***Use underline to a minimum - Don't underline too much text on your pages as it can be very distracting and make the text difficult to read.***

When you are linking to relevant pages make sure you use appropriate anchor text. So for example, if the page was showing details of the attractions in the local area you may have a link to book accommodation. The words 'book accommodation' would be the anchor text, when you click on these words it brings you to the web page. This is important from a Google point of view as it gives more importance to the page you are linking to based on the terms you are using to link to it.

## Using Images

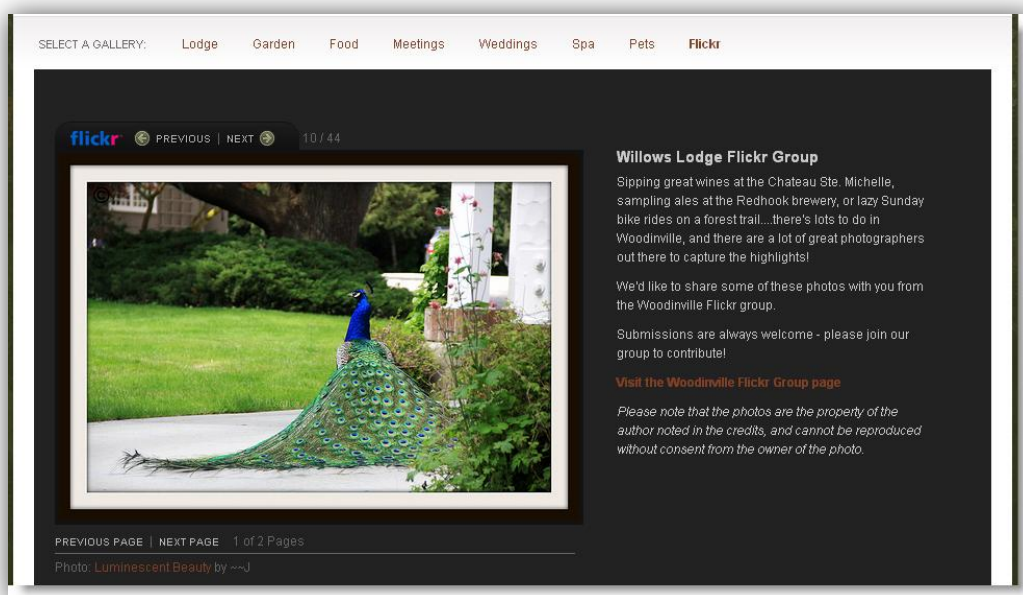
Images are very engaging and are a great way to capture people's attention. Especially with the tourism industry images are essential to give potential visitors a true feel for what they might experience if they come to your establishment. The best, and most common, way to present these images on your website is via a gallery, where visitors can browse through all the pictures at ease. Here is a perfect example of how this may look.





While images are great you also have to consider the fact that images can be quite large in size and therefore can take a long time to download. Here are a few tips on how you can minimise the impact of this on your website:

- Apart from on your gallery pages, use images sparingly, and only to enhance the visitors' experience. Don't use images that serve no purpose other than to 'look cool'. If you want to use images make them a useful and meaningful part of your content.
- Too many images make a page load slowly, especially on the home page. So be very selective about what to show on your home page.
- If you have to use images make sure to get your web designer to compress (or crunch) them so that they are as small in size as they can be without losing any quality.
- Make sure the file names are descriptive and they are 'tagged' correctly. Tagging is a way of naming the image so Google can understand what it's about. For a picture the tag is called an 'Alt tag'.
- If you have a gallery of images for your hotel, guesthouse, or cultural centre, consider hosting the images on a photo sharing site such as Flickr. This reduces the load on your own site as the images do not need to be downloaded to be viewed. Here is an example of a website that has used Flickr for some of the images on their website.



- Do not use bitmaps (BMPs) for your images as they tend to be very large. For images where colour is important (such as photographs) use JPEGs, for all other images such as buttons, advertisements, and so on, use GIFs or PNGs.

## Help Search Engines Find You

Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) is a process of ensuring that your content is indexed correctly on the search engines. You can perform onsite and offsite optimisation. Onsite optimisation is making changes to your site to improve how your content is indexed.

For more information, see the Search Engine Optimisation training guide that is part of this series of guides.

## How long does it take to load?

Design your pages so they will load as fast as possible. All of your pages should load fast, but the home page should load fastest of all.

As a rule, every page on your website should load in fifteen seconds or less on a 56k connection. Much more and too many people won't wait, they'll just click away and all the work you put in to get them there is wasted.

**Test Your Load Time:** Check your load time with these free online tools: [netmechanic.com](http://netmechanic.com) and [websiteoptimization.com](http://websiteoptimization.com), they will give you an idea of what your visitors are experiencing.

To reduce the size of your pages:

- Use a minimum number of pictures and for the ones you do use make sure they are the correct format.
- Minimise on the Flash – Flash is a multimedia format which can look great but can be very big in size so limit its use.
- Besides having pictures there can be a lot of other items which are images that may be used on your site that will add up the size of the page. For example, your menu items could be images, the boxes which surround elements of the page could be images. Use the tools mentioned above to see the size of all images and then discuss with our web developer/designer.

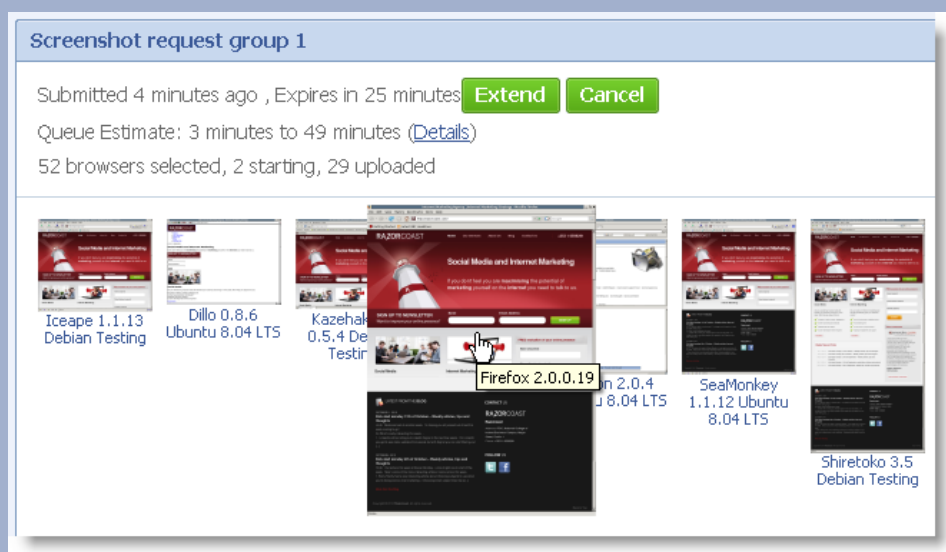
## Look the Same on all Browsers

Your visitors are using a wide range of operating systems, different browsers and at different screen resolutions. Testing how your website looks on all of the possible setups and combinations is virtually impossible. However, that does not mean that you can ignore the differences.

You should at least test how it looks on the top browsers before going live. To do this you will need to install the browsers on your machine. The most used browsers are Internet Explorer, Firefox, Chrome and Safari so at a minimum test these.

**Test Your Live Website:** After your website has gone live, there are some free tools that can help you see how it works on different systems.

See how your design looks with [browsershots.org](http://browsershots.org). Simply enter the web address of your site and tick all the browsers (and versions) you want to test your site with. As the test is run you need to refresh the page to see screenshots of your website on the different browsers you selected.



Another site that does something similar is [anybrowser.com](http://anybrowser.com).

If a web page is completely cross-browser and cross-system compatible, it will look more or less the same for all of your visitors.



## Works on the mobile device

More and more customers will be using their mobile device to access your content. At a minimum you should make sure that your content loads correctly on a mobile browser such as the Safari browser on an iPhone. If you have budget then having a mobile specific site can be very useful.



## Use Calls to Action

A call to action is a specific request to a visitor to your site, for example, Book Now. You are getting them to do something. Typically you will have a primary call to action which tempts the visitor into completing the most desired action e.g. Book a room. However, if they are not willing to book maybe they will sign up your newsletter or become a fan on Facebook. At least then you have got their details so you can continue to market to them.

Having an effective call to action is an essential part of any website. A call to action is not just limited to ecommerce sites. Every website should have an objective it wants users to complete whether it is making a booking, filling in a contact form or signup for a newsletter.

A call to action provides...

- Focus to your site
- A way to measure your sites success
- Direction to your users

There are also different levels of calls to action.

- Primary — there is generally only one primary call to action on each page and this is the ideal one you want your visitors to take. This is the one that needs to stand out the most and generally is the one that you will want to include on every page on your website. For example, make a booking.
- Secondary — you can have a few secondary calls to action on a page and these are the ones that you want visitors to be drawn to next if the primary call to action fails to catch their attention. These can sometimes support the primary call to action by directing the user to more information that may help them make the decision to take the primary call to action (e.g. Special Offers).
- Tertiary — this is the final level and includes all other calls to action that try to get the user to give you their details so that you at least have the opportunity to market to them in the future. For example, signup for newsletter, follow us on Facebook, and so on.

How then do you create an effective call to action? Here are some techniques which will help you achieve just that.

### ***Have a small number of distinct actions***

It is important to be focused in your calls to action. Too many and the user becomes overwhelmed. Studies have shown that if shoppers are presented with too many varieties they are less likely to make a purchase. By limiting the number of choices a user has to make reduces indecision, so effectively you guide the user around the site step by step.

### ***Use active urgent language***

A call to action should clearly tell users what you want them to do. Use language that suggests urgency ("book now", instead of "reservations"). They should include active words such as, Book, Call, Buy, Register, and Subscribe. All of these encourage users to take an action.

To create a sense of urgency and a need to act now, these words can be used alongside phrases such as:

- Offer expires March 31st
- For a short time only
- Book now and receive a free gift

### ***Get the position right***

Another important factor is the position of your call to action on the page. Ideally your primary call to action, and if possible your secondary calls to action, should be placed high on the page. This is also known as "above the fold" which means position it on the page so that users will always see it regardless of what screen resolution they are using.

***Common Monitor Resolutions:*** As more and more people are now using laptops rather than PCs the most common screen resolution is still 1024 pixels wide by 768 pixels tall.

### ***Use white space***

It is not just the position of your call to action that matters. It is also the space around it. The more space around a call to action the more attention is drawn to it. Clutter up your call to action with surrounding content and it will be lost in the overall noise of the page.

This website shows just how effective sufficient whitespace is. Even with a small and plainly-designed call to action button, it still stands out because of the space in between its adjacent elements.



### *Use an alternative colour*

Colour is an effective way of drawing attention to elements, especially if the rest of the site has a fairly plain palette. Deciding what colours to use for call to action buttons is very important. Use colours in your call to action buttons that have a high contrast relative to surrounding elements and the background because it is critical to ensure that the user notices your call to action.

This website sets its bright yellow "Learn More" call to action button above a greyscale image. Even with a simple call to action button design on top of a complex element (a photo in this case), it still stands out because of the colour choice.



Of course never rely solely on colour because many users are colour blind and will not see the contrast.

### *Make it big*

We have already established that position, colour and white space are important, however, size does play a large part as well. The bigger your call to action, the more chance it will be noticed.

Mozilla have certainly taken this approach to heart on the Firefox homepage where their download link dominates the page.

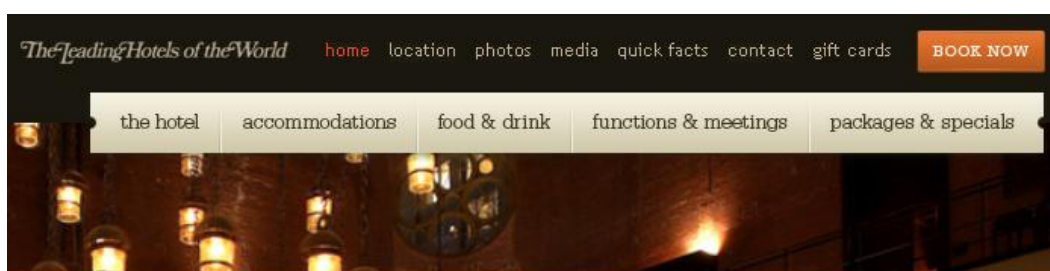


Mozilla uses size to draw attention to their call to action.

### ***Have a call to action on every page***

A call to action should not just be limited to the homepage. Every page of your site should have some form of call to action that leads the user on. If the user reaches a dead-end they will leave without responding to your call. Your call to action does not need to be the same for each page. Instead you can use smaller actions that lead the user towards your ultimate goal.

For example, this hotel has their Book Now button in the header so that it is visible on every page.



### ***Offer a little extra***

Sometimes you may have to sweeten the deal to encourage users to complete a call to action. Incentives could include discounts, entry into a competition or a free gift.

### ***Carry the call through***

Finally, consider what happens when a user does respond to your call to action. The rest of the process needs to be as carefully thought through as the call to action itself.

***Too much information:*** If you require users to provide personal data about themselves, resist the temptation to collect unnecessary information. Even though collecting demographic information can be very valuable from a marketing perspective, you don't want to run the risk that users will drop out of the process.

## Landing Pages

In marketing terms, a landing page is a specialized page that visitors are directed to once they've clicked on a link, usually from an outside source such as a Pay Per Click ad. The page is usually tightly focused on a particular product or service with the aim of getting the visitor to buy or take some form of action rapidly that will ultimately lead to a sale.

### ***Landing Page Guidelines from Google Adwords***

*Read the following guidelines from Google Adwords*

<https://adwords.google.com/support/aw/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=46675>

A landing page is an opportunity to seal a deal. For this reason, creating the right one is crucial to any campaign. The effectiveness of a landing page is measured by its conversion rate, meaning how often people who visit the page do whatever it is you want them to do. You may want them to order a product, sign up for your services, register for a newsletter, or just fill out a form. The goal is to get the highest percentage of your visitors to take the desired action.

### ***Is a Squeeze Page / Opt-In page the same as a Landing Page?***

*Squeeze pages (also referred to as opt-in pages) are a specific type of landing page created to get email addresses from prospective subscribers. They are generally used when employing email marketing techniques or when you want to get people to sign-up for something, such as, a newsletter. For more information on squeeze pages see the "Email Marketing" guide.*

Here are a few examples of ways that landing pages are used with various traffic sources:

- Traffic is sent from a pay per click (PPC) search marketing campaign (such as Google AdWords) to multiple landing pages optimized to correspond with the keywords the searcher used.
- Traffic is sent from a banner ad or sponsorship graphic to a landing page specifically designed to address that target audience.
- Traffic is sent from a link in an email to a landing page designed to prompt a purchase.

The following shows a landing page for a London hotel after clicking on an advertisement for Week-end break in a London hotel.

This is not the hotels home page it's a specific page set up for the advertisement with only one button available which is 'book now'. This will achieve much higher conversions than just bringing people to the home page.



The screenshot shows a landing page for 'The Landmark LONDON'. On the left is a photograph of Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament at night, illuminated. On the right, the text reads:

### Capital City Weekend Break

Experience London without breaking the bank. Capital Weekend is a simple but wonderful combination for your ideal city break in London - a spacious luxurious guest room at The Landmark London and traditional English breakfast in the stunning Winter Garden restaurant. To make your weekend even more special, a bottle of chilled Champagne delivered to your room.

London is unquestionably one of the most exciting cities in the world and The Landmark London is in an ideal location for everything there is to see and do.

**Includes:**

- Luxurious guest room
- Traditional English breakfast in The Winter Garden Restaurant
- Bottle of chilled Champagne delivered to your room
- All taxes

Single from GBP210, Double from GBP230, inclusive of VAT.  
Offer subject to availability. Available on Friday to Sunday only.

**BOOK NOW**

By optimizing your landing pages, you increase conversion rates and ultimately sell more. Here are some tips:

1. Make sure you have important information visible when somebody comes to your landing page. Above the fold means what is visible without scrolling. As most users don't scroll it's important to have the important information visible when you arrive.
2. For advertisements set up specific landing pages tailored specifically for your ads. If you click on an advertisement for booking a hotel you expect to clearly see a booking button on the screen the second you arrive.
3. Use persuasive images. For example, people are drawn to people and in particular to a person's face. So you could have a picture of a person looking right at the call to action, so your visitor will look to see where they are looking.

- 4.** Focus on the offer – don't over do it with too much text. Have a clear compelling offer with benefits, a supporting picture, validation of your offer (e.g. testimonial) and a clear call to action.
- 5.** It's more believable if other people are saying good things about your offer so make sure you support that offer with testimonials and reviews.
- 6.** Make sure your page works on all the important browsers.
- 7.** Do split testing. This is a process of presenting different landing pages to different users to see which one performs better. For more information, see "Split Testing" on page 25.
- 8.** Measure your results – if a landing page is not converting visitors then it is not effective. So you need to measure how many people visited the page and how many people converted. Use Google Analytics to track this.
- 9.** Avoid too many graphics which may result in confusion to the user, slow download times, and so on.



# Measuring your Website Performance

If you ran a business which was a shop you would like to know how many people came to the shop, what percentage of them bought something, how long did they stay and much more. If you had a compelling offer in the window you'd like to know if this attracted more people and if you changed this offer did this have a positive or negative impact. For your website it is crucial to measure and test your performance and keep on increasing it. There are a variety of tools available for this.

## Google Analytics

Google Analytics is a free tool provided by Google that allows you to monitor traffic on your website. You register with Google, place a small piece of code on every page on your website you want to track and then view reports whenever you want. You can even get reports automatically e-mailed to you whatever schedule you like e.g. daily or weekly.

The type of basic information you can get from these reports are:

- Number of visitors on a daily basis
- How long they stayed on your site
- What buttons they pressed
- How they found your site
- What country are they in

There is also a lot more detail you can collect. You can even assign a value to you achieving a goal on your website (e.g. when somebody books) and then track what your conversion rate is. That is the amount of visitors that came to your site compared to the amount that converted to customers.

For more information, see the detailed guide on Using Google Analytics which is part of this series of guides.

## Split Testing

Did you ever get stopped on the street and asked to test out some products? For example, you are given 2 different types of beers and asked which one you prefer. This is valuable market research as you are getting the opinion from potential customers. The good thing about online is that all these facilities are available but it's much easier.

Google has a free tool called Website Optimiser that allows you to set up testing based on web pages by presenting different pages to different users and then recording which was more effective. When you have figured out which is more effective you can then use that as the default page and introduce another one so you keep on improving your conversion.

There are two types of tests you can run:

### **A/B Tests**

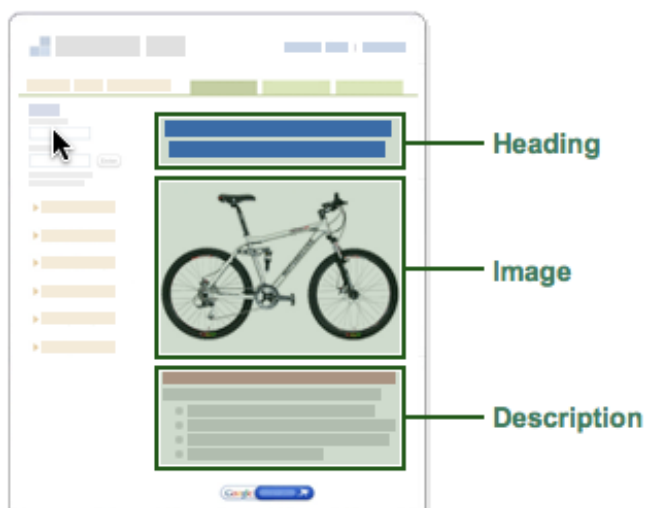
This is where you want to test 2 completely different versions of a page. The steps involved in A/B Testing are:

1. Choose the page you want to test
2. Create 2 pages with unique web addresses.
3. Identify a conversion page – To measure success you want users to go to a particular page after they visit the landing page. You can then measure which page got higher conversions.

### **Multivariate Testing**

This is where you want to optimise particular components on a page. You will probably use this if you have an effective page but want to tweak it to make it more effective. For multivariate testing the steps are as follows:

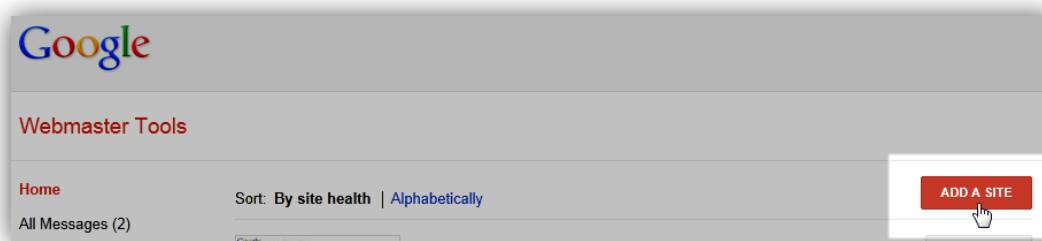
1. Choose the page you would like to test
2. Decide on which sections you want to vary e.g. heading, image, description:



3. Identify your conversion page i.e. the page that a visitor goes to that signifies that you have achieved a conversion.

## Google Webmaster Tools

Google provides a set of tools called Webmaster tools which are essential for any website. To set up Google webmaster tools you need to create an account with Google and then go to [www.google.com/webmasters](http://www.google.com/webmasters).



Click Add a Site and enter the web address of the site you want to manage. When you add this site it needs to be verified so you will be asked to perform an action. You will have 4 options:

- Add a DNS record to your domain's configuration – Google will ask you to enter a piece of text for your configuration records for your domain to prove that you own the domain name.
- Add a meta tag to your sites home page – this is basically adding a line of text to your home page.
- Upload html file to your server – Google will provide you with a file which you upload.
- Link to your Google Analytics account – if you already have a Google Analytic account this is the easiest option.

Once you have this set up you have a whole range of options that you can monitor through this tool, for example, the following is available:

- Details of any errors that Google has come across when indexing your site
- Details of the web pages that have been indexed
- Details of who is linking to you
- Any other errors that Google has found
- Where you rank based on search terms

# Integrating your Social Media Channels on your Website

Social media is a rapidly growing area where we see the likes of Facebook starting to compete with Google with predictions of them being bigger than Google in 5 years time. It will continue to grow and is having a profound effect to businesses on the web.

## ***What is Social Media?***

Social media is about how we communicate and share information the web. The Internet user has got smarter to just broadcasting your message to them is not as effective as it used to be. They want you provide valuable and useful information and be involved in the communities that they are involved in. When they are looking to book a holiday, find employment, look for workers, and so on, they go to their social network more and more and this is very worrying for businesses that don't know how to work in this environment.

## ***How can I benefit from Social Media as part of my website?***

- 1.** Provide valuable content – when somebody comes to your website they are looking for information that will help them make a decision so provide valuable content that will help them make a decision. For example, if I run a hotel in Cork I will provide all the relevant information about the hotel and I'll also provide additional information about things to do in the area, recommended places to eat, discounts for local services, details of tours they can go on, and so on. This is all valuable and useful information. Also by providing this information as well as helping them to plan their holiday you are also producing lots of new content that will be found on search engines.
- 2.** Provide sharing facility – when you do have all this content make sure that you provide the facility to share this content on the likes of Twitter and Facebook. You may not have a presence on these sites but your visitors do so make sure you allow them to share out the content.
- 3.** Integrate with social networks – if you are on any social networks make sure you display this on your website and provide an easy way to let people join your community. For example, if you have a Facebook business page make sure you provide an option for them to become a fan.
- 4.** Add a blog – a blog is basically articles you write online through your website. One of the big advantages of the blog is that typically the software for a blog provides a content management system so you can easily update content on your website without any help. Also as you are providing lots of new valuable content Google will index this content and this will be of great benefit to your site.

## Maintaining Your Website — Content Management

One thing for certain is that you need to keep on updating your website with fresh content and adapt to the changing world of social media. One way of doing this is by ensuring you have a content management system to manage all your content. A content management system is basically a very easy way to add content to your website. With the click of a button your new content is available for Google to index.

So if you are looking for a content management here are some requirements to watch out for:

- The ability to add, modify and delete any content without any technical assistance.
- When generating the web addresses for new content the content management system must allow you to create web addresses with appropriate keywords. This is important from a search engine optimisation point of view.
- For any new page you need the ability to create title, description and keywords for each individual page. This again is important for a search engine optimisation point of view.
- Multi-user authoring – The ability for multiple people to have logins to the content management system with the ability to add content.
- Ability to add and name images, embed videos, link to web addresses, format the information and create templates.
- Security – Ability to report on security of access to the system
- Backups – Backup procedures in place
- Versioning – Ability to go back to previous versions of content uploaded.

## Tips on Domain Names & Hosting

If you don't have a website already and you are thinking of registering a name you should always register the .com version of the name as this is still the address that people are most likely to type in first. If you are based in Ireland you can also register the .ie address and then automatically redirect traffic to the .com address so it doesn't matter what people type in.

Where you host your domain is very important. That is basically the location of the machine where your files for your website are on. This is important because it is one of the factors that Google looks at to work out what country specific search engine should the website be ranked highest on.

For example, if I have a hotel site and the my website is hosted in the US, I have a US based address and my web address is registered in the US then Google will think it's a US website so will try to give priority to my content being indexed on Google.com instead of Google.ie for Ireland or Google.fr for France. So ideally you website should be hosted in the country where you get most business.

If you think that half your business is in the US and half is in Ireland then have 2 separate sites and make sure that most content is different for each site as Google doesn't like duplicate content. Of course it makes much more sense to have a localised version of content if for example, France is a great source of business then have a French translated site.

### ***Domain names***

*Domain names should ideally be short, easy to remember and contain keywords that are relevant to your business. Having the keywords in our domain name is not always possible but Google does take it into account when indexing content.*



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