

Contents

Introduction	3
Purpose	4
Design	5
Content	8
Findability	12
Technical	14
Checklist	18
Conclusion	20
AttractMore	20

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https://attractmore.uk

Introduction

I have been designing and developing business websites since 2006 and have had the opportunity to see how a wide variety of organisations use the web as an important part of their marketing. This eBook summarises the main factors that I believe determine the success of a business website. By success I mean that they serve the business well and provide a good return on the investment that the owner(s) made in them.

In order to achieve this there are two main areas of focus:

- The site needs to attract a high number of relevant visitors of course, some
 of this can be done offline by encouraging people you meet to visit your site,
 but it is certainly worth investing in online methods of bringing good
 numbers of suitable visitors to your site
- 2. The site must encourage the visitors to take the action(s) you want them to take when they visit your site. This might be to contact you, download a resource, buy a product, donate money etc.

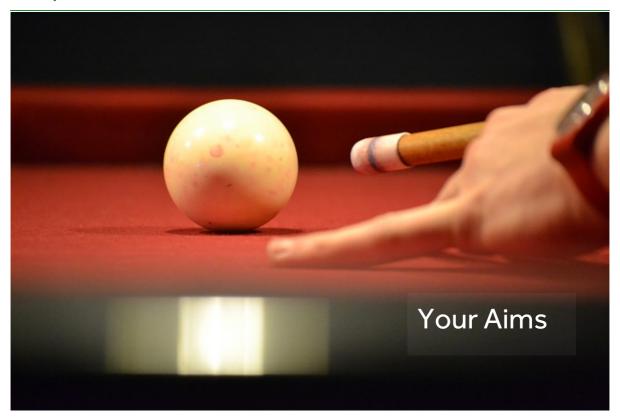
The factors detailed below are all aimed at achieving one or both of these goals without which your website cannot be regarded as successful.

Many business websites are failing to live up to their potential and I hope you will use these ideas to make an assessment of your own site to see how you can make improvements that will help it work harder for your business.

I haven't listed the factors in any particular order but instead I have grouped them into categories as I feel this is a more useful way of presenting the information so that, as a business owner, you can consider each category separately. Having said this though, I am not implying that the categories are entirely independent from one another as, for example, changes to the content can affect the position your pages appear in the search engines.

I hope you find these suggestions helpful and if you have any questions about the contents of this guide, please feel free to contact me – roger@attractmore.co.uk.

Purpose



1. Have a clear set of objectives for your site

What are you aiming for with your website? New clients? What sort of clients? How many, over what period of time? What actions do you want your visitors to take when they come to your site? Or maybe your aim is to do more business with existing clients? Whatever the case, it's useful to be clear about what you want to achieve.

2. Know your target audience

Are you clear about your target audience and what they want from your website?

Get some insight into your target market. Who are the people you want to do business with? They may split into various segments. Define a typical person in each segment – age, income, employment, desires, fears etc. This is important so that you know who you're speaking to and what needs these people have. This will inform your social media output as well as blog post topics, tone of voice etc.

More information in this blog post.

Design



3. Looks good – visual & emotional appeal

How would you like visitors to describe your website? What adjectives would they use in your ideal world? How might people describe your current site? Is there a big difference between the reality and your ideal? If there is a significant gap, then maybe it's time for some changes. Visitors are likely to make a decision about the quality of your site (and therefore your business) in less than a second so first impressions are vitally important.

4. Clear and uncluttered

A busy chaotic site is very off-putting to visitors. Aim for a clear and uncluttered design where there is a space to let the design 'breathe'. A structured and organised design gives credibility to your business whereas a cluttered layout suggests you don't care about your visitors or customers.

5. Looks appropriate for your business

The design of your site needs to genuinely reflect the nature of your business as your visitors will judge what you offer by their assessment of your website. This is especially true for service businesses where there is a tendency for some owners to choose sophisticated designs which can give the impression that they are premium services even when they are not. This creates a disconnect

between actual and perceived price point, which can result in putting off price conscious site visitors. Make sure the design properly reflects your business.

6. Colours and Contrast

The colours that are used on your website create a strong emotional impression on your visitors, so it is important to select colours that will create the right response, i.e. ones that generate the feeling tone that you want visitors to associate with your product or service. Contrast is important, especially between text and background. Pure black on pure white can look too stark and I see a good number of sites that choose a grey colour for text that is too light and gives insufficient contrast against a white background. You want people to read your text so make it easy for them – good contrast and an appropriate size. Please check the size of text on a mobile phone.

7. Clear typography

The typefaces you choose on your website are important in transmitting your message and your brand. Keep typefaces to a maximum of 3. The main content should be a sans serif font (like the one I'm using here) but you could choose a serif font (e.g. Times New Roman) if that's suitable for your business and the overall style and image you want to convey. There are vast numbers of fonts available for the web these days and, if you decide to use more than one on your website, make sure they go well together. Fonts need to harmonise, just like colours.

More detail in this post.

8. No unnecessary elements

Does your website really need a search box? Does it really need 12 different social media sharing icons? Review all elements of your site and ask what purpose they serve. I'm not suggesting you remove all decorative elements, but I strongly suggest you remove unnecessary items, so your visitors can focus their attention on your content without being distracted by superfluous items.

9. Straightforward navigation

You want to encourage visitors to look at various pages of your website (or various sections if you have a one-page site) so it makes sense to construct the navigation so that it is obvious how to move between the pages. It is important to check on devices of all sizes. How does your navigation look on an older iPhone? What about links within your text? Is it obvious that they are links?

10. Guide visitors towards the actions you want them to take.

Visitors don't come to your site to admire the design; they come to carry out a task which is often about gaining information. However, you, as business owner, probably want them to also develop the necessary confidence and trust so that they will contact you about your products or services. This is in the visitor's interest too so make sure you provide encouragement or prompts for them to contact you. These are often referred to as 'Calls to action'.

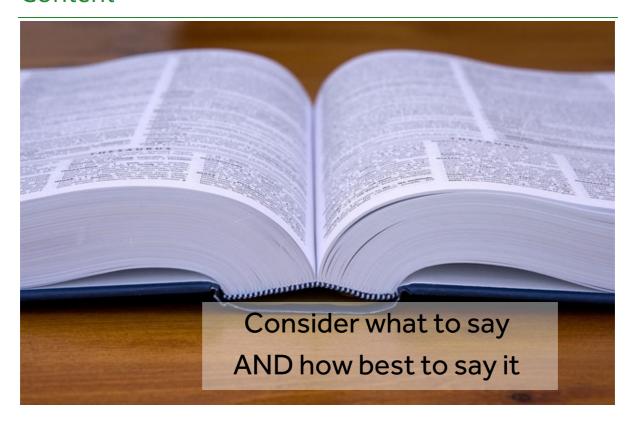
11. No broken links

Broken links give a poor impression of your site and, by implication, a poor impression of your business. Website addresses are changed from time to time by some website owners, so it is worth checking every few months that the links you have on your site still work. Some content management systems provide an automated checking method that will inform you if broken links are found. If you are using a content management system, find out if it offers this facility.

12. Accessible to people with reduced visual, motor or other abilities

Apart from the clear moral and ethical reasons for ensuring that your website is accessible to those people who have a variety of disabilities, it surely makes sense to ensure that your website can be used by as many people as possible. Why exclude a significant percentage of the population from being able to access your products and services? There are many online tools that can help you determine how accessible your website is, e.g. https://www.gov.uk/service-manual/user-centred-design/accessibility. In fact, website accessibility is a legal requirement under the Equality Act 2010.

Content



13. USP – sell the benefits of your products and services

Are you clear about what distinguishes your business from others? What is your unique selling proposition (USP)? If there are others offering the same or similar products and services, it is important to know what makes your business special and communicate that via your website in words, images and overall design.

14. Create a sense of trustworthiness, credibility and quality

Trustworthiness, credibility and quality come from the overall design but also, crucially, from the content. Many of the factors in this section will contribute to creating a sense of quality but consider including testimonials and recommendations from past clients. For some businesses, publishing a list of past clients (especially if they are well-known) can help build credibility. Anything you can do that will provide proof of the benefits of your product or service can help provide reassurance to visitors so giving them the confidence to contact you.

15. Keep it simple

Avoid long words, jargon and complex grammar. Visitors are usually in a hurry and need to be able to understand your content quickly and accurately. To

assess the ease of reading, try this tool http://www.thewriter.com/what-we-think/readability-checker/.

Also, writing for the web is different to writing an essay or a letter. For instance, professional web copywriters tend to keep paragraphs quite short, sometimes having only one sentence. Breaking text up into smaller blocks helps with readability and it can also help to emphasise specific points you want to make.

16. Good grammar and spelling

The quality of the grammar and spelling reflects the quality of the website which in turn reflects the quality of the business so it's worth checking these items. It's also worth asking someone else to check them too as it's often easier for others to see errors in our writing.

17. Answer questions visitors may have and address their needs/wants/desires

If you understand your customers well, i.e. you went through the exercise suggested in item 2 above, then you will have a good understanding of the questions your potential customers will have, and you can provide the content that answers those questions. This is another way of developing a sense of trust on the part of your visitors as they can see that you both appreciate and can respond to their concerns.

Think about the feeling tone you want to create in your visitors. If you understand your customers well, you will appreciate their frustrations, worries etc., and you can use your content to improve their emotional state by showing you understand and can help.

18. Speak your customers' language

Since you want your website visitors to feel comfortable and to trust you when they come to your website, speak their language. If they tend to use certain phrases or words, try to incorporate them into your web pages and blog posts. However, don't go as far as to incorporate jargon words unless your audience is very specialised.

19. Create content that is scannable

Most people who come to your website don't read the content of the pages — instead they scan it, looking for words, phrases or other smaller items that correspond with the reasons they have come to this page. It makes sense, therefore, to highlight, or emphasise in some other way, the most important parts of your text content. This draws visitors' attention and it is more likely that

they will read the words around the highlighted section if their interest has been captured.

20. Use good quality images/videos

Images can make or break a website. Poor quality images give the impression that you don't care, so, however good the design and the content are, low quality images can really detract from the overall experience and let the site down badly. Poor quality images, in this context, are pictures that are not properly in focus, those with incorrect exposure, grainy, badly lit etc. If you are showing off products you sell, I strongly suggest using a professional photographer.

Images are not just of products though. Images are also used to create mood or atmosphere and are an integral part of every page which, if chosen well, can draw readers into your content encouraging them to explore your site further.

See this blog post, this one and this one for further details.

21. Include contact info – phone number, address etc.

The chances are that you will have a contact form on your website, which is fine. However, depending on the type of business you run, you may wish to put your phone number, address and/or opening hours on your website in a prominent place. If you think it is likely that some people will come to your website who quickly want any of this information, don't hide it away – give your visitors what they want and make it easy for them!

22. Social Media Feeds

If you choose to show a feed from Twitter, Facebook or other social media site on your own site, you must ensure that you post to social media on a regular basis. If not, then your whole site can appear to be abandoned if the last post in the feed is weeks or even months ago.

In general, I do not recommend placing social media feeds on your website unless there is a strong and compelling reason to do so.

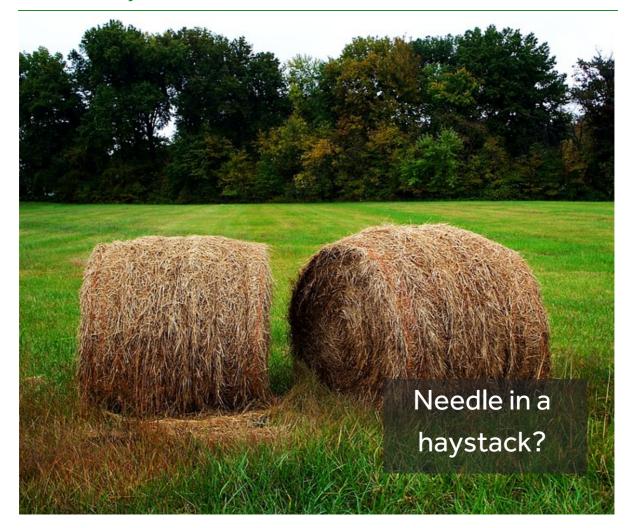
23. Adverts

Advertisements for your own events, publications etc. is fine but do not advertise anyone else's business. Avoid placing adverts from Google or elsewhere on your site as it creates a very unprofessional impression.

24. Sound

Sound from audios and videos that the visitors can choose to play are fine, but background audio is unacceptable on business websites.

Findability



25. Have a marketing plan and follow it

Clearly you need to get visitors to your website, so you can show them the benefits of the products and services you offer. How are you doing that? Are you using email marketing, social media, face-to-face networking, giving talks? For most businesses, some sort of marketing is needed. Which marketing channels are you using and what's your plan?

26. What is your process for turning visitors into clients?

Marketing people call this the 'sales funnel' or the 'customer journey'. How does your website support this process? Visitors may come to your site at different stages of the decision process, e.g. vaguely interested, actively looking at options, ready to buy. How does your website support people at each stage of the journey?

27. Know which phrases you want your site to be found for

Search engines are remarkably sophisticated nowadays in interpreting the search phrase a person uses and translating that into what they really meant! This is referred to as 'searcher intent'. Google, in particular, will deliver results based on what it believes the searcher intended. There are many ways in which you can develop a list of phrases by which you would like your site to be found. Put yourself in the shoes of potential clients and imagine what phrases they might use. Ask other people too, including, where possible, existing clients. Some of these phrases will only be appropriate to certain pages on your site so list out the pages on your site and the search phrases you would like to use for each one.

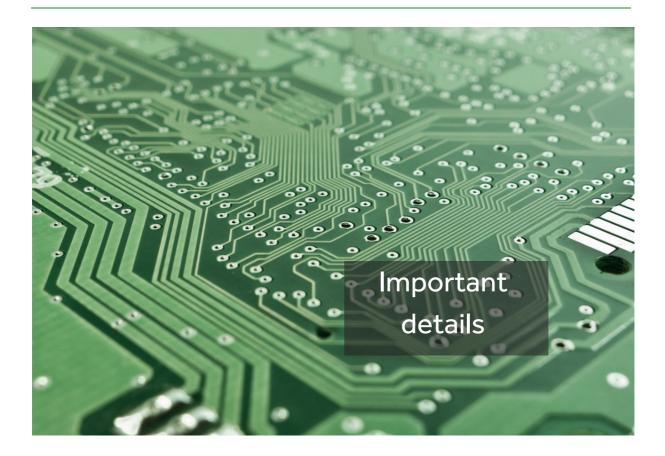
28. Make sure those, or similar, phrases are used in your content

Search engines need to gather information on what your pages are all about so include relevant phrases in the text. Don't overdo it. As noted above, Google is clever enough to understand a searcher's intent so no need for repetition of exact matches of the phrases you want to be found for. Make sure each page has a reasonable amount of content (~300 words) so the search engines have enough content to be able to develop confidence about the topic of the page. If there isn't much content, the search engines will have low confidence and so will not place your pages in good positions in their search results.

29. Ensure your content is easy to share on relevant social media

Invite visitors to share your content on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Pinterest etc. Only the most relevant one or two – no need to present a battery of social media sharing options. Focus on the ones that are most relevant to your business otherwise you will a) put some people off as they won't be able to decide which site they want to share on, so won't bother at all, and b) the sharing that does take place will be diluted over too many sites. Which social media platforms are most relevant to your business?

Technical



30. Web page names are sensible and don't contain '?' or '=' etc.

Web page addresses that are generated by some content management systems can sometimes end up like this

http://example.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogcategory&id=1 07&Itemid=124. This is far from ideal and no one (including the search engines) can tell from the address what that page is about. If you have a choice in creating page names, make them meaningful, as it helps both visitors and the search engines.

31. Works well on mobiles

In 2001 30% of people in the UK owned a mobile smartphone; in 2014 that figure shot up to 86%. With a third of all UK sales being made on a mobile in 2014 (source Google) it is impossible to ignore mobile phones as an increasingly important source of visitors to your website.

For a site to work well on mobile, the minimum requirements are that:

- a. There is no need for visitors to pan and zoom to see the page contents (scrolling is fine)
- b. Text must be large enough for visitors to read comfortably
- c. Links should be far enough apart from each other so that people can't mistakenly tap the wrong one.

Mobile friendliness is a factor that Google increasingly uses in determining where to place a web page in the results of searches from a mobile device.

Google provide a means of determining whether your site is regarded as mobile friendly – see https://search.google.com/test/mobile-friendly

More information in this article.

32. Speedy

Another important technical factor, both for humans and search engines, is the speed with which your web pages load. Most people won't wait if a page takes more than a few second to load, even on a slower mobile connection. It offers a poor service to visitors and people will associate that, consciously or unconsciously, with poor service from your business.

For these reasons, the search engines have been encouraging website owners to speed up their pages and Google now penalises slower sites with lower placings in the search results. There is a range of specific measurements that search engines use to determine site speed from a visitor's perspective and these are likely to have an increasing influence on where your site appears in the search results.

More details in this blog post.

33. Secure

We are all painfully aware of hacking and other security breaches on websites. The high-profile ones make the news but many, many sites are compromised every day.

Please don't fall into the trap of thinking that no one would want to hack your site. They would and maybe already have. You may not be aware that people without your permission have access to your server and are using it as a broadcast station for spam!

Firstly, your site must operate under a security certificate which encrypts the data that travels between a visitor's device and your server. Your site's address then becomes https://www.example.com and a padlock symbol will appear in

the browser's address bar. This is much easier to implement than it sounds and costs very little.

Secondly, take regular backups of your site.

Thirdly, take some specialist advice to harden your site against all types of attacks, e.g. enforce secure passwords for everyone that has access.

Finally, scan your site frequently for any irregularities (there is software available to do this).

34. Email

Your business email addresses should be @domain-name e.g. in my case, my email is roger@attractmore.co.uk. It is best not to use email addresses from Google, Outlook or Hotmail as these appear much less professional.

However, you must manage your email addresses carefully to ensure that you minimise the spam email you receive and maximise the deliverability of your emails (so they don't end up in recipients spam folder or worse, that they get blocked). If your email is held on the same hosting as your website, you may find the default settings for email are not as good as they should be, especially at the lower cost end of hosting packages. Making sure email addresses are set up properly is well worthwhile.

In addition, email passwords must be hard to crack as you could suffer considerable reputational (and possibly financial) consequences if one of your email addresses is hacked.

35. Measurable

If you don't have data about your website, any attempts to improve how it serves your business are going to be guesswork and you won't know if they've been effective. It's relatively straightforward to start capturing statistics about your website and you can periodically check how your site is doing in the search results by carrying out a series of searches yourself. You may need assistance in interpreting some of the statistical data provided by statistics gathering packages, e.g. Google Analytics, but it's worth the effort, so you can see what is OK and what could be improved.

Improvements to the content of certain pages may pay significant dividends and the data you collect will show how effective those changes have been. The key here is to test different variations of the content and determine which alternatives make the most contribution to your website goals.

Useful statistical information could include:

- a. Number of visitors/week
- b. How long each visitor stays on your website
- c. How many pages a visitor looks at
- d. Location of visitors
- e. The most visited pages on your site
- f. The proportion of new visitors vs. returning visitors

There may also be other statistics that are relevant for your site.

Checklist

Here is a summary checklist which you can use to score your business website.

		YES	NO	
1.	There is a clear set of objectives for my business website			
2.	I am clear about my target audience(s)			
3.	The website has good visual & emotional appeal			
4.	The layout is clear and uncluttered			
5.	The website design is appropriate for my business			
6.	The colours generate the right feel & contrast is good			
7.	The text is all clear, readable and suitable for the business			
8.	There are no unnecessary elements on the website			
9.	The navigation is clear and straightforward			
10.	The website guides visitors to appropriate actions			
11.	All links work properly			
12.	The site is accessible to people with a range of disabilities			
13.	The website clearly articulates the USP of the business			
14.	The site communicates trustworthiness, credibility and quality			
15.	The text is clear, avoiding jargon and complex expressions			
16. Grammar and spelling have been checked				
17.	The content answers questions visitors are likely to have			
18.	The content uses words that the target audience would employ			
19.	The content is scannable			
20.	All images and video are of good quality			
21.	Appropriate contact information is easily available on the site			
22.	Social media feeds are absent or have been checked for currency			
23.	There are no external adverts on the site			
24.	There is no background audio			

25. There is a marketing plan in place which is being followed	
26. There is a defined process for converting visitors to clients	
27.1 know which search phrases are appropriate for my website	
28. The search phrases and related phrases are used in the content	
29. The content is easy to share on social media	
30. All web pages have sensible names and don't include '?' or '='	
31. The website is mobile friendly according to Google guidelines	
32. Web pages load quickly even on a mobile network	
33. The site is HTTPS, secure, backed up and checked regularly	
34. Email addresses have strong passwords and are set up properly	
35. I regularly check the site statistics to understand visitor behaviour	

How many 'Yes' boxes were you able to tick?

0-10	There are serious issues with your website that need addressing urgently.
11-19	There are plenty of issues that need to be dealt with if you are serious about your business website.
20-28	Your website is in reasonable condition but don't ignore the issues that remain
29-35	Your website is looking good but check the outstanding items to see if there are other steps you can take to improve your site further.

Conclusion

Your website is a business asset and you will have invested time and money in creating it and you may also be spending time every month blogging or using social media. It makes sense, therefore, to have a great website that serves your business well and provides you with a return on the investment by bringing you more customers.

The factors I have discussed here will help you improve your existing site and will also assist if/when you come to think about creating a new website for your business.

An effective business website is not one that simply looks professional; it must also be created in such a way that it is a valuable marketing asset that genuinely reflects your business.

AttractMore

AttractMore is a web agency based in Oxfordshire. We create good-looking, highly effective, secure business websites that work well on screens of all sizes. Our aim is always to create sites that are specifically focussed on the intended audience(s) of our clients which create a sense of trust and confidence in visitors so that they are encouraged to make contact, purchase or download materials, whichever is most appropriate. In this way we can ensure the website/ecommerce site produces a good return on the investment our clients make.

We can also help to reinvigorate a website that is not performing to expectations, either because of insufficient visitors, poor display on mobiles and tablet devices or that it simply looks rather tired. We carry out site reviews for clients and offer a prioritised list of actions that can be taken to improve their site for the benefit of the business.