

GUIDELINES FOR ORGANISATIONS CONTEMPLATING A WEBSITE A WEBSITE



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WHITE PAPER 1

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Guidelines for Organisations Contemplating a Website

A White Paper by Cybermasta & Lexacorp

The Internet is evolving in PNG with more companies, organizations, government offices wanting to have a presence on the World Wide Web. But many of them don't know why! To assist organisations in their decision making before embarking on a website project, we have produced this White Paper which sets out a number of issues which need to be considered in the planning stages.

1.1 Purpose of your website

The provision and ongoing delivery of a website, like all service delivery methods, is as dependent on the quality of its management infrastructure and controls as it is on the quality of information being provided. Additionally, the pace of technological development in the Internet arena demands that organisations move with the times and seek opportunities to take advantage of any new services on offer.

1.1.1 How should a website be considered by an organisation?

It is essential for the success of any website that it is recognised as an integral part of the organisation. It is a global, potentially low-cost communication and an (increasingly) transactional medium by which information and services can be made available at any time of day or night. As such, organisations need to consider how best the Internet can be used to provide access to information and to aid in the delivery of goods and services to customers.

A clear web management strategy is at the heart of developing this thinking. It must be an integral part of the organisation's Corporate Communications and e-Strategies.

There are three main categories of website:

- **Information orientated:** these cover departmental publications, publicity, recruitment, news, statutory information, promotional material, providing advice, requesting responses and feedback. They may, for example, provide an electronic catalogue to users. Queries and requests can be handled via email or forms. Orders, and necessary payment, can be fulfilled through the conventional procedures.
- **Operational:** these are transactional websites geared towards e-business and cover the whole online process, from service selection through ordering and confirmation to online payment. These may be integrated with departmental systems to enable electronic transactions with the public and other customers.
- **Campaign:** such websites will support a specific publicity campaign, working directly with press, TV and radio advertising. All the media reflect the same messages and images. They may also provide an electronic catalogue to users with requests being handled via email. Fulfillment can be handled through the conventional procedures.

Many websites may incorporate aspects of each of the above. In all three categories the principle of developing a relevant and effective management strategy applies. This section sets out the five key components of a web management strategy:

- Purpose – what is the website for?
- Strategic and operational management – who is the owner and who is responsible?
- Information and other content management – how will material and services be provided and presented online?
- Evaluation and ongoing development – how should use and performance of the website be monitored and how should the results be used for future development?

1.1.2 What is the website for?

In establishing the aims of the website, each organisation must ensure that:

- users should be able to find your website;
- users are clear about who owns the website and what it is designed to achieve;
- navigation is clear and customer orientated, taking into account the needs of specific audiences;
- goods and services being offered by the organisation are effectively focused on the target audiences in terms of relevance and ease of accessibility
- visitors are able to access the information they seek as directly as is practicable;
- adequate security is in place when dealing with online transactions for the purchase of goods and services – and that neither the client nor the provider is compromised;
- contact points (whether email, forms-based or telephone) must be staffed and all enquiries answered within reasonable timescales;
- the information published is up to date, accurate and relevant to the website;
- content is clear, concise and appropriate;
- links are kept up to date that users can rely on the website being available and is fast enough.

The tasks to be addressed when setting the aims and objectives are:

- identification of your website's place in the organisation's overall communications strategy;
- identification of the audiences for your website, where possible on the basis of market research or dialogue with client groups;
- understanding and responding to users' satisfaction with the website;
- provision of resources, especially staff with the necessary skills, for the website team;
- integration of the website with business processes, which might include electronic dealings with the public, publication of information, recruitment and consultation;
- integration of the website into the department's strategy for electronic government and freedom of information;
- integration of web services with other systems where practicable;
- monitoring the development of the website and its success as a means of meeting departmental objectives.

To ensure that the aims and objectives of the website are achieved they must be applied to key roles in the organisation and placed under an appropriate management regime.

1.1.3 Benefits of publishing data on the Internet

Although publishing documentation on the Internet initially seems to be little different to publishing in any other medium, there are a number of special considerations that need to be borne in mind. There are almost as many permutations of monitor resolution, colour rendering, browser types, operating systems and user ability, as there are websites. Website Managers will have to consider many capabilities and standards to ensure that data is available to the widest audience.

There can be enormous benefits when documentation is published on the Internet, both for the publishing body and the general user.

1.1.3.1 Information access

A well designed website offers users a broader range of information than is available to them through conventional media, when they want it and in a form they can use.

To achieve this, the website should make use of the number of ways the web helps users find the documents they are looking for such as search engines, menus, navigational aids, indices and links between documents. Web navigation should also help users find the information they want within the document.

Some information such as menu pages and document summaries will have to be written specifically to be quickly scanned and understood.

It may be appropriate to make documentation available in a variety of differing formats.

For example, some users may find it easier to download and print an entire document in Portable Document Format (PDF) and read it offline, whilst other may prefer to read it in online and on –screen in the form of a sequence of HTML pages.

1.1.3.2 Accurate and up-to-date

The web is easier to update or correct than print. Documents contained on the website can be a point of reference for both the public and your staff. Some departments provide a copy of their website on their intranet to facilitate this. A ‘What’s New’ section should be included and constantly updated so that users have a constant and familiar route to new and updated information.

To achieve accuracy, the maintenance of documents after publication should be planned and resourced. Each document should adhere to the site template and all data should be formatted in a consistent way. Particular care should be paid to the Cascading Style Sheet, which may be used to control the formatting of the website.

1.1.3.3 Savings on print and distribution costs

Publishing data on the website should save on the printing, distribution and storing of printed documents and the wastage caused by overestimated print runs. Only the one copy needs to be maintained; as soon as a changed version is published it is available to everyone.

In order to achieve this publication in print and on the web should be part of one carefully planned publication process. This process should be audited regularly to ensure it is efficient.

1.1.3.4 Website maintenance and archiving

Web documents can also be a reliable source of older documents, developing into a useful archive.

This will be achieved if archived documents are given a stable URL and are clearly marked as being archived. It is important that electronic master copies of each document published on the website are kept. This not only makes the creation of new versions in other formats easy; it also maintains an archive version for historical purposes.

1.1.3.5 Providing the call to action

A good publicity campaign issues a call for action – something the user is expected to do. A campaign website can give the user the chance to quickly and simply carry out that action, whether it is to set up an appointment, order more information, or enter the recruitment process for a public sector job.

1.1.3.6 Opening up consultation

Government makes policies and needs to collect informed views from organisations and individuals. The web can provide this opportunity and provide another channel for the distribution of the background documents that people need in order to contribute to the debate.

1.1.3.7 Interactivity

The Web can speed up the process of individuals getting the answers they need.

Websites could be used to direct enquiries to the right place in the organisation to get an answer. Email can speed up the process of responding to them.

1.1.3.8 Adapting to user needs quickly

Feedback and access statistics can tell web managers which pages are popular and which pages need further development. They can help identify gaps in information or services. A well-managed website will respond to user needs and use the flexibility of the web to revise the website.

1.1.3.9 Building individual relations with the visitors

Web technology provides a way for users to register interests and receive automatic updates of news and developments in the areas that interest them. Website content can be personalised to meet their interests and concerns, or provide local or national versions of information that are relevant to them.

1.1.3.10 Savings costs on services

Properly supported by business plans and backend systems, the web can be used to improve services and reduce the cost of providing them.

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