

# WHIZZING UP A WICKED WEBSITE

A free report from  
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## *How to write and lay out your website for maximum impact*

Ensuring your website is a cut above that of your competition is crucial to your business success. But it is no easy task. Which is why you're reading this.

This report identifies a number of ways in which you can make improvements to your site, or, if you are still in the throes of setting one up, ensure you start out on the right foot.

It concentrates mostly on website text or copy because this is by far the most important element of a site. It does not cover design in any significant detail, because that is the domain of the skilled web designer.

### Introduction

Having a website today is as important as a business card. No business can afford to be without one. Why? Because it's how you make yourself credible in your customers' eyes, it's how you advertise yourself to the world 24/7, and it's now how people find you.

Gone are the days when people would look you up in the Yellow Pages and phone for information. Today, they Google you and expect to find an information-filled website. If they can't find you, then, to them, you simply don't exist.

You need a website. It doesn't have to be overly expensive, sophisticated or large. But you do need an online presence today for your business to be seen as credible.

### Before you start

Before you begin writing your website, you need to decide what its purpose is. What are you trying to achieve? Are you selling your product or service directly from the site? Do

you merely need an online presence to give your business credibility? Do you want to give people information so when they contact you they are already informed buyers? Are you trying to collect email addresses for your database? Are you building your brand? Are you trying to educate and inform about a particular topic.

For many, a website is the beginning of a business relationship that, we hope, will develop over time. Once people get to know you and start to like you (and what you offer), they'll be more inclined to do business with you. It's true that people do business with people they know and like.

The one true secret of lasting business relationships is being authentic and worthy of trust. This isn't always easy on the net where it's easier to hide, to pretend and to lie.

One way to win your visitors' trust is to keep your site simple. Research shows that the most credible sites are usually the simplest.

Another is to demonstrate a level of experience and competence. You do this by ensuring there are no factual errors or claims that could show you up as a rank amateur. You should use words that relate to your business but are not jargon that non-experts won't understand.

As in most business writing, the more simple your words, the more understood you will be. One of my favourite sayings is, "Never use a long word when a diminutive will do."

Make your writing easy to read and understand. Make it conversational and direct. Keep words, sentences and paragraphs short.

## Targeting your market

You may be providing a product or service which has more than one target market. Because of the importance of segmenting your markets, it may pay you to have separate pages on your website for each market.

This will enable visitors to see exactly where they need to go to get the information they need without having to wade through screeds of irrelevant information. Not offering this segmentation will lose you readers and customers.

What is the problem that your reader/site visitor has that they're trying to solve? What's the need that has drawn them to your site?

If you can provide a solution to their problem that is affordable and that they believe will enhance their position somehow, you will have a winner on your hands.

## Personality

Websites need personality – desperately. Most are very bland and make little attempt to persuade people to spend time there.

Your site needs to give something of yourself, to be a little different so that people will remember it and revisit it.

The best example I can give of a website with personality is the one for Sam Neill's South Island winery – [www.twopaddocks.com](http://www.twopaddocks.com). Visit it. It is hugely entertaining because he injects his personality into the text.

One of the reasons it's such a good example is because not all pages are written by him, although most are. You will easily be able to recognise the difference between those he penned himself (in a wry and self-deprecating manner) and those written by someone else.

Of course it's a fine line between being a bit off the wall and being completely demented. You won't keep readers if you're too wide of the mark – you are after all also trying to be credible and be seen as the expert in your field, are you not? And you want people to buy from you, don't you?

Having personality means being allowed to express an opinion on your site. But you better hope it's one that your visitors share otherwise they'll go elsewhere.

Relationships are based on trust and this is more difficult to achieve on the internet, because it can be so impersonal. But that's all the more reason why you need to inject some personality, something of yourself into your copy. So, that people think they know you.

## Ethics

Your website needs to be ethical. You must not lie or cheat your customers – and I don't mean in just the literal sense. Of course you would never tell outright lies, nor would you take people's money without delivering the goods, but an ethical website is more than this.

People don't like to be deceived, hyped or tricked. Certainly use all the persuasion strategies you can muster to persuade them to buy, but if you over-promise and under-deliver, you will never get that person's business again.

Beware the viral nature of the web. Recently, I received an email that had been written by an prospective customer of the Great Marquee Company. Said customer had decided not to use the company for his wedding and said so, but not in a particularly unpleasant way. The reply he received was way out of proportion to his writing crime. The words "time waster", "cheap, nasty and tacky" featured prominently.

The prospective customer sent it to a friend, who sent to four more, who sent it on. Etcetera. By the time I received it two days later, it had done the rounds of two city councils, Kiwibank, Lumley Insurance, innumerable government departments, the Police, Telecom, and many, many other companies.

Moral: In the old days when people had a complaint they told four friends. Nowadays they tell four email correspondents who tell 4000 or four million. Upset people at your peril!

## Giveaways and freebies

People love free stuff. And if you're able to offer something for free, people will spend more time on your site looking at what you have to offer. It's the law of reciprocation –

if you do something for me, I'm going to feel obliged to do something for you. Staying and looking around is one way they fulfil that perceived obligation.

One of the best and easiest things to offer is information. If you visit my site ([www.wordwizard.co.nz](http://www.wordwizard.co.nz)), you'll see that I offer heaps of free reports, articles and other bits and bobs that I think will help make the lives of small business owners easier. I also offer ezine subscriptions, again for free. I do this to increase my credibility in the eyes of my customers, so they'll think of me when they need business communications written.

Part of the purpose of your website will be to capture information about a potential prospect, so that you have an opportunity to build a relationship with them. This is important because, people will do business with people that they know, like and trust. And strangers do not fit into this category.

Now, you cannot expect everyone who downloads your free information to become clients. Life's not like that. But it does dramatically increase your opportunity to do business with them in the longer term because you have begun a relationship with them.

## The Nuts and Bolts of Website Writing

### Page headers

Every page on your website should have a headline. Preferably a meaningful one which invites further action.

You see, the sole purpose of a headline is to get you to read the next line. That's all. Not a big ask, is it? Or is it?

In fact, writing an attention-grabbing headline that is unique, urgent, ultra-specific, and useful (the key components of a great headline) is quite difficult. Go ahead and try it. In fact, try several because you're going to need to weed out those that hit you between the eyes from the damp squibs. Dump the squibs. They won't help your cause one iota.

One type of headline which works well is the question. As in, "Want to...", "Do you...", "Who else wants to..." etc.

The best way to work out what are good headlines is to visit sites yourself and see what grabs your attention.

## Sub-headings

Sub-heads are a great way to capture the attention of those who are just scanning the page (and isn't that all of us at some time?)

These make your reader stop in their tracks; to drag them back into the copy; to gain their attention; to re-iterate the benefits of using your product or service.

Make your sub-heads memorable, readable and even fun!

## Other writing tips

As in all business writing, sentences should be short. They should be clear and uncomplicated. They should stay on-message and not get side-tracked.

Your text should be free of jargon unless your audience has a high level of understanding of your topic.

Each paragraph should be no longer than two sentences and contain only one idea.

Check, check and triple check your writing. Your eye sees what it wants to see and not necessarily what's on the page.

In websites, the more conversational and friendly you are, the more your reader will believe that you're actually in the room with him, having a personal chat. Impersonal websites are very offputting.

One way of doing this is to use emotive words instead of rational ones. Instead of *accelerate*, write *speed up*. Replace *accolade* with *applause*. *Wealthy* becomes *rich*.

*Concerned*, should become *worried* and here's the best (or worst!): *the following are*. Use *here are* instead.

(For more business writing tips visit [www.wordwizard.co.nz](http://www.wordwizard.co.nz))

## The Components of your Website

### Home page

The most important part of your website is the first screen – that's your home page.

This is your first – and possibly last – chance to make a good impression. To do this you need two very important items:

- An attention-grabbing headline (No – “Welcome to our website” does not cut it!)
- A strong opening which encourages people to read on and click further in to the site.

Without these, your readers will quickly give up and move on to someone else's site. And you will never get them back!

Your home page is the page most visitors to your site will see first. Note that I said “most”, not “all”.

That's because search engines often direct you to another page on a site because it might more closely match your search criteria.

What this means is that each of your pages needs to stand alone. A certain amount of repetition is therefore going to take place. Do not let this bother you.

When people read your home page their immediate question is going to be: What's in it for me? This is commonly known as WIIFM. Tell them – answer the question in their mind. And make your copy benefit-oriented. Talk about your reader and how they'll benefit from your product or service, rather than talk about yourself (unless you're Sam Neill, of course. Then, it's allowed!).

I can't stress enough how important it is to stress your benefits. If you're not sure of the difference between benefits and features, think of it like this: airbags and ABS brakes on a car are features; the benefit is safety.

## About Us page

The "About Us" page is your opportunity to tell your story. People read stories, they're intensely interested in stories about other people – one of the reasons the Bible remains on the bestseller list!

One of my clients is a printing company. Its logo is a coat of arms. When writing their website, I discovered that this dates back to the 11<sup>th</sup> century, and the family's claim to fame was killing an Irish king at the end of a long and bloody battle. What a great story! All of a sudden it gives them personality and makes them stand out from the hundreds of other printers in the market.

Of course, not everyone has regicide buried in their past (for which we should all be grateful) but if you dig deep enough you'll be able to come up with a good story about yourself or how your business got started.

Here is another excellent opportunity to inject some of that personality I've already talked about.

## Content pages

The titles you give your content pages will depend on your business, your market and what you're trying to achieve.

But here's an important tip: they should be self-explanatory. When reading the menu on each page, it should be obvious what your web visitors will find when they click on that page.

Some of the more common content pages are news, site map, products, services, contact us and links. A word of warning though: don't have too many or else it will become confusing.

## Links page

There are several very good reasons why you should include a links page on your website. The first is that it will improve your search engine rankings, particularly if you can persuade people to add your link to their website.

The second is that it gives you an opportunity to do some of that reciprocation we talked about earlier. One way you are able to publicly endorse other organisations with whom you do business is to include a list of them and their website address on your links page.

One thing, though. Do check that the link you're including is still live. It's pointless sending people to another site if the link doesn't work.

Which brings me to one of the downsides of links. When people click on a link and move from your site to another one, it can be very hard to get them back.

## Credibility

Credibility is extremely important to gaining readers' trust. And, if you want them to buy your product or use your service, you need to be seen as trustworthy.

If you are perceived as being trustworthy and perceived as having expertise, you will be perceived to have credibility.

One of the ways to engender credibility in your readers is to include third party endorsements on your site. These might take the form of a product or quality service award you've won, an endorsement of your site by a well-known or established business, recommendations by magazines or other media, or other experts. But by far the most common is testimonials, which we will look at in a moment.

Another credibility technique is track record. Include details of how long you have been in business, and figures or numbers that demonstrate your success.

For example, an advertorial I wrote recently for a North Shore health provider and which appeared in the *North Shore Times* was directly responsible for the company writing

\$70,000 worth of new business. That's the kind of detail which you should include – provided you can substantiate it.

As I've already said, research shows that the most credible sites are usually the simplest. Le simple is better.

## Testimonials

Many visitors to your website won't know you from Adam. They won't have previously heard of you and they won't have any relationship with you. In other words, you're a stranger.

In order to get to you know you and to establish a relationship with you, they need to believe you're not a charlatan. That you are who you say you are, and that you can deliver what you promise.

One of the best ways to do this is to include testimonials on your website.

Contrary to popular opinion, long and rambling testimonials are not good advertisements for your business. What you need are short, ultra-specific testimonials, and lots of them.

You must include the person's name, rank and business otherwise they will carry no weight.

Edit the testimonials you receive carefully. One of my clients wanted to include the fact that the writer of the testimonial had been doing business with the organisation for 30 years. Big mistake! Why? Because if you have a relationship with someone for that length of time you're inevitably going to become friends – at least you are here in New Zealand – and what use is a testimonial that readers know was written by a friend? It also calls into question the credibility of your other testimonials.

## Attracting visitors

One of the key things people stumble over is how to increase the number of visitors to their site.

It's no easy task. More words have been written about this than almost any other aspect of websites. Search engine optimisation (as it's commonly known) is a science all its own and is now a separate division of marketing.

But while most of us don't have the money to pay for something as sophisticated as this (or our site doesn't warrant it), there are a number of things you can do to attract visitors.

Here are a few:

- Print your website address prominently on every piece of marketing material you have. This includes your business card, your email signature, your brochure, your fliers, your catalogue, your letterhead and everything else you can think of.
- Make your website easy to find. That means a simple URL or website address. The simpler, the better. So no fancy hyphens ( - ) or anything else that will catch people out when they try to find you.
- Embed key words (your webmaster knows how to do this) that include every possible word or combinations you can think of that someone looking for your site would type into a Google search engine. If, for example, you're selling herbs include herbal plants, healing plants, lavender (it helps to use specific examples), healing, etc. Even spell some of the wrong, because inevitably that's what people do.
- Tell your current customers about your website and promise them something for visiting. A free email newsletter works well or some information they might find useful.
- Links count. The more links you have on your site to other sites and the more other sites link to you, the higher your search engine ranking. (See earlier section on links.)

You are only limited by your imagination!

## Page layout

People read web pages differently from magazine, book or newspaper pages. They tend to read in a Z-pattern, that is they start at the top left, move to the top right, scan back down to the left again through the copy and read across to the right of the page.

This makes the best place for testimonials, guarantees and other assurances the right-hand side of the webpage.

Keep your pages simple, clear and uncluttered.

The most popular sans-serif fonts (that's ones like this, without any tails on the letters) are arial and verdana. Keep your fonts to a maximum of two per page. One for headings and the other for body copy.

Avoid patterned or picture backdrops. It makes the copy hard to read. But here's a useful tip: if you have something which needs to be said but that you'd really rather people didn't read, reverse the type. Put it in white on a dark coloured background. It is much more difficult to read and people are more inclined to skip over it. It's amazing, though, the number of websites out there where the text is printed in white on a black or dark background. Very hard to read.

People often ask how long a web page should be. It needs to be long enough to include all the pertinent information, but it mustn't ramble on.

Because you lose website visitors with each click you ask them to make, think length rather than depth. Readers prefer to scroll down a page rather than click to new ones.

## 7 Deadly Website Mistakes

1. Opening with a flash. There is no place on most business websites for gimmicks which can take an age to download. This is especially true here in New Zealand where even our broadband speed is as slow as a wet week. Replace such gimmicks with a strong headline and copy.

2. No compelling headlines or sub-headings. Contrary to popular belief, people do read the copy in a website and, in fact, it is the single most important element.
3. Writing on your home page: Welcome to my website/home page. Instead, write a compelling, fascinating and intriguing headline.
4. Not building your copy around key words and phrases. Remember it's the key words that will help search engines find you.
5. Not enough white space. Avoid clutter. Keep it simple.
6. Being boring. At the first sign of being bored, your reader will click to another site. Keep them with you by writing innovative, interesting and relevant copy choc-a-block with personality.
7. Under-estimating the importance of the words you use. Words can convey a huge amount. They can be friendly or formal, patronising or informative, off-putting or engaging. What you write will have an effect on your reader – either positive or negative. If it's positive, they'll stay and read more; if it's negative, they'll go elsewhere.

### Action Checklist to Make Website Work Harder

- Determine the primary goal of your website.
- Make your headline deliver a direct or implied promise.
- Put the biggest benefit of your product or service near the top, so the reader doesn't have to scroll down to see it.
- Move distracting and inessential images and links to below the first screen so you have room for essential copy.
- Eliminate as many instances of "click here" as possible. Clicks work as barriers.
- Include more and better testimonials. People love stories, especially personal ones.
- Eliminate gimmicks. They distract from the copy. These include pop-ups and pop-unders which many people set their computers up to block.

- Make your sub-heads sing – including benefits works well.
- Check your copy by reading it out loud. Too many websites have too many mistakes that make them look unprofessional and cheap.
- Have at least three people read the site and check it for usability.

## Summary

There are many more elements to putting together an effective website than those mentioned in this report. But if you apply the ideas and suggestions I've made here to your site, it will increase your visitor numbers, the length of time people stay on your site and your sales.

If you would like more information on writing your website, please email [lynnaire@wordwizard.co.nz](mailto:lynnaire@wordwizard.co.nz). I'll be happy to help.