



# 10 STEPS TO A SUCCESSFUL WEBSITE

Easy peasy lemon squeezy!

**WHAT IS A 2011 WEBSITE?** The 2011 website is a web standard that embraces the most web recent trends, such as the growing use of social media websites. This guide will help you understand some of these trends so you can future proof your website as well as giving you a good overview of how to make your website more successful.

## THE LATEST WEBSITE TRENDS INCLUDE:

- ✓ Real time communication - you can see what is happening online right now. Facebook and Twitter are examples of this technology, with major worldwide events being Twittered in real time before even the major news networks can pick them up.
- ✓ Mobility – we're taking the web with us everywhere we go, thanks to mobile devices like the iPhone.
- ✓ It's more social than ever before, with people having more conversations online, even with the companies they do business with.
- ✓ Marketing hype is rejected in favour of peer opinion sourced from review websites (like TripAdvisor) and blogs.

## THE 10 STEPS

Follow these 10 steps and you will be well on your way to a more successful website.

**1 Invest heavily in your web content, as content is king online.** Having the right content is vital to your website's success. The right content serves the overall purpose and goals of your website. So you need to have clear objectives of what you want to achieve online. Keep your content fresh with new articles, offers, images and blog posts.

Targeted content attracts new visitors through the search engines, and makes your website more interesting to existing users. Develop a content plan for 6 months in advance, this way you won't be struggling for ideas at the last minute. Image is everything online, so use professional quality images. Take the time to write clearly and concisely, emphasising your competitive advantages and how people will benefit by using you over your competitors. Make sure your web copy is free of spelling mistakes, typos, and grammatical errors, as they can get in the way of your message. Writing well can be hard work, but if you follow journalism's five W's rule (answer the questions – who, what, when, where, why, how) you'll be off to an excellent start.

**2 Get control of your website's content with an easy to use content management system.**

Delivering fresh content to your visitors is a breeze when you can login to your website and make updates using an online editor. With an abundance of free (open source) content management systems available for web developers to build sites in, there is no excuse for anyone to have a static website that can only be updated by a web designer. It's a good idea to take the content management system for a spin before you get your site developed in it as you want to be confident using it. Also check that the system is 'search engine friendly' – just ask the web developer.

**3 Have an RSS feed to syndicate your web content. RSS stands for Really Simple Syndication.** You may have noticed that newspaper websites now have RSS feeds (look for the orange RSS icon). RSS is a way for people to subscribe to website content so that it is delivered to them using an RSS reader – so they don't have to go to the website to get the latest updates. People can read content using an offline RSS reader or by using an online service like Google Reader or IGoogle – see <http://www.google.com/ig/>. RSS services like Google Reader will also suggest new content to subscribers (based on what they have subscribed to in the past), so you could reach a much wider audience.

**4 Get a free Google account.** Google doesn't just do search, it now offers a comprehensive range of online services for web surfers and website owners. Take full advantage of these services by signing up for a free account at <https://www.google.com/accounts/>. You can then register your website with Google Webmaster Tools. Webmaster Tools is how Google will communicate with website owners about their website. It lists any potential issues that may be impacting on your search engine rankings, along with information on where the site is ranking in Google for different phrases, and which phrases people are clicking on. You'll need your web designer to add a line of code to the website to verify that you are the website owner. Also sign up to Google Analytics, as this free service will track your website visitor trends, showing you exactly how many visits your site gets, where they are coming from, and what they are clicking on when they get to your website. It's the perfect tool for measuring the success of any offers or new content you add to your site. With a Google account you can also control how your business is displayed in Google Maps via the Local Business Centre. We strongly recommend that you take full advantage of the Google map listing, adding as much information as you can. Google map results are now frequently displayed at the top of normal Google searches, so to be competitive, your business must have a well written description in Google maps.

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**5 Develop a social media strategy and integrate it into your website.** Social media websites are places where people connect and share information with each other. That information could be about you, so make it easy for them to spread the word about your business. You can do this by having social media links on your website so that with one click your website link can be added to a Facebook page or a ratings website like [www.stumbleupon.com](http://www.stumbleupon.com). If you have a presence on a social media site add the 'badges' to your website to encourage people to visit and become fans of your page. There are also ways to pull content from social media accounts (e.g. your latest Twitter updates) to your website, or you can publish content from your website (such as your latest blog post) to your social media site. With the latest web trends you can take advantage of automation, so when you publish a blog post, Twitter can be automatically notified of the new post (as will your Twitter followers), and then Twitter can update your Facebook page!

**6 Add a blog to your website and publish posts frequently.** Every business has information and expertise that someone somewhere finds extremely helpful. This information can draw visitors to your site that might never have found you without the blog post. Due to the way blogs are structured (with content being classified by topic categories and descriptive keyword tags and urls) posts can rank highly in the search engines, especially if they are on the same domain name as your site – i.e. [www.mywebsite.co.nz/blog/](http://www.mywebsite.co.nz/blog/). Providing interesting and valuable information online will also set you apart from your competitors and establish your credibility online as an expert in your field. You obviously don't want to give all your secrets away, but you need to provide just enough information to make the reader want to know more. We highly recommend the free online blog software called WordPress which is what we use to run our blog. Blog software also has built in RSS feeds so your blog posts can be picked up by RSS services.

**7 Track your rankings in Google and invest in SEO.** If you know how to search Google, then you know how to track your rankings in Google. The million dollar question is just which keywords should you be monitoring. You can work this out with a bit of common sense and also by tapping into your website visitor keyword referrals by using Webmaster Tools and Google Analytics (see tip 4). There are also free keyword suggestion tools that will list what people are actually searching for online – just put 'keyword suggestion tool' into Google and you will get a list of these sites. Once you've

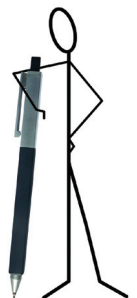
decided on the keywords you want to track, create an Excel spreadsheet and enter in the position (1 – 20) that your site is ranking in Google on that day. Come back a month later and check your position again. If the site consistently ranks at position 20 or later, then you need to take action. That action is SEO, which stands for search engine optimisation. SEO is about making some very specific changes to your website so that it is more relevant in the search engines. These changes include modifying the HTML code and the wording on the website. It pays to get a specialist in search engine optimisation to do this work. Getting links to your website is also a part of SEO, as Google takes into account how many sites link to yours when they rank it. Please resist the temptation to use sites that send hundreds of automated link request emails to webmasters. You won't get a link, and if you do, it might be on a site that could negatively affect your online reputation.

**8 Use 'calls to action' throughout your site.** A 'call to action' is simply asking a visitor to do something. The purpose is to get them to engage more with the website, with the ultimate goal of getting them to make contact or leave their details with you so you can build on the relationship. If a website fails to use the call to action effectively, visitors will leave within 20 - 30 seconds of arriving. If you're lucky, they might click on a couple of pages before going. Typical calls to action include suggestions to download free reports, whitepapers and guides, join the mailing list, subscribe to the RSS feed, request a quote, complete an enquiry form, ask for a 'call back', and click on a link. Your call to action must be obvious, so put it in a button as people understand that a button is clickable (especially important for downloads).

**“Providing interesting and valuable information online will also set you apart from your competitors and establish your credibility online as an expert in your field.”**

**9 Be 'user centric' about your website.** Being user centric about your website means considering the needs and wants of your customers at every stage in the development process. Work out who is your target audience, and brainstorm about what they would want from your website. You may like to even develop 'personas' which are fictitious users of your website, and come up with scenarios of how and why they would use your website. Test your website by watching people use it for the first time, observing carefully what they do and what they struggle with. Navigation is often one of the biggest stumbling blocks on a website; it needs to be simple and intuitive. Your navigation should show people where they are, where they've been and where they can go next – this can be achieved by using breadcrumb 'trail' navigation and on and off states for navigation links and buttons. Break content up into sections that can be quickly scanned by visitors, and keep the most important information within the first third of the screen space (at the top).

**10 Don't forget the basics!** Though it's nice to have some bells and whistles, make sure that you don't overlook some of the most basic key ingredients to a successful website. Put your phone number on your homepage – and make it really obvious. You'll be surprised at how often people just go to sites for the phone number. Your customers will love you for it. Add your full contact details to your website footer (the space at the bottom of the page – address, email, fax, phone, etc). Your contact page should be one click away from your homepage. Have an enquiry form on your contact page and keep it short and to the point. People are busy and don't respond well to long web forms with endless questions. Have a Google map on your contact/location page and keep it up to date via Google Local Business Centre. Make opening hours really obvious (preferably on the homepage), and then repeat them again on another relevant page. Tariffs and pricing – make them really obvious, especially if you are in the tourism or hospitality industries. Less is often more. People do not want to scroll through screeds of text about how fantastic you are. They want to know the essentials and how it benefits them. Keep bullet point lists to seven or less items as people scan content online.



**Take your site to the next level!**

**Contact us today to find out more about this topic and how we can assist your business online. We have consultants throughout New Zealand that can meet with you to discuss your requirements.**