

SilverFox training TOP TIPS SERIES

WORKING THE WEB

If you are not using the Web to promote your products and services, you are missing a powerful opportunity to reach and stay in touch with your target audiences. Increasingly organisations are using the Internet to interact directly with their customers, enabling them to buy goods and services directly through their computer, report faults or request product information and make secure checks on their personal account information. Your website should be a 24/7, 365 day a year shop window which allows your customers and prospects to be in touch with you regardless of time or location. Whilst you may not wish to expand your Web presence to embrace full e-commerce functionality, you will almost certainly want to:

- Develop a website that tells people who you are and what you can offer
- Display product features and benefits
- Give details of price guides
- Flag up price promotions
- Give site visitors, through an e-mail facility, the chance to contact you
- Give contact details of where you are and how to find you

Enhancing Your Marketing Capability

These days, it is not too expensive or too time consuming to develop a basic, but effective website which could be enhancing your marketing capability. You can change the information on your site regularly and have it on-line in seconds, so ensuring the most up to date information is always available to prospective customers.

Potential and existing customers can contact you via your site or e-mail and you can respond in minutes if needed. The range of services you can offer your customers via your site is growing all the time. Not only can people look at your latest product or service information, company history and company report, they can order and pay for goods, check account or transaction details, report faults or problems, take part in customer research and even download computer related promotional items – such as screensavers – that will keep your company name permanently in front of them.

The e-mail addresses of visitors can be collected and stored in a database for future electronic marketing campaigns at a fraction of the cost of using the normal postal system (registration under the Data Protection Act is required) and it is not a good idea to bombard people with too much 'junk e-mail' - known as 'spamming'.

- You can even sell advertising or promotional space to other organisations on your site, normally with banner advertisements that run across the top of the page. You may also opt to join a link exchange scheme whereby you develop links with sites of complementary organisations. This allows people looking at one organisation to visit the site of a complementary or related organisation at the single click of a button.
- Real-time market research can be conducted via polls on your site, encouraging visitors to return later to view the results.

Planning Your Site

- You should plan your Website on paper first, before any programming is done. There is nothing more infuriating to a potential customer than to visit a site to find it only half built or 'under construction.'
- Begin with a central or 'home' page, welcoming visitors to your site and introducing your organisation.
- Then think about who the likely visitors to your site may be or what they will be looking for. For example they could be:-
 - Existing customers who want to access specialist areas of the site through a subscription service or check their account details via a password protected area;
 - Potential new customers who need information about your company backed up by clear contact details and ordering facilities;
 - Customers looking for an on-line brochure to order your goods or services via an ordering form and secure payment system.

- Each section on the Website is a separate page, or set of pages. Relevant sections or pages are linked together for natural movement around the site. For instance a visitor may log on to the Home Page, then look at the goods and services offered and finally want to move to the on-line order form or some other response page to request for information or a meeting. Each option should be available at the single touch of a button.

What To Include On Your Site

- The most important information on your site is your organisation's contact details. This might sound obvious, but a lot of sites only list an e-mail address. This is not advisable as it makes your organisation look remote and impersonal. In addition some people still resist the Internet as a way of conducting business, and will want to be assured that there are 'real' people at the other end of the line. You should include company name, postal address, telephone and fax, a general enquiries e-mail and personal e-mails for key personnel if appropriate.
- Product information is obvious to include, together with company history, details and profiles of directors and other key personnel, news about your organisation and new contract wins. You decide what goes in the site so you construct it to show your organisation in the way you want.
- A simple looking site is usually more effective than an overly complicated one with lots of features and pictures that can take a long time to download. Remember, not every visitor has the fastest computer, Internet connection or latest browser (software to view web pages). If a site displays error messages or takes too long to load, then it will give the wrong impression and visitors will leave never to return. Don't forget that your Website can be the first impression that a potential customer gets of your organisation.
- Try to personalise the site to the visitor if possible. By using a device called a 'cookie', which recognises when someone returns to the site, a personal greeting message can be displayed. This is a simple example. You could expand this type of system to recognise what someone has bought from you before and e-mail them with special offers on the same themes or products; show the visitor's personal account details; recommend services and products based on the visitor profile drawn from their past visits to the site.
- You can include a guestbook for visitors to sign, an e-mail form for them to recommend your site to other people, a visitor poll on a current issue or topic, an opt-in e-mail list to be kept informed of your organisation's news and offers as they happen and, if appropriate a discussion area where people interact with other visitors to the site, posting questions and joining in debates.