

This article outlines the key principles of website design and development.

### Know your audience:

It's one of the cardinal rules of website design, but crucially for this industry it is important to understand who the target audience of the website is. B2B websites are different from B2C, they address a few specific user groups. Engineers look for data and don't want to be distracted by the company info and the corporate-brand-building graphics. Senior decision makers want to know business benefits, not the technical information. Investors want to know figures and press announcements. The effective corporate website caters for each audience differently and makes it easy for each group to get the information they need.

### Know the purpose of the website:

Is it a sales lead generator, a customer support site or to attract investment? In high tech industries, businesses often only have a small number of key customers who they already speak to, and the website is not used for sales but is very important for attracting press attention of investment interest.

Knowing the website's purpose is critical to its success.

### Define the message first:

Content is king. Get the message right and the design will follow. After all, once you've defined the content, there's only so many ways of laying it out and chances are there will be a well defined branding to follow anyway. Do it the other way round and you'll have a great design which doesn't have room for your message, or which deploys it in a less-than-clear way. They're not selling fashionable impulse buys, they're selling the company as a reliable, established, well connected, innovative and well invested brand.

### Get the home page right:

Once the purpose of the website, the audience and the message are known, it should be easy to distil the most important aspect of the message into a clear one line statement of who the company is and what it does (without using popular but ambiguous phrases like 'solutions provider'). In addition to this, there should generally be two or three obvious links to the key offerings to drive traffic down preferred routes, whilst still keeping the focus tight.

### Call to action:

Although the homepage is crucial, if your SEO is done well, lots of visitors won't come in through the homepage, they'll arrive via a link to one of your content pages on Google. With this in mind, every page should feature a call to action which drives visitors towards the stated goals of the website.

### Don't blind people with jargons:

Keep it simple and tell visitors enough to get them interested but not to make a decision not to buy. The goal is to get people interested enough to make contact and then let the sales team do their job. Speaking to someone is far more likely to result in a sale than letting someone make a decision unaided. Technical support documents should be available for those who need them but they shouldn't be at the top level.

### Consider using video or animation:

The benefits of a cutting edge technology can often be explained more simply with animation: after all, a picture speaks a thousand words.

### Keep working on it:

The site launch date is only the start of things. Continually adding new content will keep the site up to date, fresh, relevant and SEO friendly. It will keep visitors coming back and new visitors will have confidence in the relevance of the up to date content. A content management system may be the answer, and if a professional copywriter is not being used then strong editorial control is to be recommended.

### SEO is NOT optional:

Many successful companies have an established client base; assume that SEO is not important. However, all companies can benefit from positive press and additional investment; and a good search engine ranking can help secure both. A good ranking is also indicative of market position, and a good ranking requires ongoing work. Secure your position in Google and don't let anyone else take it.

### WHAT NEXT?

For more information on website design and development  
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