

Creating and developing an online presence – part 4

Continuing his series on how retailers should best develop their business online, **Stuart Jackson** this month focuses on the finer details of what a website should contain.

Having covered project preparation in previous installments, we are now working through the characteristics and functionality that every retail website might choose to present.

Last month's edition elaborated on the loading and controlling of products online, shopping cart functionality, a site search facility, order status and "your account" options and this month we finalise the pages most often integrated into websites. Many of these offer a much greater freedom of content.

About us

The content of this page is really a personal matter but usually contains an explanation of the goals, origins and ethos of an individual or a company.

Some prefer to add detail on the team, their roles and even pictures or comments from them.

Our industry's noble cause provides an opportunity to elucidate on the merits of natural products or the internal workings and ethics of our independent supply chain.

Help...

Exists to explain the purpose and how to go about using each page or service on the website. It is also a chance to list and



answer "frequently asked questions" that a customer might have, including those on services that the website does not yet offer.

Topics could include advice on how to order, an explanation of shipping charges, the various payment options, the impact of VAT, what to do if there is a problem with the website, log in or an order in progress.

It would also cover updating account information, returning an item, cancelling an order, offer security assurances, explain data protection policy and member benefits and so on.

Contact us

A simple page with the company's full address, registered office details and a contact or department head names. A facility to email directly from that page to an

administrator or a chosen department is useful.

customers can view other customers' comments and write their own. To prevent misuse, it should be set up in such a way that any comment submitted is first authorised by the website administrator before being published live.

News

A page where latest products or stories could be posted with links to the shopping cart. As with information links to external sites, retailers will need to be careful what they post to this page so as not to cross the MHRA.

Links and features

As with "about us", the links that are provided to other websites are a style choice. Some prefer no links, only links to friendly sites, to those that compliment the nature of this site or professional references to sources of nutritional information.

Be advised that links and references to websites offering unscientifically proven nutritional data can cause your website to fall foul of the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), which police the sale of our industry's products.

Comments

Not strictly necessary but a user-friendly feature where

Testing the site

There are complex methods such as "split testing", which involves having two or more versions of a web page with one thing changed on each version.

Web visitors are then divided so that each version gets a portion of the total traffic. By keeping track of the "success metrics" for each version, it can be determined which version is performing better.

Without delving into that kind of expensive detail it is crucial to test the website before going live and to periodically review in the future.

Recruit friends of varying age and web experience and set them tasks on your website such as ordering a specific item

or locating help with a health issue. Monitor their struggle through the website pages and make any necessary changes to ease that process for genuine users.

Security

Visitors must feel that they are both visiting a reputable website and that their personal data will be safely stored and protected.

Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) technology protects your website by enabling encryption of sensitive information during online transactions.

This can be obtained, for an annual fee, from a Certificate Authority. Each SSL Certificate contains unique, authenticated information about the certificate owner and a certificate will pop up on screen to reassure users. Look at www.verisign.co.uk for further information.

Legal

The website will require a section that explains all of the legal aspects of trading online

from your own terms and conditions to data protection and the laws governing online sales.

The Distance Selling Regulations came into force in 2000. Anyone ordering by any means other than a face-to-face transaction is covered under this directive.

The legislation requires that a website provide "pre-contract" information. It must state the business name, address, payment arrangements, a description of the goods, the full price, details of any delivery costs, methods and schedules, information about the right to cancel, any special offer restrictions and a policy on substitute goods. In the case of goods, the cooling-off period normally ends seven working days after the day the goods are received. Consumers must inform you in writing of a decision to cancel.

Once an order is received it must be confirmed in writing including the aforementioned

data. It is best practice to send confirmation in advance of the goods but the law requires it is made no later than with the delivered goods.

Should the seller fail in this requirement the customer's right to cancel is extended to three months or seven days after written communication of their rights is finally achieved. The customer is not required to justify their cancellation but must take care of the unwanted product.

If stated in the terms of trading, the customer can be obligated to pay for return costs but typical of UK law, the seller has only 30 days to complete the refund whether the goods have been returned or not!

In such a case the online retailer would have to recover the goods and costs of recovery separately through standard

legal channels.

Perishable foods and personalized products are excluded from the regulations.

Core message

That while much of the site requires a standard approach, particularly to meet legal requirements there is also plenty of opportunity to personalise many of the pages on offer. It is through these pages that the website can be differentiated from the competition so take the time to plan carefully.

December's issue will see the final installment on creating your own website when we will discuss the fascinating subject of how to monitor and report accurately from the website as well as maintaining a strong response position with search engines. [HFB](#)



If you have any questions for Talking Shop or would like further information on Stuart Jackson's consultancy service, contact him on 0131 315 0303 or email stuart@forceofnature.co.uk or visit www.forceofnature.co.uk