

## First impressions count

By Simon Williams – Bridge Leisure Management



Anyone involved in a customer facing business or role will be well aware that people make assumptions about a business or service from the first impression with which they are provided. Traditionally this has been via a brochure, telephone call or recommendation by a friend. These days, however, more and more people are turning to the internet in order to research for information on potential destinations and accommodation providers. Consequently, it is increasingly likely that the first impression a potential customer has of your business is via your website.

If this is the case, then how does your business fare? Is there any way to measure or quantify this? If so, how can you go about it? All very valid questions and I will seek to provide some suggestions in this article towards assisting you in beginning to find the answers to these questions.

Firstly, does your business have a website? If not, then put this article down and organise one to be built, as it is now a vital part of attracting new customers to come and experience your business.

If your business does have a website then when did you last look at it or make any changes to it? If it was over a year ago then it is very much likely to be out of date by now. The internet moves at a frenetic pace and, as new technologies and faster internet connections allow web designers and developers to compress and deliver high quality pictures, videos and other media elements, this is set to continue. For example, flash landing pages are now considered out of date and provide a frustration to users when, not so long ago, they were all the rage. When it comes to using a website people want the information they are looking for found quickly and easily. Why put another page and click in their way? This principle should flow through your site giving users the information they want via the shortest route. This isn't to say that you must constantly spend a fortune to keep up with the very latest trends, as I have already pointed out how they can quickly be seen as annoying rather than 'flash'.

The reason for having a website is to promote your business, therefore let's make it easy for them to use it. Many websites make the mistake of trying to have all the latest gadgets or gizmos on their site, these can end up looking tacky. Poor website design will get in the way of your good content. If the design is intrusive, hard to read or difficult to navigate then people will become impatient. If they can't work out your business and navigate your site quickly then they will go elsewhere and there are many search engines waiting to point them to a site they do feel comfortable using and eventually spending their hard earned money with.

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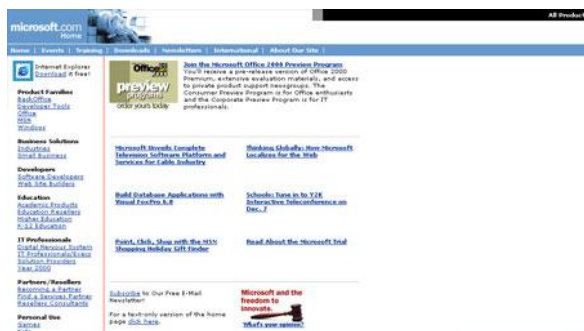
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So what other design items or features can turn users away? We've put together a top ten in no particular order of what there shouldn't be:

1. busy distracting backgrounds that make text hard to read
2. text that is too small to read
3. broken links
4. under construction signs or pictures
5. animations that never stop
6. hit counters
7. too many different colours and fonts
8. pop up windows
9. flashing text
10. no focal point on the page

A good example of how websites evolve can be seen below, the first shot is from Microsoft.com in 1999 and the second is taken this year.



Microsoft.com in 1999



Microsoft.com in 2009

You can find archive snapshots of most sites at [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org) using the way back machine.

When you do look at your site, ask the following five questions:

1. Is it easy to find? Try searching for it in different search engines.
2. Does it present an accurate image and experience of your business?
3. Is it easy to navigate?
4. Can contact details easily be found?
5. Does it compare well with competitors' sites?

If the answer to any of the above questions is no then there are certainly improvements to be made to assist users in having a good first impression of your business and, indeed, you could be costing yourself customers.

So how can you tell if your site is attracting visitors? Well in days gone by we would have looked at our hits counter but I have already pointed out that these are now a *faux pas* and, in any case, they only used to tell you how many people had visited the site.

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For all we knew they left straight away. Any business that is serious about using the internet as a method of marketing is now using Google Analytics and has been for some time.

No not Goggle Antics but Google Analytics, what on earth is that I hear you cry. Well it is a FREE to use piece of software offered by the all powerful search engine Google. In order to use it you need to sign up for a Google Account, tell them a little about your website and then they will provide you with a few lines of HTML Code which need to be copied and pasted into the code of your website. You can either do this yourself or ask your web developer/designer/host to install it for you. Once the code is placed within your website it starts collecting information on those who visit your site. Examples of the information obtained are:

- the number of visitors
- the number of first time visitors
- the number of pages viewed
- the average number of pages viewed per visitor
- the average amount of time they spend on your site
- what keywords they used to find your site
- where visitors come from
- what age group they are in and so it goes on and on

For example on the 29<sup>th</sup> May 2009 our website [www.bridgeleisure.com](http://www.bridgeleisure.com) had a visitor from Hyderabad, India. They spent just under eight minutes looking at five different pages and this was the first time they had visited the site. Yes, Big Brother has been here for some time!

There are various reports that you can run to allow you to interpret the multitude of information on offer to you. As someone wishing to promote a business, this sort of information is invaluable. Imagine if, when you placed your newspaper advert you would get to know how many people looked at it, how long they looked at it for, where they were from and whether they went on to look at your business amongst other things! And yes this is a free to use service. If you do not feel confident inserting the code then get someone to do it for you but it should not cost the earth as it really is a 10 minute job once the account is set up. You can then log in as and when you choose to view the reports.

So we've checked our website is up to date and presenting our business in a good light, and we are now monitoring how visitors to the site are finding and using it, as well as which pages are popular and which are not. You can now begin to make informed decisions about your website and how your visitors interact with it.

Bridge Leisure can help and assist with your online presence whether that is a review of your current website and online activity through to the design and build of a new website. For further information please visit [www.bridgeleisure.com](http://www.bridgeleisure.com) or contact Simon Williams on 07921 079655 or [simon.williams@bridgeleisure.com](mailto:simon.williams@bridgeleisure.com).



## Pitch fee arrears

By Kirstie Apps – Tozers LLP



*In this current economic climate everyone is feeling the pinch. You may have some residents who are in pitch fee arrears which affects your cashflow. Before the economic downturn you may have been more inclined to pursue residents with high pitch fee arrears through the courts to terminate the Mobile Homes Act agreement and gain possession of the pitch, allowing you to sell a new home on the empty pitch. Now however, sales of park homes are slower and a pitch maybe empty for some time. So, what can you do to recover the arrears from the resident?*

Under the terms of the agreement your residents have agreed to pay the pitch fee when it falls due. If they have fallen behind they are in breach. You could:

1. Pursue the debt through the court (it's a small claim if below £5,000) and seek judgment on the outstanding amount. If you decide to do this, you should:
  - write to the resident. Set out the breach of the agreement, tell them how much they owe you and when this must be paid to avoid legal action
  - if they do not pay the way is clear to issue a claim in the court. The amount of the court issue fee will vary depending on how much is owed to you. If the sums are not disputed by the resident you will be able to get what is known as judgment in default of defence which is granted by the court on application by you but without the need for you or your lawyer to appear in court
  - if the debt is disputed you will be required to comply with various preliminary directions of the court before there is eventually a hearing.

The downside of this procedure is that the amount of the claim cannot be increased even if the resident continues to fail to pay. You are also unlikely to gain an order for payment of your legal costs if it is a small claim. Once you get judgment there may be difficulty in enforcing it since sanctions for debt are notoriously ineffective. On the other hand, by pursuing the resident for a debt rather than possession, the home stays on the pitch.

2. The alternative is to follow the procedure under the Mobile Homes Act (MHA) and serve notice of breach on the resident, asking for the breach to be remedied within a reasonable period of time. If the arrears are not paid within the stipulated time you are entitled to apply to the court for permission to terminate the agreement and gain possession of the pitch. If the resident defends the proceedings and seeks to repay the debt in instalments, the court is likely to give you judgment on the debt but allow the repayments if this means that the debt will be paid off within a reasonable period of time and subject also to the resident continuing to pay the pitch fee as it falls due. You should ask the Judge to direct that, if the resident fails to comply with any part of the order, you can apply to restore the possession proceedings and ask the court to end the owner's right to possession.

The advantage of following the MHA procedure is that you obtain judgment on the debt and there is an incentive for the resident to pay the arrears instalments and the pitch fee on time. You are also more likely to obtain an order for legal costs by following this procedure than if you limit yourself to seeking a money judgment in the small claims court.

If you are experiencing problems with pitch fee arrears, please telephone **Kirstie Apps** on 01392 209572 or **Tony Beard** on 01392 667634. Alternatively, you can email [k.apps@tozers.co.uk](mailto:k.apps@tozers.co.uk) or [t.beard@tozers.co.uk](mailto:t.beard@tozers.co.uk).