How To Keep Your Website Current

By Graham Jones

Workshop

This booklet is based on the Keep Your Website Current Workshop run by Internet Psychologist, Graham Jones. Further booklets, handouts and other downloads associated with this workshop are available from:

www.grahamjones.co.uk/currentwebworkshop

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Introduction

The one thing you can be sure of about the Internet is that it isn't the same today as it was a year ago. Indeed, it is different today than it was yesterday; change is a way of life for online businesses.

Keeping up with the changes can be tough. Every day new services are introduced, old ones improved and mountains of information about how to run an online business is added to the web. Indeed, as an example, the amount of material in blog posts written in just one day would fill up Time magazine's pages for 770 years…! The amount of data added to the web each day would fill 268 million DVDs. And that's to say nothing of the emails sent each week - if they were actual letters it would take the US Postal Service 14 years to process them…! The Internet is drowning business leaders with so much information, ideas, services and applications that it is impossible to keep up.

But therein lies the problem; if you don't keep up-to-date your web presence quickly looks tired, out-of-date, old-fashioned and out-of-touch. In short, you become less appealing to customers and potential customers. So you cannot afford to stay "old"; you have to change with the Internet - and that means a whole new approach to business.

This workshop will help your business work out how to keep updated on web matters relevant to your organisation. You will also discover how you can constantly change what you do online, without significantly impacting your actual work. However, you may well discover you need to re-focus the way your business operates if you wish to take advantage of what the ever-changing Internet can offer your company.

Where are you now?

Before you can really decide which opportunities to take advantage of, you need to know your current position. Are you ready for some of the more exciting and dynamic aspects of the web? Is your company organised to react with the speed required by the ever-changing Internet? You need to establish those kind of baselines first, before you can work out what you could achieve with the latest the web has to offer.

Does your website do anything different to what it did a year ago? Or is your website pretty much the same, albeit maybe with a different design? If little has changed on your website in a year, you are falling behind and that could be dangerous as your competitors may be embracing new ideas and thereby gaining greater attention amongst your potential customers.

To help you set the "where are you now" baseline consider three things - three things your website does now it did not do a year ago, three things you sell online now you did not sell a year ago and three things you do yourself online that you did not do a year ago. Focusing on these aspects will help you see if your website is making progress. If you can't think of three things that have changed on your website, but you can think of three things you do differently online, then there is a clear gap which may need filling.

Another way of assessing where you are now is to undertake some competitor research. Look at the websites in your sector and see what functions and features they have. Assess your direct competitor's activity on social media. And take a look at keyword research to see what the marketplace is doing.

One tool which will help you do all three of these things is Raven, available from: **http://uklik.me/ravenseotools**.

Things have changed

The Internet is growing exponentially. For the first few years there were only thousands of websites and there was little updating of services; all that was really available was information and search.

Nowadays, things are different; there are now 42 new websites added to the Internet every minute of every day. What was the "hottest thing" a year ago might not be the flavour of the month in a year's time.

Back in 1997 the world's Number One website in terms of traffic was "Geocities" (remember that…?). The third site at that time was "Starwave". Of the top 5 sites then, only one remains in the top 5 now, Yahoo. But that has dropped four places. In 2012 the number one site is Facebook, pushing Google into second place. Yet, six years ago Facebook was a private system, not available to the public. Now it is used by over half of the online population for an average of 16 minutes each day.

Meanwhile, one of the Top 10 websites in the world, Wikipedia, functions with just 65 staff worldwide responsible for more than 4m pages which between them get almost 11m views every single day. And it does all this simply by asking for financial donations once a year which brings the non-profit organisation a total of $24m per annum. Wikipedia is a small company, with a massive impact achieved not by selling anything but by getting a tiny fraction of its users to donate small sums.

New business models, new services, new ideas - they are all surfacing on the web every day. Are you keeping up-to-date or are you still living in the Internet's past (a year ago…!)?

One way of keeping updated is to subscribe to Mashable's news services via **http://www.mashable.com**.

Are you ready to change?

You may know what you want to do to improve your company's online presence. You may also know what you want to achieve online. But are you ready for the changes necessary to ensure your website is always current?

One way of working this out is by using a mapping tool. You determine where you are on a spectrum of various categories. An example is shown below which shows the direction of change needed to move from the present to the future. This kind of mapping technique also shows the changes in attitude which may be necessary within a business if it is to capitalise on the current online trends.
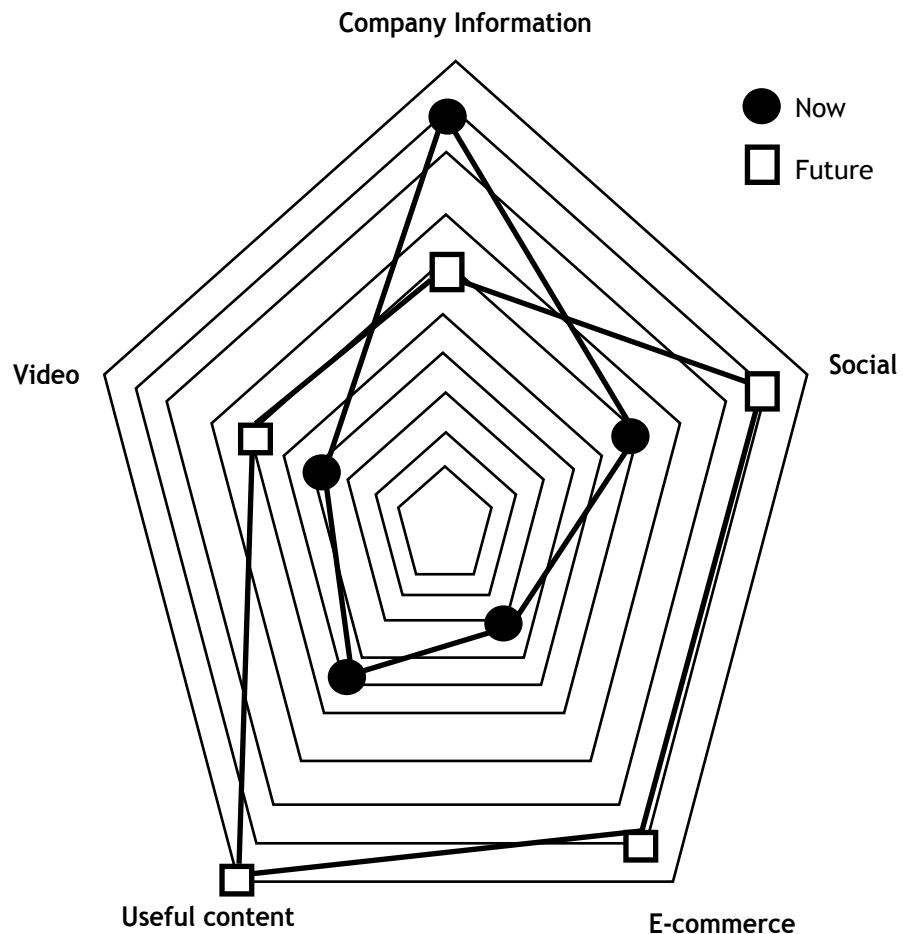
Looking for opportunities

Sometimes, business leaders simply want to take up "the latest thing" because it is just that, the latest. However, this fails to take into account any kind of strategic importance of the latest thing. Some businesses do things online simply because it is new or because other people are doing it; that is hardly a strategic approach.

To work out which new things to take up and which ones to avoid you can undertake traditional SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis. However, you can add a "twist" to this to see what happens if you combine each of these aspects of some online activity. Look at the example below and you will see what social media opportunities there might be for a law firm.

	STRENGTHS Experts in family law Experienced in difficult situations Know how to deal with upset children	WEAKNESSES Not very web savvy No-one uses social media Pushed for time
OPPORTUNITIES Families want online law advice There are few interactive guides especially for families with children	Talk to families about what they want from us in social media which would help them and their children	Work with an independent lawyer experienced in social media
THREATS Other family law firms could be looking at this Social media conflicts with client confidentiality	Use social media to explain how lawyers arrange and respect client confidentiality	Get family clients to help write and run our social media pages

Create a measurable strategy

Once you have assessed where you are, where you want to go and the opportunities you have available to you, then you need to create a strategic plan. Otherwise you are simply relying on hope.

Yet, a strategy is not a strategy unless you can measure the impact of your proposed changes to your web presence. You need to establish what it is you want to achieve and then how you are going to measure that impact. Remember too that web analytics gives you lots of data, but not all of it is relevant.

Ultimately, it is sales or leads for sales that actually matter. So you need to ensure that whatever new things you do online you build in some kind of measurement to see the impact of what you are doing on your actual sales or lead generation performance. Often, simple methods are easier than complex ones…!

So, instead of trying to set up some complex computer-coded analytical system to see if some new social media service produces more leads, all you probably need is a special telephone number which that service alone directs people to. Then you know automatically how many sales calls you received as a direct result of one online service. One great way of achieving that with low costs and excellent call statistics is via the Telephone Number Company at: **http://uklik.me/telnoco**.

Also, the Raven tools system mentioned earlier is an excellent system for measuring your online goals. See: **http://uklik.me/ravenseotools**.

Finding the alternatives

You may, of course, have developed a fantastic strategy which is well-planned and that you have in place the organisational change necessary to implement it. But nagging away at the back of your mind is the perennial problem for anyone doing business online: what if something changes and it's all different by the time my plans are in place?

This is the issue behind why so many business websites remain unchanged for years. There is fear that that the costs in redevelopment will be wasted because something new will come along. Hence, many business leaders decide to maintain the status quo, looking to make more out of an existing website, rather than changing it for the new Internet.

Part of the fear is borne out of the massive increase in information and services available. But most fears are usually developed as a result of lack of information, not too much of it. So, you do need to gain as much information about new online services and features as quickly as possible, but without wasting your time or drowning in an overloaded ocean of information.

One of the best ways of doing this is to set up your own "information dashboard" in a service such as Netvibes (**http://www.netvibes.com**). In doing so you can gather together information on the latest online trends and services into one page. All you need to do is regularly log in to your Netvibes account (which is free of charge) and you will quickly see the latest information about the web from the sources you have selected. Good sources are Mashable and Hubspot.

Spotting the trends

Even if you have a system in place such as Netvibes or you follow the activities on Mashable and Hubspot there are still new ways of exploiting the Internet which you might not know about. You need to keep up-to-date with the trends in your own sector too.

Obviously, being part of a network, a business club or a peer learning group are all ways in which you can find out about trends and ideas for online business. But how can you evaluate what you discover and determine whether or not the new things are of value to your business?

Firstly you need a method of collecting such information. One good way of doing this is by using Evernote (**http://www.evernote.com**). This allows you to use a computer application, a website and a phone app to collect titbits of information for later review. When someone mentions a new web service to you, jot it down in Evernote and then come back to it at a later date when you want to check it out. This way you will be able to keep track of trends and ideas you pick up from meeting other people.

An additional method of keeping track of ideas and checking out such things is to use a content curation service, such as ScoopIt or Storify. Both of these services allow you to collect information on any aspect of web business which you wish to know more about. See: **http://www.scoop.it** and **http://www.storify.com**

Updating your web presence

With the ever-changing and dynamic state of the Internet it is all too easy to get "locked in" to old systems or bespoke software from specific developers. This is no longer suitable or flexible enough for the modern Internet and so if you don't already use a content management system which has future-proofing built in, then you will face difficulties as the web changes.

There are several systems to choose from, but the ideal one which has the largest market share is WordPress, from **http://www.wordpress.org**.

WordPress allows you to adapt and change and add new services and features as the web itself grows and develops. Most of what you will do with WordPress is entirely free of charge, with only modest fees being charged for some design aspects and for some of the more advanced management features.

Alternatives to WordPress do exist, such as Blogger and Joomla. However, WordPress has the largest developer community and unlike Blogger is independent of a large multinational conglomerate which could switch off or alter features if they are not commercially viable for them (Google owns Blogger).

WordPress can produce entire websites and many large companies now use this content management system including Reuters, UPS, Volkswagen, eBay, Ford and CNN.

WordPress also connects with various social media services, allowing you to extend your web footprint easily.

Further Reading

Making sure your web presence is fit for the future is an ongoing task. Here are three books which will help you with that.

Web 2.0: A strategy Guide

By Amy Shuen

This book shows you how to transform your business by helping you set a strategy for all that Web 2.0 can offer your particular circumstances. The book does not focus on technology, instead looking at business strategy, planning and outcomes. An ideal book for medium-sized firms.

http://uklik.me/web-strategy-book

Get Content Get Customers

By Joe Pulizzi and Newt Barrett

This is an easy-to-read and practical book which shows you how to produce compelling content for your web presence, whether on your website or elsewhere. The book includes several business case studies which show how content can be turned into profit.

http://uklik.me/get-content-book

Content Rules

By Ann Handley and C C Chapman

This is regarded as one of the best books on content and its impact on the web, both now and in the future. The books shows you how to use content on your website and in social media for maximum engagement with customers and potential clients.

http://uklik.me/content-rules-book

Graham Jones

Internet Psychologist Graham Jones helps businesses succeed online by harnessing the power of the Internet for increased profits.

Internet Strategy Planning and Coaching

Advice, information and ideas to ensure your business is using the Internet effectively and efficiently so your business can make more profit. Development of strategic plans to help your business use the Internet to its maximum effect. Assistance with integration of Internet technologies into your existing business structure and organisation.

Internet Efficiency Audit

Many businesses feel they are suffering because staff get distracted when using the Internet at work. Or companies feel that personal use of the Internet can reduce productivity. This audit will help your business ensure that staff continue to be motivated to work without being distracted by all that the Internet has to offer them. Using this audit you will be able to work out how to manage the Internet within your business to ensure maximum productivity.

Internet Marketing Analysis

Is your business doing as much as it can to capitalise on the Internet? There is so much more that many businesses could be doing online, but it usually takes a fundamental shift in attitudes and in business processes. This analysis will help you find out if your business is ready for that shift and what to do to ensure you can profit from Internet marketing.

Contact details

Telephone

0118 336 9710

Email

graham@grahamjones.co.uk

Web

www.grahamjones.co.uk

Twitter

twitter.com/grahamjones

Facebook

facebook.com/internetpsychologist

LinkedIn

linkedin.com/in/grahamjones

Video Channels

youtube.com/grahamjonesuk

vimeo.com/channels/grahamjones

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