

# Three Biggest Website Mistakes Probably Creeping Up On You

*One aim for your website is to present your brand and hopefully build awareness of it.*

**A more important aim is to attract clients.**

Technical progress is speeding up the internet in all sort of ways. Google and other search engines keep moving the goalposts. If you take no action to keep up, your website will lose productivity. That means fewer and fewer enquiries.

Having looked at 409 Solicitors' websites (at the time of writing), I've seen some big ambushes that have emerged in recent years. Here are three to give you a perspective.

## ***Images are given too-high priority***

**It's true that websites are a visual medium, but...**

Designs have become increasingly dominated by images. This creates two problems – one for Google and another for humans.

### **1. Google checks images as well as text.**

If your images are large in their file size (which may or may not be related to their visual size), Google down-rates your websites position in its results pages. That means it may not get found easily and therefore few people will visit it.

### **2. Images take up space that you could use for text.**

It is your writing that persuades and convinces people, so I suggest that is the priority. It's true that images, colours and logos etc. can easily differentiate you from your competitors, but these leave only transient impressions. Your choice of words is what really makes you more attractive to people on the verge of enquiring.

Google does like pages to have at least one image.

But you don't need several pictures unless you are illustrating something important to your readers. And they don't have to be big or at the top of the page – website builders are often graphic designers who like images more than text: beware!

So it is better for your client-attracting results to relegate images to second place. Make sure that your text is clear, easy-to-read and 'sells' the benefits of choosing your firm instead of another.

**That is not always easy.**

The 'normal' fundamentals of marketing don't work easily for professionals.

Writing persuasively about yourself can be challenging – maybe not quite having those skills, a shrinking from boasting, or a lack of clarity on what's important to your clients...

## ***Designing the Homepage as the front door***

**Websites were originally designed with a Homepage, which was treated like the front door.**

Websites were originally designed with a Homepage acting like a front door.

The internal layout was conceptualised to be a bit like a house. The front door opened into an

entrance hallway which had a number of other 'main rooms' leading off the entrance hallway. These were the main pages you see in the navigation bar.

Most of those rooms had other subsidiary rooms connected through them. And occasionally there were corridors and stairs to other subsidiary rooms.

The Homepage was designed and written as though everyone would enter through that door and find their way to an internal room that interested them. So it was usually the prettiest page.

But nowadays, Google etc. show searchers any of your pages relevant to their search. You probably experience this yourself when you search for something new.

What it means is that you can go straight to any page as your first point of entry. In other words, many searchers will entirely skip your Homepage.

### **This has several important consequences:**

1. If that one page your potential clients inspect has missing information (eg contact details or hints about other related information etc), those clients will never realise what they're missing out on.
2. If your internal pages do not link to related information, readers will simply return straight to Google to continue their researches. Google notices this and assumes the website as a whole was not relevant to the visitor's search. It will then reduce your ranking for those search keywords, meaning that others are less likely to find your website when they search.
3. If your firm has more than one office, your web designer may recommend creating a Contact page for each office. This might be better for SEO – to make it more findable for local people. But a searcher may enter your website through the Contact page for the office nearest them. So rather than find useful information about you, your services and their problem or opportunity, they will find a map, a contact form and a telephone number – which they are probably not ready to use. So they also will back out of your website and go on elsewhere.

### **What to do?**

Your website needs to be designed around your client-to-be's experience.

As much as possible, every page should be designed as though visitors might arrive through it. This means a degree of repetition, but this must be done very carefully as Google dislikes over-duplication. Therefore each page has to be written within appropriate style guidelines but should also have its own personality.

This might seem like verging on 'creative writing'. Flowery literature is not necessary, but it does require more than the straightforward announcements many websites seem to display.

### **How to tell?**

Announcements use the word 'we' a lot - often at the beginning of a sentence. The danger is that this can lead to factual descriptions, text-book white papers and academic grammar - all unappealing to your potential clients.

I suggest you check this out the easy way - visit a competitor's website and scan it for sentences beginning with 'we'. Then make a plan.

## ***Over-writing with big blocks of dense text***

### **Some websites just look off-putting at first glance.**

You see lots of text written in dense blocks. The paragraph blocks are large. There are few images (if any) to space out the mass. (There may be a large one at the top of the page but that makes for more contrast.)

Then you spot that the font is coloured gray. And displayed in a small font. And the sentences are long and difficult to navigate within the paragraphs. They are nearly unreadable.

### ***It's all overwhelming!***

You wanted easy-to-read stories so you could easily do what you came for – to scan the gist and decide quickly whether to stay and get into the detail... or abandon it.

*This is bad news from two points of view:*

#### **Human reactions**

When people first arrive at your website, they are usually in research mode. They are looking to see if you are relevant to their search. They are scanning pages quickly.

A dense block of text might get the first few lines scanned and then skipped as visitors move on to the next thing that catches their eye – which could just be a picture!

If it's difficult to read for any reason, people just rebel. “Why should I waste my time?” You probably know the feeling when you've found yourself in the wrong place.

It has been said that people reject inelegant websites within less than a second.

#### **Search Engine reactions**

If humans give up on a page of hard-to-read text within seconds, Google *et al* will notice and judge that it is an unpopular website. It will then down-rank it as common-sense (sic) says other people won't want to read it either.

And yet, your website might contain a lot of unique, expert and valuable information. But its design gives it a bad reputation, so your valuable information doesn't get read.

What to do?

Use typography - the art and technique of arranging type to make written language legible, readable, and appealing when displayed.

- Texture your text with long headlines, lots of subheaders, a few bullet lists
- Sequence of subheadings logically so scanning readers still get the gist
- Use more subheadings if your client have a lower reading age
- Insert one 'big word' into occasional subheadings to appeal to intellectuals
- Write bullet lists as though subheadings - brief, punchy, focussed

### **I hope these hints are useful.**

Could I help you more, with rewording your text to help Google help potential clients find you?

All the best, Dave