

Transforming your Website into a Business-Critical Resource

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BY LYNDA RATHBONE



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Executive summary

DO YOU know what your users' experiences are like on your website? Are you making it easy for them to do business with you online? Are you giving them a quality website experience that represents your company and your brand? Most importantly, are they finding what they are looking for?

As websites are now the first port of call for any target audience seeking information from your organisation, you must ensure it's an easy-to-use tool and that it represents your organisation. This report is essential reading for web and marketing teams, senior management, and anyone else interested in transforming their site into a best-practice business resource. Whether your site is a public internet site, a customer-specific extranet or an employee-focused intranet, this report focuses on improving your site through a user-experience approach. It aims to guide the reader step by step through a website revamp – from conception, to practice and to implementation and maintenance. It features real-world examples, success stories, project failures and case studies from a wide variety of organisations to learn from. Examples and case studies include:

- The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development;
- The Society of Chiropractors and Podiatrists;
- Save the Children UK;
- Vodafone Global Enterprise;
- Diabetes UK;

- The Carbon Trust;
- Cable & Wireless;
- AccountingWeb;
- Office Angels;
- MORE TH>N Premier; and
- BskyB.

Chapter 1 defines an effective website and explains why now is the time to update or re-launch it. No longer is it simply good enough to publish a brochureware site, and then hope for the best. New tools and technologies are available and it's time to evolve your web presence into a critical business resource for your company.

Chapter 2 focuses on your target audiences, ensuring you are defining your audiences correctly and that you understand their needs and requirements. Your users are becoming more sophisticated as they move through the online world and demand more from their online experience – this chapter makes sure you can deliver.

Chapter 3 introduces one of the most important concepts of good user experience on a website – findability – or how users seek, find and act on information in their user journey. This chapter explains the meaning of website findability, introduces the findability methodology and provides tools to make findability work for your site and your users. Towards the end of this report features a findability case study to show how certain tools and a methodology have transformed the site of a large charity organisation.

Chapter 4 explains how to develop an online strategy for your organisation. This strategy should encompass more than a website strategy and look holistically, across your company, at its online use.

Armed with improved knowledge of your users, Chapter 5 takes the reader into the world of online content. Easy to get wrong, this chapter steers you in the right direction by discussing best-practice website navigation, how to use information architecture and wireframes for a user-led site structure, the importance of content formatting and making your content assets (.pdf files, audio, video and more) work for you. This chapter discusses the relevance of knowledge management, metadata and content wrapping, the use of dynamic content, personalised and customised content, reachability and portable content for hand-held devices. It also provides guidance on buying and using content management systems (CMSs).

Chapter 6 examines what makes good website design. It explains how to strike the right balance between visual and information-led design, and features expert commentary.

Chapter 7 discusses the topics of search, metadata and taxonomy, offering tips and tools to make your content more findable, both from an external and local-search engine.

Chapter 8 examines website aftercare in the form of business-process redesign and the potential impact the updated or re-launched website could have on the business.

Just as important as revamping your website is understanding how to measure its success – or failure. Chapter 9 discusses ways to evaluate your website by creating a variety of metrics for use in the business, to both showcase your successes and justify budget spend.

And finally, no report would be complete without analysing how certain trends are

shaping the future of websites. Chapter 10 analyses what's in store for websites, particularly with respect to the power that Google possesses online, where this giant is heading and why you should care, as well as the power of the people and social media, the impact of device and hand-held technologies on websites and planning to extend your site to these platforms.

A list of useful website resources can be found in the appendix of this report to use online alongside this report.

About the author



A TECHNOLOGY veteran, Lynda Rathbone started working on the internet for the US government before transitioning to the web and making history by setting up the first ever e-mail to the White House for the former US President Bill Clinton and Vice President Al Gore, as well as launching the first White House website (<http://www.whitehouse.gov>).

Following her government tenure, Lynda worked at MCI on the e-commerce site – internetMCI – and then moved to New York City to work in the world of internet consulting, managing major accounts including General Electric (valued at over US\$100m).

From New York, she moved to London to take a position with News International working at online auction site FiredUp! and helping create the first e-commerce platform for all of News International's major titles, including *The Times*, *The Sun*, *The Sunday Times*, *Page3.com* and *The News of the World*.

Lynda spent the next three years at Cable & Wireless as director of the Global Internet Group, overseeing all web-enabled employee and public and customer-facing online environments.

Lynda now runs her own web services consultancy Four Square Media Limited, which helps organisations with user experience and interaction design, knowledge management, online strategy, content management, optimisation, classification and categorisation. It specialises in the creation of technology solutions that form the foundation of an overall business strategy, and approaches them from an audience-led, business-driven, technology-supported perspective, believing good technology solutions start with the user, not the software.

She also writes for several business publications and is a regular speaker on web technology.

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I'm grateful for the opportunity Ark Group has given me to write this report. It has been a very satisfying experience.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this report to my parents, who, after reading it will finally understand what I do.