



Preparing for the [re]design of your Website – Part 1

In a previous newsletter we talked about the importance of understanding the wants, needs and behaviours of your online customers and then designing your site around the tasks that those real users want to complete.

There is, however, an (often missed) fundamental step that comes before this user centred design work and long before any web pages are built. What's the point? The single most important question you can answer when setting out on any web project is "What is the point of this website?"

Sounds really straightforward, but try answering it now about your own Internet or Intranet site(s). Right now many Local Authorities' answers may include:

- The ODPM made me do it to meet PSTO's,
- The previous Chief Exec was a geek and loved the web, so it was quite a focus here and now we are "stuck" with it,
- The IT department had a budget excess and a very "good" relationship with a tech company that were excellent at marketing their web capability,
- Neighbouring authorities and / or County all had websites and we really didn't want to be left out,
- We realised that the web, if properly integrated into our other contact channel strategies and serviced with a single back end fulfilment operation that targeted the tasks and services that customers actually were prepared to carry out online, would reduce the overall costs of customer service.

There is only one of those answers that generally isn't heard... I will let you guess which!

Of course, different people within an organisation will have different opinions as to the purpose of the website, so at the beginning of any new project it is essential to establish who these stakeholders are, what their real needs are and then to document and prioritise these needs.

From this prioritised set of business requirements – and I use that term deliberately because the web goals should only exist in line with overall business direction – a firm answer can be produced to the "What is the point?" question. That answer will need some fine tuning and maybe even a little banging together of heads sometimes, but what it gives us is the Overall Objective of the web site, i.e. the point.

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