

WHY DOESN'T MY WEBSITE WORK? - CHECK LIST FOR EXISTING SITES

PART TWO – CAN PEOPLE USE MY SITE?

INTRODUCTION

Use this check-list to help you establish if users are able to use your site effectively – by their standards. So often we hear people talk about their new website and the things that they want to tell their users about. Frankly this is the wrong starting point; you really need to find out what your users want from your site. Very often there will be significant differences.

BASIC USABILITY

Speed – your website should be designed for people connecting to the Internet using a modem. Pages, Images, Flash files all should load within a couple of seconds. A page that takes too long to download will never be used.

It is easy to check the download speed of your site, but don't be fooled by how long your site takes to download on your machine when you access it. Often your pages and images will be stored in a cache on your PC so when you look at your site you are more than likely looking at a copy stored locally rather than a copy from the web server which is how everyone else is viewing it.

When you next visit your site press the shift key and click on the refresh button on your browser toolbar. You should notice that the page is being refreshed and it may take a good time longer for the whole page to appear than you are used to. If this is the case your users will have a problem and will most likely go elsewhere.

As a guide file images should be no more than 10 KB in size. If you have lots of large images on your website you should get your web developer to look at this. (When we talk about images being large we are not necessarily talking about the dimensions. You can have two pictures of the same dimensions with radically different file sizes.)

Let's look at the two images below. Although the image on the left is larger it has a file size of 15KB and will load faster than the picture on the right which although of smaller dimensions has a larger file size.



Browser Compatibility - it's easy to look at the world from your own perspective and it's easy to forget that users see your website differently when they use different browsers and different operating systems. As a minimum your website should provide a high quality viewing experience to users of the last two or three versions of Internet Explorer and Netscape. You should also be aware that Mac users will see your site differently even though they may be running Explorer.

If your web developer has not checked your site using different browsers you should see if you can check this out yourself. Often libraries and schools will run different operating systems and software versions. If you experience difficulty viewing your pages using different browsers you should discuss this with your web developer.

Navigation – Do your users have to scroll to see all of your navigation options? Are your navigation buttons disguised as pictures or icons that are not immediately obvious? Do your users have to scroll to see all of your pages?

Do your users click on links and buttons only to find a 404 message – page not found? It is really easy for links to become outdated. Be careful when a page is removed from your website that all links to that page are also removed.

Necessary Information – there are some things that you must have on your website for a user to have confidence in you.


Full contact details are a necessity. It is also worthwhile to list some of the more likely email addresses your users may want to use. Do not simply supply a contact form, this inspires little trust. If you are asking for an email address or any other personal information you must have some sort of privacy statement or policy. People are rightly suspicious of how their contact details are being used, spam has killed any off the innocent user.

Security – is a must if you are trying to sell through your website. Asking people to supply their credit card details on a non-secure page is not only unlikely to work, it is also very unwise.

USABILITY CHECKLIST

Use this checklist to see how your website measures up to your user's basic requirements.

	YES	NO	DETAIL
Home Page			
Number of Images			
Total size of all images			
Time taken to download			
Your Company Details			
Is it obvious to your users what your business is about and how they can use your website?			
Is your website kept up-to-date?			
Browser Compatibility			
Netscape			
Explorer			
Mac			
Navigation			
Easy to find			
Easy to understand			
No broken links			
Contact Page			
Company details including ABN			
Commonly used email addresses			
Physical and postal address			
Phone / Fax numbers			
Office Hours			
Information on how you will respond to queries sent via email or your mail form.			
Privacy			
Privacy statement			
Security			
If you sell from your website and ask users to provide their credit card details do you use SSL?			

 Remember, this check list is your starting point. If you can put a yes tick beside each of these minor points you are doing well and your users will be showing their appreciation with their presence. If usability is high on your to-do-list for your website you should get your user's opinions. Use the resource [What Do Your Customers Think of Your Website?](#) to help you conduct a simple usability test.