

A personal view...

Top 10 common website errors

When browsing the web, it is far too common to see even basic errors with websites. This is not just me, as a 'power user' complaining about subtle issues; even my wife, who is a 'newbie', gets frustrated.

Make sure your site does not make these basic errors:

1) The website does not exist

This has happened several times. My wife reads an article in a magazine about a product or service that looks interesting. She goes to the website given in the article. It just isn't there. What a waste of all that marketing opportunity...

2) You cannot find the product

This follows on from the above. The website is there but there is no trace of the product or service mentioned. No wonder so many of these businesses are 'here today, gone tomorrow'.

3) The website just doesn't work

With some sites, often driven by content management or other database systems, you just get pages of script errors. Perhaps they didn't check the site after it went live – who knows?

4) The navigation fails – pages are missing

This problem is far too common when clicking through a site and, really, there is no excuse. If you have pages, put them there, if not, remove from the navigation.

5) The checkout requires you to register

I want to buy a product, not join your club. Several companies have lost my business by asking me to register before I can buy from them.

6) The checkout asks for personal details

Why, when I am just buying a product, do I need to tell you my date of birth or give other personal information? If it is a product I want, I just lie, but mostly I go elsewhere. My website date of birth is usually 01/01/1910.

7) Old news

In the excitement of getting a new website for your business you incorporate a 'latest news' page. 6 months later you cannot be bothered to update it. It does your business no good if your 'latest news' is years out of date. So get rid of it if you cannot maintain it. For some reason this problem seems to be popular with professional practices such as accountants.

8) Under construction

I do not want to be told that your new super website is being built and 'please come back later' (often, if you do, it is still under construction). If you are not ready, a simple page saying what you do with contact details is far better.

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9) Opening splash pages

This is where you get an animated introductory sequence (usually in Flash). You have to wait for it to download (remember, not everyone is on super fast broadband – even in the USA) and then wait while it runs. Some have a ‘skip intro’ button which, in my experience, most people use. In which case, why bother with it?

10) Confusing navigation

With far too many sites it is just plain difficult to find your way around. If people get lost they go elsewhere (it so easy to go back to Google and start again).

And a bonus issue:

11) Fancy design

Is your web designer developing a website to win prizes for clever design work, or are they working to provide a site suitable for your business and customers? Many sites seem to be designed for the graphic design industry or colleges, not for ordinary people.

How to overcome many of these issues

Test, test and test again. Test thoroughly before you go live, test thoroughly after you go live. Get inexperienced users to test for you, as well as the more experienced surfer. My wife tells me where I am going wrong – and not just with websites!

Then check back regularly to ensure nothing has gone wrong with the hosting. I lost my subdomains once but they were only gone for a day before I spotted the problem. That was bad enough; it could have been weeks or months before someone told me.

Now go and check your website!

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