



ASPAC CONSULTING GROUP

Marketing Consultants

ABN 57 279 943 512

Information as Website Content

A website where visitors want to keep reading, also to return to the site because they find it informative and reliable is one of the major goals for any marketer, virtually regardless of market category. The content must be relevant and more appropriate to the needs of the site visitor than information available on other competing websites. There are many success factors, but one of the most important is the provision of information that generates a desired action. In some situations, this action may be subtle but it still exists. For example, a lawyer's website may not overtly ask the visitor to "purchase", but the communication of legal skill and knowledge implies credibility designed to induce contact and referral when the need arises.

Types of Information

Not all that long ago, information on most subjects was restricted in some way, regardless of whether it was "public," "privileged" or "sensitive." In fact, these distinctions still have a bearing on the practical development of website content. In the case of "public" information, whereas it was once necessary to consult reference sources like libraries, government or media archives, today, such information is freely available from multiple sources via a simple search engine query. Such information has significant value even when used in a commercial environment. A website that provides it has just passed one of the first tests of "stickiness" by encouraging visitors to use the site as a "portal" to related and relevant subjects.

Privileged information is slightly different. It may be reasonable to impose some restrictions on its availability, less to protect its value than to prevent it being used improperly or illegally. Examples might include weapons and surveillance techniques but there is a problem here, namely that far too much information is guarded for the wrong reasons. In business, for instance, many companies hide information that if included in its public domain offering might enhance its credibility. Conversely, commercially (or other) sensitive information *should* be restricted. This can easily be achieved by creating login-protected areas where only authorised persons may access it. Doing this again enhances a perception of the value of the website.

Providing a "Reason Why"

An Internet user conducting a search on a keyword or phrase has some valid reason for doing so, whether this is for immediate or some future transaction. However, there may be thousands of results listed from this search. This article is not the place to dwell too much on Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) but it is worth noting that website content is one of the most significant elements in generating high rankings. Let us presume that a site has reached the top few pages of the results listing. Whether it strikes the potential visitor as interesting and relevant will partly be the wording of the title and description appearing with that listing. It is therefore important to provide a *reason why* the link should be selected *right from the moment of this initial contact*.

The same principle applies to the actual site content. It needs to create immediate recognition that it will provide the desired information in an easily

accessible way and in terms the user can understand. The visitor must be convinced of the value and the "reasons why" the goods or services offered are valid solutions. The better the content on the website, the more likely it will be to turn interest into action. There are far too many sites on the Internet where the content is so poor or the navigation so convoluted that visitors are virtually encouraged to leave as quickly as possible.

Content creation & positioning

Regardless of how much the site owner knows about the products and/or services on offer, it is a very different matter to be able to communicate effectively. It requires more than just writing skill and graphic design ability. The structure of information must promote intuitive navigation and the site must be kept "fresh" with new material that might include a blog, feature articles and a user forum.

The term "positioning" means not just placement of the information within the site pages, but also the style, tone and structure of the information provided. This is virtually impossible to achieve without a clear understanding of the characteristics and needs of the visitors within the defined target market, the kinds of questions and concerns potential buyers have and how best to express the benefits in terms with which the site visitor will relate. User forums and even competitor websites are excellent ways to determine what is important. Also, feedback forms and similar customer research techniques may help, although judgement will be needed to differentiate between facile and useful input.