

New year, new website?



Business owners frequently approach me expressing frustration that they have just invested a small fortune in a new web site that doesn't rank any better than their old site and, in some cases, a whole lot less. This is often just one of their issues - the new sites may also be a good deal slower too. Even more surprisingly, not only does their new web site generate less traffic, but even more depressingly, there are fewer engaged visitors and enquiries.

Do you really need a new website?

This begs a fundamental question. Do you really need a new website? Or simply a better performing website? You may already have a perfectly respectable site that brings in a fair bit of traffic with a good level of engagement that generates a decent level of business. All too frequently however, the traffic levels and business that the old website attracted are not considered until the new website fails to deliver anywhere near the same traffic levels!

So what drives companies to put their existing traffic into jeopardy? It can be worth considering a new website if your current site is not mobile friendly for example, given that as many searches are now made on mobile devices as on desktops, and delivering as good an experience to as wide an

audience as possible makes a lot of sense. Another reason may be that the site is no longer supported or maintained which could leave it open to hackers, but as importantly may no longer work as originally intended. An additional complication is that an unmaintained site can lead to sluggish performance or functionality issues, which will prevent prospects from engaging.

Change for change's sake?

The 'need' for a new site is often driven by other reasons, with the motivation often coming from the business owner or marketing department wanting a nice new site, since the existing one "looks a bit tired". Some of the cause of this 'tiredness' may of course derive from the technical reasons that I have already mentioned. However, it can just as easily derive from the fact that it hasn't been regularly updated, in terms of both content



and technical updates.

There can be many counter measures to consider before simply opting to have a brand new site built. One is to update the theme - if available, along with plugins and system updates that may address both sluggishness and functionality issues. Installing a new, fresher theme may address many of the cosmetic and functionality issues, including making it mobile friendly. Another option, if not done already, is to implement an SSL certificate - moving from an http domain to https - which can be relatively easy and inexpensive. This puts the small padlock icon on your web address and makes it more search friendly. Finally, you may want to consider a technical tune up to make sure that your site is running the most up to date elements that it needs to function properly. You may discover your site is running a lot of unnecessary or obsolete software in the background, and that it speeds up once they are removed, and possibly solving a lot of the functionality issues. You will of course want to involve a web designer in this to ensure a successful outcome.

Simple transformations

There are also a fair few things you can do yourself, before looking at technical alternatives, for example

you may simply wish to refine or update your existing content, possibly involving a copywriter to reword and rearrange your content to give a more compelling message or a clearer call to action. Some of these changes can make it look as though you have a new website, even though all that has changed is a clean up and content refresh.

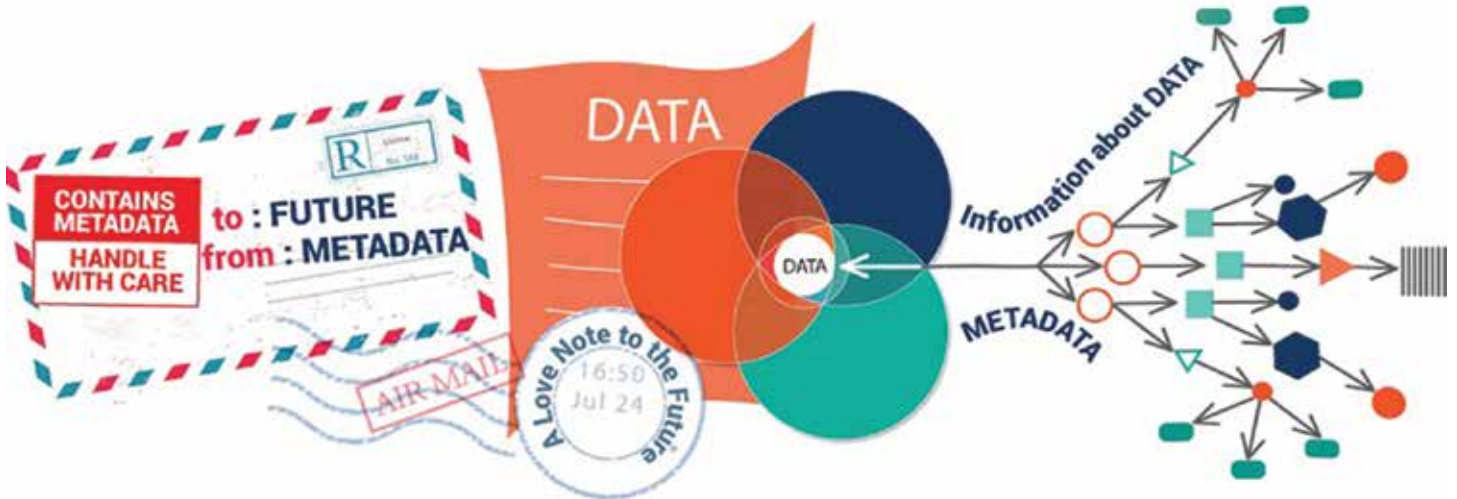
The above options are not always cheaper alternatives to a whole new website, but are worth considering and may be particularly attractive to companies wishing to preserve websites that rank well for targeted keywords with engaged traffic and a strong record of converting visits to business.



Throwing the baby out...

However, if you rule these options out and determine that a whole new website is required then here are some recommendations for you to consider. The first is spend a good period of time determining what pages of your existing site are ranking well for keywords you





are targeting and also for pages that receive a lot of traffic before embarking on the redesign. You can use things like Google Analytics and Google Search Console to determine this. However, if you are unsure how to undertake this ask the web designers to assist you.

Many prospects I talk to did not investigate any of this until - as I have mentioned earlier - they found their new website performed even less well than their old site. You may think that your existing site does little to win new business, but might be surprised - this is particularly true of those companies that do not determine the source of new enquiries. While the existing site may not drive direct enquiries, it may have a much higher level of traffic than you imagine. Moreover, you may be surprised at the range of keywords it ranks well for. The fact that this doesn't translate directly into new business may be more related to the fact that there is no call to action for visitors to your site, or to slow loading, both of which can be remedied without creating a whole new site.

New tricks

So once this analysis has been conducted, you will have identified the pages that rank well and draw traffic and which should be implemented on the new site. In addition, redirects can be utilised so that the old website pages point to their new counterparts. Involving your website designer with this task will be vital. Pages should not simply direct traffic to the new Home page but to the most appropriate page, helping the new pages leverage the old page rankings.

Another issue which is frequently overlooked is your meta data, the vital information that lurks behind your site. Put simply, there is a range of information to consider that many web designers will not prompt you for, but which play a huge part in the likelihood of a page ranking well. Ask the designers to be involved in the construction of the title tags and meta descriptions for each important page. There is a lot more to this, but these two data sources are what appears in the search engine results where your

page ranks. Put simply, much like the time you might put into devising the perfect e-shot title or AdWords advert this should demand at least as much of your attention.

Don't be distracted by a pretty face

A further consideration is not to have your head turned by the cosmetic value of the website. Put simply, most website designers want to create beautiful sites to win kudos in their community and enhance their portfolio. However, a beautiful image-heavy site with lots of animations, videos and widgets may appeal to the eye, but be detrimental to the overall user experience. How so? Keep a careful eye on the speed of the site. Of course, this might only be fully determined when the site goes live. So prior to this you may wish to set certain website speed levels that will be acceptable across mobile and broadband connections.

Additionally, be mindful that your core values and Unique Selling Propositions are not lost in the new website. An 'all singing-all dancing' website may look very impressive, but may hide what you actually offer and what makes you unique. Moreover, be certain to ensure that there are clear 'calls to action' in a new site which are not hindered by too many elements vying for your prospect's attention so that they don't actually know what to do next. A good way to test this is to share the prototype site with people you know and ask them for their opinion as to whether they understand and are convinced by what you are offering and what action they need to take next.

Avoid duplication

Finally, when creating a new website be careful not to duplicate

content. Google will penalise sites that may have 'liberated' content from other sites but also be mindful of having much the same content appearing on the same pages of your own website. Be clear what each page is going to address and for that matter what range of concepts and keywords you are looking to address on each page. You will know when this hasn't worked when you find similar pages of yours appearing in search engine results for the same keyword. This means that you have effectively diluted the ranking potential of both pages, since Google is unsure which page it should rank specifically for that page.

As with so many things in business, it is well worth asking "Why are we doing this?" Following the steps above should help to make your new or revamped site a success, and even more importantly, help consolidate on your existing keyword rankings and website traffic.

About the author: Guy Willett has over 10 years marketing experience working



in the powered access sector. If you would like to know more about reputation management, including addressing bad reviews, claiming and optimising your GoogleMyBusiness listing, or other SEO services that can be provided to the rental market then contact guy@readysteadygoseo.co.uk or visit www.readysteadygoseo.co.uk.

