

Topic | The Basics

Tutorial 3

Web strategy: Assessment and components

Description This tutorial will help you assess your e-readiness level. It will also review the different components of a successful online strategy. It is recommended you first read the previous tutorial which conducts an analysis of your existing website.

Reading time: 25 minutes | Prerequisites: Tutorial 2

The Tourism e-kit is an initiative of the National Online Strategy Committee and is funded by the Australian State & Territory Tourism Offices. This tutorial has been produced by The Australian Tourism Data Warehouse as part of the complete online education program, Tourism e-kit

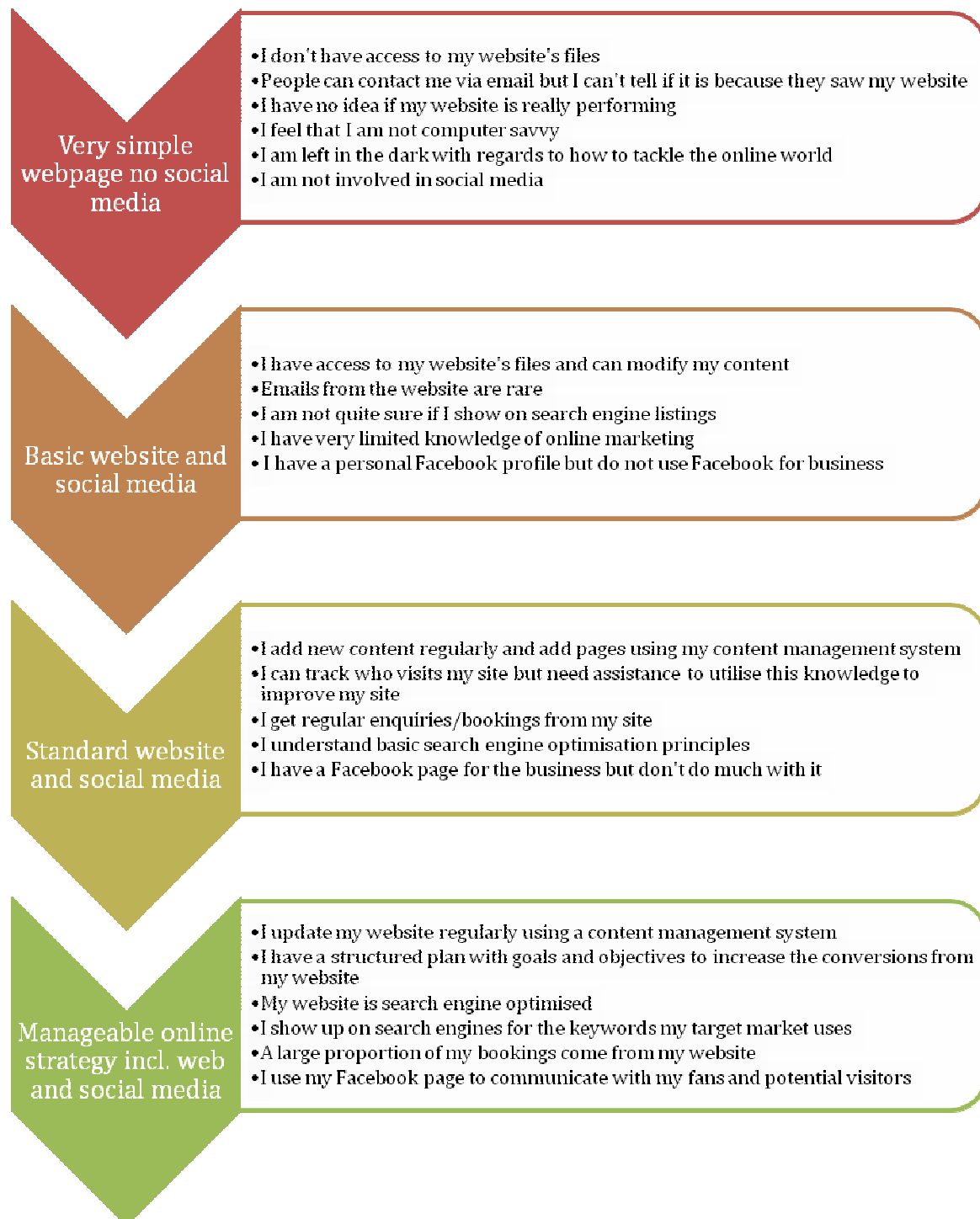
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1. Where am I now?

The below chart will assist you defining the level of your business online-readiness. Four levels, from having a very simple webpage to a manageable online strategy have been identified. Assess which level you best fit in by reviewing the dot points.



2. What is the next stage I can reach?

Tick your current level in the first line of check boxes and aim to increase it by one within the next 12 months. When you read the other tutorials the abundance of information could be a little overwhelming. Come back to this tutorial and re-focus: you are only going to aim for the next level.



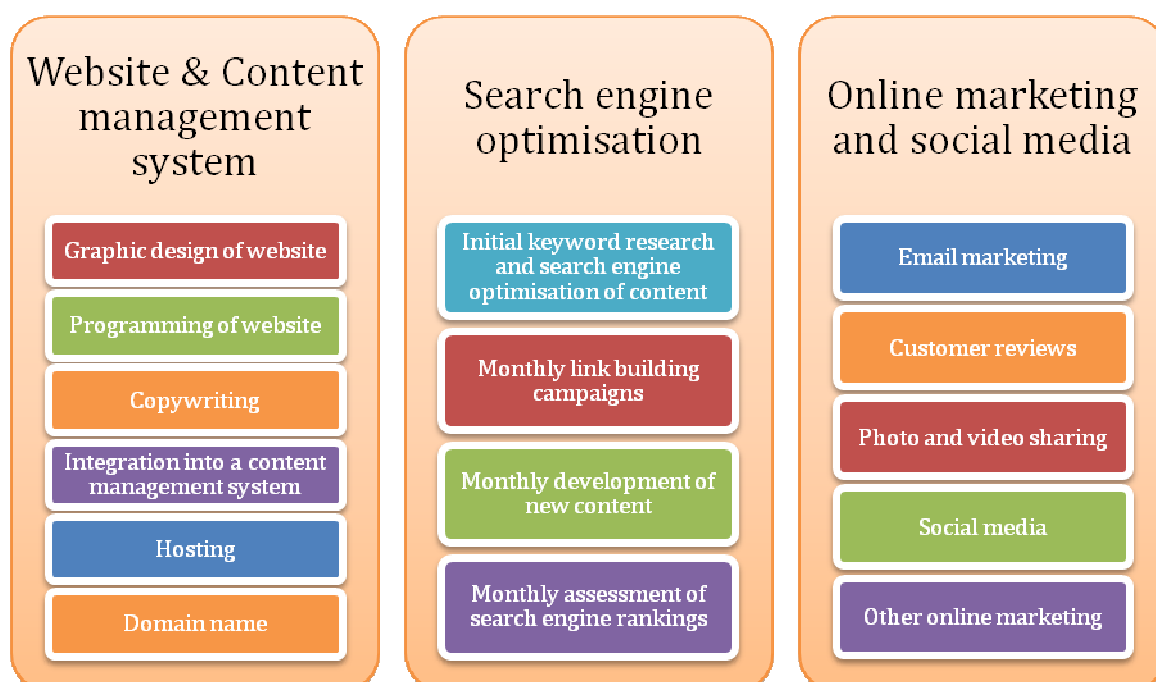
Level my web strategy is currently at:

Level I am planning to reach in the next 12 months:

3. Components of an online strategy

Now that you have assessed your current level, let's look further into the elements of a successful online strategy.

A web or online strategy is achieved by balancing three components, which will be further analysed in the paragraphs below:



4. Component I: Website and content management system

The cost of fully customised and professionally designed websites for small tourism businesses can vary between \$3,000 to \$20,000+ dollars. This generally includes a custom design, the programming into an open-source user- and search engine friendly content management system and the population plus basic search engine optimisation of your content.

If your website has a lot of pages (for example more than 25-30) you may want to work with your web developer to populate the content yourself to lower the cost of the site.

a). Design options

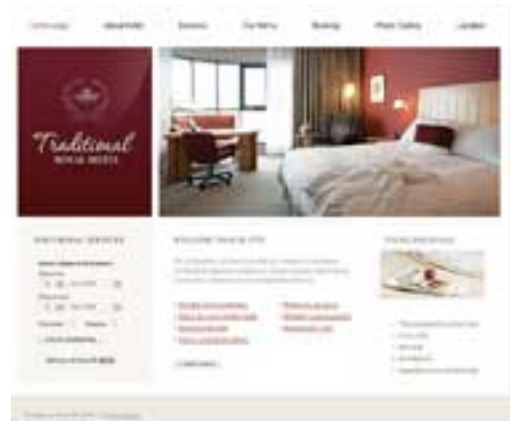
The graphic design component can increase the cost of the website as it involves a long consultation process with a specialised web designer. Depending on your requirements and the number of revisions required, this cost could easily reach up to a third of the cost of your new site.

To minimise the cost of the design process, many web development firms offer the opportunity to modify existing website templates. Some firms might simply get one of their in-house templates and customise it for your site without mentioning to you that it is based on a template. More customer-focused companies might give you broader options and ask you to choose amongst a series of templates they own. They could also refer you to a template-dedicated website such as www.templatemonster.com and let you decide which template you like best. Template Monster offers templates that suit small tourism and hospitality businesses. Below are two screenshots.

Note: many templates exist that are already formatted for the major content management systems (CMS). For instance, if you select the WordPress CMS you can choose amongst many different templates (called themes in WordPress). Many of the free WordPress themes are available here: <http://wordpress.org/extend/themes/>



Hotel Template from Template Monster



Tour Template from Template Monster

Talk to your web development company to assess the options they offer. They generally offer both. Choosing a template-based design could not only save money but also a lot of your time!

b). [Summary: website technology and content management system](#)

Below are the key points to consider in terms of web programming and content management system.

- Your website should be developed in XHTML and table-less CSS. You do not need to understand what XHTML and table-less CSS are but need to ensure your web developer is programming using these languages. If they don't, seek a new one. We recommend you stay away from Flash, as it is not a search engine friendly technology.
- Web developers will sometimes quote you a price for your website based on the number of pages it will hold. If this is the case, you need to ask for clarification. Ask your web company two questions:
- Will your site include a content management system? In our experience developers who quote on a "per page" basis generally do not use a content management system (unless they are referring to copywriting or content population) Content management systems allow your websites to have as many pages as you wish as adding a new page is only a click away.
- Does the "per page" cost include copywriting, population and search engine optimisation of content or simply the creation of the page itself, without the content population? If your web company offers to do the

copywriting, content population and search engine optimisation of each page it justifies an increase in cost based on the number of pages your site holds.

- The content management system installed on your website should be search engine friendly. The tutorial about content management systems will help you assess this.

5. Component 2: Search engine optimisation

Search engine optimisation is to a website what wheels are to a car.

A non-optimised website could provide you with a very low return on investment and therefore with very little business. An easy way to find out if your website is optimised for search engines is to look at your website's data which is captured by analytics programs such as Google Webmaster tools and Google Analytics. If your website is optimised for search engines there should be a lot of traffic referred to it from search engines. Let's look at the pie charts below to see which one of the two examples is an optimised site. This diagnosis is available in the majority of web analytics programs.

The first picture below shows that the bulk of traffic is coming directly to the website (e.g. users enter the address of the website in their browser directly). This website is missing out on a lot of business that could be brought by search engines. It is not search engine optimised.



The second picture reveals that the majority of the traffic to the website is brought by search engines. Search engines are promoting the website for free! This is the sign of a well optimised website.

Screen captures copyright: Google

97% of searches start with a search engine, and google is by far the most widely used in Australia. We recommend you work with search engines.

When sourcing quotes for a web developer or an online marketing agency it is crucial you ensure they are familiar with coding a website for search engines. Many aren't.

Web developers are not always aware of key search engine optimisation principles. This is why it is important to work with a company that has expertise in both.



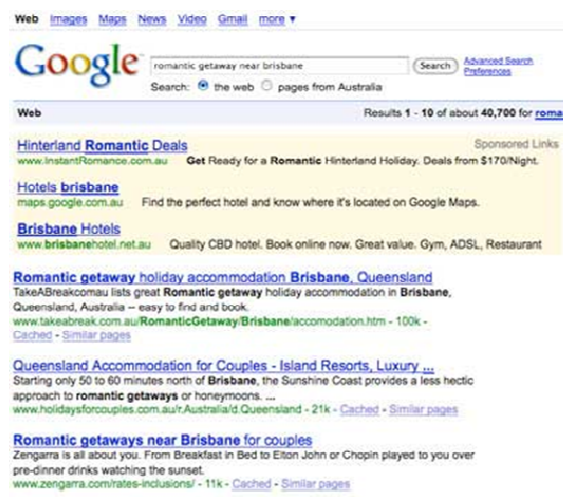
Lastly, be aware that search engine optimisation is not a one-off but a continuous process. Make sure you put a plan in place to manage what needs to be done for your business to continuously appear on page one of search engine rankings.

Provided your website's content is optimised and you have a continuous search engine optimisation strategy in place, your website should start to rank high on the search engine results page when people type in your keywords.

*Imagine you are a bed and breakfast offering a romantic getaway near Brisbane. The keyword research done by your optimiser reveals that **romantic getaway near Brisbane** is a phrase often searched on Google. You should then rank on the first few pages of Google for that keyword.*

The screen shot on the right shows the results of a search for "romantic getaway near Brisbane". The third, non-commercial listing "Romantic getaways near Brisbane for couples" is a small bed and breakfast website that has been optimised for those keywords.

Screen capture copyright: Google



6. Component 3: Online Marketing

Online marketing encompasses all the online activities you can undertake to promote your website. They are generally separated in two categories: free or involving payment. The paragraphs below will summarise these activities.

a). Free activities

- Social media marketing: in 2011 it is crucial you engage in social marketing. You need to at least monitor what is being said about your destination and business on mainstream social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr and TripAdvisor. Ignoring social media would not be wise as they are the mediums your potential travellers use to research and book travel.
- Search: appearing in search engine listings is free. All it requires is a solid search engine optimisation strategy and an investment in terms of your time.
- Linking strategy: getting other relevant sites to link to your website does not involve money but relies on the content provided on your website being relevant to the sites linking to you. Having quality and relevant websites linking to you will make a positive difference in your search engine rankings. Sourcing links is part of your search engine optimisation strategy.

b). Paid-for activities

- Search engine marketing (SEM), also known as pay per click (PPC): paying search engine to promote a website. The key difference with unpaid (also known as organic) search engine results is how they are positioned on the page. The key players in PPC are:
 - Google: Google AdWords
 - Yahoo: Yahoo! Search Marketing
 - MSN/Bing: Microsoft adCenter

The search engine results in the below image are a combination of organic search engine rankings (which directly result from a well-executed search engine optimisation strategy) and search engine marketing rankings.



The organic results are on the left, below the yellow “sponsored links” results. The SEM results are above the organic results as well as in the right column.

Screen capture copyright: Google

Other online marketing activities that a small tourism business would have to pay for would be for instance:

- Email marketing
- Having a banner advertisement on another site
- Paying for a link from a travel or other directories which are not free of charge

7. Key learning outcomes

- A website is not a web strategy
- Your website needs to be designed in a search engine friendly format
- Many online marketing activities are free. They however take time.
- You can not avoid engaging in Social media marketing.

8. Related material

a). Related tutorials

- Initial assessment of my website
- Web strategy: cost and timings
- Target market 101
- Search engines 101
- Bringing people to my site with e-marketing