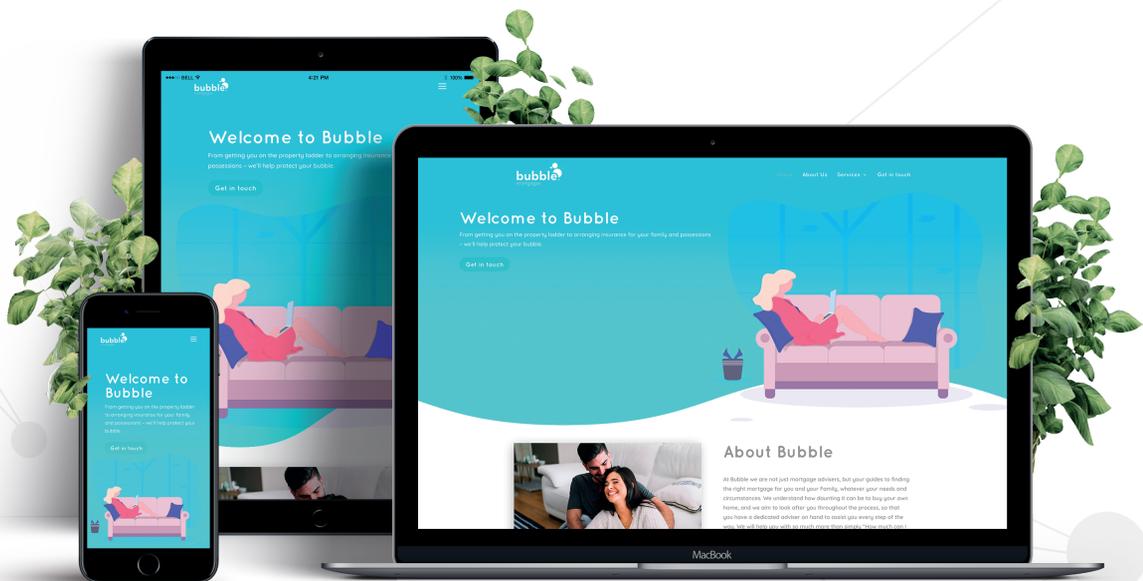




A business owners guide to a **Profitable** Website

An E-Book guide to **success**



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Who do we think we are?

I'm Andrew and I'm a small Business owner, just like you! I've spent many years both running my own businesses and helping others to run theirs by building them financial systems and websites that make them more profitable. During that time, I've been fortunate to experience enough challenges, that I can share many stories and experiences that can help you find an easier route to being profitable.

We all make mistakes, I've made my fair share, and there is nothing wrong with that if you learn from it. If you can learn from other people's mistakes and turn them into lessons, then that is almost as good.

The web team at Visible Thoughts, and myself, have worked extensively with small and large businesses, but our interest has always been working with the small guys where things move faster, and small changes make the biggest impact to their websites and businesses.

Here are some of the lessons that I have learnt over the years and some of the things that work best when I build websites for our clients.

The first hurdle

This book is aimed at helping Business Owners, like yourself. Business Owners that are looking to attract more paying clients and the kind of client you want to engage with. After all, if you are investing time and yes money building your website, you will want it to do more than just bring visitors to the site and nothing more. Here we will explain in plain English not just how you can do this but more besides. To start with we are not going to focus on your website but on your Business itself and first of all your mind set.

The first hurdle for most business owners when they start to think about purchasing or building a website for their business is their mind set. We often get asked by potential clients, "How much will a website cost me?". We all need to know how much things cost before we purchase them, but if it is the first thing on your mind you may be misunderstanding why you are looking to buy a website.

Change to a business mindset

More often than not we don't think twice about buying/renting a mobile phone as part of running our business. After all it is how we communicate with our clients, staff, suppliers and prospective customers. We couldn't run a business without it because it is a business tool. Just the same way that your website should be... This is an important concept to grasp because if you don't view your website as a business tool at this stage it will never become one and will be a cost rather than an investment that makes your business grow.

The first lesson that I learnt from building websites was that if you start with a specific purpose for your site and business then it will bring profitability, otherwise it will be a money pit - it needs a purpose that will make money and bring benefit to you. Start with this mind set and you will have a far better experience and website.

Do you really need a website?

Well that is a question that you won't hear very often, unfortunately. But unsurprisingly it is one of the first questions that we ask. Some people are surprised to hear that, as depending on what they sell/promote, there may be alternatives to a website which fit their business type, budget and style much better. And that is a discussion that you should be having with your existing web designer. It should also be one that they are happy to have with you.

It may be that you need a single page website for contact details etc. but it may be more appropriate to have a solid well-designed Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest or LinkedIn presence. That is perfectly OK and should be done if it is the right option for you. What I'm trying to emphasise is that it is about finding and building the right tool for the job. If you are a Decorator, is there any benefit from buying a £100 paint roller and tray when you specialise in hanging wallpaper - no. It is the same principle when you look at the benefits you will gain from having a website designed for you and that is the key word, "Benefits".

Once you start to look at the benefits to your business of having a well-designed website it moves from being a cost to be a business profitability tool. So how do I make my website profitable? Simply make it do the things you want, but what are those things?

What do you want your website to achieve?

OK, the simple answer is that you want it to make you money, or at least contribute toward doing so. This is a great starting point which will keep you from being distracted by other things, so we will focus on this for a while.

Influencing people's actions

We started by asking the question "How can something that costs me money be profitable to my business?" The simple answer is that we use it to influence people's actions by explaining to them the benefits of our products/services (not just what we do) and also to provide them with an easy path to making a buying decision and then to enable them to buy. For this to work we need to understand our visitors well enough to be able to design our site to meet their needs, explain how we can relieve their pain and problems, and build a relationship with them that will help them to become brand advocates. We will talk about understanding your visitors later.

What can we do?

Your website can do a number of things for your business that will raise profitability, sometimes indirectly:

- Give your visitors the chance to buy your product directly from you using an eCommerce website. This is probably the most obvious.
- Explain the benefits of your products so that you create a desire to buy from you. This may lead to them buying online or by visiting you, but it is about creating interest.
- Introduce them to a new product or service that they may not be aware of which they will then go on to purchase.
- Inform them of add-on purchases for a product or service that they have previously purchased through your site or shop.
- Provide them with a community where they can learn more about your product and services as well as making them feel supported which leads to them making more purchases and creating brand loyalty.
- Boost your SEO rankings (Google Rankings)

Looking at that short list there is only the first point that is a direct sale, but it does not detract from the fact that all of them raise profitability and potentially by quite a large amount depending on the ticket price of the goods or services that you are offering.

Gains for all

Whatever actions are taken by your site visitors it is important that both of you achieve something. That may be that they gain a better understanding of you, your products and services and that you nudge them further along the path to buying. Whatever it is does not matter as long as every visit by your visitor ends in a gain for both parties. If that does not happen then it's time to review your site, what it should do, what it does do and whether a website is the thing for you.

Who is reading your pages?

This is the million dollar question. But it is not the only one, in fact here are a number of questions that you should consider for your existing website:

1. Can you tell who is looking at your website? – *No, ask your web developer. You should be able to find this information through Google Analytics.*
2. Can your web developer tell who is looking at your website? – *No, ask your web developer! They should be able to tell through looking at Google Analytics.*
3. Who are the right people that should be visiting your website? – *have a look at your existing best buying customers and build a profile for them – these should be the right kind of people and if not, they are a pretty good starting point.*
4. Are the right people visiting your website? – *No, it's another reason to review your website content and what you are offering online.*
5. When people visit your page, do they buy or just look around? – *If they are just visiting and not buying or following the call to action then again you need to review your content.*
6. Are you getting repeat visits and if so, which pages are repeat visitors interacting with? *Again, this relates to the first two questions.*

That is just the tip of the iceberg but I'm sure that you can see that by starting to ask these questions and reacting to the answers you can turn your website into a selling tool. The profitability does not come from your website, but from your customers. If you are not talking to the right people and getting them to buy the right goods and services, you will never have a website that is profitable.

What do you want your visitors to do?

Let's assume, just for the purpose of this book because there is no room for assumptions in real world business, that you are getting the right people to visit your site – what next?

In a nutshell your website can be used to provide the following for your visitors:

- Opportunity to raise their awareness of your brand, business, product and services.
- Give them in-depth information about your products and services which they are specifically interested in.
- Encourage them to download free information like guides
- Encourage them to complete a questionnaire or survey.
- Provide relevant videos for them to watch
- Give them the opportunity to buy (online)
- Give them instructions of how/where to buy (off line)
- Provide them with information about appropriate add-on products/services.
- Encourage them to contact you.
- Provide you with information. (Their contact details for a mailing list)
- Provide supporting information for your products (FAQ/Support Articles)

Give enough away and people will buy from you

In my experience, the best way to engage people is to offer them something that takes their pain away and of course offer it for free. As an ideal opportunity to demonstrate your knowledge and skill level, giving away information is a great way of breaking down barriers between you and your potential clients, helping to forge a relationship that will be longer lasting.

If your site visitor is capable of carrying out what you suggest then they will do it themselves, they would have found out how from somewhere so it may as well be from you, if they can't they are more than likely to ask you to do it. Either way you are supporting your clients and putting yourself in position where they will buy from you.

I'm no Einstein but time is relative

How long does it take to build a website? Again, one of the top questions that all web developers are asked, including us.

Can I have it by Christmas?

This was a question we were asked about the build of an eCommerce website. Three months was more than enough time to do all the things that we needed to do to hit the project deadline. "Not a problem" I said. However, it took the client somewhat longer than they expected to rewrite the specifications and description for nearly 1000 technical products, have them all re-photographed and edited by a third party. Then input them.

Three months turned into eighteen, but they now have an up to date website that is selling more products and manages the whole process for them. In addition, they have more advanced reporting which is benefiting their business and allowing them to make better, more informed and profitable decisions.

The moral of the story is don't under estimate the time it will take you to provide your input into the project.

There are a lot of variables when developing a website from arranging images, working on content and getting your domain name released, plus many more. More often than not in our case any delay is largely down to waiting for the client or clients third party suppliers. This is not just us saying it's not our fault but because your project is our business, we have 100% focus on it. For you this is not the case as you have your everyday business to run too and that takes priority and rightly so. Take in to account the time it takes to run your business while drawing up the time scales for your project.

It's OK, my developer is going to take care of everything!

Give me a pound, just one pound, for the number of businesses I speak to who come to me and say that they had no real input into the design of their website. The online providers who used to do the YELLOW telephone directories are amongst the worst for this. They'll knock you a generic website together for the price of a bag of chips and a bottle of pop, but it will have no resemblance to your business. Stock images, bland generic quotes and a pot luck choice of colours and in the case of one of my clients they had to wait six weeks for their domain name to be released to enable their new site to go live, and that only happened after I had sat down with the client and provider over a conference call to thrash out what they needed to do.

Time well spent

I spend a lot of time with my clients, getting to know them and their businesses before we, that's us and the client, start to write content. More often than not we will use a photographer to supply images that are specific to the client. Images that truly represent them and their business. We will go on site and look at how they make their product and deliver their service. We will talk to staff and customers. Our customers bring their knowledge of their business to the table and we bring our vast Marketing and Web Development knowledge. Our websites are born from an effective partnership between both us and our clients in my mind it is the only way to work.

Conclusion

You need to approach your website as a business tool, not just something you need to have because every other business has one. It is also a tool for nudging your customers along your sales process, not just getting them to buy instantly. If you can demonstrate your competence in your business sector and supply them with free information that they can implement and gain from, they can experience your expertise.

Don't rush the process as you may create sales but not loyalty. By providing support and information both pre and post-sale you are more likely to build a long-lasting relationship which will also end in them becoming brand advocates.

I can see that I will be adding to this document at some point and sharing more ideas so we will send you an updated version when we do.

As I have said before, this is not rocket science. It is just the application of logic, patience and plenty of caffeine. Something we are more than happy to help you with or give you some guidance on. If you would like us to take a look at your site and let you know what you can do to improve things (should it need improving), then get in touch in a method of your choice. Our contact details are below.

My final words – a business website should make money, not just look pretty.

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Appendix – Top tips for a profitable website

i. Choose photos carefully - make sure any stock photos you use are authentic. I have a pet hate when I see websites for UK businesses that have images of workers in work clothing that just looks American or using tools that we would never have in the UK. Other branded items are a bit of a give-away. why is that business man in Leeds getting into a yellow taxi? Or the waitress in Scarborough serving drinks next to a beach under an azure sky. It just shows a lack of attention to detail which will reflect on the attention to detail when running your business.

ii. Don't make your brand fit your website – sorry, here comes another pet hate! When we speak to businesses about their logo and brand identity and they tell us that their web developer threw it in as part of their website package. If you get the opportunity, make sure you deal with your brand identity first and then design your website to meet the Brand Identity guidelines. Anything that is thrown in is not going to have the investment in time and effort to reflect your business to it's best. That said we also specialise in building brand identities but we don't throw them in – we have too much respect for your business than to do that.

iii. A website is not just for Christmas – Would you buy a car and never have it serviced? I'm guessing your answer is no and that should be the case when you are looking at your website. Each month as part of our paid maintenance packages which we insist are taken out on all our websites we send our clients a 20-page report explaining amongst other things:

- A list of software updates applied in the month.
- A list of backups performed and their status.
- Report on your Google Analytics (SEO) rankings
- How well the site is optimised
- Website uptime
- Google Analytic Results
- Website Speed/Performance Reports

iv. Beware of linking service pages to blogs – we talk a lot about using blogs to drive traffic to your site and demonstrate your credibility and skill set. This is very true but we don't want to drag visitors away from our services pages. Service pages should be designed to convert. If you were to allow your visitors to be distracted by a blog or anything that moves them away from a call to action the you will experience a drop in conversions. A general rule of thumb would be to link service pages to service pages, because they are designed around a call to action, while blogs and other pages should lead to service pages.

v. Don't put candy in your page header – social media is great and linking to it on your site is a great idea, in the right place. The danger with social media, however, is that it can be a great distraction and a great way of losing visitors for ever! Avoid placing bright coloured M&Ms in the header of your pages. Like kids in a sweet shop your visitors can't resist clicking and they are off to look at pictures of kittens.

vi. Avoid jargon – the easier it is to read your website the more likely visitors are to stay, read more, build a relationship with you and carry out your call to action. Talk in your visitor’s language and not yours.

vii. Who is your website built for? – this is a simple question that really has only one answer and it’s not you! Your website should always be built for your visitors. It should provide answers to their questions, allow them to buy goods and services that help them. Ultimately you will benefit but it should not be before the visitor. It should never be a shrine to your business or ego, not if you want it to be profitable.

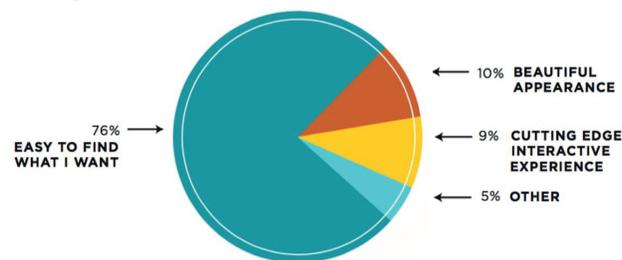
viii. Loss aversion – as a species we struggle understanding cost/benefit by overvaluing losses and undervaluing gains. Essentially the pain of loss outweighs the pleasures of gain. This can be useful to know when designing your website and when writing your copy:

- Emphasise the costs of not using your product or service.
- Group costs together, list benefits separately.
- Emphasise immediate gains.
- Create urgency with limited time offers. If the product is scarce, say so.

ix. More than just a pretty picture – don’t get me wrong, your site needs to look good and should represent your business in the best light but finding information is king with your visitors. After all they came to you looking for answers. A survey by Hubspot showed some interesting results that backed this up:

What is the most important factor in the design of a website?

source: Hubspot



Equally when a web page fails comes down to the same issues. NN Group research backs this up too.

Causes of User Failure

source: NN Group

