

# The 4 Pillars of a Successful Consultancy Website

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By [Sonja Jefferson](#)

I'm often asked to evaluate a consultancy website before we get down to rewriting the content.

As an independent outsider it's easier to give a fresh perspective, without being mired down in the detail. I try my hardest to think like a customer and review the site from their point of view.

Here are the four crucial elements that customers have come to expect from a consultancy website, and some ideas on how to fulfil them.

## 1. VALUE

*Does your website provide information that is of real value to me, the customer?*

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Once upon a time, in the beginning of all things web, company websites were merely over-designed, hype-filled brochures, pumped up with their own importance and bursting with impressive phrases such as 'world class', 'cutting edge' and '....' (Feel free to add more meaningless gobbledeygook here).

This approach was supposed to wow customers into action: the flashiest, ballsiest website would win the war for new business. Very 1980s, don't you think?

It worked for a time when we were web-green and gullible, but today customers rightly expect more.

We want value. We want to know how the sites we visit will help us solve our problems and achieve our goals.

- **Focus on customer problems.** Tell your customers, in language they understand, exactly how you help clients in their position.
- **Segment your customers.** For each group, describe their business problems and say how you will solve them. Show the benefits your services will bring.

- **Make yourself useful.** Serve your customers with valuable content - educational articles, papers, resources, e-books, video clips, audio files, cartoons - whatever content will best help them to solve their business problems.
- **Prove the value.** Show that current customers have had success - provide case studies and testimonials that show the real benefit of what you do.

## 2. TRUST

*Is this a bona fide company, providing actual benefits to customers like me?*

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Trust and credibility are big, big issues on the web. There are millions of company sites up there and not all of them are reputable. Web users are a suspicious bunch. How can you win the confidence of your visitors? Here are a few ideas:

- **Provide information on your people** - your management team and key customer contacts. Show photos of real people so they know who they'll be dealing with. Enable your customers to make contact with your team directly.
- **Use social media** and provide links from your website. One of the major benefits of getting your company into social networking is the ability to show that your company is made up of real people with opinions, passion and expertise in their marketplace. Social media enables you to connect with your customers. Whether it is via a company blog, LinkedIn, Twitter, another platform or a combination of the lot, social media makes good business sense.
- **Keep your website up to date** - provide fresh content, regularly updated. Don't let your website go stale - if you last updated your company news in 2006, visitors may well think that you've gone out of business!
- **Provide testimonials** from customers and case studies that tell the story of their success thanks to your services.
- **Be approachable and authentic.** People like to do business with people. Genuinely communicate through your site and it will help you to form a connection.

## 3. USABILITY

*Can I find my way around the site and get to the information I want?*

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People visit websites for their utility. As usability expert Jakob Nielsen states:

*'The web is a tool. If it's convenient, people will use it; if not, they won't.'*

Today, users are far less tolerant of difficult sites. Usability is more important than ever.

It's all very good providing information that gets customers to trust and value your services, but you've got to make sure people can find it. Make your website easy to use, so your customers can get to the information they want, fast.

- **Pay close attention to navigation** - plan and organise your content carefully. If you're redesigning your site, build a wireframe first.
- **Test your navigation with real customers**. Give them a task and see how easy it is for them to achieve this. Tweak the navigation accordingly.
- **Follow web conventions** such as recognisable page names. Web layout has become standardised.
- **Write for the web**: poor writing makes web sites fail.
- **Design your home page carefully**. This is where web usability usually succeeds or fails.
- **Make contact easy**. Make your contact details very, very obvious.
- **Don't make me think**. If I have to think about it I'll click away - to the competition.
- **Usability for all**. Make sure your site is accessible to everyone, including the disabled - follow WC3 guidelines.

## 4. PRESENTATION

*Is this company professional? Do I like how they look?*

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You'll notice that presentation is fourth in the list. Colour schemes, branding and imagery are important of course, but must not be prioritised at the expense of usability and content.

- **Hire a professional web designer** to make the site visually appealing to your customers: bad design can frighten customers away; good design adds interest and will help to draw them in. NB: hire someone who specialises in *web* design.
- **Don't overcomplicate things** - make it interesting but also simple, consistent and free of clutter.
- **Pay attention to typography** as well as graphics - make sure your content is easy to read.
- **Avoid bloated design and splash pages** - these will detract from your content.

If you're thinking about taking your own company website forward, try these four criteria for size. How does your website fare? Does it meet your customers' expectations?

Sonja Jefferson is a freelance marketing consultant and business writer, based in Bristol, UK. She helps busy consultants and business owners to grow their companies with well-written content and customer-focused websites. She writes web copy, case studies, tenders, white papers and articles that get their clients' attention and helps them to plan their websites to get results.

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