

Effective and economical websites for startups and small businesses

We all appreciate websites are critical in modern business, offering nothing less than a shop window for the world. But how can you produce a site which looks the part and does everything you need when resources are limited?

Here are the important points to remember when producing a website.

Website Key Messages

Your key messages are critical on your website.

People are busy and impatient.

They're likely to spend only a few seconds scanning your site before deciding if they're in the right place for what they want.

Which means you have to make clear what you do instantly, using no more than 10 words.

Not just that, but you have to do it in an interesting, appealing, and credible way, to encourage visitors to stay and have a look around.

Plus, of course, draw them into doing business with you.

We've just produced a website for Cambridge Public Health, part of the University of Cambridge. The key message there was:

– Improving the health and wellbeing of our societies together

For Creative Warehouse it's:

– *All your communication problems solved with style*

For Cambridge Sensoriis, a startup producing radar for drones, driverless cars and other transport:

– *Radar solutions for the autonomy revolution*

See how all say exactly what they're about instantly, and hopefully lead a visitor into wanting to find out more?

Those core messages are prominently displayed on the sites as well, right at the top, in big, bold text.

They may be just a few words but they're crucial, so spend some time getting them right. It's well worth the investment.

User Experience

A question for you:

– *How do you feel when you get bombarded with pop ups?*

If you're like me, you tend to swear and click away.

So remember, user experience is key to a successful site.

Simplicity is your friend here. As I often say when I'm teaching communication:

– *Simple is smart, not stupid*

As a Simple Simon, I've obviously got an interest in spreading that message!

But seriously, it's important.

Make your website easy to read and navigate, with no nuisance attacks of newsletter sign ups, or special offers, or a hug from the boss, or whatever.

Also, lay out your site attractively.

A kind typeface, gentle colours, plenty of pictures and white space help to make browsing a pleasure.

The images are particularly important, as they can be as powerful in creating the right impression as your words.

People relate to people, so let's see you and your team doing terrific things, with lots of smiling customers surrounding you in ecstasy and awe... or something like that!

Don't forget to keep an eye on your readability as well.

You don't want long and wordy sentences like this, which seem to go on and on, and then on some more, and then even more for good measure, and then find something else to say, and then something else etc etc.

Keep your sentences short, sharp and simple.

Like this.

As I've mentioned, most people will probably be reading on a phone.

The screens are small.

Which means the sentences should be as well.

That's how it needs to be on the web.

Here endeth the lesson.

Ok?!

Video on Websites

Try to feature a video prominently on your homepage.

A heat map shows you visitors to a site will generally go there first.

They're also powerful for talking about your company, saying more than just words can, as with ours.

Testimonials are a key part of any video, so remember to collect them as you work with customers.

Even if you're just starting off and can't produce such a comprehensive video as ours, you can always record a hello and welcome.

Here's [mine](#) for the Creative Warehouse site, for example.

Such videos are easy to make with a plug in microphone for your phone, and a small tripod. They don't cost much – no more than about £100 in total – and are well worth the investment in effectively providing you with a mini TV studio.

Website Priorities

Take a trick from the journalist's playbook to help your website work well.

Put the most important information in first, right from the top.

Most people won't read the whole of a page, or they'll scan, so give them the best bits straight away.

For example, with Sensoriis, the opening line of text after the core message is:

– *Our RadarAware systems are a critical component of the drone, driverless cars, and autonomous vehicle revolution*

Hook the reader with your key message, then go on to say what you do and why you're worth working with.

Website Keywords

Keywords help Google and co. understand what you do, and so give you a chance of appearing prominently in search results for your services.

To make sure you include the right keywords on your website, think about what clients would type to find you.

For Creative Warehouse, our site talks about startups, small businesses, websites, core messages, design, media coverage, pitching for investment and customers, and video production.

We also repeatedly mention Cambridge, because happily most people will look for a company based in their area.

Headings and titles are particularly important in search engine optimisation, so make sure to get your key words into those.

Mobile First Websites

Statistics tell us most people will visit your site on a phone in these mobile dominated days, a trend which seems to be ever increasing. That means it's critical that it's optimised for mobile viewing.

When we work on a website we take a mobile first approach, only shifting to how it looks on desktops and tablets later.

(Although that has to be done, of course, and the site needs to look good there too.)

We find mobile first is the most effective way to create a website with a true wow factor.

Website Platforms

Finally, a word about where and how to build your site.

I'm not here to sell any of the many platforms which are available to help, although I'm always open to sponsorship

offers! But if you're on a tight budget think about whether you need to pay, or how much you can afford.

Most platforms do roughly the same things. We design bespoke sites, but more commonly work from WordPress when helping startups and small businesses.

It's free, and by using our own designs we can make the sites look unique and classy, as well as excellent in terms of user experience. If you're not trying anything too advanced, like e-commerce, you probably don't need some of the more singing and dancing features and their associated costs. Save that until you're a mega success, I hope this has been some small help on your journey, and good luck!

Finally, (and brace yourself for the inevitable plug here):

If you'd like support with your website, please email me via Simon [at] Creative-Warehouse.co.uk or just get in touch via our [site](#). We've made a lovely range of clients very happy with their sites, and promise to look after you impeccably as well, whatever your needs or budget.

About the author

Simon Hall runs business communication agency, Creative Warehouse, and is a journalist, author, business coach and university tutor. He teaches communications, media, business and public relations skills at the University of Cambridge, for government departments, and companies.

Simon has a series of books on business communication – from public speaking, to writing blogs, to how to secure media coverage – published, along with eight novels, all in the thriller genre.

Previously, he was a broadcaster for 20 years, mostly as a BBC Television, Radio and Online News Correspondent, specialising in business and economics, home affairs, and the environment.

For more on Simon and Creative Warehouse see www.thetvdetective.com and www.creative-warehouse.com or find Simon on LinkedIn at <https://www.linkedin.com/in/simon-hall-communications/>