Chapter VII
Website Design

INTRODUCTION

This is the most technical of the chapters in this book. It is centred on Website design and is the only chapter in the book where we exclusively refer to Website rather than Web presence. In the previous chapter we discussed how a small business, once it decides to have a Website, needs to decide where it will be hosted, how it will be built and how its content will be initially loaded and then maintained. Website
design is considered at the time of implementing the Website and then again at any major redesign of the Website.

BACKGROUND

The Website has generally become an expected operational tool in the small business environment and should evolve over time to reflect its needs and the demands of prospective and existing customers. Arguably, the small business Website that has been designed appropriately will have a certain element of fundamental functionality - allowing the business to easily address future implementation and new technology issues. Moreover, a small business that has adopted various Website design conventions tends to be well-positioned, in not only in attracting new users to its site, but also increasing its opportunities for e-commerce activity and online marketing. The design of the small business Website does not need to be complex and there are some that advocate that the simpler the site, the easier it will be to use (Nielsen 2000).

The Website can be viewed as a publishing medium and there is a commonly held belief that good design should aim at making information visible and manageable (Sellitto and Wenn 2005). Appropriate Website design should utilise information effectively, with each Webpage interface being a vehicle for conveying that information. Furthermore, evidence suggests that design can be the differentiator between a successful and unsuccessful Website - where the adoption of good practices in Website implementation can alleviate some of the drawbacks of unexpected maintenance associated with more complex and costly sites. Some of the good practice aspects of Website implementation need to encompass aspects of design that are associated with usability, proper coding of pages, accessibility and metadata (discussed later). In an environment where ICTs are constantly evolving and changing with respect to interactivity and customer expectations, the need to adopt good practice conventions or guidelines becomes a necessary requirement. Within the general ICT community there are various groups that have provided an open forum for discussion on development of Website design conventions. Groups such as the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) and the Dublin Core Metadata Initiative (DCMI) all have been instrumental in formulating a set of self-regulating guidelines. Notable authors such as Jakob Nielsen, (http://www.useit.com/) have strongly advocated the mantra of Website usability as an essential good practice when it comes to Website implementation. For the small business there should be an awareness of the various development and Website approaches that allow for the improvement of site maintenance and
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