

# Information Overload

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## Welcome:

The Internet has become one of the major business and social interaction tools in use today. With the internet anyone and everyone can be a publisher and probably has. But we are not going to talk about opinion, bias and hearsay (which is most website content if you think about it), but the reason why we create websites in the first place. Well I'm assuming it's so people can find you. Unfortunately, there are some people who still assume that if they launch a new website today, visitors will be beating a path to their door tomorrow. Sorry it doesn't work like that, and we tell you why.

We would like to thank you in advance for forwarding this edition onto friends, colleagues and other interested readers. Please note that all back issues of this edition, as well as our registrant resources edition can be read and/or downloaded from our web site – <http://www.iea.com.au> should any of the topics be of interest and use.

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## In this Issue we will be looking at:

- Web sites and Search engine optimisation
- So what makes a good website?
- A Thought to ponder.

## Web sites and Search engine optimisation

Several years ago we looked at the importance of search engine optimisation for your website. Well as with all things web based, there have been some interesting developments and we thought it would make for a good return to, topic.

Your corporate website is one of THE most powerful marketing tools you can ever employ. But as a friend (who also happens to be a web developer) once told me, most people make one or two (dozen) mistakes when creating their online presence.

The first and perhaps biggest mistake is thinking that your website will receive significant traffic from day one of launching it. That's like opening a brand new shop on some back alley somewhere and expecting people to arrive in droves through the door. And you wondered why shops open and close rapidly? Well websites are no different. Domain names are bought and re-bought on an annual basis – if you haven't had any significant return on your investment, chances are going to be good, you won't bother renewing after the first year.

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The second biggest mistake people make is they go for the flashy front end, with lots of nice pictures and not much content. Worse still are those sites that have some kind of java script running across the front (things that move !! for those who have no idea what I'm talking about) as an introduction to the site. The first time you see it, you may think – yeah ok, that's pretty cool, but after a while – they really do get annoying. But worse than being annoying, they can make your site invisible to the search engines. If you right click on some white space you can actually read the coding – that's what the robots and spiders see. And it is the robots and spiders who determine whether or not your website is worthy of listing and what kind of page ranking you are going to get.

Robots and spiders are just little bits of coding, they trawl through hundreds of thousands of sites, and they don't particularly care about flashy bits and whirring wotnots. They don't know they're supposed to wait for the flashy bits to stop flashing, or there is a button to press to enter the site proper, all they see is a few lines of code that says – we're arachnophobes – so please go elsewhere – which they do.

So am I saying don't use nice pictures – no, of course not, but there are things you need to do. And we'll discuss that in just a minute.

The other reason why a lot of sites fail to climb the ranks is down to size and incoming links. Incoming links are essential – these are the other sites that link to you, dragging people into your site from other (preferably relevant) sites. But what do we mean by size?

Size of your site relates to the physical number of pages there are. Most new websites launch with hundreds of relevant pages. These websites have employed a team of writers to write relevant content and as you now know, relevant content is essential if you want to rank higher than your competitors.

But assuming you don't have the money to employ a team of writers to create hundreds if not thousands of pages of copy for you, what do you do. Well you have to write it yourself of course, or pay lots of money to get the paid listings slot that you see at the top of most pages.

But we'll be discussing how to create good copy (and lots of it) in just a minute.

## So what makes a good website?

The answer to that one is simple. An answer to their question / query or problem, easily and quickly. Make the content relevant to the searchers needs and give people a reason to return.

If people perceive your site to be authoritative and containing useful information, they will read beyond the landing page. What do we mean by the "landing page"? Well more often than not the landing page is the home page. Do you make it easy for your visitors to use your site? Or do you expect them to guess what is available? Do you want them to do something specific? Is it obvious?

However a landing page can be any page within your site. So take a good look at each of your pages. Do they offer the reader something of interest and value? Do you make it

obvious what else is available for them to look at? And if not, then you have to ask yourself – what is the point of that particular page at all?

There should be little or no excuse in today's web environment for pages that go nowhere, or offer little of interest or value. For the spiders and the robots of the online world this is all too true. They like keyword rich content. They like to follow links. They like sites that change rapidly and regularly. And as we mentioned they also like sites they can get into. If you make it difficult for a spider to get into your site it's unlikely they will bother to come back, and your traffic will never improve, which is a problem if you were hoping to sell something via the site.

There is yet another problem with websites that most people don't consider when designing a site and that is the content management system that the site utilises.

The following image is of a website that has some great content, keyword rich, relevant content – but the site itself sits in a database. How can you tell? Well take a look at the search line

This tells me the website sits in a database. Only the page number changes.



To improve your search engine ranking, each page should have its own title – which can then be used within the blue header bar. Unfortunately for this website the blue bar cannot change.

If you can utilise both the blue title bar with additional page titles (which should be relevant keywords) and the search line tags, you can improve your chances of all your pages being found in the results pages. And each page can be used as a potential landing page.

I'll show you what I mean



As you will notice – IEA’s website utilises both.

I don’t know if you remember IEA’s old site – but that was a frames based site. And had all of the same problems as the first site we showed – we had to rely on people knowing the URL (the [www.iea.com.au](http://www.iea.com.au) bit) to find us, or being linked to by other sites and gaining valuable click throughs.

Whilst we have overcome some of the problems of web design and search engine optimisation, our current website has a whole set of other problems to overcome.

The first one is interesting. We have four parts to our business, and whilst they are linked, they are also different enough to confuse the spiders, which does not help with ranking. If the spiders see what it deems to be conflicting information – in our case, we have 4 sets of conflicting keywords, it won’t know where to put us (so to speak) and we will rank lower than other sites who only have one main aspect to their business. As with The Centre for Cerebral Palsy – their website contains information about one main thing – cerebral palsy, what it is, how people live with it and so on.

Our other main problem lies in the nature of our business and the words we use to describe it. “Information Management” “records management” and “library management” are very broad subject headings and again it can be hard to rank in the results listings for broad subject terms. Will we ever get to Number 1 for these terms? As much as I hate to say this – it is unlikely...unless we take down all the other sites around the world of course. Hmm – I don’t think so. Which is why we provide lots of information and we hope lots of reasons for people to return to our website.

Earlier I mentioned a potential problem with the use of images on websites. Sometimes these can be way too big and can slow down a sites loading time, but the main problem with images is they aren’t utilised as an information source. A keyword rich information source. If you add metadata to the <alt tags> you can add several more keywords / key phrases to your site, which can help you rank higher than your competitors. For instance:

Who / what is in it, where it was taken, when it was taken (assuming the date and time function is set properly on the camera – this may be assigned automatically), and what you used to take the picture with. Add some descriptive words you want to assign to the image, and you will improve your chances of the spiders liking your site a little bit more.

The other thing spiders like are websites that change. The more changes you make to the website the more likely it will be the spiders will come back to you. But a caveat, the information has to be relevant to the site and of benefit to the visitors. Remember we are

talking basic marketing concepts here. Give people what they want and they will come back. Make it easy for people to do business with you and they will.

One of the best ways to attract regular visitors is by creating a blog or online diary. People can read all about you and what your organisation is doing. Used well, these blogs can become viral marketing tools. You know what we mean by viral – they spread quickly because of the content. Some of the best ones are of course sites like youtube, and the onion ([www.theonion.com](http://www.theonion.com)) the sites people pass around on a Friday afternoon with a hey have you seen this type of comment attached.

But you have to be consistent. Writing one blog post a week isn't enough. The best sites are the ones that are being added to on a daily basis. If you have the right set up – these posts do what we call “ping” the servers. It tells the spiders there is new content to look at – so come and have a look. But another caveat. Do not ping the servers too often otherwise the spiders will get suspicious and assume you are not a legitimate site.

Getting decent ranking in the search engines is a long, hard process. More of a marathon than a sprint to quote my friend. I should know, it took about a year for my personal website ([www.motivateme.info](http://www.motivateme.info)) to get to number 1 – and 2 years to get the thousand indexed pages / entries. And yes, that's a lot of writing.

With many thoughts  
Lorraine

### A Thought to Ponder:

“When I took office, only high energy physicists had heard of what is called the World Wide Web, now even my cat has its own page”

Bill Clinton