

Defining your target audience

A successful website is designed to appeal to its target audience. This section will show you how to define your target audience, and how to test your website to ensure it works for them.

It's easy to be woolly and vague when defining your target audience, but this won't benefit your website in the slightest. A target audience of 'the general public', or 'men' is far too broad – you need to be much more specific, defining age, gender, marital status, number of children, etc. etc. etc.

Don't worry, there are two very simple ways of doing this. Firstly, you can picture someone you know – someone who, to your mind, is the sort of person you're targeting with your website. Keep that person in mind for a moment, we'll be analysing them later.

Alternatively, if you don't know anyone from your target audience well enough, you can develop something called a 'persona' - an imaginary individual from your target audience. Give the persona as much character as you can – give them a name, age, marital status, house-owner status, children etc.

Here's a quick example persona:

- Jane Smith.
- 28.
- 2 kids – one three year old, one baby.
- Married – husband called Bill.
- Rents her property.

Finally, find a picture that could be 'Jane' – one from a magazine is useful – cut it out and keep it as a reference. This will bring her alive in your mind.

Whether it's a real person or a persona, detail is important. The more detail you can give to that person's life, the better you'll understand them. By the time you're finished, you should know a lot about the way they use the internet. Examples might be:

- They go online after tea.
- The computer is in the corner of the living room.
- Their kids are a continual distraction (this will make a HUGE difference to the way they use your site).

From now on, every time you make a decision about your website ask yourself, 'Is it right for this person?'

Imagining your target audience in this way is really useful, but you still need to test your website on real users.

You'll spend a long time in the development process, and it's easy to find yourself in a position where you can't see the wood for the trees. Don't expect the design agency to be able to give you unbiased feedback either – they're as deep in this as you are.



The solution is user testing. This has numerous benefits:

- It will give you feedback from people outside the project, which is incredibly useful.
- It takes personal opinion out of the equation – instead of ‘I think our users will like this’ you’ll have actual feedback from those users.
- It gives you the opportunity to detect problems early on, before it’s too late to fix them.
- If your site is useable, you’ll increase customer loyalty. This is of vital importance online.

User testing does not need to be expensive and complicated. At its simplest, it can be you and a user sat in front of a computer, using your website. Get that user to complete key tasks – placing an order, giving feedback, navigating to the homepage, searching, etc. Do these tests **little** and **often**:

- **Little** - You don’t need hundreds of people to test against. A handful will do.
- **Often** - Test as often as you can, because you’ll pick up problems all the way through the process. Test from the very earliest stages – sketches, designs, prototypes. If you leave your tests to the end, it will be too late to make the necessary changes.

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