Producing websites that are used

1. Be clear about what you want to get from the site

2. Then concentrate on your target audience. Why should they choose to visit your website? What's in it for them? This may be a particular problem for local parts of national organisations, such as the NHS or large charities. Other than local opening times, complaint procedures etc, why would the public want to visit this type of website? A lot of other information that the public might want will be provided by the central body, like NHS Direct. There is little point in duplicating this. So if you want to attract people who aren't interested in what you do but still need your help, you may need to think outside of the box

3. The answers to these dilemmas may be to
    a. Research what people are actually interested in and link this to health e.g. if research shows that crosswords and puzzles are popular, use these as a tool to give out health information. Get sponsorship from local companies to give out appropriate prizes
    b. Find a particular niche, that is relevant but isn't covered nationally, e.g. a particular health topic in a minority ethnic language
    c. If you want something less niche consider a local 'what's on' site that in passing gives out health advice. For example, do restaurant reviews that include the healthiest choices on the menu. Also make use of seasonal events, people do more DIY at Bank Holidays and as a consequence have more accidents. Tips on safe DIY might be useful at this time. At other times, like the Christmas holidays, when teenage pregnancy rates often increase, promote contraception, along site festive events

4. Make the site a real part of the local community. Involve your users. Have user groups. If appropriate allow local people to add content, though you may need to moderate this. Have competitions sponsored by local companies

5. Think about what the 'Look and Feel' of the site should be. This includes the overall impression, individual images and font. Ideally test this out and choose an approach which appeals to the target audience as opposed to merely the Chief Exec

6. In a similar way consider what the written tone of the site should be. What is the relationship between the site and the user, e.g. expert to patient, friend to friend

7. Make sure that the layout is easy to follow, i.e. people can find pages that they want or easily come across information you want them to see

8. Put key information in the headlines, subheadings and under pictures. People often read these before the main text. Think about also putting a summary of the main information in the first paragraph of an article in case people don't read any

further. Then prioritise the information in paragraph order, the more important stuff going at the top

9. Use paragraphs and keep your sentences to a maximum of 25 words, with many shorter than this

10. Use plain English and if you want people to read it, who only speak it as a second language, try not to use metaphors e.g. 'over the hill'. These can be confusing

11. The web isn't like a book; people don't necessarily start at the beginning and read on to the end. Make sure that every page makes sense on its own

12. Make sure that it is AAA compliant if possible so that people with disabilities can use it

13. Pilot the site to see if it works and is popular. Keep doing this until it is ready to launch

14. Promote it via search engines e.g. key words. For more ideas see http://solvater.com/2011/02/top-essential-seo-tips-2011/

15. Also promote it with mutual links with other sites, as well as advertising

16. Make sure that you keep the contents and links up to date

17. Evaluate what you are doing. Use Google Analytics to look at figures about who is visiting you. (See www.google.com/analytics/). Which pages do they visit? Also check out what people think of the site in person, if you can. Finally, keep checking that the site is helping you meet your goals.

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