

Relating to your users

Key questions to consider

- what interactivity is required to achieve your objectives?
- what are the design implications of the interactivity and the intended impact on the relationship with users?
- how do you want to handle registration and log-in procedures?
- what kind of online communities do you want to create?

Relating to your users

Key points

- list the interactivity, feedback opportunities, tailoring and personalisation selections you require the website to offer and produce a matrix for which users will use what
- plan your registration and log-in procedures
- write a structure for the bulletin boards and online communities you propose, outlining numbers of subject groups, how threads will be handled and arrangements for moderation. Your web developer should help choose the specialist software for this
- list the categories of web relationship you wish to offer and the character of newsletters and any response mechanisms you require

Relating to your users

How to relate to visitors on the web and exploit the advantages of this interactive medium

The web is fundamentally two-way. People can send information in both directions and it is this potential for dialogue and feedback that transforms how we can relate to our customers.

- how can we provide simple interactivity?
- what are the issues involved in registration and log-ins?
- how can we build communities on the web?
- how can we use web relationships?

The web and browsers offer interaction, eg at the simplest level rolling the mouse over a link will turn the pointer into a hand and text should pop out from the link to describe what it is and where it leads. The Contact Us button can provide an emailable form to send direct to the organisation.

The screenshot shows a contact form on the website www.andante.com. The form is titled "CONTACT US" and includes the following fields:

- Name:
- Email:
- andante Username:
- Subject:
- Category:
- Message:

Below the form is a "Send Message" button. The page also features a navigation menu, a search bar, and promotional banners for a newsletter and a free trial.

Users of classical music website www.andante.com are offered a web form in which to provide feedback.

There are many other possibilities for animation and interaction. A panel can contain changing information, cycling through a sequence of text and/or images, and rolling the mouse over it can stop it; clicking on it can take you to further information. The South Bank Centre usually offers a good example of this (at www.rfh.org.uk). Fields can provide drop-down lists, banners and pop-ups can appear, and new frames open.

Pop off

There is a danger to this. Animations on websites can be a turnoff to many users. Some browsers can be configured to suppress pop-ups and banner ads. Many users click the close box on small frames before they finish downloading. It is absolutely essential to ensure that animation and interactivity relate directly to the primary purpose of the website, improving the experience for the user and helping build the relationship with them.

Because the web is interactive, it is important to reflect this in the opportunities you offer. One argument is that simply providing tasks that require users to respond starts to build a relationship. So some websites ask visitors to vote on a subject or participate in a simple quiz or game, email a named individual in the organisation to give feedback or comment, or ask a question. However, it is important to ensure that these do not form distractions from your primary purpose.



Visitors to the BBC website (at <http://news.bbc.co.uk>) are offered the opportunity to vote for their favourite Turner Prize artist.

Going further, the public is usually willing to give helpful feedback to those organisations they favour, so an online survey can obtain good response rates. There are shareware versions of such interactive surveys which can be incorporated into your website. Market research rigour still needs to be applied to the formatting of the questions to ensure usable practical responses. The nature of the sample and the respondents will require careful consideration when assessing the answers.



A simple online survey from Speed Survey (<http://ballet.speedsurvey.com>).

To register or not to register

A key issue in the planning of your website is at what point you choose to ask users to log in, if at all. Web servers collect basic information about users such as the platform, browser, and country of their ISP, and can/will place a cookie in their computer, which recognises a returning user, based on their behaviour on their first visit.

To be recognised, individuals must register in some way. This can be achieved simply by requesting their email address and a user-chosen password. This minimum is adequate but it is very helpful if you can also collect real names so you can identify the person properly (who may have more than one email identity). For e-commerce purposes, much more information is needed such as full address and contact information. There is a debate about when this extended information is collected.

The first argument is about when and why users should be asked to log in. If you ask users to log in as they arrive at your website, this may deter some new visitors and you will lose their involvement with your site. Many websites will offer log-in fields as part of their fundamental navigation in the belief that users will log in at the point which suits them during their visit. This means that this facility must be on every page.

It is possible to configure the website so that first-time visitors are not asked to log in until later, on a second visit, when they are recognised by a 'cookie'. This enables real interactivity to begin, for example the opportunity to encourage people to choose to receive email newsletters, to tailor the subjects on which they want information and to configure the website according to their personal interests and priorities. All these elements need careful specification with the developer.

Returning users

Returning users are more interested and therefore it is important to give them personal recognition. If your organisation recognises customers with mailing list schemes, memberships, season tickets or subscriptions, then you should provide this recognition

online. Again, the cookie can be configured to recognise the character of the returning user. Users need to see some benefit from this – not least a significantly different first page which shows that you know who they are.

The log-in process is harder for the customer if it requires an offline membership number or such-like, not least because the user will need to have this to hand to log in the first time. While this number can be emailed to them automatically and immediately if they have forgotten it, the step adds a significant obstacle.

The screenshot shows the login page for Sadler's Wells. At the top is a red navigation bar with the logo. Below it is a breadcrumb trail: Home > Book a ticket > Patron login > Log in. A vertical banner on the left reads 'SECURE BOOKING'. The main content area has a heading 'Please login or register to continue with your purchase. Please enter either your Sadler's Wells Patron Number or your email address. Then enter your password to continue.' Below this are three input fields: 'Patron number', 'Email Address', and 'Password'. A 'Log In' button is positioned to the right of the password field. Below the form, there is a note: 'If you are an existing patron who has not booked online your password is your Patron Number and the first four letters (or less if appropriate) of your last name e.g. S34567890'. At the bottom of the form area, there is a link: 'If this is your first booking with Sadler's Wells please register now.' At the very bottom of the page, there are links for 'Home', 'About Us', 'Accessibility', 'Contact Us', and 'Terms & Conditions'.

Requiring users to have their offline membership number to hand can add an obstacle (see www.sadlerswells.com).

One argument for requiring users to log in and provide their personal information at the start of the transaction sequence is that they are more likely to complete the transaction because of the commitment they have already made to the process. If your website provides e-commerce and particularly online ticket sales, then at some point there is a requirement for input-heavy collection of information. There is an argument that customers should be encouraged to input information as early as possible to reduce the burden of input during the actual transaction. So it can be useful if contact details are collected at the initial log-in and used to populate the forms in the e-commerce transaction.

Talkback

Patrick Marber's play *Closer* contains a scene in which two people in separate rooms have a desperate dialogue using an Internet chat room. Frenetically fast typing still means their dialogue is slow. But it is still dialogue and the responses don't have to be instantaneous. Enter the world of Bulletin Boards, chat rooms and discussion forums.



The Fuel4Arts email discussion forum (www.fuel4arts.com) provides the opportunity for dialogue among arts practitioners and arts marketers.

For many users, the main interaction websites can provide is the ability to post questions, contribute to discussions and read changing information posted by other contributors. The software to provide this functionality is often available as shareware but it is important to ensure that it has the functionality you require.

Posting on the web is effectively publishing, so moderation of content is important. Most websites have a member of staff who reads all postings before publishing or at least ensures postings are monitored daily and inappropriate ones removed. This is not optional. Some venues ask users to post their own short reviews of events they have seen, and even these need moderation as some may contain offensive personal remarks about individual artists and their work. Some sites offer a special email on the Bulletin Board for users to warn the moderator if they see a posting they think inappropriate.

Bulletin Boards and discussion forums are specific tools for creating online communities of people with shared interests and specific needs. An example of users of such forums would be teachers who can share education workshop and project materials and explore or discuss subjects and experiences. It can take some effort to get such online communities up and running but they can then operate largely on a self-help basis with only modest moderation.

Each Bulletin Board should have its own log-in arrangements and make clear who it is for and what areas are covered. Most software supports discussion threads and also enables contributors to subscribe to receiving emails of new postings so that the online discussion can keep moving and contributors are made aware of activity.

Web relationships and e-marketing

If users log in, websites can monitor much of their behaviour, what buttons they click, which pages they view and how much time they spend on each page. The large amount of information which can be collected, much automatically, makes websites a rich source of data capture. This information needs to be exported in a usable format so that it can be used for direct marketing. Some computerised box office and e-commerce solutions provide this functionality such as *ts.com's ticketing solutions*.

Newsletters

The challenge of data capture and user-defined requests is deciding when to push information out to users and when to let them pull what they want. Provided permission is obtained under data protection law, organisations can send out appropriately tailored and targeted emailings based on website behaviours and expressed interests. However, most arts organisations simply let users tell them what information they want to receive. The most common usage is to send email newsletters. It is more effective if multiple newsletters are produced according to interests, so this means the website must offer the opportunity for users to select the character of newsletter they want to receive and at what frequency.

E-commerce and Internet ticketing

Key questions to consider

- what factors determine the selling of merchandise on your website?
Minimum order size and value? Fulfilment and delivery? Customer queries and follow-up?
- what will users want to buy from your website? Can you afford to sell to them? Will it be profitable?
- if you plan to sell tickets, how do you persuade users to buy? What could put them off buying from your website?
- how does your internal search engine work? What happens when you interrogate it?
- what is your policy on fees and charges? On what terms will your ticketing system supplier do business with you?

E-commerce and Internet ticketing

Key points

- plan an e-commerce strategy with all the processes fully analysed and an agreed methodology for executing them
- review page optimisation and information collection with your web developer and, if appropriate, your ticketing system supplier, and identify the steps to shorten the process and improve the flow
- monitor sales and view web server logs to see if you can identify problem areas in the e-commerce process
- monitor customer input into your search engine and configure responses to deliver the links they want. Discuss with your web developer how to optimise your search engine to meet users' needs

E-commerce and Internet ticketing

The implications of offering e-commerce functionality on websites

For most arts organisations, e-commerce is unlikely to be quoted as the primary purpose of their website. However, some are recognising that, as purchasing tickets is the preferred activity of the majority of their users, they need to focus the functionality of their site around this. For example, in London in 2003 some arts organisations reported that on average over 20 per cent of their tickets were sold online, and for some events up to 60 per cent (www.ticketing.org.uk). For many existing attendees, this is seen as an important added-value element to the sales channel, with the purchaser in control.

Imposing logic on shopping

How do you shop? Is your approach to shopping logical and reasoned? Are you methodical and systematic? For most people the answer is No. The physical retailer can still expect high volumes of sales, because you will arrive at your purchase selection your way. Your behaviour is considerably restricted if the inventory is provided in a catalogue – you can still skip about the pages, but the order in which the goods are offered is set and the information is limited to what the vendor thinks is of interest to you. Your behaviour is even more restricted when you move to buy things on the web. It is necessary to impose a logical process on to the purchase.

E-commerce is mail order by another method. Every item sold has to be packaged and delivered, or arrangements made for it to be collected. Even the 'collect from the box office' option can be onerous if 35 per cent of your tickets are sold online and all the purchasers turn up 15 minutes beforehand. So arts organisations selling successfully on the web have a new terrestrial problem – ticket collection kiosks.

Back-office requirements

Consideration of e-commerce opportunities needs to start with the back-office functions:

- what packaging will be required for UK delivery and what packaging and customs notification will be needed for overseas delivery?
- who will post and pack and how much will it cost?
- who will track deliveries to completion?
- who will manage stock control and 'out of stock' problems?
- who will receive telephone and email enquiries about orders?
- what currencies and payment methods will be accepted?
- who will handle credit card chargebacks and queried transactions?
- how might refunds and damaged goods problems be handled?

Card payment

It is easiest to accept payment only by credit card. This means payment is guaranteed at the time of purchase and customers from anywhere in the world can settle in sterling. However, the acquiring banks (the banks to which you pay credit card income) now require separate merchant accounts for web sales and usually impose higher percentage commissions. As a result many e-commerce organisations make a surcharge for credit card payment. Some also accept debit cards which, dependent on the bank, can be processed through the same merchant account. The choice of credit card bank need not be determined by which bank provides your main account, but by which one offers the best terms and service and accepts the most card types.

Banks sometimes demand a bond to cover the time lapse between order/payment and delivery. Banks tend to adopt the side of the customer if they query delivery or satisfaction. This can lead to chargebacks and cancellation of payment which can make it difficult to recover payment. This may be a serious reason to reconsider where you supply, especially outside the UK.

Bundling

Order size is a key determinant of profitability, so it is essential to identify whether the cost of processing low-value transactions is worthwhile. There may be public benefits that outweigh logistical issues, such as selling exhibition catalogues, posters or postcard bundles. Items can be grouped together into a single higher-value transaction – not one poster but three; cards in a pack of 10. In every case, the true cost of fulfilment must be considered.

Cataloguing

A physical shop usually has software to handle product recognition, stock control, inventory/stock order position, cost of sale, margin, tax treatment, etc. An online shop needs to interface with this. Some software packages will accept interfacing with the web and some computerised ticketing systems will handle a limited inventory of merchandise sales. There are also e-commerce software packages that can handle everything from cataloguing to payment mechanisms. The key issue is ensuring that stock control and sales accounting is under control.

E-commerce requires an online catalogue of items for sale that can be browsed and searched. The catalogue will need thumbnail illustrations of each item and these need to be meaningful. The description should be aimed at satisfying users' needs for information to persuade them to buy, together with the stock position, typical delivery times, and purchase costs including postage and packing (also allowing for overseas delivery), plus VAT.

Shopping cart

The functionality of a shopping cart is essential. This icon works for most people. The basket should appear on every page of the website and permit access at all times to its contents, with an itemised, costed list plus a total including all delivery costs. Clicking on this icon should offer navigation into the inventory as well as itemising the current contents and permitting items to be removed.



The functionality of a shopping cart is essential for an e-commerce site (see www.npg.org.uk).



www.npg.org.uk

Terms and conditions

Once users have completed their selections, they proceed to the check out. However, more than payment is handled at this stage. It is essential that purchasers see and understand the terms and conditions and the data protection implications. It should only be possible to complete their purchase once they have acknowledged these. The recommended practice is that the terms and conditions are read and that the button to accept them and proceed is at the bottom of the text. It is not recommended that terms and conditions are an optional read, accessed by a separate button.

Data protection

The public have many fears about the security of making purchases and giving their personal details and credit card payments on the web. There are web security schemes and some ticketing system suppliers have their web pages approved, such as Verisign or Verified by Visa. Standard security procedures can protect credit card details and the transmission of personal data. However, it is essential to provide a clear data protection statement on exactly who the purchaser is trading with, who will process their data and where, and what the outcomes of the processing will be.

The recommended practice is again that the data protection statements have to be read through even with scrolling, and that the button to accept them and proceed is at the bottom of the text. However, whereas with terms and conditions the purchaser must accept these to proceed, it is thought unfair under data protection legislation to prevent a purchaser from proceeding because they don't want their data kept and used, so there should be two buttons: proceed and accept and proceed and decline.

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privacy statement

Britart Privacy Statement

At britart we are committed to maintaining your privacy. What information do we collect?

For the britart "The Works" email we collect your name, email address, age bracket and whether you have a credit card. If you purchase from britart in addition to the above, we also ask for delivery address, and payment method details. What will the data will be used for?

1. When buying your personal details will be used to help us process your order.
2. We will send you the exclusive britart monthly emails, which will inform you about our products, exclusive invitations, services, promotions and special offers.

If you do not wish to receive email newsletters from britart simply unsubscribe from the email at any time by sending an email to theworks@britart.com with the word "unsubscribe" in the subject line.

3. We may from time to time disclose your data to approved third party partners or parties in order to bring you information about products or services we feel will be of interest to you. The details include: name and email address. All third parties will manage the data under the guidelines of the Data Protection Act and all the information is processed in accordance with the principles laid down by the Act. These carefully chosen companies may send you by mail or other media details of their products and services.

We comply with the standards, procedures and requirements laid down in the UK Data Protection Act to ensure that the personal information you give us is kept secure and processed fairly and lawfully. If we make changes to this policy, we will immediately notify you by updating this statement on our web site.

By using our website, you consent to the information you give us being processed for any of the purposes we have explained above except where we have received your "unsubscribe" email.

Customer Feedback.
If you have any comments, queries or complaints relating to our privacy policy please email info@britart.com

A clear data protection statement is essential (see www.britart.com).

Registration: Agree to Terms

1. Enter Information 2. **Agree to Terms** 3. Confirm Your Email

Accept the User Agreement

- Review the eBay User Agreement and Privacy Policy
- Read and accept the two specific clauses below by checking the boxes
- Click the **I Accept** button at the bottom of the page

This agreement helps keep eBay a safe place to buy and sell, and promotes trust among our community members.

User Agreement

Welcome to the user agreement for eBay.co.uk ("User Agreement"). The services available at <http://www.ebay.co.uk> are provided by eBay International A.G. ("eBay", "we", "us" or "our"), located at

Privacy Policy

Welcome to the privacy policy ("Privacy Policy") for eBay.co.uk. The services available at <http://www.ebay.co.uk> are provided by eBay International A.G. ("eBay", "we", "us" or "our") located at Helvetiastrasse 15/17, 3005 Bern, Switzerland.

I accept the eBay User Agreement and the terms and conditions incorporated by reference, I have read the Privacy Policy and I specifically acknowledge and accept the following:

I must be an adult (18 years old) to trade on eBay and I certify that I am an adult and can enter into this Agreement.

I agree to be contacted by eBay in accordance with the default settings of my Notification Preferences and understand that I can change those preferences at any time by going to the Notification Preferences page in my eBay.

A clear data protection statement is essential (www.ebay.co.uk).

Log-in and registration

When is the best place and time for customers to log in or for new users to register for the first time? Loyal customers will want to log in at the start of their web session, especially if they are members of friends or subscription schemes and, for example, gain privileged access to discounts. The website will need to permit purchasers to register and give all their details as easily as possible. This is a data input-heavy process and the design and layout of pages is crucial. Forms should avoid scrolling and multiple pages, and content should be designed to be 'above the fold' at all times (the online ticketing example on pages 88 to 91 provides a detailed examination of what can be involved).

Order confirmation and delivery

Once payment has been made it is expected that:

- first the website returns a confirmation, with an order number and details of delivery. This tells the purchaser that their transaction has been completed and should give contact details for queries and to track delivery. It is good if this offers a button for a printable version
- second an email confirmation is sent to the purchaser, repeating the above. Where there is a despatch delay, it is customary to send a further email once the goods have been collected by the carrier
- in some systems these emails are sent automatically and do not use an address that can be replied to. It is essential to put mechanisms in place to track responses from purchasers and to ensure that they are dealt with. Orders can become an administrative nightmare if purchasers roll back their credit card payment because of a tardy response. The choice of carrier may be significant since some now give purchasers the opportunity to track delivery through their system, which is greatly appreciated. There is of course a modest delivery cost implication

Online ticketing

Most arts organisations have existing computerised box office systems, but interfacing these with websites to provide an effective ticket-selling experience is not always easy. The simple fact is that many arts organisations have their own ticket-selling procedures which reflect their ways of doing business, so standard Internet-ticketing engines immediately restrict their options. The vast majority of box office managers require that seats sold on a self-service or semi-automatic basis are selected not by the purchaser but by a best-available algorithm set up on the computerised system. This can be configured with the order in which seats should be sold to provide the best seats, dress the house, and ensure no singletons are left.

There is considerable evidence that purchasers don't like being allocated a seat and would prefer to select their own, but only a couple of UK computerised system suppliers offer that option at present (for further information on this see www.ticketing.org.uk). For venues with numbered seating, it looks as though achieving high percentages of online sales will depend on this functionality.

'We in the arts industry need to understand that we're not the people that are driving online ticketing, it's not the ticket agents and software companies that are driving online ticketing – it's the customer. Ultimately we are responding to customer expectation and the expectation of online ticketing is growing every day. If we don't pay attention now, our businesses will simply be left behind.'

Stuart Buchanan, former Marketing Manager, Royal Court Theatre

There are a variety of solutions for delivering online ticketing, often easily confused because of unclear terminology. In fact, selling online may not involve a computerised box office system at all. The options and implications are:

- giving an allocation of tickets to a ticket agent for them to sell over the web, such as First Call (www.firstcalltickets.com). No connection to live box office data. Will involve manual reconciliation of sales
- making an allocation to your own web-selling tool, such as ts.com, for example. No connection to live box office data. Will involve manual reconciliation of sales

- using a combined ticketing system/services supplier who links your ticket sales to their Internet ticketing operation, such as Ticketmaster. Live connection to box office data. May involve substantial fees imposed on customers
- using a ticketing system supplier who supplies an Internet gateway and Internet connectivity, such as Tickets.com, for example. Live connection to box office data. May involve choice of license fees or per-ticket fees
- using a ticketing system supplier who supplies an Internet gateway software module, such as Artifax and Galathea STS for ENTA. Live connection to box office data. Requires the organisation to provide its own web server with firewalls and flood protection, plus credit card clearing. Usually involves only license fees
- using a ticketing system supplier who sells a specification to enable you to develop your own Internet ticket sales tool, such as Galathea STS for BOCS. Live connection to box office data. Involves development costs or out-sourcing

It is strongly recommended that venues should implement one of the last four options, all of which give real-time ticket-selling solutions, selling live off the changing inventory. Allocation methods ought only to be considered as a temporary solution.

Connecting the box office system to the Internet usually requires a separate connection to the web sales engine. This can be either a leased line to your ISP or an ISDN line or an ADSL (broadband) connection. Call charges will be incurred for some of the telecommunications options. This is significant because it may mean the venue incurs costs even when customers do not complete their ticket purchase.

Live online ticketing has some technical challenges. Venues need a system to manage access, ticket availability, seat allocation and then payment processing. This is why some suppliers have developed integrated Internet ticketing solutions in which they supply the ticketing system, Internet gateway and Internet connectivity, thereby delivering services as well as software. Some of these come with a 'private label' version that enables venues to sell directly off their own website.

Optimising the process

Where e-commerce is a fundamental requirement of your website, a few simple rules apply:

- minimise the number of pages to be viewed and the number of times the mouse must be clicked
- make it obvious and quick to find the e-commerce area from every page of your website
- don't make the users repeat actions or get caught in circular processes, eg if they look at What's On and identify event, date and time, then the link to ticket purchase must not require them to repeat this process
- speed is essential – design pages to download quickly and make suppliers reduce delays while pages interrogate the box office system
- transactions require interaction from the user and heavy data input, so minimise what you need to collect and keep it simple
- ask whether you would find it easy to use, whether you have given the user the information they need to confidently complete their purchase

Only a small proportion of users who start e-commerce transactions actually complete them, and these are often a small proportion of the overall visitors. Clearly users visit websites to obtain more information. If they don't find what they want easily, then they will leave. Does the start of the transaction process in some way put them off, is it too complicated and does it involve too many steps and inputs? This is an area where venues are experimenting to see what they can do to improve results. Minimising the number of pages and simplifying the selection and form-filling process is clearly very important.

A recent review of Internet ticketing on arts organisations' websites in the UK for www.ticketing.org.uk showed nearly half had problems that prevented progress with transactions. A considerable number of these came from wrong links within What's On event details, possibly because of incorrect text within the link – a typo here is not a misspelling, but a failed link.

What's On and date/time selection

The same review revealed problems with What's On information itself. Event details often listed a whole season, and despite most events having passed, it was necessary to scroll down to reach current events. Current events often had inadequate information and links were mostly wrong for events originally put on the website many months earlier. Details of dates, days of the week and times were often not presented clearly or with alternative formats such as a simple listing or a calendar. If these formats were offered, the actual dates and times were usually not configured as links straight to the appropriate point in the booking process. Many websites assumed the public would fill in a field stating the date and time or choose from a drop-down list at a later point. Clearly this is a major area for design and functionality improvements to which both web developers and ticketing system suppliers need to pay attention.

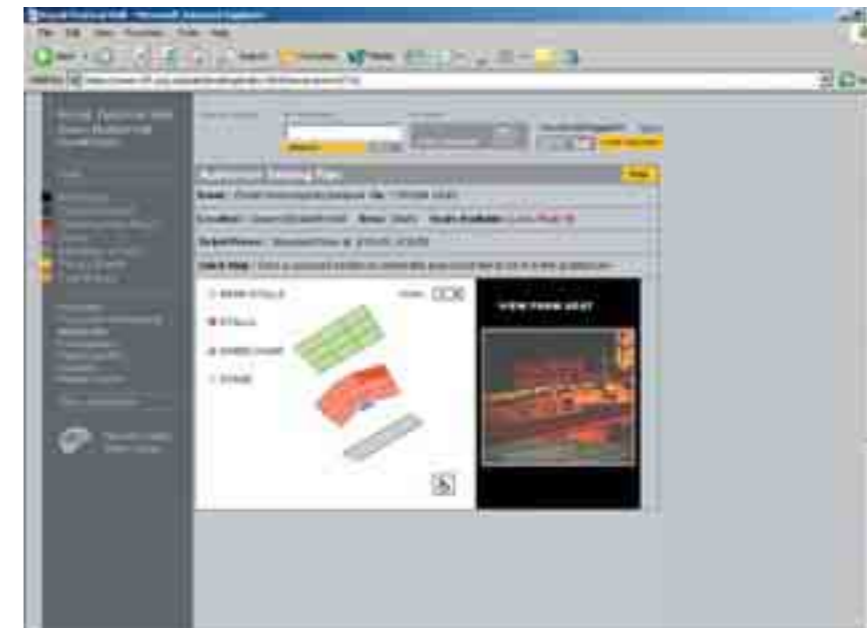
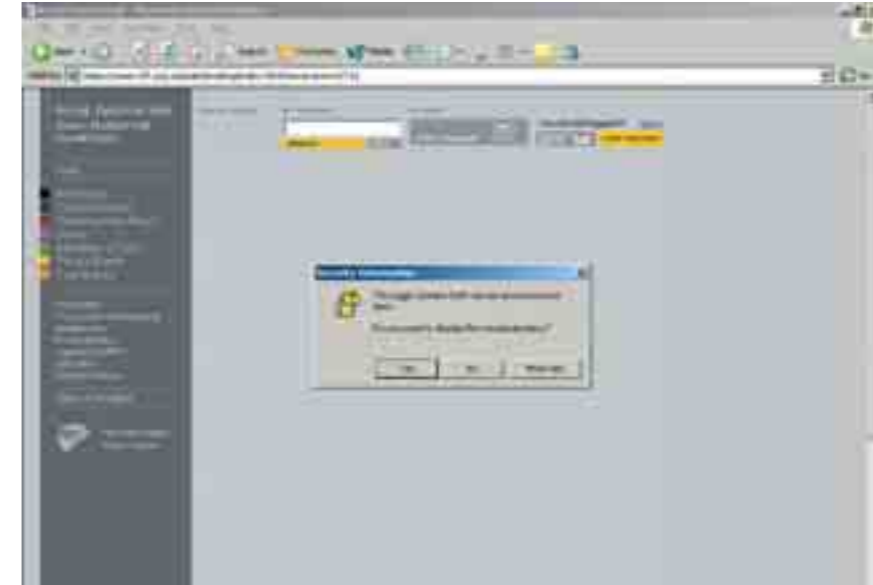
Exit points

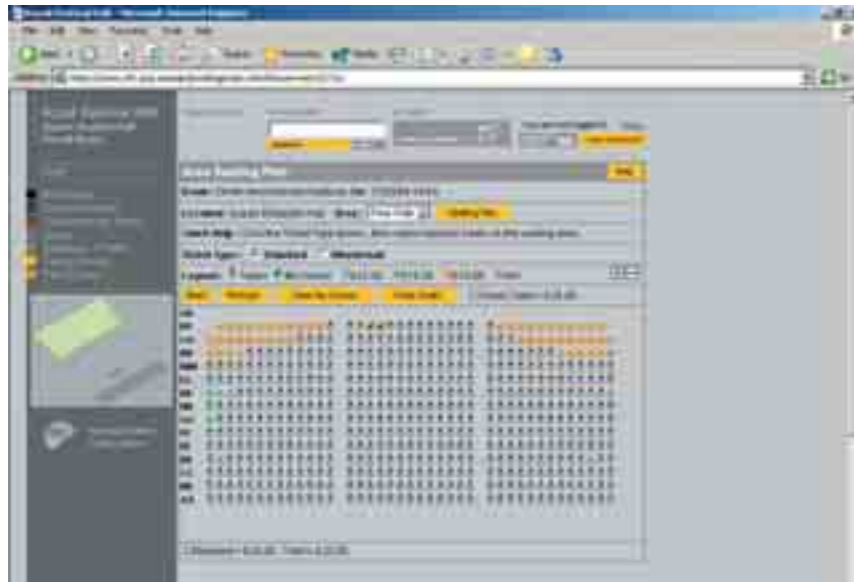
Many potential customers leave at the payment screen, even more where ticketing is concerned. There is no published research that reveals why, it could be because of issues with credit card security, the first viewing of total cost with fees and charges, form filling, or, for ticketing, the first time the user has seen the actual seat numbers allocated to them, or perhaps because the user is simply doing a price and availability check before phoning the box office.

What we do know, is that those few venues that provide the choice of the actual seats off the plan over the Internet achieve a much greater level of purchase completions.



What's On information and ticket purchase sequence on the Royal Festival Hall website at www.rfh.org.uk





It would appear that some members of the public expect web prices to be lower than purchases through other channels, because they themselves do all the work and the venue is notionally saving on staff. It is the practice of many commercial companies to discount prices for web sales, with companies such as easyJet taking £5 off web fares, even on their lowest prices. Without a price reduction on the web or with a convenience fee charged on top, many people seem to prefer to speak to box office staff.

Internal search engines

Jakob Nielsen and others suggest that once on a website, just over half of users use the website's internal search engine to try to find what they want. This is a major problem. Search engines are mathematically very simple unless specially configured.

Example

Imagine you wish to book for the London Symphony Orchestra at the Royal Festival Hall in London, which typically has over 4,000 events booking in advance, some years ahead. If you typed London Symphony Orchestra into their search engine, and if it made the standard Boolean search, you would get all the events with the word London, all the events with the word Symphony and all the events with the word Orchestra – thousands. An experienced web user might know to type in quotes "London Symphony Orchestra" so the same search would only find the proper name combination. A solution in this case is to configure the search engine so that if a user types in capitalised words it adds quotation marks.

Search options

Because some users have problems knowing the exact spelling or name of an event or artist, it is necessary to configure search engines with 'sounds like' and 'looks like' alternatives and common keyboard-juxtaposition misspellings. Dates in a variety of formats must be accepted. Web server logs show that some people simply type in the date they plan to attend, but most search engines don't recognise the date or link the

date to events on that date. Essentially, you don't want the search engine to respond with a 'no entries found' message, but for it to ask to 'try again', offering alternatives or new options. Avoid offering advanced search functionality – maths graduates are declining in numbers and even they can't necessarily spell Alan Ayckbourn.

Resources

Web Word Wizardry A Net-Savvy Writing Guide, Rachel McAlpine, Ten Speed Press; 1st edition, 2001

E-commerce User Experience, Nielsen Norman Group, 207 Guidelines for E-commerce Sites: www.nngroup.com/reports/ecommerce/

E-commerce Research Room on Web Marketing Today website: www.wilsonweb.com/research/

Internet Ticketing advice on the Ticketing.org site managed by the Arts Marketing Association: www.ticketing.org.uk

Planning the website development project

Key questions to consider

- who is responsible in your organisation for managing the website?
- who do they report to and what budget is allocated?
- what skills and advice will you need to develop your website? How many of these can be provided internally and effectively?
- who will it be appropriate to recruit to provide skills and advice and how will you appoint them? Will they be freelancers, web development companies or a mixture of both? Should you seek a 'one-stop shop' solution?

Planning the website development project

Key points

- compile the web manager's outline job description and identify whether this will be an internal appointment by changing responsibilities in another post or a new post
- carry out an appropriate appointment process and agree the timetable for the web manager to prepare a project plan
- produce a matrix of the skills required and their likely source and prepare a checklist for discussions with freelancers and web development companies (you may need to produce a draft of your development brief to approach people with – see pages 105 to 116)
- plan visits, arrange interviews and collect references of candidates. Review websites on which they have worked and talk to the people who directly commissioned them
- ensure style guides at your organisation include a section on websites

Planning the website development project

How to plan the development of a website and identify the skills and the people you will need to work with on the project

It is clear that ultimate authority for the website is a matter for the board and senior management, who need to ensure an appropriate management solution and adequate budget are agreed. It is recommended that a senior member of staff is given responsibility and authority as web manager for the organisation. This need not be full time and could be incorporated within another post, but it is essential that it is publicly signalled, all staff are aware of the responsibility and there is a time allocation.

The web manager will need to manage both internal and external teams, relating internal staff to external assistance, so the ability to lead and manage a project, resolve issues quickly, and keep it on track will be important. It is fundamental that the web manager can resolve conflicts of priorities and implement an effective hierarchy on the website. Therefore, the web manager should report directly to the chief executive or through the head of marketing if that person clearly carries responsibility for all external communications. Marketing should have a major role in the website and marketing policies should inform many decisions about the character of the website.

The web manager should act as the project manager for the web development project, as well as holding ongoing responsibility for the website. It is important to understand that a web project is not a one-off event.

Project plan

The first responsibility is to prepare a project plan for the development of the website, to be signed off by senior management and the board. At the start of this process key decisions have to be made internally about the purpose and objectives of the website. With a firm view on the agreed primary purpose of the site, the project plan should comprise:

- key purpose and objectives of the website
- target markets
- key requirements of the technical and design solution in order to achieve the objectives and the primary purpose of the site, defining the needs not the solution
- staff and departments to be involved and the implications on their time
- key tasks and responsibilities, and the requirements for outsourced skills and knowledge
- approach to recruiting and working with third parties
- content required and how it will be produced
- arrangements for ongoing maintenance and management
- planned web marketing strategies to help achieve the objectives
- available budget and what it must cover
- timeline indicating each stage of the development process and the key dates
- how the website results will be measured and success evaluated

Note that planning and preparing the content for the site is a major piece of work in itself, and can catch by surprise those whose website is built before the content is ready.

The web manager will need to understand website architecture (see pages 105 to 116) before implementing the project plan. Key decisions are required on whether content is unchanging or dynamic, determining whether the website is static or database driven. External advice can be obtained to help make these and other decisions, starting with the budget.

Budgetary considerations

There is no simple answer to budget level, but there are two figures to consider: the initial set-up cost and the annual maintenance costs. A website is a new and extra responsibility, and both extra staff time and a budget must be allocated. Suggested expenditure figures are not helpful here because the budget for the initial set-up has to be calculated on the basis of the purpose and objectives for the website and therefore the requirements for structure and design. While static page websites have served some arts organisations well to date, it is inevitable that an in-depth web experience will need a database-driven content-rich site for most arts organisations, which will increase the initial set-up cost.

In the research for this guide, most arts organisations were found to have spent in the range of £3,000 to £30,000 (2002 figures) for largely static page sites, though you cannot be sure like is being compared with like. You will need to investigate the range for an appropriate budget for developing your website. Start by asking around your network of contacts for recommendations; visit the websites of similar organisations and contact the designer or developer of those that you like. If no company has been recommended to you, look in the Yellow Pages, Internet magazines and online directories to find possible companies to contact. Surf the web and contact the developers of sites that appeal to you. Most people will willingly tell you their development costs and may also introduce you to people to consider working with.

The budget for the website will need to cover:

Set-up costs

- web server and licences, if needed
- application software and licences, if needed
- web developer's fee
- content development
- specialist fees including graphic design, content writing, bulletin board configuration, etc
- e-commerce implementation
- domain name costs

Running costs

- hosting of the web server and ongoing licensing costs
- support and maintenance
- firewalls and flood protection (traffic management)
- e-commerce licences and operating costs, including banking services
- telecommunications
- content and design updates

Timeframe

Even if your website is to be a small static site, the timeframe for the entire development is likely to be three months or longer, typically six months. How will this impact on internal staff involved? Think about whether it will be advantageous to hold regular team meetings to manage the project, or if email and phone communication will be the most efficient method. Meetings and short presentations are recommended to help communicate ideas and thinking, show examples, and encourage feedback and debate.

Project team

Most web managers will need to work with at least one other company or freelance contractor on the website development project. Finding the right people to work with can be difficult, but it is the key to a successful project. You will need to have in your team, not necessarily on an in-house or full-time basis, the following skills:

- project management: overseeing the entire project and liaising with all members of the team and other parties such as the host Internet Service Provider (ISP) and relevant organisations
- proposal/brief writing: identifying the site's objectives and target audience, outlining the content and functionality, and developing a development, design and technical brief
- web development: depending on the technical complexity of the site, the skills required will begin with HTML (hyper text mark-up language) programming and could extend into other programming skills

- web architecture: planning the site's technical and navigational structure and organising the information
- design: creating a cohesive look-and-feel that is consistent with your organisation and reflects the site's purpose
- content creation and management: compiling all text copy and other content (photographs, video, audio) that will populate the finished site, and delivering all of this in a suitable format and process to the designer and developer
- site population: inputting the content into page templates, database or other framework created by the designer and developer
- quality assurance and testing: a thorough check of the entire site for errors and bugs
- content management: developing processes and systems prior to live date so that updating can begin smoothly once the site has been launched

Depending on the size and complexity of your site, you may be able to find one person or company externally who has most of these skills, and others internally who have some of the skills or are willing to learn them. If you don't have an existing relationship with a web development or design company or freelancer, start by doing the research suggested in the budget paragraph above. This should lead you to potential partners. If your project is for a static or a medium-sized interactive website, you may find that one or two freelancers can provide everything you need at a better price than a web development company. However, most web development companies draw on full-time employees as well as associates or freelancers, and can provide end-to-end website development services if you want a one-stop shop.

Web development company checklist

Begin first by following company guidelines on procurement procedures and obtain competitive quotes from more than one company. Once the preferred company or companies are identified, ask:

- how long has this company existed?
- what sites have they created and what do you like or dislike about them?
- will they allocate a project manager or account manager to your site development, and are you happy to work with this person?
- how will they keep the project on track?
- what do they expect of you? How many meetings? Where?
- have they introduced you to all the people who would be working on the website, and are you able to work with them?
- what sort of reporting and communication processes are they proposing for the development?
- how do they propose to evaluate success?

Beware of working with graphic designers. Some have made the effort to retrain for this different discipline, but many organisations with problematical websites can point to fundamental issues stemming from the work of the designers.

'Unfortunately, we have hired a generation of web designers who don't know anything about computing, or the principles on which the web is based, or the reasons for its success. In fact most of them are not web designers at all: they are graphic designers, or print designers, who have strayed into an area they don't understand. The worst of all are the trendies who think things should be "cool" rather than functional.'

Jack Schofield, Editor, Guardian On-Line

Planning web content and maintenance

Planning the content is one of the most important aspects of a web development project. Content is often underestimated by creators of websites as being merely the text that fills the gaps in the new website. However, the strategic decisions about the content and the management of the resources required to produce and maintain it are two of the most important responsibilities of the web manager.

Responsibility needs to be assigned for:

- coordinating the content at a high level (sourcing, compiling and commissioning)
- briefing content providers about the specific requirements of writing for the web
- generating new content
- editing the content to prepare for publishing on the web

It is very important that the web manager understands that repurposing text from printed brochures or press materials to provide content for a website is not a viable solution. The development of content should apply the different requirements of writing for the web.

Resources

Web Design on a Shoestring, Carrie Bickner, New Riders, 2003

Professional Web Site Design from Start to Finish, Anne-Marie Concepcion, F&W Publications, 2002