

# Seven tips for health website managers

Post NHS reforms, many organisations now exist to provide the NHS with advice, consultancy and training. A few have excellent websites that deliver good content in an engaging, accessible way. More though fall short, making the lives of information professionals harder. If they were to ask for his advice as a user, this is what **Matt Holland** would tell them.



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## 1 Your home page is your front door

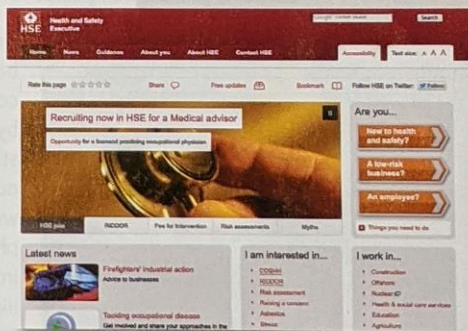
It's good to think of your home page as your front door. Just have one. Otherwise it gets confusing for the users. If you have a members only area, link from your home page. If you think your users know you, then a login button on the top right will do. Better to divide your home page in two. Right hand side – members login here – on the left hand side your free to access corporate information. If you have changed URL, check that you have redirects in place. If you have legacy pages, kill them off. Search Google and see what results come up. Could your potential users navigate to your home page based on those results? Don't assume all your users will come from one place, the corporate intranet for example.

## 2 Give something away

You can attract people to your website if you have the right offer. Share some knowledge based on your area of expertise, something users can't get elsewhere. Imagine you are student, even a manager, trying to understand the regional health infrastructure for an essay or a report. Say they find a distilled analysis in a free-to-access report with your name, marketing and logo on it. Imagine that. Good free content gets around the internet. It drives traffic to your site and gives those who are trying to promote you something to work with. It's classic internet marketing, especially for those selling services, even to members.

## 3 It's marketing Jim, but not as we know it

Think carefully about what goes behind the member or registered user only barrier, if you have one. There is very little point in having a link to 'More about us...' if you have to be a member to find out. While protecting premium content, you should provide content in the public space to inform non-users, potential users and funders. Present a coherent picture of who you are and what you do before they get to the members only area. Spare a thought for the people who are trying to help you to promote yourself. In other words, your public facing website is your marketing opportunity. You need to get this right.



#### 4 Write for the web

You know when the web page is a 'cut and paste' from a Word document. No need to read it. No one else will. Writing for the web is easy... and hard. The very short version is here:

- Imagine you have one screen to get your point across. The screen is one looking across. That's your horizontal side of A4. Don't be tempted to write on side two.
- Put your key message at the top. Keep a lead. Put the words you expect people to search for in the first two lines.
- Use short paragraphs and short sentences.
- Use lists but remember the rule of seven. No one can remember more than seven things.
- Use words with images to make your point, but make images relevant and, if possible unique to your text. Use images from the web or clip art sparingly. It looks tacky and your users know that.

#### 5 It's a big house, couldn't they afford any furniture?

Ever get the feeling you are alone? You click down endless corridors of the website and find... well, just the old document. People have been there, but not for a year or two. If you think that describes your website, maybe you have a content management system that has encouraged you to build a big feature-baked website that you don't need and can't fill. Don't spread your content too wide. It's a form and function question. Build a really good section around your publications up front and centre, breaking it down by topic or date. If you cannot do that, content and create a separate area for each topic with one publication in. It's hard to find and it looks thin. In other words create critical mass, aggregate to overcome it. Close some of those empty rooms, and make the place look full. It's easier for users to find things and that generates activity. It's a virtuous circle.

#### 6 What's the story?

If you don't tell your own story, users won't put it together for you. This is where website management, editorial and corporate communication need to talk. This is never more than for those who offer or sell services. You need to tell your story in a compelling and coherent way. You may offer courses. Website users may eventually find a link to a lengthy course description with some output from one or two courses. Hmm... Why not just let them have it? Here is our next course, it's great. Here's some video of past participants saying it's great. Here's the course leader saying, 'I'm great. Do my course, there are some of the quotes from participants telling you to do this course and here's why. Here's a flyer you can show your manager/clients. Here's how to register. Here's how we make it easy for you to do this course... use this service... contact our expert consultant.

#### 7 What's this website for?

Opportunities are missed if you just do my size in all. It's good to specialise. Get someone who knows about marketing to write, review or edit your copy. Is a world where you are competing with everyone, no one likes bland. The flip side is do you have the vision to see it differently? If you collect good multimedia content from courses or conferences, don't just archive it. Why not repurpose it as content an online course for users who weren't there? Can you use it in your marketing? Can you allow others to reuse your material (with permits)



Images some health information websites that get it right.

them on their websites or research? Why not get a copy number. Why not plan to collect good multimedia content that suits your needs?

#### And a final thought: use best practice

Some very bright people have put a lot of thought into website design so you don't have to. No need to read a multi-volume encyclopedia on website design to understand it. Get everyone round the table and ask for examples of existing websites that are best for you. Chances are the one you like used a content management system similar to yours. Then you can judge that one. At least it's a place to start. [1]