

ACCOUNTANCY MARKETING TIPS AND TRICKS

by Andrew Nixon - Marketing Advisor, Practice Track

The Firm Website

Why you need to get online, how to build a great website, and how to make the most of your firm's online presence

“Do websites work for accounting firms?”

A little while ago a delegate at a conference for small and medium-sized practices asked me the above question. Of course, the answer had to be: “It depends what you mean by ‘work’”!

If you hope that simply investing in a half-decent website is going to instantly solve your marketing and allow you to sit back while Google brings the clients flooding in, then you're likely to be disappointed. On the other hand, a website can be a highly effective (and cost-effective) prospecting and cross-selling tool – so long as you know what you're doing.

But by asking the question “Do websites work for accounting firms?” the delegate showed that he had missed a fundamental truth about how today's business world works. Even if a website isn't a marketing ‘magic bullet’, you need to have one because everyone expects you to have one...

Two Website Lessons

1. **You need to have a website because everyone will expect you to have one**
2. **A bad website is worse than no website at all**

Website Lesson One:

You need a website because everyone will assume that you have a website

Ask any twelve year old: the world works through the web. Whether it's booking a holiday cottage, buying insurance or choosing a restaurant, the first thing most of us do these days is consult the internet. If you're offering a service in a competitive marketplace and you're not listed, you will miss out. Professional service firms are no different.

But the website is not just there for anonymous browsers googling “accountants in Bristol”. These days, it's odds-on that word-of-mouth referrals will have a quick look for your site before deciding to become a client. Referral sources, whether they're longstanding clients, bank managers or solicitors, will pass on your URL or perhaps even just say “they're on the web”. Prospective staff will certainly look you up, to gauge what kind of firm you are and swot up for the interview.

We've passed the point where not having a website is the norm for accounting firms. Today, if you don't have a site, people will wonder why. And that will only become more and more the case – it's never going to go back to the way it was before the world wide web came along...

Registering a URL (web address)

Make sure you register your own domain – this will mean that you can keep control of your address even when you change website providers. Registering a URL is easy and usually very cheap (a few pounds a year).

Go to a domain registration provider (there are hundreds, including www.easily.co.uk, www.123-reg.co.uk and www.ukreg.com) and follow the instructions. You can check if your desired domain is available (eg. www.exampleandco.co.uk), register it and pay by credit card.

Website Lesson Two:

A bad website is even worse than no website at all

In his book ‘Moments of Truth’, Jan Carlzon famously said: “Any time a customer comes into contact with any aspect of your business, however remote, that customer has an opportunity to form an impression.”

If you look up a hotel's website and the photos are dingy, the booking form looks unsafe and the ‘seasonal menu’ is two years old, chances are you'll look somewhere else. In reality, the hotel itself might be a perfectly decent place to stay. But the first impression created by the poor website – the ‘moment of truth’ – is critical and irrevocable.

The same applies to your firm. If you want to project a professional, reliable, reassuring image to potential clients – an image that genuinely reflects the quality of your work – then there really is nothing worse than a site that looks like it's been thrown together by somebody's nephew for a school IT project. I frequently come across accounting firm websites with low res scanned logos, amateurish animations and ‘tax facts’ that are four years out of date.

Like it or not, the website is a vitally important ‘face’ of your firm. Even if your website doesn't bring in hundreds of new clients every month, you must at least make sure it doesn't put anybody off!

For further details on this subject please see overleaf

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Making Marketing Work for Accountants

The Firm Website

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What should be on the website?

At a bare minimum your site needs to have the following pages:

- **Contact Us** – with your details and perhaps an email contact form
- **Our Services** – details about your core and added value services, plus contact names for specialist areas
- **About Us** – perhaps with a short history of the firm and details of the principal staff
- **Why Choose Us** – explain why a prospective client should work with you

At the next level up from a basic 'brochure site', **tax rates and facts, Budget summaries and business content** give your site depth, extra value for clients and a reason for visitors to return to the site. You can buy this content in an editable, ready-to-upload HTML format from Practice Track (www.practicetrack.co.uk).

News stories or blogs - whether they're about the firm itself, client successes or general tax and business news – will keep your site looking 'alive'. But be warned: if you have news, you need to keep it up-to-date. A 'latest news' page that hasn't been touched for six months or more is worse than no news at all.

Interactive features such as **calculators, links, downloadable forms and PDFs** will take your site to the next level and provide a genuinely impressive online resource.

Traps to Avoid

- Out-of-date 'news'
- Over-fussy animations and splash pages
- Pictures that take an age to download
- Too many fonts
- Pages that all look different from each other

TIP

Whether you're using an external provider such as www.practicetrackonline.co.uk or having a go at putting the website together yourself, it is important to make sure that one person in the firm is given responsibility for the website – for managing the design and content, and for keeping it updated.

Publicising your website

Once you have a website, you'll want to publicise it as widely as possible. Put your URL on all stationery, business cards etc. Include it in your email signatures and encourage your referral sources to mention it to their contacts. Online directories such as Applegate and Yell.com can also be useful.

You'll also want to consider **search engines**. There are various ways of approaching search engine optimisation. Submitting your site to Google, Ask.com etc is easy, but getting to the top of the rankings and staying there is not and, depending on what you want to achieve, can be quite expensive. Google offers pay-per-click advertising for search terms, which can be very effective. This subject requires a whole factsheet for itself – if you'd like Practice Track's free guide to search engines, email a request to andrew@practicetrack.co.uk.

More help?

Practice Track, with its long experience of helping firms with marketing and client service, has created the ideal website solution for accountants at a realistic price.

Visit www.practicetrackonline.co.uk for the complete, one-stop website service.

You can also email andrew@practicetrack.co.uk or call **0117 932 7812** for more details.

Alternatively, complete the form below and fax to **0117 932 1132** or post to Practice Track Ltd, The Old Estate Yard Offices, Upton Cheyney, Bristol BS30 6ND

I am interested in Practice Track's website service. Please

- Call me to discuss
- Email me with more details
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Your contact details

Name _____

Firm _____

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