

Web Sight

John Nurick



From Porridge to The Prisoner, every destination needs a website

When habitual criminal Norman Stanley Fletcher was doing Porridge and making us all guffaw with laughter during the 1970s, the internet was just a mere glint in the bottom of his slopping out bucket. But today e-commerce and e-marketing are essential activities in the destination sector as elsewhere. Even the Prison Service now has a cheery site, complete with virtual tour of a prison. Every prison has its page at www.hmprisonservice.gov.uk, like a chain of hotels – although this business has to deliver radically different messages to different audiences. Prisons are good places to make a career or to visit friends or relatives, the site says, but not somewhere you'd want to stay.



More and more people are using the internet as their first and sometimes only information resource. As a recent survey in The Economist put it,

A useless website suggests a useless company, and a rival is only a mouse-click away.

Even if customers don't make an e-booking or an e-purchase they are doing their e-research before using their telephone or their front door. In some sectors the e-penetration is astounding: The Economist found that "three

out of four Americans start shopping for new cars online, though most end up buying them from traditional dealers." In the US, some 20% of travel is already bought online. The EU is following a similar curve, lagging by about three years. All this means that your website will increasingly be your customers' first encounter with your brand and product offer – and, all too easily, their only one. It's vital to include conventional contact information on your site: if you don't include telephone numbers people will think you have something to hide.

Worse, if they don't find your site they may never find you. A survey late last year found 42% of potential visitors to a proposed London attraction used the Internet when planning a day out.

It's important to register all the obvious domain names. Once people know about the new .museum top level domain, they easily guess the thebritishmuseum.org or louvre.museum. Only one of these works, however: the Louvre has registered musee.louvre.museum to supplement the older www.louvre.fr and www.museedulouvre.fr. Similarly, the British Museum also has www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk and www.british-museum.org.



Sharing links with other sites also helps people find your site. For instance, the ceramics company at www.portmeirion.co.uk and the fan-club at www.theprisoner.org both link to the destination www.portmeirion-village.com. There are also many local-information websites, whether commercial, municipal or amateur: make sure they have links to your site. But for most destinations, internet search engines are likely to be the main source of potential e-customers. These deserve an article to themselves.

John Nurick is a Managing Consultant at Locum Destination Consulting.