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Case Study: The Exchange website

The Exchange is The Norfolk Education/Business Exchange, launched as a charity in 2001. There are similar organisations in each county in England. They act as a link between local business and schools/colleges facilitating employers' involvement in education from work placements and mentoring to teachers' professional development.

In January 2008 Alison Withers at multimedia reputations was asked to assess their current website and make recommendations for improvement.



The original website:

- Minimal navigation from a top bar with drop-down boxes.
- All items in red had to be opened in separate windows.
- Not search engine friendly

The current Exchange Website:

Google "The Exchange" - it is the first organisation of its type on page 1 immediately after other bigger business organisations using the same name.

"Alison has a real gift for making a web page come alive"
(Tom O'Connor, CEO, The Exchange)

Our report:

Design: There were no pictures on the site and the home page was uninspiring. Text was green or red, small and hard to read.

Navigation was from a top bar using drop-down boxes rather than the more usual left hand menu.

The home page consisted of "news" articles as documents or PDFs, each of which had to be opened separately and appeared in a separate pop-up window. We advised this was not user-friendly for readers who want to carry on reading from the page they're on. If a reader wanted to print the article for reference they couldn't without copying and pasting into another document first. Most importantly these windows **could not** be scanned by a search engine, which meant anyone searching for information they contained would not be directed to the Exchange website

Website management: additional items were uploaded by the webhost with a charge per item and often with an unacceptable time-lag.

Content: there was scope for creating a much more information-rich site and including useful reference materials for the two target audiences (schools and businesses).

What we did

We recommended an open left hand menu instead organised into main categories: About, FAQs, Links, information for Schools, Information for Businesses, Ongoing projects and News with sub-sections as article pages where needed

We organised migration to a new web host, offering a more affordable basic template with CMS to enable the client to upload new information regularly and the option of adding free downloads of useful documents, application forms and information sheets.

We liaised with the host to supply artwork and achieve the overall, livelier look we wanted.

In consultation with the client we devised a new homepage (including side panels that can be changed whenever there are new announcements and events to be highlighted) plus content and categories to be added.

Ongoing management

Our client retains us for an agreed 16 hours each month, fixed amount payable monthly.

We write and upload new content, pictures, downloadable documents, all on demand, and keep the web pages current with regular checks. Communication is largely by phone or email and we have a regular quarterly meeting to assess, refresh and make changes.

We keep a log of tasks done and time taken. We have found that even if we don't use the full 16 hours in one month there are others where it's exceeded so it balances out over a year but this arrangement allows them to budget more easily.

Included in that time we also write content and if required liaise with printers for printed material. These are two examples.

