

1 -Looks aren't everything.

Too often people focus on making their site pretty. They might see a flashy site with music and videos and all kinds of bells and whistles and try to emulate it. Don't get me wrong looks are important but a website has to function properly first and to do that it needs to fulfil your users' goals.

2 -Understand your users.

Who visits your restaurant and why and who do you want to visit your restaurant? Maybe the competition attracts a type of client that you don't or you have identified an untapped market you want to focus on. These need to be explored. Try and categorise these people into groups and understand their needs. Who are your most important customers? Rank them. Are your clients mostly tourists, business people or locals? Why are they there? Is it casual dining with friends, entertaining clients, holding a function, just a quick easy meal or walking past? When you know this you can prioritise their goals and focus your site, not just its layout but its language and style as well. For example you might conclude that the most important customer group for your restaurant is business people entertaining clients.

	1. Business People	2. Tourists	3. Locals
Entertaining clients	Enter their goals in here.		
Holding a function			
Quick easy meal			
Walking past			
Casual dining			
Special night out.			

The objective of your website should be to provide the most pertinent information to the right people at the right time. You will understand what type of customer already visits your restaurant and you should have an idea of the type of customers that visit your competition. That will help define how you structure your site.

3 -The bare essentials

It's kind of obvious but restaurant sites should all have similar features:

- A short introduction about the restaurant that also leads people via links to the other [aspects of the site](#). Some people find their way around a site by using the navigation, other people read the text and follow the links. You should provide for both.
- Contact details, opening hours and online booking links easily accessed on every page. It's best to include them on the homepage, on the footer of

each page and as a prominent 'contact us' navigation option. You want to let people book in the way most convenient to them (as long as you can handle it – see point 8 about online bookings) and you need to make it easy to find.

- Good quality photos of the interior / exterior to convey the type of ambience.
- Up to date menus (printable so they can be easily shared) and photos of the food.
- Maps and directions on how find your restaurant. You can embed maps from maps.google.com.au in your site.
- Special conditions such as deposits, BYO, corkage etc.
- A privacy policy – Just what you do with personal information if you collect it. Check out some other sites.

4 -Keep it Short

You're going to spend all this time and money preparing the most wonderful website and I can tell you. NOBODY WILL READ IT. That's right, people tend not to read internet sites. They scan them. They have done [various studies on tracking peoples eyes as they read internet pages to see where they are looking](#) and the conclusions are:

- **Users won't read your text thoroughly** in a word-by-word manner. Exhaustive reading is rare, especially when prospective customers are conducting their initial research to compile a shortlist of vendors. Yes, some people will read more, but most won't.
- **The first two paragraphs must state the most important information.** There's some hope that users will actually read this material, though they'll probably read more of the first paragraph than the second.
- **Start subheads, paragraphs, and bullet points with information-carrying words** that users will notice when scanning down the left side of your content in the final stem of their F-behavior. They'll read the third word on a line much less often than the first two words.

Source www.useit.com

5 -What's in a name?

Pick a short domain name and try and avoid hy-phens, under_scores and unyoosual spelling of names that aren't intuitive. If people make common spelling mistakes writing the name of your restaurant consider buying the extra domain names with the spelling mistake. Spend the money on a .com.au, The others such as .info, .biz etc are a waste of time. Consider buying a .com as well as .com.au – especially if you are targeting overseas tourists as the search engines sometimes treat .com names better for international searches.

6 -Different types of sites.

A. Brochureware.

It is a one way conversation with your customer telling them all about your restaurant. It's often where people start with a website but it's not very compelling for the user as the powerful thing about the internet as medium is that it allows interaction with you as a business and also interaction with other internet users.

B. Interactive sites.

Examples of how you might make your site interactive are things like newsletters, recipes, ask the chef questions, branded restaurant products for sale. You could give people an incentive to sign up for a newsletter to get recipes, special offers and birthday rewards. You could include a forum that allows your guests to leave feedback and for people to talk with each other or provide links to services like www.evite.com that allow people to organise groups for dinner at your restaurant.

7 -Hot tips for making sure you have the killer design

Don't mess with your navigation. People are familiar with navigating a site with links down the left hand side or at the top of the page. Having a "funky" navigation that moves and spins and takes you to the food menu when you click on the obscure animated chicken will only frustrate your users. You wouldn't ask someone to eat with their fork in the opposite hand so don't expect someone to re-learn using the internet.

Beware of patterns or images in backgrounds. Make sure your text is easy to read. Text should either be very dark on a very light background or very light on a very dark background.

Don't do your whole site in flash. Flash sites look funky and you do get the ooh ahh factor as people come to the site. Flash is best used for components of the site. You might do your navigation in flash or have some scrolling photos or some other piece of innovative creativity but doing your whole site in it has some drawbacks. Such as:

- It takes longer to load. You should test your site on a dial up connection and see what the experience is like. Just like when you're serving your customers people don't like to wait.
- Linking to specific pages can be difficult. If somebody wants to email a link of a page of your site to a friend flash may not allow it as they don't have unique links for each page.
- Making changes is more difficult.
- They are normally more expensive.
- Search engines often cannot read the content of flash sites so you're less likely to get a good ranking. Essentially if you can't click and highlight text in a page its unlikely a website can read it (there are some settings for the latest version of flash that can overcome this so make sure your designer knows about this and implements it if you do use flash).

8 -Taking Bookings

The purpose of your site is to give all the most pertinent information to the right people at the right time. It makes sense then that if your customer has all that information they will probably want to make a booking. Those sites that let customers do things the way they want will get more bookings. So offering online bookings with quick response times and providing a timely response to phone bookings will help you attract and retain more customers. With the technology available today there is no excuse for not answering bookings in a timely manner.

Phone bookings.

Ideally a person should answer the phone from at least 10am to 10pm. Phone companies easily allow you to divert to a mobile number when the phone rings out during certain hours or when you manually divert the phone. Double check with your phone company this is enabled.

Restaurants should all have an answering machine for answering when out of hours and let people know in the message when they will hear back with a confirmation of their booking. For convenience you should be able to dial in and check your messages remotely so if you don't get into the restaurant until 2pm or later you can dial in from home and get back to people.

Online Bookings

In the travel industry people who research online end up booking online and that trend is increasing in all industries including the restaurants. In the last year Booking Angel has booked over 15,000 people online mostly in Sydney restaurants. With their expansion around Australia the general increasing trend for online bookings and their growing partner network that number will at least triple this year. In the US the market leader in online bookings has delivered 50 million people across just 8000 different restaurants.

Some restaurants say they prefer to talk with the customer on the phone but it's not about what YOU want, it's about what the customer wants. There are many reasons why people prefer online bookings. The most common is that people who are organising their dinner plans at work don't want their work colleagues overhearing them making plans. Corporate assistants and other people can organise group outings easier as they can email their friends the result and details of the booking and the fact they can do it at any time of the day or night and the restaurant gets back to them is a real puller. (This is particularly important for tourists organising their trip before they leave). So what are your options when it comes to taking online bookings.

Email – People fill in a form which is emailed to your restaurant. This is normally fine when you have a dedicated receptionist checking the emails all of the time. If you can't consistently answer people within an hour at least during 9am – 5pm seven days then you should use Booking Angel or some other method for taking online bookings. People will not wait 24-48 hours for you to get back to them. You can also set up an auto responder so that when an email is sent to a restaurant the customer receives an automatic response saying the message has been received and will be attended to within the hour during 9am – 5pm.

Fax – Some services can convert emails to faxes. This can be handy if you don't have a computer at your restaurant, but your response times must be at least as quick as the email above. There is a risk that faxes get lost (or that it's out of paper or the phone line is engaged so you don't realise there are faxes coming through).

Point of Sale System – Some point of sale systems have an online booking component. If you opt for this you should be prepared to invest significantly in training staff to make sure they understand how to enter bookings and review the number of bookings. It's also important your kitchen staff know how to look in it so they can plan for the days bookings as well. The advantage of this system is that bookings go into your system automatically. The disadvantage is the cost of setup and maintenance and the change in behaviour that will be required from your staff.

Booking Angel – Is an easy online booking system designed specifically for busy restaurants. Restaurants often find dealing on the phone the easiest for them. Booking Angel means restaurants can deal on the phone whilst allowing the customer to book online. Customers make a booking at your own site or at a directory enabled with Booking Angel (such as Eatability.com.au, YourRestaurants.com.au, restaurant.org.au and Cityeatery.com). The restaurant instantly receives a phone call if it's during its designated hours or is queued until they open. The restaurant hears a message which reads out the details of the booking. If the restaurant can accept the booking they press 1, to reject the booking because you are full press 2 or to suggest an alternate time press 3 or to speak to the customer press 4 (This feature will be available on Nov 1, 2007). The instant that you press the key the customer is informed of the result via email or SMS (available Nov 15, 2007). The restaurant receives the name and phone number over the phone and the details can also be emailed or faxed as well for a confirmation.

You can sign up for a free trial of the system at www.bookingangel.com.au.

9 -How to build a website

The type of site you get made will depend on how good someone in your business is with computers, your timeline and budget. The main points to consider are how easily your site can be updated and the cost.

A. Content Management System – This is the most user-friendly. You can just paste in text into some specially designed pages that allow you to instantly change your web page. These have templates that guarantee the website content will have a consistent look.

2. WYSIWIG editors (What you see is what you get) – This is like using an online version of Microsoft word but a little less user-friendly. They take some getting used to but if you are good at using Word you should pick this up pretty easily. As soon as you save the file it can change your website. There is some risk of losing content or having inconsistent formatting with these so you have to be careful. Get started with <http://pages.google.com>

3. Website programs such as Dreamweaver or Adobe Indesign – These essentially download your web pages as a file that you or your designer can

change. Making simple text changes and maybe changing a few images should be ok for intermediate users. Changing the format or layout of a page can get tricky so it is for advanced users only.

4. Flash sites – You will need a designer / programmer unless they have a specific content management system for you.

You should employ a professional to set up your site and provide you with a way to edit the content that needs to be updated most often (either by way of a maintenance agreement with them or some tool or software). For major changes you should go back to them. Make sure when you negotiate with the designer / programmer that it is clear who owns the rights to the artwork and that you have all the passwords for every aspect of your site so if the relationship deteriorates you can take the site to someone else.

Using a web developer.

Write a brief summarising the outcome of point two above as well as some objectives of the site ie increase customers.

Write a functional specification.

- If the web developer does this for you expect to pay a little more and expect to be involved in the process if you want it to work.
- If you want to save some \$\$ you need to do a site map ie what specific page you require
- For each page mock up in Microsoft Word or some equivalent what content you see as going on each page.

This will help you and the web developer be clear about what is being built and will give you both a point of reference.

Have an idea of what you want in a design. Reference competitor sites and look through designs at places like www.templatemonster.com. If you find a design that could fit with your requirements here you will save yourself a few more dollars as the designer may be able to customise a template.

For designers normally they will design two or three top level design options and allow you to pick or refine one.

Make sure you have all your words and photos ready to supply to them.

When the site is built, insist on a builder's trial where you sit with the developer and go through each page to make sure it delivers what you want and what was outlined in the functional specification.



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