Expert advice and guidance from the
Communications Sector

SEO AND WEBSITE DESIGN

MEET OUR EXPERT

Mike Holland
Marketing and Communications Director at OlsenMetrix Marketing

Mike Holland has spent more than 30 years helping companies to get their messages across to potential customers – in a way that generates a response.

Before that he worked as a journalist and editor on newspapers and magazines. His work is still frequently published in print and online. He blogs regularly about marketing communications and related topics.

He is a chartered marketer, a member of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations and a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Marketing.

Get in touch at **www.olsenmetrix.com**

Would you like to get involved with our Communications Sector? Do you have ideas for future events or expertise to share in a guide like this?

Please get in touch with Helen Bosett, Sector Co-ordinator at Cambridgeshire Chambers of Commerce on 01733 370809 or email h.bosett@cambscci.co.uk

Cambridge Office
Cambridgeshire Chambers of Commerce
Enterprise House, Vision Park,
Histon, Cambridge, CB24 9ZR
Tel: 01223 237414
Fax: 01223 237405
email: enquiries@cambscci.co.uk

Peterborough Office
Cambridgeshire Chambers of Commerce
6 The Forum, Minerva Business Park,
Lynch Wood, Peterborough, PE2 6FT
Tel: 01733 370809
Fax: 01733 237437
email: enquiries@cambscci.co.uk

www.cambridgeshirechamber.co.uk
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Getting found online - and then what?

Your website is your shop window for the world. But it is a total waste of your time, money and energy if no-one can find it – or if, having found it, no-one interacts with it (by buying something, for example, or making an enquiry).

So, two essential ingredients for website success are making sure your website is found and then making sure it converts visitors into customers.

Getting found: One way of ensuring your website is found by potential customers is search engine optimisation (SEO).

If you are a widget maker you want your website to feature at the top of the results that search engines such as Google give to potential customers when they are looking for widgets. So, if you type 'widgets' into Google, what do you get? You get a page of results related to widgets.

At the top of the page will probably be some results marked 'Ad'. If you want your website to feature here at the top of the page, you have to pay. Below the adverts come the 'organic' search results. These are the ones that Google thinks best answer the query that the user entered.

The results are for individual website pages, not websites. So every page of your website has an opportunity to feature here. Every page, therefore, should be 'optimised' to get it to the top of the list of results.

From SEO to conversion: You need to think what (and who) your website is for before you begin to design and write it.

What is your objective? Do you want visitors to make a purchase? Or do you want them to download a white paper, fill in an enquiry form, book a conference place – or any one of dozens of potential outcomes?

Make sure every page on your website steers people towards taking the action you want them to take. At the same time provide clear navigation to allow visitors to find the information they are looking for if they are not yet ready to do whatever you want them to do.

5 Top tips for SEO

1 Think about the search terms you 'optimise' your website for. The 'trick' is to think like a user. What will the customer be looking for? What is the problem you are solving? If your widgets stop leaks in kettles (to pick a random example) optimise some web pages for phrases such as 'stopping leaks in kettles' as well as for 'widgets'.

2 Think about 'long tail keywords'. If you specialise in 'widgets for kettles' then create pages optimised for that longer search term, rather than competing against every other widget maker to get top results when people search simply for 'widgets'.

3 A page with a lot of text, telling the reader everything he or she might possibly want to know about widgets for kettles, will rank higher in the results than a page which has just a sentence or two on the topic. The search engines are looking for pages that answer users' queries.

4 Write for the human reader — not for a search engine. If the text seems stilted or awkward, it needs rewriting. Google is increasingly human! It is also increasingly 'quality conscious' so poor spelling and grammar will see your page pushed down the result list.

5 You don't need to be an expert — but there is a lot you can do to get great SEO results. There is a good 'beginners guide' here - https://moz.com/beginners-guide-to-seo - which is well worth reading.

5 top tips for conversion

1 Make sure you know what your objective is before you start building your website. What sort of visitors do you want to attract and, importantly, what do you want them to do?

2 Visitors could 'arrive' at your site on any page because search engines list pages, not sites. Make each page easy to read with good headlines, subsidiary headlines, photographs and diagrams (clearly captioned) and a logical 'flow' to the story that you are telling on each page. Every page needs to have a clear instruction as to where to go next ('buy now', 'get the white paper', etc).

3 Every page also needs a clear navigation menu. Make it easy for people to find what they are looking for — but all the time keep pushing them towards your desired outcome.

4 Make sure that every page keeps your SEO 'promise'. If you have optimised the page to attract people wanting to know about widgets, make sure that the page actually delivers that information. Otherwise they will simply go elsewhere.

5 If you want to collect data from your visitors (a name and email address, for example) think about what you can offer in return for that data — a free sample widget, perhaps, or a market research report into the future of the widget market? Ask for the least amount of data that you need — every additional field that people must fill in on an enquiry form is another barrier to them reaching the end.