

The Saudi British Trade Directory goes on line <http://www.sbtbd.co.uk>



The summer months saw some frantic keyboard bashing at the Mead Offices, as we tried to convert pages & pages of information prepared for the annual printed directory into a format suitable for web publishing.

Before embarking on what has turned out to be a massive project, we sought help from Web Design professionals including a new member to the RGBB, John Jacobs. John heads up Blue Ocean Media a company with offices in the UK and India and now in Riyadh. John has drafted the following article to give a few pointers to those of us struggling to adapt to the new media:

Saudi Arabia's use of the Internet constitutes 60% of all the Internet use in the whole of the Middle East and North Africa. Figures indicate it is currently growing at the rate of 8% per month.

The development of Internet has a strong influence on how we do business. We are dealing with new game rules, new players as well as a playing field that is changing dramatically. A few years ago, who would have thought that Microsoft would become one of the biggest travel agents in the world, or that companies would sell their stock via digital auctions. In this new situation, existing companies are confronted with new questions: Should I offer my products on the Internet; how would this affect my existing distribution channels; what takes priority? How quickly must I act; do I have time to integrate Internet in my existing organisation or do I also have to set up new concepts? These questions must be answered in order to exploit opportunities and ward off risks.

The possibilities of Internet, new combinations of providers and changes in consumer behavior demand a clear, decisive vision. Questions that play a role are: which new business concepts should I develop; which earning model should I then use; how do I realize this; how do I position myself and with which brand; if I choose for multi-channel marketing, how do I organise this?

The design of an effective website involves the design of three levels:

Web Management
Interaction Design
Content Design

Just like a hamburger the middle layer is one that will attract the most attention but the other two are just as important as the medium is not the message.

Here are the classic mistakes in managing the design of the site.

1. Not knowing why: Companies should start their web design by finding out ways in which they can provide true customer value giving users benefits from spending time on your site.
2. The site should be designed with customers needs in mind and not promote your own grandiose ideas of self-importance. Don't build a site that your top executives will love as they are not your target audience. Your company is not the center of the universe for your customers. The market and the consumer have got to be your starting points.
3. Site structure should be determined by the tasks users want to perform even if this means having the information on two different departments on the same page
4. Ensure that the design of the site is consistent. When all the interaction components look and function the same, users feel more confident using the site and are more likely to return.
5. Maintenance encompasses a whole range of functions including site promotion with search engines, checking for invalid links, updating materials etc. and is one of the most important functions of your site. Typically the cost of maintenance is approximately 50% of the initial development cost of site development so make sure you budget for this element. Make sure you don't just invest in a site and then let it go stagnant.
6. The only way to get good web content is to design the content for the web. People treat material on the website differently to printed text, they tend to scan read. Traditional print material is written in a linear fashion so transposing traditional material onto a website will only result in substandard content.
7. Wasting linking opportunities: the Internet is a linking medium so make sure you utilize this function and if you do make references to a particular product or service make sure the hyperlink goes to the page it refers to.

Do not overestimate the impact of the Internet in the short term and do not under-estimate its long-term impact. The impact of any simple network grows by at least the square of the number of connections and once everyone is connected everywhere (through Internet ready devices e.g. mobiles, PDA's etc) you will see the Internet come into its own.



The Home Page offers links to an assortment of information



including e-mail links to Commercial Staff



and of course the RGBB website



Core material is a searchable database which provides all the contact detail you need, including office location maps where available.



John Jacobs
Blue Ocean Media
Tel: 465 6512
Mob: 053 119967