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Just Plain Friendly

a guide to creating websites that can be found easily, tell people what they want to know and look good

by **Jan Scott Nelson**

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UNCHANGED, TO OTHERS.**

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Everyone I work with wants a gorgeous website that's easy to find; it's no good creating a beautiful site if no one is going to see it and, equally importantly, there is little point 'optimising' your site up to the hilt if, when the potential client arrives, s/he is put off by the look and feel you've created, and what's more, can't find the information they want.

I create airy, elegant and simple websites for independent professionals. And what's more my sites are user-friendly, search engine friendly. I like to say they're **just plain friendly**.

<http://janscottnelson.com/website-design/>

If you're considering having your own website you may well have heard expressions like 'web friendly' 'search engine friendly' 'search engine optimisation' and maybe you haven't a clue what they mean. Here I'll try to explain some of the factors that make a website 'friendly'. The notes should be useful to you whether you're building your own site, or commissioning a designer. It is an inexact science and there is debate about what the most important elements are. What's more, these elements change from time to time. Nevertheless, I believe the pointers I give here will be of value to you.

First of all, here's a question for you:

What is your website for?

Some of my clients have an established business and they want a website which is an online brochure - a place where their existing clients can find them and get up-to-date information at any time. They don't particularly see it as a means to attract new business.

But **mostly, a website is built or commissioned with the intention of attracting clients**. So, where to start?

How can you **make sure yours is a Friendly Site**? One way is to employ a designer who understands what it's all about, but the first job is yours:

You need to check that your site is filling a need. Let's take life coaches as an example. Many coaches tend to take an 'I can coach anyone' approach. And that may well be the case, but internet marketing doesn't work like that. First of all, it comes down to being absolutely sure who your client is, and what s/he is looking for. What is the need you are offering to meet? Some marketers call it 'the pain'.

To put it in very clear language - **what will your potential ideal client type into Google in order to find you.** It certainly focuses the mind!

If you have a 'niche' you will know precisely what issues your ideal client will be faced with – therefore the kind of search they are likely to make.

In a nutshell, that is the starting place for your text – because the first thing the viewer must read on arriving at your site is something which they can connect with. In the case of life coaches, a treatise on the power of the technique(s) ain't it. Neither is a potted biography. Say you needed some tomatoes for a salad, you wouldn't want to be presented with a government pamphlet on '5 a day', would you? Or a dissertation on the history of the tomato in the UK. No, you'd want to know where you could get some bloomin' tomatoes!

So, the first place to start is some research of potential keywords – find out what people search for and how many people are already offering this. Look at who is at the top of the listings

Reality check – *Just say for a moment that you don't want to niche down, you are a generalist and proud of it. My suspicion is that you will, despite the best efforts of whoever builds your website, languish in some remote, rarely visited page of the listings. Don't despair though – visit Google Adwords and find out how you can create those little ads that appear down the side of the listings and pay per click through. I did it for several years and it was a good investment.*

Google Adwords has a keyword research tool you may like to use - <https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal>. It will tell you the search volume for each keyword and how much competition there is. Obviously the best keywords have a high volume of searches and few competitors.

[Jan Scott Nelson website design](#)

Websites for people who would rather not build their own but want something fabulous (and optimised) anyway!

I create simple and elegant websites. They're positively gorgeous actually, if I do say so myself!

You are my dream website designer [...] extraordinarily creative with the wonderful layout you produced and utterly meticulous and professional in producing the finished product.

[Christine Compton](#)

Friendly sites are easy to find:

You just pop some search terms into Google and Bob's your uncle, there's precisely the site you want. So how do you get that to happen?

- **Friendly sites** are clear about what is on offer and of course the text is based around those keywords we just looked at.
- **Friendly sites** have been submitted to some key search engines e.g. Google, Yahoo, Open Directory Project and LookSmart. *(By the way, never pay for a service that promises to submit your site to 100 search engines – this is completely unnecessary and a waste of money.)*
- **Friendly sites** have a name that says what you do and your url (domain name) can echo this (not utterly essential but a useful part of the tool set). E.g. www.JanScott-LifeCoach.co.uk – *and as a quick aside, note the way I've written that – if you've got a url that spells out who you are or what you do, make sure people can see what it is!*
- **Friendly sites** say what you do in the <title> tag. This is what you see in the top left hand corner when you look at the page in a web browser (in Explorer that's the blue strip across the top). So many sites just say 'index' or 'home' or 'welcome' and this is a wasted opportunity.
- **Friendly sites** have relevant meta tags (hidden code). These will reflect the keywords you've decided on and the text in the site.
- **Friendly sites** have **the dynamic duo, text and keywords**. Worth more than the sum of their parts. On a website you truly can't have one without the other. Or if you do you're inviting the search engines to stick their fingers in their ears and sing 'la la la' very loudly.
- **Friendly sites** put keywords in bold at least once on the site – it's a bit like waving a flag at the search engines and shouting 'yoohoo, this is important'.

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Friendly sites are easy to follow.

- **Friendly sites** don't beat about the bush, they **tell you just what you need to know**, and **make it easy to find the information you need**.
- **Friendly sites** have a simple text (not graphics) navigation system. Fashions change but generally I'd place your 'navigation bar' or 'menu' on the right hand side or across the top of each page. Sometimes I repeat it at the very bottom of the text.
- **Friendly sites** have internal links. So, if you're referring to another part of the site you include a link to it.

A friendly site has lots of links to it

- **Friendly sites have links** from sites which are already listed. If I design your site you will appear in my portfolio and there will thus be a link from my site. I suggest you also get listings in free directories and ask for reciprocal links with colleagues in complementary professions.
- In order to keep the traffic flowing to your site, thus pushing yourself higher up in the search engines, you must be proactive: write articles and submit them to www.ezinearticles.com with a link to your site (you can even have some of the text showing).
- Write focused newsletters which contain links to your site. I use www.Icontact.com (aff)
- Don't forget to always use an **email signature** which contains your website address.

A friendly site has regularly updated content – blogs

- Blogs are just about the friendliest sites of all. It takes a little while to get used to the technology, but it's really intuitive. Wordpress is a great favourite with many people and I have used it to create my <http://janscottnelson.com> site.

A friendly site has regularly updated content – new stuff

- Search engines seem to like it when they find new content on your site. It indicates that it is active. Inactive sites will soon disappear from the listings.
- Updates and amendments: you need to either be able to do this yourself or ensure that your web designer will do it quickly and inexpensively for you.

Most of my clients ask me to do their amendments for them. I work very quickly and charge £1 a minute. In practice, most clients rarely pay more than £10 for several text amendments. Here's what they say:

*Amazing speed and efficiency and an unfailingly friendly response. **Paul Roberts.***

*If I want to change one word or several paragraphs, it is discussed, amended and complete within hours and I only pay for the time that it takes Jan to make the adjustment, which never seems to be very long at all! Jan has made having a website an effective marketing tool that is a delight rather than a chore. Thank you Jan. **June Gamble***

It is possible to buy programmes to run on your computer to allow you to do your own web amendments. These tend to be in the region of £50-£200.

Friendly sites are easy on the eye

- Colour and design are key in making a site attractive; they are also what help to make you proud of your site. If the design etc reflects your own personality, the impression you want to create, people (potential clients) start to feel they know you straight away.
- Choose your images carefully. I find lots of fantastic, original photographs at www.istockphoto.com and I also use my own photographs. By making these decisions early in the process you'll also be able to choose the colours you want to use throughout the site.
- I believe that, once your potential client has reached your site, along with being able to read exactly the information they need, the site needs to be attractive. This is why I always use **lots of white space** and develop **colours and designs to suit the individual client.**
- You may not know it, but your website can look quite different according to which browser you use: **Friendly sites** can be easily viewed in a range of web browsers (you probably use Microsoft Internet Explorer (IE), but there are others including Mozilla Firefox). When I'm designing websites I check out the appearance in both of these.
- Think about what is attractive to your potential client group, e.g. if your niche is style-conscious 20-somethings then keep an eye on the fashion rails, or the trendiest sites for colour inspiration.
- **Friendly sites** are easy to read. Generally the text is dark (preferably dark grey or black) and the text background is white. You must have visited sites

where bright yellow or green text strobos against a black background.
Horrendous.

- **Friendly sites** have **consistency** of look and feel throughout
- **Friendly sites are concise.** Keep it short. Well, certainly do so if you want people to read what you've written and not drop off half way through!
- **Avoid centring text, it is difficult to read and looks very untidy.** Justified text can also look dreadful, personally I avoid it at all costs.
- **Friendly sites** are **aesthetically pleasing** and yet are still,

easy loading

Friendly sites load up really quickly

You must have visited sites where you have time to go and make a cuppa whilst they're loading up? You don't need fancy flash videos or loads of images. Just KISS (Keep it simple, sweetie)!

Overview

So, finally, how can your designer make sure yours is a **friendly site** (and if you're a DIY person, YOU'LL need to do this):

- What you do must be in the title tag – when you look at the page in a web browser this shows up at the top left of the page – in the blue strip across the top.
- How will people find you? What will you expect them to search under? These are your keywords; they must feature in your text.
- Submit to search engines: Google, Yahoo, Open Directory Project and LookSmart.
- In order to keep the traffic flowing to your site, thus pushing yourself higher up in the search engines you must be proactive – ezine articles, newsletters, updates, use an email signature.
- Get links from sites which are already listed. If I design your site you will appear in my portfolio and there will thus be a link from my site. I suggest you also get listings in free directories **and don't forget those articles!**
- Keywords in <alt> tags (These are the tags attached to images. I usually put the title of the site, which contains the keywords, in here).
- Choose your site images very early on as these can inspire the colour choices you make.
- Keep the site clean and simple

My websites are very specifically for sparky, discerning independent professionals who absolutely do not wish to build their own site. They understand the importance of getting the job done and are very capable of writing their own copy. They want to be part of the process, but only as a client. They want a web designer who understands their business, someone who they can talk to easily, someone who is creative and who they can bounce ideas around with. They want to be really excited about and proud of their website.

If this is you, have a look at janscottnelson.com/website-design/ or call me on +44 (0) 1422 842543