Improve your website's usability and accessibility to increase sales.

How did **Legal & General** double online sales of Life insurance?

How did **Tesco** increase online home grocery sales by £13M last year?

How did a website usability improvements increase **Virgin.net** sales by 68%?

In this whitepaper
- We explain the reasons why you should act now to improve your website's usability,
- What the key issues to be addressed are and
- How to select a partner to help you in this project.

This whitepaper reviews how by reviewing how people use your website and making their route to the information they want easier will increase your online sales.
We explain how the techniques can be applied to your website to increase your online business and reduce costs.

Content

Executive Summary.

Tesco, Virgin, Legal & General and IBM stumbled on a secret when they took steps to provide accessible sites for the visually disabled or upgrade their main sites in order to comply with government legislation. They were surprised at the other commercial paybacks when they improved the usability of their sites.

You can follow their example.

Many companies have considered the requirement to modify their website to comply with Government Legislation to help the disabled and have put it aside till "a future date".

There is now strong practical evidence that improving the usability of your site will reap good business benefits for you today and if you aren't investing in this its likely your competitors are.

Many companies invest in paid Search Engine Marketing but neglect to consider the experience of the visitor arriving at their site. Why spend your Pay Per Click budget to bring visitors to your online store if you make it difficult for them to find your products when they arrive.

Google dominate the UK Search Engine Market with over 80% market share. They recently changed their rules for how high they display your links in the Organic (Left Hand) section of their search results page to reflect the relevancy of the information on your website landing page to the search term the viewer is using. Similarly they now also raise or demote your Adwords PPC position on the Right of their Search page depending quality and effectiveness of your advert and the content of the landing page on your website your advert takes the surfer to.

People's lives continue to be busy and they are presented with an increasing array of ways of accessing information quickly. PDA's and Smartphones are increasing in number daily. The time you have to get a persons attention is reducing. Today you have 7 seconds to capture the attention of a visitor to your site else they will click away. You then have on average 21 seconds to convince them to take an action, whether that be to contact you, decide to read an article or choose to start the purchase process.

The essentials.

It is important then that you follow some basic rules to avoid your visitors clicking away. These include:

- Structure the information on your site clearly and logically. It should be possible to find any item in a maximum of three mouse clicks. If not people will click to a competitor's site.
- Make information clear, unfussy (white backgrounds are best) and easy to read. Employ skilled web copywriters if possible.
- On PPC bring the visitor into your site on a page that talks about the topic or produce they were searching for; don't expect them to navigate around your site to search for their item.
- If your visitor has arrived on your homepage tell them clearly what you do and provide simple consistent navigation to let them investigate your offerings. Do not use Splash or greetings pages without navigation. In fact just don't use them – they annoy visitors.

A smart Internet Marketing company will help you to review the usability of your site and will help you segment and structure your information. They will advise you on the latest "best practice" and will be able to test your site's usability. It is an "eye-opener" to watch videos of members of the public who have been set the tasks to locate specific information on your site and how they have difficulty. It is natural to expect that others will think about information in the same way you do – but that is often a fallacy. A smart Internet Marketing company will have the facilities to test scientifically the usability of your website.

If your site is accessible to humans then it is more easily accessed (and indexed) by search engines. So improved usability will improve the visibility of your business on the internet and increase your Search Engine Rankings. This will help bring in new business. Your improvement of the "visitor experience" will increase the conversion rate of visitors to customers or clients. Your products and services will be available easily to a larger marketplace. All this increases your business revenues.

What are the benefits for my business of making our site accessible?

- ✓ You reach a wider audience.
- ✓ Your web sites are more useable by everyone.
- ✓ You achieve reduced site maintenance costs.
- ✓ It improves search engine positioning.
- ✓ You comply with current legislation.
- ✓ Improves your image, reputation and shows social responsibility.

IBM introduced an Accessible Intranet solution. This saved over 40 % in bandwidth costs, hence improving response times plus freeing capacity which in turn saved additional investment spend.

TESCO made their home grocery service more accessible to blind customers; this resulted in extra £13m revenue per year; it is also popular with the non-blind users.
Tesco originally developed their parallel website for blind and partially sighted customers
These are the obvious group that need to use home shopping services. To their surprise they found that many normal visitors much preferred the ease of navigation and improved simplicity of the accessible site and switched to use it. Tesco have replaced their "normal" site with their accessible version and expect a further increase in revenues.

They have found that Usability increases revenues.

Virgin.net - Redesigned their site to incorporate accessibility standards and achieved a 68% increase in sales.

Legal & General: Almost doubled sales of life insurance online after changing their site to comply with good usability standards. They found that less people were abandoning during the online form completion stages.

How do I improve the usability of my site?

A simple pragmatic way to start this process is to implement the accessibility requirements documented to make sites comply with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). In doing this you "become legal" and significantly improve the usability of your site for the whole public. This will inevitable as we have described improve your visibility in the search engines.
It will also open a larger market to you.

Summary of the Legal requirements.

The final extension of the Disability Discrimination Act recently came into force so businesses can no longer ignore issues of accessibility to their company's information, particularly online. Very few managers seem to realise the dangers presented by a simple failure to modify their website. The clock is ticking.

History

Recent developments in the **Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)** make it more likely that companies will be prosecuted if their websites are not accessible to users with disabilities.
At present, more than 80% of UK websites do not meet the most basic level of accessibility defined by the **World Wide Web Consortium (W3C)**.
In 1995 the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People, William Hague, introduced the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). It Act stated that *"disabled people should not be discriminated against by any service providers or those involved in the disposal or management of premises"*. The legal requirement to provide access first became effective in 1996 was extended in 1999 and again in October 2004.

Earlier this year the **Disability Rights Commission (DRC)** in collaboration with **BSI** launched **PAS78**, it's "Guide to Good Practice in Commissioning Accessible Websites". This will fuel the moves to greater enforcement of good practice in building accessible websites.

Media coverage of the entire topic of accessibility, which is not restricted to websites, has been substantial this year so it can only be a matter of time before test cases are initiated and businesses are penalised in the courts of penalties for non-compliance with the legislation in order to "set an example".

Organisations should act now and seize the opportunity to invest time and money in making sure their sites meet at least the basic accessibility (Level 1) requirements and if possible, achieve Level 2 or even Level 3 thus making their sites fully accessible to all users. (Please later for more details on the levels)
Doing this will not only remove possibility of prosecution in the near future but it will also allow full participation in the markets of a disadvantaged sector of our society who wield spending power estimated at £50bn annual; this group being disabled people in the UK.

Guidelines

Alongside PAS78, internationally **W3C** has set out a guide to best practice that defines three levels of accessibility and the requirements for meeting them. Priorities for complying with the requirements at each level are clearly specified to provide guidance for web developers creating accessible sites.

Compliance at Level 1 or 'Level A' is defined by a schedule of features a website must have for it to be accessible in some way to one or more groups of users. The requirements for Level 2 or 'AA' compliance are described in terms of the reasonable measures that should be taken for a site to be accessible to most people. Level 3 or 'AAA' specifies a degree of accessibility that allows anyone, regardless of disability, type of web browser, or any other factor, to use the site as intended.

The W3C guide details how developers can meet its checkpoints for the three levels of accessibility it establishes. Even those with a working knowledge of HMTL, however, are advised to employ the assistance of a professional web developer in creating accessible sites. It is also important to note that of the increasing number of companies already claiming to follow W3C guidance many are complying with very few of the checkpoints. You can view the W3C guidelines at www.w3.org/WAI — it is important that you ensure your site's claims to accessibility are firmly based on them. Several firms have already faced embarrassment following public scrutiny of their ostensibly 'accessible' new websites.

In the litigious culture of the present day, every company must think seriously about website accessibility. If your organisation is among those that are neglecting the issue, now is the time for action.

Cater for a range of disabilities.

You should also consider the various forms of disability visitors to your website might have. Doing so is not straightforward. Users may be unable to see, hear or move; they may have only text-screens, small screens or slow internet connections; they may not speak the language in which written content appears, or they may be unable to use a mouse or keyboard. These examples illustrate just a few of the factors covered by the issue of website accessibility.

If a website is fully compliant with the W3C guidelines, and you use the AIS toolbar to turn off the CSS, you should see a very clearly structured page that lies beneath the design components, which can be easily translated for a disabled person by a screen-reader.

Costs

Having an accessible website does not mean sacrificing design values, nor are the costs involved extortionate. A site that complies with the PAS78 / W3C guidelines will require minimal future maintenance, as cascading style sheets (CSS) hold all the information relating to site design. Using this web technology, design is easily manipulated without the necessity of reformatting content. Compliance with accessibility requirements will reduce longer-term costs, as redesigning a site will no longer mean overhauling everything that is already in place.

Accessible sites also allow you to increase your market access. Increased visitors means increases in profits for the business.

Is our site accessible? Is it usable?

For a quick check as to how accessible your website is today, download the accessibility toolbar from www.nils.org.au/ais/web/resources/toolbar . This facility allows you to validate the levels of accessibility of all your web pages. Using the toolbar, you can check every aspect of your site's design, enabling you to identify areas that are in need of attention.

This AIS Web Accessibility Toolbar has been developed to aid manual examination of web pages for a variety of aspects of accessibility. It consists of a range of functions that:
- identify components of a web page
- facilitate the use of 3rd party online applications
- simulate user experiences
- provide links to references and additional resources

Summary

The Internet is increasingly a key and integral part of business and personal life and an important source of information.
Improving the usability of your website makes it more effective. It will be a more pleasing experience for your visitors and will improve their conversion to clients or customers. Search Engines will find it easier to index and hence your visibility will improve.

In addition in reviewing ad improving your sites usability for the general public, you will be accessible by a new disadvantaged audience with considerable buying power.

There is a significant percentage of the population who have been unable to benefit fully from use of the internet as business has not prioritised enabling their websites to allow their access. This group has significant spending power and businesses who facilitate their access to information on websites will gain access to this market. Government legislation aims to encourage organisations to give the disabled access to the information the remainder of the population take for granted.
We have shown that leading firms have found that a significant part of the general public prefer the ease of use of accessible sites. Increased revenues and cost savings were generated from their accessible sites. This is reason enough to take the step you have delayed and now redevelop your sites to tap into these benefits as well as to comply with recent legislation.
We have explained the issues surrounding accessibility and provided the criteria by which you should assess services from any consultancy, supplier or partner you choose to engage to help you convert your web presence for accessibility compliance. This expertise and skills are available from your local WSI Consultant who combines latest technologies designed from the ground up to provide compliance with W3C and PAS78 with the experience and skills to efficiently project manage and deliver your new compliant website.

Contact Peter Connolly on 01526 345599

WSI is committed to improving the profitability of our customers through the use of leading-edge Internet technologies, delivered by knowledgeable and service-oriented **Internet Marketing Consultants**. As more businesses realize the importance of the Internet to their continued success and growth, WSI is ready to serve their needs with affordable Internet Marketing solutions.

With our headquarters based in Toronto, Canada, WSI has been developing profitable Internet Solutions since the mid 1990s. Our network of certified Internet Consultants and Marketing Specialists is the largest of its kind and we're ranked the #1 Internet Services Franchise in the world by industry-leading *Entrepreneur* magazine.

In support of our mission, WSI holds memberships with SEMPO (Search Engine Marketing Professional Organisation) and the Canadian Marketing Association and. These industry associations give our Internet

Marketing Consultants access to cutting-edge training and resources and share in our belief of following responsible marketing practices.

When you work with WSI you can be sure you're working with true SEO (Search Engine Optimisation) industry professionals. Thanks to the trust and support of our customers over the years, our network has grown to over 1,500 Internet and Marketing Consultants serving small- to medium-sized businesses in 92 countries worldwide.