Website development advice

This guide is designed to help people who have been tasked with the development or re-development of a website.

You may already be familiar with the process of web development, but for the purposes of this guide we have assumed no prior knowledge.

Before diving in and contacting web development companies, it's worth having a think about what you actually want and need from your new website, and where you want your website to 'live'.

For example, to comply with the CMA's guidance, you want a website that enables you to provide information about your care home and its services in a clear and accessible way, with your key information being no more than one click away from the main home page, or on the first page of your website, and your important, additional information being prominently highlighted and being easy for potential residents and their representatives to find and access - for example, by providing it using a clearly labelled icon / tab on the navigation menu bar of your home page that takes people to a page where the information is clearly set out, or, by providing prominent weblinks to the information.

One important point to remember is that, unless you specifically agree otherwise with your web development company, you will need to supply all the text to be placed on your website. This should be written and given to your web developer before the build starts.

Step 1: Where will your website live?

The first thing you should decide is where the files and folders for your website will sit. All the files for a website will sit on a server somewhere (you can think of a server as just a computer that is made to store files and serve them to other computers on a network when requested). There are a number of server choices open to you. These are:

A. A server physically located in your office.

B. A hosted server; rented from a hosting company like 1&1, GoDaddy or Siteground.
C. A cloud hosting service; the 'cloud' is just another way of saying that instead of renting a single server, you will pay for the space you use and your files and folders may be stored on more than one computer, connected through a network and accessible to you through the internet.
D. Hosted by a website-building platform, like Wix, Squarespace, Weebly or Pagecloud.

Step 2: Who do you want to make your site?

This can be done in a number of ways. You should think about which approach will make it easiest for you to update and manage your content. The main options open to you are:

A. Do it yourself, using a visual editor provided by a website-building platform like Wix, Squarespace, Weebly or Pagecloud. These platforms often work with 'themes' (pre-designed layouts) so you should always check there is a theme available that is suitable for your needs and the requirements of the CMA's guidance.
B. Pay a web development company to use a pre-designed theme. Even using an existing 'theme' can be complicated for those unfamiliar with web-building platforms so professional input can help.
C. Pay a web development company to create a bespoke design and structure. This can be built on a Content Management Sytem (CMS) like WordPress, which you can use directly once built.

Step 3: Register your web address

Before you put your site on the web you will need an address that people can use to find it, called a 'domain name'. You will need to either:

A. Use a domain name you have already registered; make sure you know with whom it is registered and you, or your web developer, know how to set up new DNS records to point to the server for your new site.
B. Register a new domain name through a service such as GoDaddy, Fasthosts or Google Domains; you can check the availability of your desired domain name with these services as well before making a purchase decision.
C. Register a domain with your chosen website-building platform. You can often register a domain through the interface of your website-building platform when you sign up.

Designing your website

There are a number of different options available in terms of how to design your website. You can either:

A. Choose a pre-built website theme using a website builder like Wix, Squarespace, Weebly or Pagecloud. There is typically a lot of choice, but you will not own the design and will only have acces to it while you are paying to use the platform.
B. Choose a pre-built theme for a Content Management System (CMS) like Wordpress, Drupal or Joomla. The choice of pre-built themes for a CMS platform may be more limited than for a website builder and customising them may require the assistance of a development company or developer, but you can use a theme on an open-source CMS, such as WordPress for free.
C. Have a design completely custom made for your website. This is likely to be more expensive (at least in the short term), but it can make your website stand out from the crowd, and you can own the design and the site.

Before talking to website developers it's a good idea to have a look around at other websites to collate a list of designs, or elements of design, that you like and think would be suitable for your website. A website developer should then be able to help determine whether an off-the-shelf theme is suitable, or whether a custom theme is more appropriate to achieve the desired overall look and

feel.

Designing for different devices

More people than ever before are now using their smartphone to find content online, when traditionally they would have used a desktop computer. In the past, when users' focus was on a desktop experience, mobile design was an afterthought. Today, it's important that your website can be viewed and functions well across multiple devices.

There are two ways to think about designing your website for smartphones and tablets:

1. Mobile-first design; this means that your website is designed at mobile size first of all and then expanded to larger devices such as tablets, laptops and desktop computers. This is likely to mean having different designs for mobile and desktop.
2. Responsive design; this is where your web pages can detect a visitor's screen size and orientation and change the layout accordingly. Responsive design can be mobile first.

Responsive design (whether or not it's mobile first) is generally a better approach than having completely separate designs for different devices and gives customers a consistent experience however they choose to access your site. So, whatever device people are using, information should not be hidden or obscured and care homes should still abide by the principles set out in the CMA's guidance to ensure that they are more likely to comply with consumer law.

Think about your branding

You should also consider what branding you require for your website. If you are using existing branding, then branding assets and style guides will be useful to have to hand. You may wish to have a new brand created as part of the website development process, although this would not normally be included as part of a typical website development project.

Finding a website partner

Once you have identified what you need from your website, your preferred platform, and what you want your website to look like, it's time to get in touch with organisations who can help you to create it.

If you are looking for a completely custom design or branding for your website, you don't have to use one organisation. There are website design agencies who can create website designs, but may not be interested in building the website for you. If you take this root ensure that whoever is building your website is happy to work with another company, and ensure everyone is clear as to who is responsible for each element. For example, once a website design is agreed, decide who will be responsible for creating the templates (that is, coding the design into the website theme).

It's always best to contact a few website development organisations so you can get a feel of how they work and how much the work will cost. Levels of service and costs can vary greatly, so approaching organisations that you have received recommendations for is a good way forward.

Be careful to agree a scope of work at the beginning so that you know what is included and what's not, and ensure that when the site is ready you will be comfortable with adding text and images to it.

You should also think about whether you need the development company to manage the website for you after launch, keeping software up to date and fixing any problems that arise. There may be an ongoing

cost for doing this.

Ultimately, care homes will be responsible for the information that is provided on their website.

Website Builders vs Content Management Systems

	Website Builders	**Content Management Systems**
Design	choice of templates often provided customisation of design can be limited	choice of templates with CMS or from third-parties design can be customised as required
Functionality (modules)	specific functionality often provided often restrictions that prevent adding your own specific functionality	some basic functionality provided with CMS, although further modules or 'plugins' often available some modules may be free for open source CMS's which can reduce development costs functionality can be developed as specified
Ease-of-use	designed to be very easy to use and to carry out basic tasks	can be built to be easy to use, but sometimes will require user training

	Website Builders	Content Management Systems
Hosting	hosting is included as part of the service often no ability to decide where hosting is located meaning data can be stored outside of the UK the service may have limited resilience, so not ideal for critical websites	you will need to check whether hosting is provided can be hosted wherever you wish additional resiliency can be put in place to ensure website availability is maximised
Security	to a large degree you are reliant on the level of security provided by the service you don't have to worry about applying security patches often an SSL certificate is provided for your website as part of the service	you are responsible for ensuring the website is secure you will need to ensure that security patches are applied at a hosting and CMS level you will need to provide an SSL certificate for the website you may need to get the website security tested if you have developed custom modules or are storing personal or sensitive data
Backup	you are reliant on whatever backup the service provides	you have control to what level of backup is provided for the website

Glossary

Development company / developer. An organisation or person that is skilled at building or 'developing' websites.

Website builder. An online platform that allows you to create a website using a simple interface, usually for a monthly fee.

Content Management System (CMS). A system that allows non-developers to easily add text, image and video content to their website through a specially designed interface.

Visual editor. A common part of a website building-platform interface which allows you to make changes to the code of a website through a visual representation of the site.

Theme. A templated pre-designed layout, structure and navigation menu for a website.

Server. A computer or computer program that stores data to be served to other machines on a network when requested.

DNS records. The DNS (short for Domain Name System) stores information on what server a website's traffic should be pointed to.

Responsive design. This is where your site can detect a visitor's screen size and change accordingly.

Mobile-first design. This means that your website is designed primarily to be viewed on a mobile browser.

SSL Certificate. A data file that allows a secure connection to your website, which is important for securing data transfer and transactions.

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