



## WEB DESIGN - Research, checking the competition

Unless you have a very niche product or service you will be competing for customers against any number of other businesses so you must be aware of what you are up against. Hopefully you have already researched your business idea and have a feel for your competitors. In today's Internet environment you have an abundance of opportunities to research your chosen field from the comfort of your home.

Here are some things to consider and try:

- Are you hoping to find your customers within your own town, county, country or even internationally? Obviously the wider you spread your net the more competition you will face and the more effort and time will be needed to ensure you are competitive. *(For the purpose of this course we will assume that we are looking at businesses aiming to reach a relatively local audience)*
- Have you identified your direct competitors? You can utilize traditional resources such as Yellow Pages, Thomson Local, local newspaper/magazines or online directories such as Yell.com and Google searches.
- Are you competing against a handful of other businesses or literally dozens or even hundreds?
- Do your competitors have a website? Visit the websites of as many as you can practically manage and look out for the good, bad and the ugly and use this to pick up good ideas for your site and note the things that annoy or confuse you about their sites so that you can avoid making the same mistakes.
- Carry out some Google searches to see how many relevant pages are returned and which sites are ranked highly, say in the top 20 or 30. As we are only interested in local competitors in this instance you can focus your search by specifying a town/region.
- Don't just rely on your own taste and opinions, get others to look at these sites and give you feedback. You are not necessarily the best judge, it's not what appeals to you that matters it's what will appeal to your customers.
- Pay attention to the navigation/menu design and layout. Can you easily find the information you want on their site?
- If prices are shown are you competitive or can you offer more to justify higher prices?
- Are the products or services on offer clearly and adequately described?

These are only some of the ways in which you can carry out your research. It may seem time consuming and daunting but your efforts in this area will hopefully reap rewards when you come to design and launch your online window on your business.

Remember to cross check your opinions with others to get a more balanced perspective. Try not to influence them by using phrases like "eeeeek, don't you think that colour background is soooooo yucky", let them voice their own reaction.

Good luck!