How to judge a business by its website

You may not be able to (entirely) judge a book by its cover (or so they say) but you may be able to judge a business by its website.

Let's start with the very basic question of does the business have a website? If the answer is no, that says a lot. Among other things, not having a website says that a business doesn't get how people search for information nowadays, or that it works strictly off referrals and very traditional advertising or that it is not tech-savvy.

However, most businesses do have a website. Some websites are better than others, and that often has to do with the budget allocated to it and also whether it is being handled by a communications person or a tech person (yeah…the communications person should handle this unless you want the website to speak IT).

A website is a necessary part of any marketing/communications strategy. Keeping that in mind, this is what should you look for:

Appearance and design: Does the website look good? Is it easy to read? If so, it shows this business has considered that potential customers' perceptions are important. Also, if it looks like it was designed in the 1990s, it shows that the business has not bothered to keep up with the times.

Clarity: What does this business do? It should be crystal clear by looking at the home page what kind of service or product the business offers.

About us page: Does this page provide you the information you need to consider doing business with this company? Or is it a

lot of fluff and platitudes, short on substance?

Services or product listing: Does the website specifically list what services or products this business provides? How deep do you have to dig for this information?

Contact page: Does the business provide several ways to contact it? Businesses that don't provide a physical address and/or phone number and/or email are suspicious. They want to be able to contact you but not for your to contact or find them.

Freshness: What is the copyright on the website? When was this content updated and is it really up-to-date? If there is a blog, when was the last blog entry dated? Clearly, if a website lacks freshness, you have no way of knowing if the business still exists or in what form. For instance, if this is a restaurant website, and the menu is date Spring 2008, how do you know if they are still open for business?

Useful information: You need certain information to decide whether you want to contact a business or not: Does it work with your industry? Are there fees? What are the opening hours? Does this website give you the necessary information you need? For example, you are looking at a hotel website and you have a list of needs (location, availability of WiFi, restaurant on premises)—does the website provide you with the answers you need? In a hotel's case, does it list of room amenities and hotel services?

Easy to navigate: Is the website easy to use? Do you have to dig deep to get crucial information? If a website is not easy to use or navigate, it shows that the business does not understand what information its potential clients and customers need. Sometimes, it is a business decision to bury information on purpose (and this tells you a whole lot!)

You can read 5 Simple Tips for Better Business Websites on OpenForum.com to see some more technical issues (like making

sure a website is mobile friendly).
What would you add to the list?