



**Things to  
consider **before**  
choosing your  
Website Designer**



A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Stuart Houghton-Jelly".

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# Over 70+ things to consider **before** choosing a Website Designer!

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## Introduction

Once you have decided you need a new website it's time to decide who will build it, in-house or outsourced. Because of the specialist nature in creating a well designed and built website most companies decide to use a professional web design agency, but how do you find the right one?

A great website can be a valuable asset to any business but a poor site will cost you money, drive away customers and damage your reputation.

So what makes the difference between a poorly performing website and one that converts visitors into sales? What do they do differently and how can we all learn from them?

The difference is that all the top converting websites are direct marketers and adopt a completely different mindset.

For ecommerce websites it's not about how many visitors come to a site, it's not about search engine optimisation or even making that initial purchase. For the top converting websites it is all about the second, third and fourth sale to the same customer thereby driving profitability. For these sites they make it exceptionally easy for returning customers to buy again and again.

Lead generation websites still enjoy the same marketers' mindsets but the emphasis is on converting the visitor into an enquiry. There are numerous low-cost but very effective ways to generate high quality sales leads. We have selected over 70 tried and tested top tips that have been proven to work for any business no matter what size or industry.

Located in the Cotswolds, 310k Internet Solutions Ltd clients range from international corporations, independent retailers, medium and small enterprises. During this time 310k has seen the good, bad and the ugly.

The following tips and suggestions are provided to help guide you through the maze of conflicting advice from barstall experts. The information offered is based on 310k 12 years experience as an award winning Internet marketing company.

*“Our website was out of date and didn't get a lot of traffic. We required an online brochure where we could manage and update the site ourselves. 310k also helped with securing a grant to fund the new website which was really useful. They came up with lots of ideas and we eventually decided on a formula which has worked very well. Since publishing, the site has generated lots of new business for us with one job worth over £85k so we are very happy.”*

**Stephanie Allison – CEO,  
Corinium HRM, HR Management, Gloucestershire**

## 1 Top Tips you should know before choosing a Web Designer!

The following guide and tips have been put together to help you avoid the pitfalls and ensure you get the right product, on time and to budget.



- 1.** Ensure there is a market for your product before you launch. Seek out those markets filled with ravenous buyers and then develop a product or service that meets their needs.
- 2.** Don't try to change your market's buying habits. Only produce something that you know people urgently need. Find an existing market that is already searching for a product or service like yours.
- 3.** Choose a product or service that you can produce and deliver with ease. If your product isn't selling, don't be tempted to drop your prices. Buyers are not always driven by price. You need to increase their perception of your product or service's value. Add incentives or bonuses to your offer.

## 2 Managing your expectations

What do you want your website to achieve, what are your goals and how will you measure any success?

4. Let us first consider the different types of website and their functions. They broadly fall into the following categories;
  - Company brochure. A site that answers questions about your products or services. Typically it provides an overview of who you are, what you do and where you do it. Included will be your contact details, possibly key players within the organisation, terms and conditions, where visitors can buy your products or services and any other general information. This type of website is ideal for those visitors carrying out research on your business.
  - Technical information. Typically a reference or catalogue site where your customers can look up information, access your technical skills and expertise without having to phone or email you for help or support. The site may also provide news feeds and news stories, archived or historical material with a search facility. Other popular areas may be to book or make a reservation with a sales representative or technician, update their account or profile, etc.
  - Ecommerce. Selling products or services over the Internet either business to business, business to consumer or consumer to consumer complete with online payment facility.
  - Lead generation. Specifically designed to generate sales leads and enquiries. Often these sites are poorly executed due to the lack of sales process knowledge by the web designer. When done well however they are an exceptionally valuable asset.
5. Now we need to establish measurable lead generation goals. Business owners often set vague targets such as “Increase in sales activity”, or “More opportunities”. These are difficult if not impossible to measure and are virtually unattainable. So you need to have specific targets to aim for such as “five leads per week from our landing page” or “three face-to-face appointments per week”; these are easy to measure and track.
6. Having decided on the type of website you want and set realistic goals, the next step is to identify your target audience. Make a list of;
  - Who they are.
  - What are their needs or desires?
  - How do your products or services solve their problems?
  - Why should they buy from you and not one of your competitors?
  - What will convince them to take the action you want them to do?

It is also a good idea to ask your customers why they buy from you - it may surprise you their reasons. Often customers buy not on price but because you provide an excellent service therefore you may like to consider charging a premium.

### 3 How Will You Be Found Amongst All Your Competitors?

7. Next on the list is to agree on how you will market the site. You can have the best website in the world but if no one knows about it then it is just another expensive and well kept secret.

A marketing strategy and project schedule is absolutely essential. This could be a mix of traditional advertising, PR, Pay Per Click advertising and organic search engine placement, promotional email, newsletter (online or offline), viral marketing, social media e.g. twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn etc.

The methods you choose to market your website will have a major impact on the design and build of your website. For instance, if you want your site on page 1 of Google then your web agency needs to design and build the pages to be search engine friendly. As this is a highly specialised area the graphic and web designers, website programmer and search engine submitter must all collaborate together to ensure your site is properly optimised.

Make a list of;

- What methods are you going to use
- What are the dates for the individual campaigns
- When are you going to prepare the marketing materials
- When will they be published and by what method e.g. email, post, website, social media, radio, TV, newspapers and magazines etc.
- How and when will they be followed up
- What budget will be required and payment schedules
- How will you assess/test the success or failure of a particular campaign



8. Having decided on the type of website you need, identified what visitors to the site require, how you intend to market it, you can now consider the overall look and feel.

It will help the graphic designer to have a good understanding of the things you find attractive in other (not necessarily related websites) but also what you dislike. Spend some time searching on the Internet exploring other sites to get different ideas and make a list of their URL addresses. This will ensure both you and your designer are both on the same track.

9. Finally you need to set some goals to measure the overall success of your new website. It could be simply the number of people who visit your site, access or download specific information, sign up for future marketing e.g. newsletter, promotions etc; buy your products or generate sales enquiries.( See Tip 5 above)

*“My IT skills were minimal. I just muddled along with what I'd found out for myself. I did everything the slow way, or just plain couldn't do what I wanted! I was a bit worried that the course would be too advanced for me - but because I could practice on a training website, and learn at my own pace, it was simple. I've learned so much. Now I work confidently and quickly on my computer. I can even manage and update my own website, which is very important for my business.”*

**Chloë of the Midnight Storytellers, Gloucestershire.**

## 4 Approaching a Web Design agency!

Many of our clients have previously been miss-sold to, misled by unscrupulous or unprofessional website designers or have been adversely affected in some way or other. For many companies this has understandably resulted in fear and anxiety in making a similar costly mistake.

Creating a new and successful website will require a considerable amount of time and effort from all those involved, but working with a professional company should also be an enjoyable experience. It is about developing trust and confidence in each others skills and knowledge over a period of time and building long term relationships.

What to look for when choosing a web design agency.

- 10.** Search for website designers on the Internet and create a minimum short list of at least three companies.
- 11.** Examine their portfolio to see whether you like their style; is there a consistent feel or are they flexible in their designs. A good agency should have a wide portfolio demonstrating how creative they can be in creating the look and feel that you need and not simply dictating to you what you will have.
- 12.** How long have they been in business? Do they have a successful track record? Will they be around once the website has been published or will they disappear with your money leaving you with a partially built or perhaps no website at all? Remember you are looking for a long term relationship including after the website is published to the Internet.
- 13.** Do they have their terms and conditions clearly displayed on their own website?
- 14.** How easy is it to make contact with them? Is their telephone number and address clearly visible or are you having to search for it? One of the most common reasons people leave a site is down to poor contact information.
- 15.** Are there any testimonials or case studies to verify they can do what they say they can?
- 16.** Do they have the right specialists in-house? You will need the following;
  - Graphic designer or “Visual Artist” - to design the overall look and feel of your new site incorporating your brand identity.
  - Website Designer - determines the page layout, text and graphic locations, navigation and cross links.
  - Website Programmer - will take the design and convert that into code to make the site run and work properly.
  - Marketer - helps in the entire design and build process to ensure your website can be easily found on the Internet. He will also help you with your overall marketing strategy to make sure you get the maximum traffic and sales from your website.



- 17.** Arrange an initial exploratory meeting.
- 18.** How do they sound on the telephone? Do they ask you many questions? Initial impressions are very important.
- 19.** Do they confirm the meeting by email or post?

*“Our goals were to re-vamp our website look and feel and ensure that our web search engine results improved. We wanted to be able to edit the website in-house and to do it quickly and easy. 310k developed a CMS which surpassed our expectations resulting in conversion of visitors to clients steadily increasing over time”.*

**Chris Halpin – IT Manager,  
Newton Perkins, Property Consultants, London**

## 5 Your first meeting



20. How much do they ask about you and your business, your goals and objectives? They should want to get to know your business intimately otherwise how else can they create a site that reflects you and your business.
21. Do you like them? Remember this is all about developing a long term relationship. You will be working with them for potentially a considerable amount of time and therefore it should be an enjoyable experience. Many of 310k original clients are still with us after 10 years reflecting our friendly but professional approach.
22. Do they have a structured planning and execution process, a project schedule with the various milestones?
23. Ask them what they know about marketing and search engine optimisation.
24. Ask how they will optimise any new site for search engines. If they just talk about “meta tags” then they really have no idea what they are doing. Search engine optimisation (SEO) is constantly changing and is a highly skilled and specialist area that requires considerable knowledge and experience. Unfortunately most designers say they can do SEO but in reality very few can!
25. Qualify their search engine competency by testing using websites listed in their portfolio.
26. Make sure that they're creating a site that meets your overall marketing and business goals.
26. How will you pay them? Will they invoice when various milestones are reached or require payment in full and up front.
28. What happens if the site takes longer than expected will they invoice you for the delays or is it a fixed price.
29. What happens if you don't like their designs? Is there any money back guarantee.
30. Check out their recent clients and enquire how smoothly the build, publication and ongoing support was/is.
31. Will you be protected from the use of images later found to be copyright protected?

*“We wanted to have control over the content and update our existing website however we didn't have the necessary software, knowledge or skills in-house. So we went on 310k's course. They showed us how to manage our site using simple to use software. We can now change the look, information or anything else including making new pages.”*

**Bob Allison – CEO,  
Corinium Fire and Security, health & safety, Gloucestershire.**

- 32.** Once completed who owns the website? Make sure the contract states you own the copyright to the entire website (excluding any stock images of course). We regularly experience problems where a client wishes to move the hosting of their website to another provider but cannot because they don't own the software that runs the website. Effectively if they move away from their original supplier they lose the entire website and have to start again from scratch!
- 33.** If the web design company organised the purchase of your domain name, make sure it has been registered in your name and you have ownership.
- In 310k experience this is not an uncommon mistake however usually it is just that - a mistake. But occasionally we have discovered that the domain name was deliberately registered in the web design company's name to ensure the client is permanently locked into that company.
- 34.** What happens if you want to move the website away from the web design agency? Are there any restrictions, penalties or administration costs involved? Will you have full and unrestricted access to all source files?
- 35.** How will the site be constructed? Will it be built in HTML, Flash or other code? If being found on the Internet is important to you (and let's face it, whose site isn't), what impact will that have on search engines like Google, Yahoo, MSN etc? Poorly coded sites, extensive use of Flash or frames could render your site invisible to search engines.
- 36.** Can the web designers meet your deadlines? Many businesses underestimate the amount of time it takes to collate all the website information, agree on designs, organise the launch and ongoing marketing etc. Then there is the constant testing of different page content and designs after the site has been published. It all takes time therefore in 310k experience allow brochure and lead generation websites a good 12 weeks to initial publication but for advanced or ecommerce sites allow considerably longer.
- 37.** Who will make changes to your website? Will you have full and unrestricted access allowing you to manage and make changes? If so how will this be possible, via the website designer's content management system or a third party software programme? If only the agency can make amendments you need to seriously consider whether this is the correct route for you to take as it can lead to excessive delays and be financially costly.
- 38.** Can the website design agency actually do what they say? 310k regularly experience ecommerce projects in particular, where the designer is out of their depth and lacks the necessary skills to deliver. This is not only financially crippling but often results in starting again right from the beginning with all the associated time delays.
- 39.** Is the solution a designer is suggesting an off-the-shelf package or bespoke? This is particularly important with ecommerce websites as many of these packages allow little or no scope for control.

- 40.** A cheap ecommerce subscription or licence service may on the surface appear to be a good deal especially with the added attraction of low start-up costs however in our experience they never bring a return on investment and tend to be very costly in the long run. The old adage “You only get what you pay for” is never truer than in the case of ecommerce websites. (See *Tip 42 on costs*)
- 41.** Ask whether your site will meet all the legal requirements and Internet standards of which the main topics include;
- W3C. This stands for World Wide Web Consortium and is the main international standards organisation that your website should meet.
  - Privacy Policy Statement. A legal requirement where you capture any visitors details e.g. enquiry form, newsletter sign-up etc.
  - Cookies statement. A legal requirement where your website uses cookies. (most websites do)
  - Registered company details. A legal requirement if you are an Ltd company or charity.
  - Distance Selling Terms. A legal requirement if you are selling anything online.
  - WCAG (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines) and WAI (Web Accessibility Initiative). Not legal requirements but defines how to make web content more accessible to people with disabilities.

*"I kept getting advice that I needed to improve my internet presence and start moving into social media. I had no idea how to do this or where to get started. I got great advice from Simon at 310K on what to think about. He gave me examples of other successful websites, helped me define my product by using Google analytics, advised me on the legal side, and helped discuss my business ideas. As a result, my business case is now completely different from what I would have been able to do on my own."*

**Andrea Pellegram – CEO,  
Raspberry-Red, ecommerce, Gloucestershire**

## 6 Evaluating proposals

**42.** Obtain quotes from the selected web designers so you can compare the quality of their design and services they offer.

- Examine each proposal individually and whether what they are suggesting meets your business needs and goals.
- Look at how well they have presented the proposal as this may reflect in their work.
- Consider the strengths and weaknesses of individual agencies, their skills, knowledge and experience. (See *Tip 14 above*)
- Having made your choice it is only fair to contact those that did not succeed and inform them of your decision.



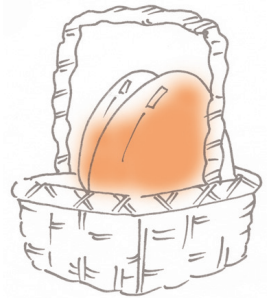
**43.** Follow up all references to ensure they can complete all work on time and within budget.

## 7 A word on hosting your website

44. Most website can be hosted on a shared server. This means a single machine can host your website and many others all at the same time. The main advantage is that it keeps the costs down.

However if there are too many websites located on that one server or if a particular site is very busy then it will affect the speed people can access and view your website. It is the same as when you have too many applications open on your PC all at the same time. Your PC can only process so much information at any one moment and so it slows down or even stops completely.

If your site takes longer than 3 seconds to load then your customers will simply go elsewhere. Therefore it is important to establish what happens when this happens. Will a redundant (back-up server) take the overload? This also applies if the server fails or needs to be restarted. All the time your website is invisible you are losing money and therefore it is essential to make sure there is always a redundant server to instantly take over when there is an overload or failure.



The alternative is to have a dedicated server, or in the case of a busy ecommerce site typically three dedicated servers. This means that only your site is hosted and therefore will not be affected by anyone else's.

The downside of adopting this belt and braces approach is the cost! It is considerably higher to have dedicated servers than a single shared service. However you must take into consideration what it will cost you in lost revenue if your business is effectively shut down because no one can access it or it is particularly slow!

*“It cost us every time we wanted to make changes to our website, but also we couldn't be found on any of the search engines so we looked for a new supplier. Now the efficiency of the website is really good. We have excellent support and help with marketing and promotions from 310k. We are also shortly to launch some new enterprises and will certainly continue with them.”*

**Alan Rogers – CEO,  
Red Carpet Enterprises Ltd, Wiltshire**

## 8 What happens after your website goes live?

- 45. Will the agency provide ongoing support and backup? Is this part of the initial build fees and if so for how long?
- 46. How do they provide that support? Is it by telephone, email, fax or post? Check their support service by actually trying to contact them and experience for yourself first hand how long it takes to speak to the appropriate person?



310k has one particular client who insists we use their hosting company. When contacting their supplier by phone, on a number of instances we have been put on hold for up to 5 hours!

- 47. What about regular reviews? How often will the agency go through your site and evaluate whether it is still meeting your goals and expectations, delivering an acceptable ROI or any suggestions on improvements that can be made. Remember your website will never be finished but will always require fine tuning as your customers needs and the market evolves.
- 48. Make sure you have a good statistics package installed on your website like the free software Google Analytics. Stats are essential to evaluating what your visitors are doing on your site. They will tell you what pages they are looking at and for how long. What landing page did they arrive on and which page did they exit from. It will tell you where your visitors came from within the world or whether they were directed to your website from another referring site.

By spending a little time to understand what all this information means you will be in a position to tweak and fine tune individual pages ensuring you get the maximum ROI.

*“My colleagues and I needed to be convinced that any investment in a new website would be helpful to the business. Working with 310k to build the new website was great fun and has been really successful, however it's the on going help and support with marketing ideas and suggestions that has been such an added bonus.”*

**Mathew Harrison, Operations Director,  
CIA Fire and Security Ltd**

## 9 What will it cost?

- 49.** Make sure you have a detailed breakdown of any investment required so you know exactly what you are paying for, plus any ongoing costs.

One of the most common mistakes businesses make is to buy on price. Don't start with a fixed budget. Decide on what your goals are, how you intend to achieve them. From that datum point you can work out the investment required and whether the project is viable with an acceptable ROI. If you start with "I can only spend £x amount" your site is already doomed to failure before you have even started.

It's not just the initial build cost that needs to be taken into account but also the ongoing investment covering hosting, support and backup, marketing, the occasional refresh and regular updates, lifespan of the site etc.

As a rough rule of thumb whatever you spend on the build of your website needs to be spent every year simply on general marketing and that is excluding any Pay Per Click advertising (PPC).

Most companies who intend to use PPC advertising on various search engines greatly underestimate the cost. It will probably be at least the same sum again as the whole of your general marketing budget!

So consider your overall financial commitment before thinking of choosing the cheapest quote but also remember you are also buying ongoing expertise. What initially appears to be cheap probably is just that which does not equate to good value for money. You don't have unlimited funds, so be sure you can live with the costs.

## 10 So now the fun really begins – adding content!

- 50. Begin by defining the purpose of your website in five words or less. You need to be able to define the purpose of your website succinctly and then remove any elements that don't support that purpose. The more things you try to accomplish with your website, the more confusing it will look and the less likely it is to achieve your goal. If you really have two clear goals for your website, then consider creating a second website.
- 51. Use a headline at the top of the first page. The headline is more important than your company name unless your brand represents the strongest benefit to your prospects. Use your USP and a strong benefit as the headline of your site if you want to keep people interested.
- 52. Don't think your logo is going to do the job - it won't. This is about engaging your visitors so you need something that identifies a problem they have or which promises a benefit that you know will interest them. Spend 80% of your time on headlines.
- 53. Headlines with sub copy increase reading and click through only if the style of the headline and sub copy are integrated! In that case, people will read the copy and click on what interests them.

But if you make the font of the headline much bigger, and particularly if you underline it, people will skip from headline to headline and they won't read the sub copy. So if you want them just to scan, make the headlines big and different.

- 54. If you can't get people interested and excited by your website's headline, then you aren't going to keep them on your site for very long. Top copywriters spend days writing headlines and come up with well over 100 possible headlines for any sales message they write.
- 55. Make sure you place a big benefit “above the fold”. Don't make your visitors scroll down to read the benefit your product or service promises to deliver. Most won't bother. Make sure it appears in the first screen that appears.
- 56. Focus 100% on the benefits. Prospects don't care about how long you've been in business - in fact, they don't really care about your products or services - only about the benefits they will bring to them. Tell them what it will do for them. Is the guarantee located near your call to action?
- 57. Communicate your USP. What is unique about your product or service? Is it better than your rivals or does it deliver the same benefits or experiences as every other product on the market? Perhaps you offer additional benefits that are bundled up with the product and therefore are in a position to charge a premium.

Your USP is more critical than your promotional copy. Your copy doesn't have to be brilliant it just needs to highlight the benefits your product or service will give your prospects.



- 58.** Making use of sub-headings. They break up blocks of text, which makes it easier for visitors to read. Some people will only read your sub-headings so make sure they tell the story too. If you have a list of things, a single column will get more viewing. If you break a list into two or three columns, people generally will see fewer of them.
- 59.** Bullets are a powerful way of advertising. To grab the attention of prospects and create the buying decision, use plenty of quick benefit listings.
- 60.** Check that your offer is going to make your visitors take action. Many website visitors want and expect instant gratification. You'll also save money on post and packaging if you can deliver a digital product.
- 61.** Offer an ironclad guarantee. Nothing beats a No quibble, full money-back guarantee for credibility. A tiny minority of your prospects might take advantage of your guarantee but many more will be persuaded to buy from you because of your guarantee.
- 62.** Use referrals and testimonials from satisfied customers; promoting your clients success stories are always effective. Make sure their story describes a problem that they have solved by using your solution. Do ensure it's the customer rather than your product or service that is the focus of the story.
- 63.** Avoid big blocks of black! Look at your page and squint: if everything looks like a big block of black with no visually distinct elements, it will not be looked at.
- 64.** Images and photos. Images, such as small icons next to a paragraph to draw the eye, work well. They're mostly not directly viewed but they draw attention to the content next to it.
- 65.** Faces too draw attention but they focus attention on themselves, so they're not as effective at drawing attention to the elements around them.
- 66.** Get rid of any graphics and links that are unnecessary and distract from the purpose of your web page. Using too many graphics on your page will mean that it will take too long to load and visitors will give up and click somewhere else. Remember you only have 3 seconds for a web page to load and convince a visitor to stay.
- 67.** Leave plenty of white space. It will make your web page easier to read and navigate however watch out for scroll inhibitors! It is also soothing on the eye and helps guide and focus the visitor to specific areas of the web page.  
  
However white space that runs from one side of the page to the other as if you could draw a line and not have it hit anything makes it look like the page is complete and visitors will stop scrolling down. This is known as a scroll inhibitor.
- 68.** Don't use 'click here to continue' page breaks. Allow your readers to see the entire message in one long scroll-down. The less clicking your visitors have to do the better.

But also don't make your page too long as visitors prefer to know where they are within your overall message. A good rule of thumb is to restrict your page length to the equivalent of an A4 sheet of paper.

- 69.** If the purpose of your site is to build a mailing list, put your signup box above the fold (that is in the first screen of the webpage without scrolling down the page).

But why should a visitor want to join your mailing list? What's in it for them? Do you think they will be interested in learning about your latest deal? The simple answer is if you want their details you have to offer them something in return that they want.

If you think about it there are numerous incentives you could offer in return for their information;

- £x or x% discount off their next purchase.
- Free delivery on purchases made before the end of the month.
- Copy of your "Free Top Tips booklet".
- Monthly subscription to leading experts "How to do it" guides.
- Entry into a Fee Prize Draw.
- Preview into forthcoming products, services or events etc.

- 70.** Promise Privacy. Make sure you include a privacy policy statement that says you will never share your visitors' details with anyone or any other company without their permission.

- 71.** Be sure that every page on your website links back to your main page. Don't presume your website visitors will just hit the 'back' button to return to your main page or that they'll even remember where it is. Make every page on your website link back to the main page.

- 72.** Get your own domain name. Don't rely on a free server. Having your own domain name establishes credibility in the minds of many of your prospects.

- 73.** Use a hosting service that provides full support, CGI access, and secure ordering.

- 74.** Accept credit cards. Your online business must be able to accept credit cards - most of your customers will buy with a credit card.

- 75.** Make ordering as easy as possible. Offer a secure order form, as well as details for placing phone, fax and postal orders.

- 76.** Test and track all your advertising using a good statistics package like the free Google Analytics. Wherever possible create two web pages; publish the first and track your visitors and the conversion rates. Then publish the second web page and compare how the two pages perform.

You will probably end up by taking the best of both and putting them onto a completely new third web page. By this method you will be constantly testing and improving your websites performance and increasing the ROI. (See *Top Tip 47*)

## 11 Conclusion – share your success!

Having read this guide and if you have adopted or used any of the tips and advice provided here, 310k would like to hear of your successes and to share them with others.

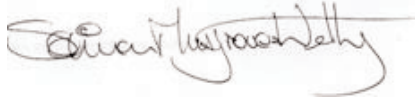
Send us your story and how you successfully used a 310k principle in your business to:  
info@310k.co.uk

or by post to:

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We may contact you for further information and possibly feature your story in one of our newsletters or future publications, so please include your contact details.

We look forward to hearing from you.



Simon Musgrove-Wethey  
Chairman  
310k Internet Solutions Ltd