

Small changes stack up: an accountant's guide to a brilliant website

INSIGHT REPORT
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A collaborative report by



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Introduction

Your website is the cornerstone of your digital marketing mix. You can use it to generate leads, build trust with your audience, share expertise, attract new talent and, ultimately, make sales.

It's also an important digital communication tool. Users go to your website to find out **who you are, what you do, and how to get in touch** with you. It's often the first interaction they'll have – whether that's indirectly, by reading your content, or directly, like through a live chat.

A good website, then, should clearly articulate those three things. It should be a single point of truth for what makes you, you. But it's more than just putting words on a page – especially when you're selling something users know they need, but don't necessarily want (like tax advice).

Despite 58% of SMEs saying it's important to see evidence of expertise on an accountant's website*, many are outdated and generic.

*The digital accountant: is your firm behind the curve? 2022 research.

If that doesn't sound like yours – well done. You're probably standing out in the sector, and looking for tips to boost rankings or improve conversions (you'll find those here).

If it does sound familiar, this report's for you, too. We've created an industry-wide benchmark to map yourself against and delved into how clients actually use accountants' websites.

Whether you're a marketing manager looking to justify the investment, or an accountant curious about how a website can help you, we've created this insight report to show you how, inch by inch, it's possible for small changes to transform your website into something brilliant.



Beth Steer

*Head of content & digital marketing services,
PracticeWeb*



Hannah Stringer

*Marketing director,
Money Penny*

How good are accountants' websites – and what do clients care about?

At PracticeWeb, our head of brand and creative, Mark Jones (a big fan of metaphors), likens benchmarking to two friends who encounter a bear in the forest.

One turns to the other in panic and whispers, "What are we going to do? We can't run faster than this bear! We're sure to be mauled!"

The other friend, busy lacing his trainers, replies, "Mmm, true. But I don't need to outrun the bear. I just have to run faster than you" – and sprints off into the sunset.

And that's the way we approach accountants' websites. When it comes to lead generation, branding, design and content, you don't have to outrun the bear – you just have to beat the competition.



Understanding the landscape

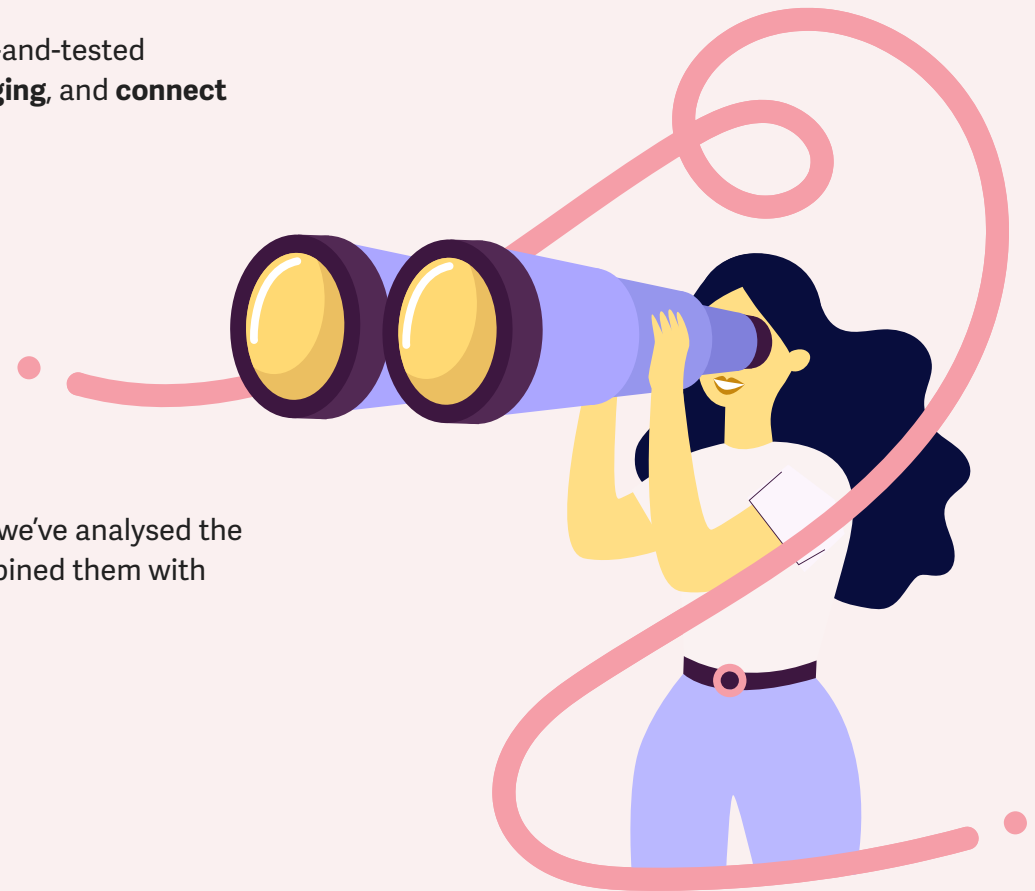
To help you suss out how fast your competition is running, so to speak, we've looked at over 50 accountants' websites and identified common failings and markers of success.

When we help accountants with their digital marketing, we follow a tried-and-tested methodology: for a website to do its job, it needs to be **findable**, be **engaging**, and **connect** with the right audience.

To see how your competition stacks up, we've explored five key criteria:

- findability
- branding
- usability
- content
- making contact.

Then, so that you're fully equipped before you start making any changes, we've analysed the trends to work out exactly what impacts user behaviour most – and combined them with suggestions on how to improve things.



Findability

Findability is all about how easy it is for clients to find you when they search for something online (usually on Google). Search engines want to give people the best answers to their questions: so if your website has great content for a particular kind of person, they'll reward you with high rankings.

A website can **rank organically** – which means it'll show up in search results without you paying for the privilege.

Users look up terms (like "accountants near me" or "help with payroll") which are **known as keywords**. The results they see will depend on how optimised for search a website is, both in general and for that keyword. **Search engine optimisation (SEO)** is the art of mastering that skill.

It follows, then, that you'd expect a website to be well-optimised for its own brand name. In other words, if someone googles you, do you show up?

Moneypenny's team of experts found that in 90% of cases, accountants did indeed show up when they googled their firm name. What's more interesting, though, is that 10% didn't, and 14% relied on paid advertising to do so.

If you're not **ranking organically for your own brand**, what chance do you stand of ranking for anything else?

A website that ranks well does so for several reasons – all of which contribute to how likely **leads are to convert**.

Our SEO expert, Rene, says:



Rene de Villiers

SEO expert

PracticeWeb

"A huge proportion of traffic to your website is down to good SEO – over 66.4% of our clients' traffic is organic, rather than paid or referred. That tells you how important googling really is.

[Your website needs to tell Google who you are, what you do, and where you do it.](#) Something as simple as featuring keywords like 'accountants in Bristol' or 'payroll specialists for startups' gives the right sort of clues.

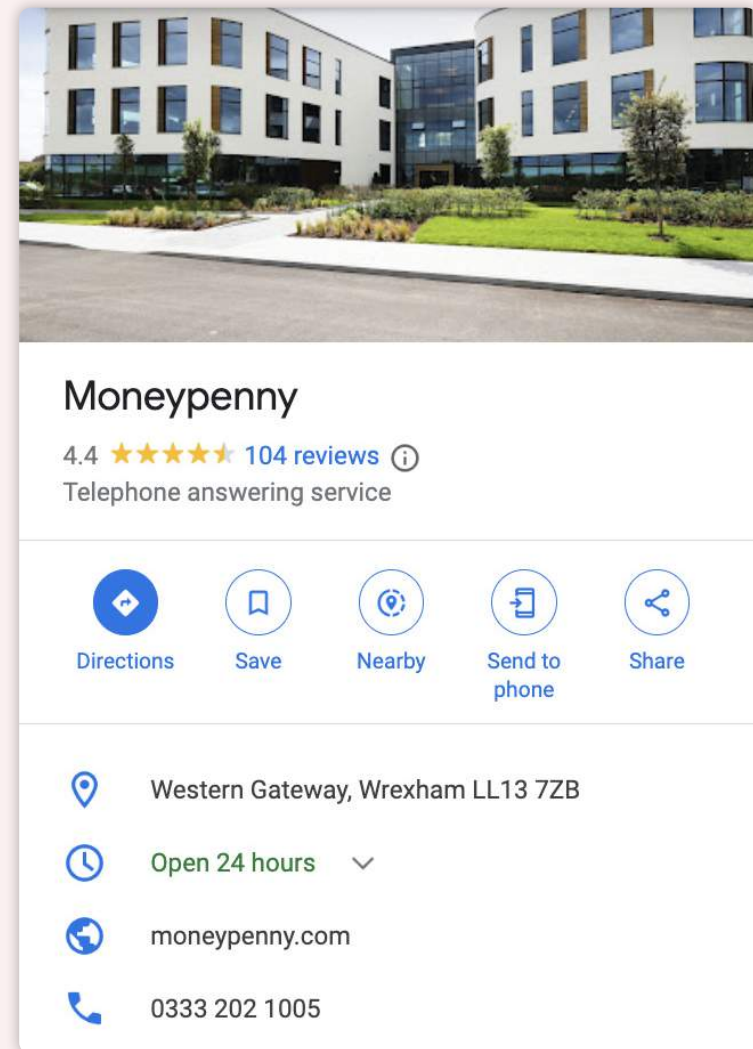
There are multiple parts to SEO – technical, which is how your website works in the background; on-page, which is the content and keywords you use; and off-page, which is about people linking back to your site. You need a targeted mix of all three to really see results."

Google My Business is another important factor when it comes to boosting your organic traffic – particularly locally. When properly implemented, it's usually one of the top three ways people reach your site.



Top tip! To rank for your own brand name, make sure your Google My Business profile is up to date - and that your name, address and phone number match any other listings. Make sure your social media profiles are consistent, too, and that your brand name features prominently on your site.

“It takes about 50 milliseconds (0.05 seconds) for users to form an opinion about your website.”



Above: example of Moneypenny Google My Business page

Brand

When it comes to brand, you don't get long to make an impression. It takes about 50 milliseconds (0.05 seconds) for users to form an opinion about your website.

As the **flagship for your brand**, your website needs to send clear, upfront signals about what it's like to work with you, the approach you take, how formal you are, and whether you're 'like' a client or not. Think of it as your chance to show people what you're all about.

Our research found, though, that 72% of accountants' websites 'did not stand out positively' against others and only 38% scored 'very strong' for clarity – implying that there's too much generic content kicking around, and not enough differentiation.

"There's **too much generic content** kicking around, and not enough differentiation."

That's interesting, because it represents a missed opportunity. 88% of SMEs agree that having an accountant who understands technology is important – and two-thirds would pay more for a 'tech savvy' accountant*.

And a well-branded, modern website can go a long way in showing prospective clients, rather than telling them, that you're forward-thinking when it comes to tech.

In terms of client acquisition, it's important that your website doesn't give the impression that you're a traditional, formal practice if your goal is to work with dynamic, fast-paced start-ups!

Trust is a big part of a brand, too. Using reviews to demonstrate your relationships with clients can be a powerful way to signify the positive impact you have.

13% of people say they check reviews immediately when looking for a new accountant – but only 50% of accountants' websites are capitalising on this by integrating review platforms like Feefo or TrustPilot.

If you've got happy clients, encourage them to leave you a review – and let them be your biggest brand advocates.

*The digital accountant: is your firm behind the curve? 2022 research.

Usability

The better your website is structured, the easier it will be for you to convert leads.

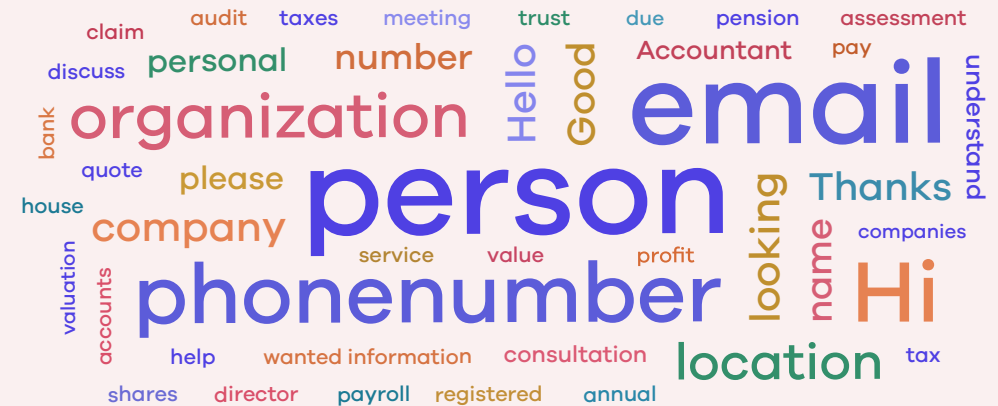
There's no sugar-coating it: if your website's **user experience** (UX) is terrible, you won't convert the users that are ready to buy your services.

UX is a discipline in itself, and it combines elements of design, accessibility and usability. Of the sites we analysed, usability was generally poor:

- only 50% had a search bar
- 40% scored 'not clear' or 'very unclear' for signposting
- 50% scored just 'poor' or 'okay' for clarity
- only 16% had a clear FAQ section.

Take a look, too, at this word cloud, generated from Money Penny chat logs across multiple accountants' websites.

The themes are mostly around contact details and information about specific services – which indicates that **users couldn't find the information** easily elsewhere on the site.



Above: Wordcloud Of Common Words Across Money Penny Chat Windows

Our lead designer, Jacob, thinks it's surprising that so many accountants' websites aren't built with UX in mind:



Jacob Pugh
Lead designer
PracticeWeb

“If the UX on a website isn't there, people simply won't be able to do what you need them to do. Aside from leading to fewer conversions, [a poorly structured website is also frustrating for the user.](#)”

Nobody wants to interact with a website that's difficult to navigate, poorly adapted for use on mobile devices, or just plain confusing.”

So, think about your **user journey**, and ask yourself these questions:

- is it clear for people what they should do next?
- are your calls to action (like buttons) prominent visually?
- is there clear signposting to valuable information?
- are there pop-ups, ads or other elements cluttering the page?
- is your site well-adapted for mobile, or difficult to use on different devices?

Remember, the aim is always to keep things as straightforward and streamlined as possible.



Top tip! Almost 48% of web traffic in the UK in 2022 was from mobile phones. For PracticeWeb's SEO clients, the percentage is 33%. That means designing a mobile responsive site (using the right template, stripping back content, eliminating pop-ups, and using a large, readable font) is key to good UX.



Content

Websites are generally made up of **fixed content** – like your homepage, service pages and about us – that doesn't change very often, and **reactive content**, like blogs and topical updates.

When assessing your website, you need to make sure that both types of content are well-crafted and keyword-led so that:

1. Google knows what your pages are about and can **rank them accordingly**
2. your audience has the **information they need**.

We found that 60% of sites had 'the right amount of content' (enough for a user to decide whether the firm would fulfil their need), while nearly a quarter (24%) had nowhere near enough.



Top tip! *You don't need to go into great detail about everything you do – but make sure you're saying enough about your areas of focus: whether that's a specific service or a new sector. As a general rule, aim for over 300 words of useful content on your inner pages. Use the 'People Also Ask' function on Google for clues about what you should cover.*

What do people look at?

The pages that receive the most traffic are the homepage, careers, blogs, team, and services pages. Users generally look at 2.4 pages per session, spending just under a minute on each.

Here are some headline stats:

- careers and vacancy pages generate high traffic that **often leads to conversion** – make sure they're set up to maximise this, especially if you're struggling with recruitment
- 'meet the team' or 'about us' pages are within the top four clicked pages – people are curious about **who they're working with**
- **sites with a blog receive 42% more traffic** – blogs drive more traffic than homepages
- websites with blogs have 30% higher conversions – including **email clicks** and **online forms**
- websites with downloadable content have 25% longer **engagement time** – it's critical to provide resources that clients can take away.

It's clear, then, that users value both well-written, informative blogs and downloadable assets like eBooks – and also that blogging is a driving force of traffic to your website.

That means if you're not blogging currently, it's time to start. If you don't have the skills or resources in-house to put pen to paper, think about teaming up with a specialist agency (like PracticeWeb) to help you out.

Communication

Communication is a pain point across most accountants' websites, and the impact on client experience is significant.

While most sites had **contact information** available (98% had a phone number, 96% an email address, and 86% a contact form), that information was often buried.

0% of sites scored 'very clear' for ease of finding a phone number, and only 10% scored 'clear'.

That becomes significant when you consider that 90% of people find it frustrating when a business doesn't provide a phone number or **makes it difficult to find**.

And, if users manage to contact you by phone but have a 'bad' experience, 36% take their business elsewhere, 34% make a complaint, and 25% leave a negative review. Remember the importance of trust from earlier?

What do the chats tell us?

Moneypenny's chat logs demonstrate how frequently accountants' clients struggle to find contact information.

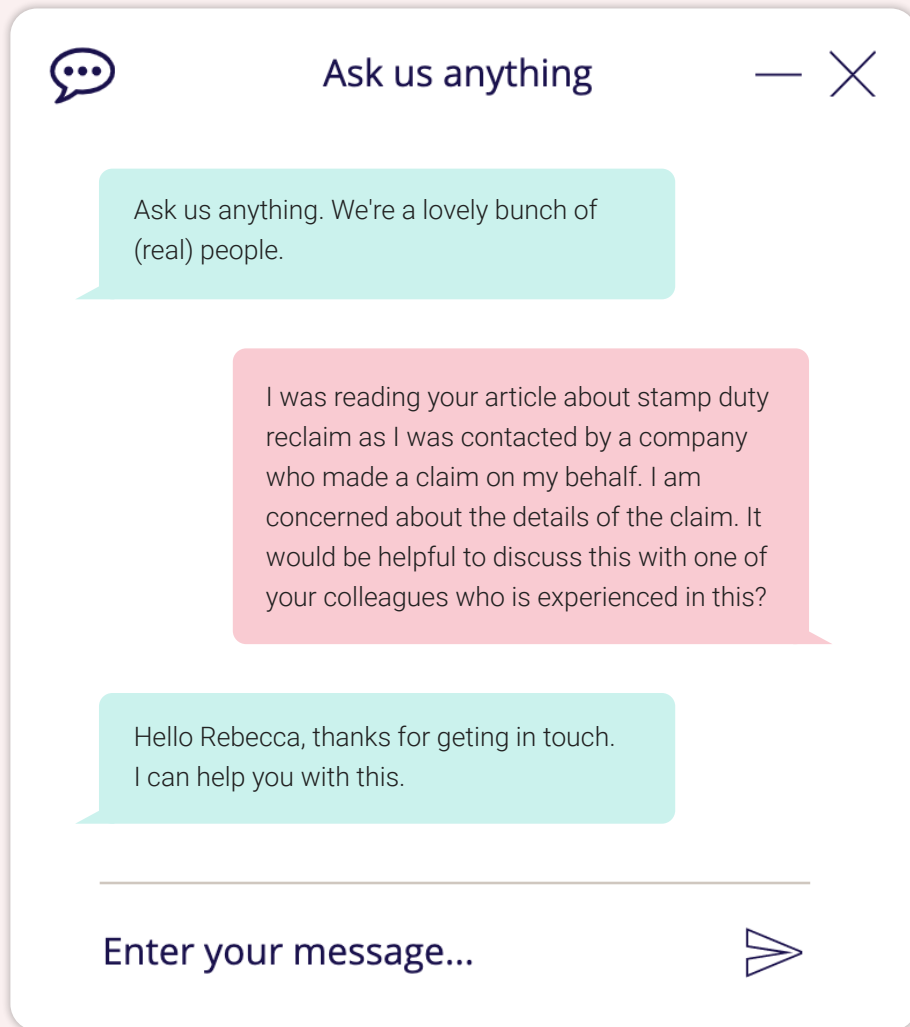


Queries like 'I'd like to send an introduction but can't find the right email' or 'I need to send a letter but don't know your postal address' are common – and point to a lack of visible communication information on the site.

When it comes to channels, as well as phone and email, it's worth thinking about live chat. **42% of people like to use live chat to contact a business or solve a query**, particularly if it's outside traditional office hours, like 46% of chats are.

Yet only 8% of accountants' websites have the function installed, which feels like a missed opportunity – because as well as capturing queries, it can also give you insight into your users' journey.

Take this example:



The screenshot shows a live chat window with the title "Ask us anything" and a close button (X). The chat history includes:

- A light blue bubble: "Ask us anything. We're a lovely bunch of (real) people."
- A pink bubble: "I was reading your article about stamp duty reclaim as I was contacted by a company who made a claim on my behalf. I am concerned about the details of the claim. It would be helpful to discuss this with one of your colleagues who is experienced in this?"
- A light blue bubble: "Hello Rebecca, thanks for getting in touch. I can help you with this."

At the bottom, there is a text input field with the placeholder "Enter your message..." and a send button (right-pointing arrow).

Here, the user has read a relevant blog (probably by googling the keyword 'stamp duty reclaim'). For them to have made contact, we can assume they found the blog insightful, and it convinced them of the accountant's expertise. They then used live chat to reach out directly.

Hannah Stringer, marketing director at Money Penny, thinks it's instances like this that demonstrate the value of live chat:

"If we think of our website as a physical location that people enter, live chat acts as a friendly shop assistant who greets you and offers help if you need it. That proactive engagement is what makes live chat so effective – it engages the visitors who are in browsing mode and brings them into the sales funnel."



Top tip! *When it comes to live chat, you'll have to decide between humans or chatbots. There's a place for both: chatbots can signpost visitors to useful info, which is great if your site's usability isn't top-notch. Humans, though, win out when it comes to customer experience - and genuine engagement can lead to valuable business or a great new hire.*

The most important insight

Phew! That's a lot of information, but for us, there are some key takeaways:



Generally, accountants' websites don't have great findability, usability, or communication information



There's a lack of distinct branding and differentiation across the industry



Providing genuinely helpful content boosts overall traffic, drives conversion and generates enquiries



Communication is key: giving users the tools to get in touch easily should be a priority

The overall message? Websites certainly are important for accountants: because your clients expect you to have a good one.

The frustrations that come with a poor website could be leaving users with a negative impression of your brand, making you impossible to find, hindering conversion, preventing communication and ultimately costing you leads.

“The overall message? Websites certainly are important for accountants: because your clients expect you to have a good one.”



With that in mind, you’ve got a real opportunity for your website to stand out if you:

- spend some time honing your proposition
- make sure it’s reflected in your digital brand
- think carefully about what content your audience needs
- invest in a communication channel that removes any blockers.

That’s the dream, right? We know, though, that your time and resources are limited. So, if you only do a few things to capitalise on the above opportunity, follow the 10-step checklist below.

Let’s go back to the bear analogy – and consider this your training programme.



10 steps to improve your website

1. Work out where you are now – be critical!

Using the table below as inspiration, as well as the five key elements discussed in this report, where would you score yourself? Make a map of your strengths and weaknesses, and use those as your baseline for improvement.

Content	SEO	Design	Feel	Usability
Distinct messaging	References location	Generic design	Feels more premium	Easy to use
Displays pricing	References to specific services and sectors	Images very cliché	Feels more personal	Form is easy and nice to look at
Lots of testimonials	Sector pages	Perfect use of icons	Feels trustworthy	Phone number is clickable
Tone of voice is unique	Service pages	Complex/simple design	Perfect amount of professionalism	Buttons are obvious
Tone of voice is interesting		Looks dated/modern	Feels inspiring	Hard to read text
Our clients don't talk that way		Too many choices	Feels edgy	Doesn't look good on mobile phone
Too few/many words		Feels "like us"	Feels overwhelming	Hard to get to the information

2. Improve your headers

Rewriting your entire site can feel daunting. But tweaking your headers across your homepage and service pages is a small task that can have a big impact on both findability and user experience. Make sure you spell out exactly what you do – users are busy, and want to know they're in the right place.

3. Introduce clear calls to action

Make sure your users know where to go. Introduce buttons, in a colour that stands out, with clear text like 'Get a quote'. Be consistent; users will remember that a certain colour means something's clickable. If you've got two buttons, make the secondary one more neutral.

4. Address the user's pain points

People are on your website because they're looking for a solution to a problem. In your fixed copy, reference common things clients and prospects ask you. Demonstrate empathy and understanding, and don't be afraid to state the obvious. People are busy and want to know that you have a solution.

5. Have a plan

This comes back to usability. Spell out exactly what you need from people, how your process works, and what they can expect. Do this in as few steps as possible – no more than four. When people are ready to buy, they want it to feel easy. Link your 'how we work' to a clear call to action, and make it as straightforward as you can.

6. Give yourself a voice

People buy people and nobody (except maybe other accountants) wants to read something that feels like it's been written by an accountant. Honestly, trust us. Spend some time thinking about how you'd like to come across, shape that into some dos and don'ts, and use that as your tone of voice guide. Speak directly to your audience, in a language they understand, and you won't go far wrong.

7. Make sure the design isn't hindering your SEO

This is an easy fix – optimise your images! Images make a website look great, and they're integral to design. But if they're big, they'll slow your site down, and each second counts. Compress them using sites like tinypng.com and aim for all images on a single page to be less than 250KB.



Hannah Stringer
Marketing director
Moneypenny

"This report is an important reminder that when it comes to our websites, small changes can and often do have a major impact. [Taking the time to review your site with a more critical eye than usual, and importantly, gathering feedback from people outside of your business should be a high priority for all firms.](#) Once you start making changes, you'll find the right levers to unlock opportunities to grow your business."

8. Get testimonials

We've talked about trust – and nobody can sell you to new clients better than your existing ones. Make sure you're featuring testimonials on your website, whether that's by using a review platform or highlighting case studies. People want to hear what others' experiences have been like.

9. Prioritise communication

Make it really easy for people to contact you, and you'll be surprised at how many leads come through. If you're listing phone numbers and email addresses, make them clickable (for mobile, too). Consider what other channels you could make the most of, like live chat, and feature this information prominently.

10. Don't be afraid to ask for help!

You probably say it to your clients all the time: why should they spend hours wrangling with the numbers when it's not what they went into business to do? We say the same to you. If writing and branding isn't your thing, don't spend hours struggling to put a blog together or tinkering with colour palettes – ask an expert to do it for you, and use your time doing what you're best at.

Money Penny provides call and live chat solutions to hundreds of accountancy practices and is trusted by the UK's top accounting firms, including eight of the Top 20.





PracticeWeb

PracticeWeb has been a leading digital marketing agency in the accounting sector since 1999. We're proud to be a part of the AccountingWEB and Accounting Excellence family, helping to support, celebrate and nurture the UK's ambitious and diverse accountants.

Over the past 24 years PracticeWeb has been trusted by almost 400 firms around the UK - joining the dots between business and marketing to deliver branding, websites, content and SEO to help connect firms to the people that matter.

For more information on how PracticeWeb can support you and your firm visit www.practiceweb.co.uk

moneypenny

Established in 2000, Moneypenny is the world's market leader for Telephone Answering, Live Chat, Outsourced Switchboard, and customer contact solutions. More than 21,000 businesses globally benefit from Moneypenny's mix of extraordinary people and ground-breaking technology.

For more information about how Moneypenny supports the accountancy sector, visit www.moneypenny.com/uk/accountancy-answering-services/

Thank you for reading

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