Websites for Care Homes - A guide

CareStudio

Marketing for Care Homes

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Introduction

Today, we don't need to tell you that your care home needs a website. The internet is the first place nearly 100% of people will hit when in the research phase of their care journey. Here are a the foundational reasons you need a website and what to be thinking about in terms of content:

Firstly, it allows a home to provide important information about its services and facilities to potential residents and their families. This includes details on accommodation, care options, staff qualifications, and pricing (or not, depending on your pricing strategy).

Secondly, a website can serve as a platform for communication between the home and residents' families, with updates on events, activities, and health and wellbeing being regularly posted within a news section.

Thirdly, a well thought through website helps to build trust and credibility for a care home, with testimonials from current and former residents and their families, photos and videos of the facilities, and information about the home's history and values.

Finally, a website is the best place for a care home to stand out in a competitive market, attracting more residents and increasing revenue. It's important, therefore, that your website really represents who you are and what you do in an authentic way. Does yours?

Laying the Foundations Understanding Website Basics

In the digital age, having a website for your care business is crucial. However, if you are new to website development, it can be overwhelming to know where to start. Here, we will cover the basics of website development and what you need to consider when creating a website for your care business.

Domain Name and Hosting

The first step in creating a website is to purchase a domain name and hosting. A domain name is the web address that people will use to find your website (e.g. www.yourcarebusiness.com). Hosting is the service that stores your website files and makes them accessible on the internet. When choosing a domain name, keep it simple, easy to remember, and relevant to your business. Hosting services can vary in cost and features, so do your research to find the best option for your needs.

Design and Layout

The design and layout of your website is important, as it will affect how users interact with your site. When designing your website, choose a clean and simple layout that is easy to navigate. Consider the colour scheme, font, and images you want to use, and make sure they are consistent throughout your site. Keep in mind that your website should be accessible to all users, including those with disabilities, so make sure it is easy to read and navigate with assistive technologies.

Content

The content of your website is what will attract and inform potential customers. Your website should include information about your services, facilities and you could also use it to attract staff. You should include testimonials from current and former customers to build trust and credibility. Use clear and concise language, and make sure your content is easy to read and understand.

It is really important before you start your website project that you collect all your content into one place, ideally in cloud storage. This way, when you are engaging a web developer (or if you're doing it in-house) everyone is clear from the start about what content is available. It is the most important part of your website and understanding what you have and what you need at the outset saves a lot of time later on and helps the project flow and be delivered on time.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

Search Engine Optimization, or SEO, is the process of optimizing your website to rank higher in search engine results. This is important, as it can increase the visibility of your website and attract more potential customers. To optimize your website for SEO, you should include relevant keywords in your content, use descriptive titles and meta descriptions, and make sure your website is mobile-friendly.

SEO Options

1. **Keywords** Keywords are the foundation of SEO. They are the words and phrases that people use when searching for something online. For example, if you run a care home, your keywords might include phrases like "care home," "elderly care," and "assisted living." To optimize your website for SEO, you need to include these keywords in your website content, meta descriptions, and page titles.

2. **Meta Descriptions** Meta descriptions are short summaries of your web pages that appear in search engine results pages. They provide a brief overview of what your page is about and why someone should click on it. To optimize your meta descriptions for SEO, you should include your keywords and make them compelling and engaging.

3. **Page Titles** Page titles are the titles of your web pages that appear in search engine results pages. They should be concise and descriptive, and they should include your keywords. Page titles are important for both SEO and user experience because they help people understand what your page is about.

4. **Content** Content is king when it comes to SEO. Your website content should be informative, engaging, and helpful to your target audience. To optimize your content for SEO, you should include your keywords in your text, headings, and image alt tags. However, it's important to avoid keyword stuffing, which means using your keywords excessively in your content. This can actually hurt your SEO because search engines see it as spammy.

5. **Backlinks** Backlinks are links from other websites to your website. They are important for SEO because they signal to search engines that other websites consider your content to be valuable and trustworthy. To improve your backlink profile, you can reach out to other websites in your industry and ask them to link to your content. You can also create high-quality content that people naturally want to link to.

6. **Site Speed** Site speed is an important factor in SEO because search engines prioritize websites that load quickly. To improve your site speed, you can optimize your images, minify your code, and use a content delivery network (CDN).

7. **Mobile Optimization** Mobile optimization is also important for SEO because more and more people are using their mobile devices to search the web. To optimize your website for mobile devices, you should use responsive design, which means that your website adapts to the size of the user's screen.

Check with your developer what is included with the website build. There are some things that they will be able to help with (site speed, mobile optimization) which are linked to the construction of the site. There are many agencies that deal only in SEO and offer various levels of service. It should be an ongoing practice, and you should review your site's performance and set future goals at least once a year, ideally more.

Creating a website for your care business can seem daunting, but it is a valuable investment and should form the centrepiece of your branding and marketing operation. By understanding these basics, it will help you to ask better questions at the outset, and help you to understand the deliverables of the project.

What Is A CMS?

A CMS, or Content Management System, is a software application that allows users to create, manage, and publish digital content on a website without the need for extensive technical knowledge. It provides a user-friendly interface for creating and editing content, organizing it into pages or posts, and publishing it to the website.

A CMS can also handle website design, allowing users to choose from pre-built templates or create their own. Popular CMS platforms include WordPress, Joomla, and Drupal. You may decide to manage the website in-house, or you may engage an agency to do so for you. We use Wordpress and provide training for you to manage it, so whatever you decide, you'll be able to keep your website up-to-date simply and without fuss.
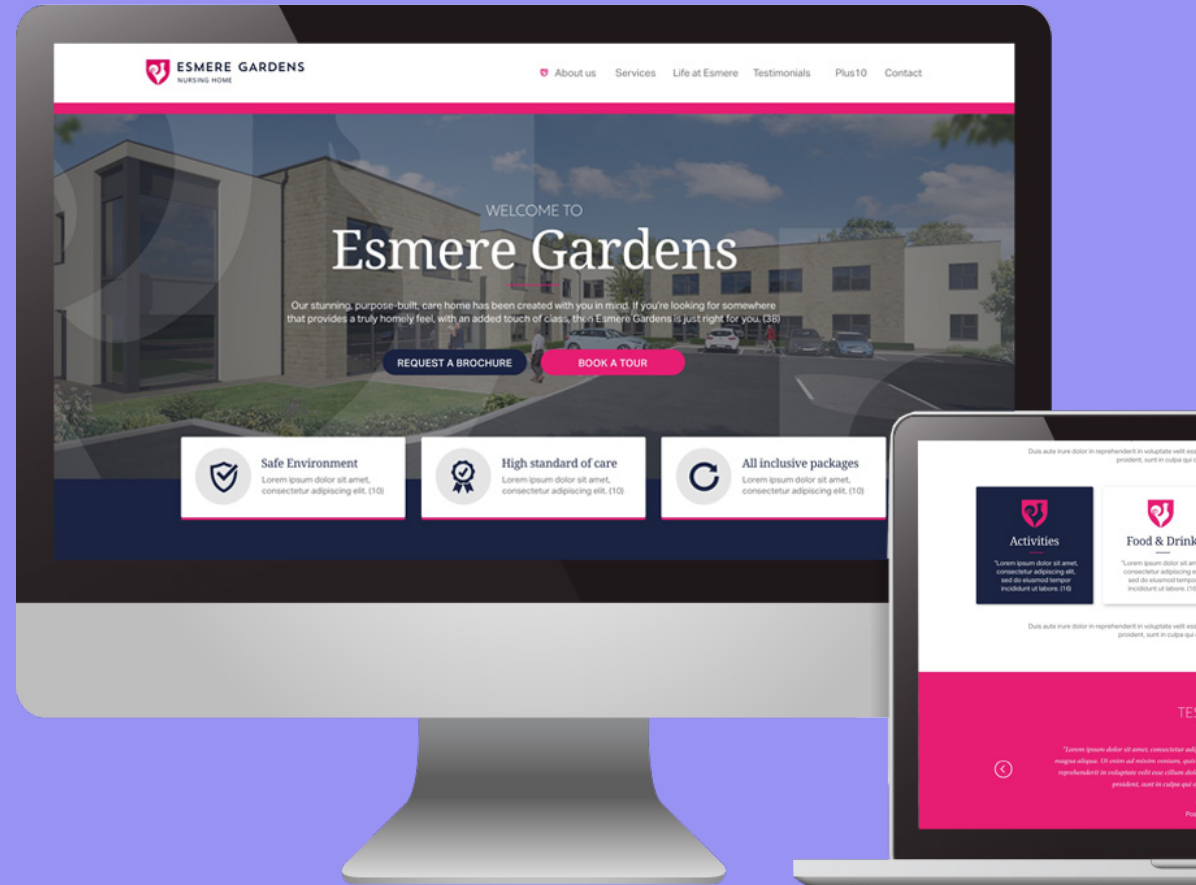
Designing & Building Your Site

Even if you don't plan to do this yourself, many of our clients find it really useful to have an overview of the processes we employ throughout the project. Here is an overview of how we kick off a website project:

1. **Define the project goals and requirements** Before you start creating wireframes, it's important to understand the project goals, target audience, and specific requirements.

2. **Conduct research** Research similar websites or competitors to get an idea of what works and what doesn't. This will help you to create better wireframes.

3. **Create a sitemap** Create a sitemap to organize the website's pages and content.

4. **Sketch initial wireframes** Sketch out rough wireframes that include the basic layout and structure of each page.

5. **Review and iterate** Review the initial wireframes with stakeholders and make changes as needed. Repeat this process until all stakeholders are satisfied with the wireframes. Remember to not try and

invent the wheel, and don't get bogged down in minor detail at this stage.

6. **Create digital wireframes** Create digital wireframes using software such as Sketch, Adobe XD, or Figma. Digital wireframes will give you a better idea of how the website will look and function. We use Adobe XD.

7. **Validation** You should always validate the wireframes with the developer to ensure they are feasible to implement. Missing out this part of the process can result in the design you wanted or more expense.

8. **Hand off to the design team** Once the wireframes are finalized and validated, they can be handed off to the design team for further development.

9. **Test** Test the website to ensure it meets the project goals, requirements, and user needs.
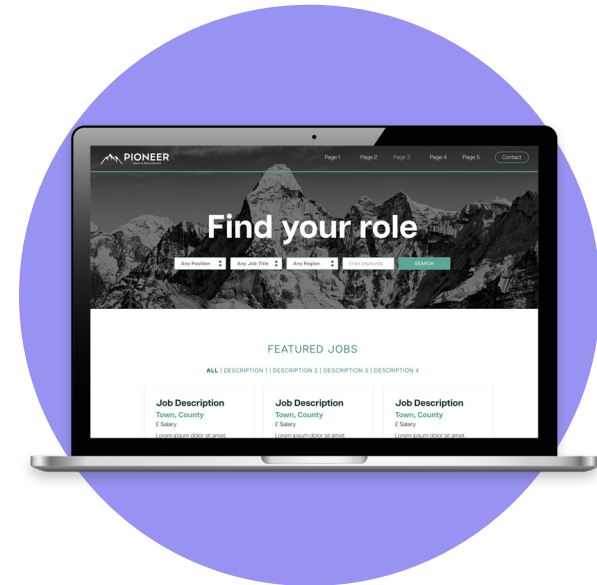
This is an example of a workflow, they will differ depending on who you are working with. If you can create website wireframes that accurately represent the website's structure and functionality, and that meet the needs of all stakeholders, it makes the rest of the project smoother.

The Importance of Authenticity

Authentic content is crucial for any care home website because it helps to build trust and credibility with potential residents, their families, and other stakeholders. In the care sector, people are often making difficult decisions about the wellbeing of their loved ones, and they need to feel confident that they are making the right choice.

By showcasing authentic content such as real photos, videos, and testimonials from current residents and their families, a care home can also demonstrate its commitment to transparency and honesty. This can also help to differentiate the care home from competitors who may rely on generic stock images or marketing language.

Ultimately, by providing authentic and informative content, a care home website can help potential residents and their families make informed decisions and feel confident in their choice of care provider. When they arrive for a show-round, if it looks like it did on the website, it puts potential customers at ease.

Integrating Features for Improved User Experience

Virtual Tours

Virtual tours have become increasingly popular in recent years, and they offer numerous benefits to care homes.

Firstly, virtual tours allow potential residents and their families to get a realistic sense of the care home's facilities, amenities, and services without physically visiting the premises. This can be particularly beneficial for those who live far away or have mobility issues.

Secondly, virtual tours can help care homes to showcase their unique selling points and stand out from competitors in a crowded market.

Thirdly, virtual tours can save time and resources for care home staff by reducing the need for in-person tours and allowing staff to focus on providing high-quality care to residents. Overall, virtual tours are a valuable tool for care homes to enhance their online presence, attract prospective residents, and communicate their commitment to transparency and quality care.

Live Chat

Chatboxes on care home websites can be a useful tool for providing quick and convenient customer service to website visitors. Pros of chatboxes include the ability to answer questions in real-time, personalized communication, and the potential to increase website engagement and conversions. Chatboxes can also help to reduce call volumes and email inquiries, freeing up staff time to focus on other tasks.

However, there are also some cons to consider. Chatboxes can be expensive to implement and maintain, and they may not be suitable for all care homes depending on their size and resources. Additionally, chatboxes may not be able to provide the same level of personal touch and empathy as face-to-face interactions, and there may be concerns around data privacy and security. There are many on the market, your developer may already be familiar with a particular brand. We use Chat For Business who offer four tiers of service, starting free.

Compliance

GDPR Compliance To cover all of your GDPR requirements, we recommend using a third party like Cookie Pro. It takes the need to think about it out of your hands and leaves your website covered. Other providers and plans are available.

Care Quality Commission Requirements

Make sure that you are aware of any stipulations from CQC about what you can/can't and must display on your website and where. As a matter of course, we include their rating widget for you either on the homepage of a single home site, or on the home's individual page if it is a group site.

Unfortunately the design of this is set by CQC and must be kept the same – we cannot change it.

Landing Pages

A landing page is a web page that is specifically designed to encourage a visitor to take a particular action, such as filling out a form or making a purchase. Typically, a landing page is created as part of a marketing campaign and serves as the first point of contact between a potential customer and a business.

They are often used to promote a specific product or service, and they typically include a clear and compelling call-to-action that encourages visitors to take the desired action. The design and content of a landing page are carefully crafted to engage visitors and provide them with the information they need to make a decision about whether or not to take the desired action. For care homes we suggest that it is one or more of the following:

1. Download brochure
2. Arrange show-round
3. Request Callback
4. Contact the home

Often it is better to keep calls to action (CTAs) to a minimum and focus on what you want from the user. A name, email and telephone number with a description of the resident's needs is ideal.

Maintenance, Security and Performance

Ongoing website maintenance is critical for ensuring that your website remains functional, secure, and up-to-date. Regular maintenance can help to identify and fix issues before they become major problems that could potentially harm your business. It can also help to ensure that your website remains optimized for search engines and user experience, which can improve your online visibility and attract more visitors to your site.

Additionally, ongoing maintenance can help to protect your website from security threats and hacking attempts, which can be detrimental to your business and reputation. Overall, investing in ongoing website maintenance is a smart and necessary decision for any business that wants to maintain a successful online presence. Most developers will offer various levels of website maintenance. Check this at the outset of the project so that you can effectively budget for the future of the site.

The Future of Care Home Websites

The future of care home websites will be towards a more immersive experience, employing sophisticated virtual and augmented reality, which can allow users to explore care homes and facilities from the comfort of their own homes in a way which enables the user to gain a better sense of the environment.

Other important technologies that are starting to impact care home websites right now include voice search, chatbots, and artificial intelligence, which can all help to enhance the user experience and improve engagement.
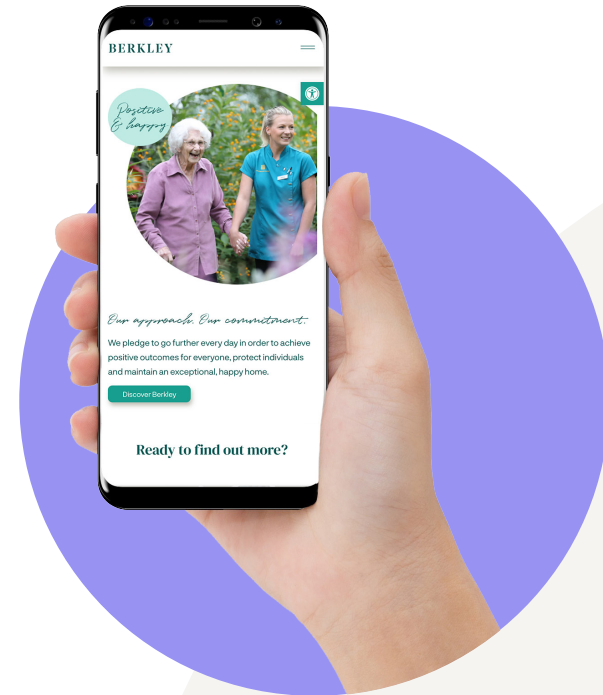
Contact Us

It's easy to say, right? But it's often harder to get started. There are many companies who can help you with all of these steps. We have been assisting care companies with this for over a decade. If you'd like to get started on your own, or just hear a little bit more about how we can help, arrange your 20 minute chemistry call today.

If you'd like to know more about our other services, you can also download free e-books on:

1. Branding & Identity for Care Homes
2. Websites for Care Homes (this doc)
3. Marketing for care Homes
4. Mission, Values & Culture - support for care businesses.

All are available to download at
care.studio

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Let's talk about marketing your care home

Email us at:
hello@care.studio

Or call us on:
01386 57 11 77