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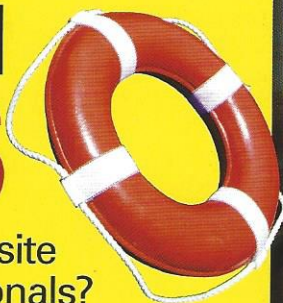
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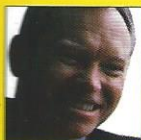
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DESIGN SOS



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- HELP FOR BUSINESSES IN THE SOUTH EAST
- STRIKE THE RIGHT WORK-LIFE BALANCE



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Web clinic

THREE WAYS TO SPEND £1,500 ENHANCING THE CREDIBILITY OF AN ESTATE AGENCY VIA ITS WEBSITE

THE BRIEF

BUDGET: £1,500

WWW.MARSHALLVIZARD.COM



THE SITE

Marshall Vizard is a residential estate agency based in Watford, Hertfordshire. The agency was started up in January 2003 by its two owners and partners, Neil Marshall and David Vizard. It handles sales, lettings and property management. The website includes a home page and online forms that enable potential buyers to request details of suitable properties and sellers to request a valuation. All the agency's sale and rental properties are listed via the Find A Property service (www.findaproperty.com).

THE PROJECT

Marshall Vizard is a new company, which hopes to distinguish itself from its competitors by combining traditional values with modern business practices. For example, it works to a 'no minimum term' sole agency contract, in contrast to the usual practice among estate agents of committing clients to a 12 week exclusive agreement. "If you instruct us to sell your property, we will act for you only as long as you are happy," claim Marshall and Vizard on the site. As Marshall Vizard is not as well known as its more established competitors in Watford, it wants its website to communicate its unique message more effectively so that potential buyers and sellers gain a positive first impression of the agency and are therefore more inclined to make contact.

PITCH 1

REBRANDED

JASON WILLIAMS DESIGNER, WWW.REBRANDED.CO.UK

IDENTIFYING THE NEED TO promote your business on the internet is one of the first steps to establishing a comprehensive marketing strategy. Operating in such a tightly packed market, Marshall Vizard must embark on creating a local profile as a foundation before then branching out into a larger awareness campaign.

Marshall Vizard has identified a need to provide a website that not only presents its image as a vibrant new estate agency, but also dispels the old image of its trade by running a transparent, client-oriented business.

Raising its profile can be done simply by advertising its URL on every piece of company literature and placing the URL on sales boards. Adverts in local newspapers are also a great way of beginning the process. Potential buyers will perhaps notice a property they like but not have the time to visit Marshall Vizard's office. Instead, knowing the URL, they'll be able

to look up the property online at a later time. Taking this scenario on board, the website must provide as much information as possible regarding properties and other essential information.

The existing website fails to grab the user's interest and also fails to deliver the message that Marshall Vizard wants to get across. A clean and crisp layout showing enticing homes and interiors would not only grab interest but also give the user an idea of the types of properties available throughout the website. Exterior images of the property can be linked to a separate page providing all the information available, including interior layout pictures.

The user forms would benefit from being streamlined into



■ Rebranded created a fresh and clean look for the hair and skin clinic www.staceystyle.co.uk

distinctive forms that provide 'pick lists' and dropdowns to narrow the field. A mailing list is also essential to circulate a monthly or weekly newsletter of properties.

Database-driven websites can provide all of the above. With a database-driven site, information would only need to be supplied to the database, as the pre-coded templates would display the images and information in the allocated areas when requested by the user. This is a simple and effective way of providing the information that a user would require.

The combination of a database-driven website with new media design and clean and crisp pages will provide Marshall Vizard with an interactive, attractive website. ■



"The agency must embark on creating a local profile as a foundation before then branching out into a larger awareness campaign" JASON WILLIAMS

SUMMARY

- Design and layout: £500
 - Database: £800
 - Additional marketing analysis: £200
- TOTAL £1,500**



"As Marshall Vizard is not as well known as its more established local competitors, its owners want the website to communicate its unique message more effectively"

PITCH 2

KATY WHITTON

KATY WHITTON PROPRIETOR, WWW.KATYWHITTON.CO.UK

MARSHALL VIZARD IS in a reasonably strong position through the use of affiliate programs that list its properties on several of the major property search engines in the country.

However, I feel its own search engine rankings could be improved through the use of extra metadata and search engine submissions, giving visitors access to the Marshall Vizard site directly.

The website itself, while showing the visitor the relevant

agents, alongside customer testimonials regarding the level of service received. All of these can be used to improve search engine rankings and encourage visitors to stay longer and visit more often.

A text-based email is sent out two or three times a week, listing relevant properties that have been selected by the recipient. At the moment Marshall Vizard attaches a Word document to the email containing the property details.

I would suggest that it moves



■ Katy carried out a site revamp for www.director-e.com along the lines proposed here for Marshall Vizard

house type and price band, will give more targeted results. This will make each visit more productive.

At the moment there is little in the way of content on the Marshall Vizard site to draw



"Search engine rankings could be improved through the use of extra metadata and search engine submissions"

KATY WHITTON

information, could do with an update of both content and design. Updating the colour scheme and extending navigation to allow easier access to relevant properties could improve the design of the site from a usability standpoint.

In terms of content, I would recommend a complete revamp including new sections such as local area information, staff profiles, a buyers' guide and an AQ page.

I also suggest extending the existing company profile on the home page to further stress the difference between Marshall Vizard and 'traditional' estate

over to an HTML-format email, which would contain the relevant property details within the email and thereby negate the need for a Word attachment.

Marshall Vizard could publicise the newsletter by placing details of it prominently on the home page, having a sample copy available for viewing and allowing the user to save searches that could then be used to send them future marketing properties.

Increasing the functionality of the property search engine by allowing the user to select from a variety of options, such as

visitors back if they do not initially find a property they are interested in. Improved content and functionality will make the site stand out from its local competitors and increase the return-rate to the site. ■

SUMMARY

- Site redesign, including improved navigation and new sections: £700
- Improve and rewrite copy: £200
- HTML newsletter templates: £100
- Improve internal search engine: £400
- Search engine registration and site metadata: £100

TOTAL £1,500

LEARNING POINTS

■ DATABASE-DRIVEN WEBSITES

This is a useful way of maintaining websites that need to change on a frequent basis. Individual pages do not need to be amended each time; instead, the website operator just updates a database. When that page is next requested by a user the web page pulls the revised information from the database and inserts that revised information at its predetermined position. There are a variety of available technologies for building database-driven sites – PHP, JSP, ASP, Perl and Cold Fusion are examples and each has advantages.

■ HTML NEWSLETTERS

Text-only newsletters have certain limitations. They are often difficult to read – for example, the lack of structure means it can be difficult to spot interesting headlines or content. The lack of white space can also make them tough to read. Another downside compared with the HTML format is that you cannot include images, videos, or HTML features such as forms. All you can do is to put these features on your website and place links to them within your text-only email.

■ NEW EMAIL LEGISLATION

If you decide to produce an email newsletter be aware of new UK email legislation, which came into force in December 2003. One of the new requirements is that you need to secure permission from people first before you send them emails. You'll find a full summary of the new provisions at www.webcertain.com/email-european-law.html.



■ New email rules have placed more pressure on direct marketers

Web clinic

THREE WAYS TO SPEND £1,500 ENHANCING THE CREDIBILITY OF AN ESTATE AGENCY VIA ITS WEBSITE

PITCH 3

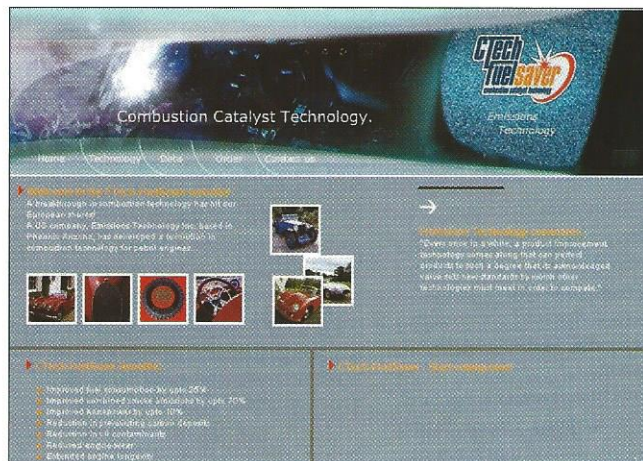
JAVLIN

NICK WALLWORK MANAGING DIRECTOR, WWW.JAVLIN.NET

IT IS IMPORTANT TO TAKE every visitor to the website on a journey, so that at the end they have a positive feeling about your company and want to do business with you. On this note we recommend having testimonials and FAQ pages, where Marshall Vizard can show these new site visitors what the business has achieved and how its working philosophy is different from that of traditional estate agents.

Examples of clients whose house sales really benefited from the 'no minimum term' contracts will help to give Marshall Vizard credibility and new visitors the confidence to use its services.

We feel that the website needs a total redesign, as there is a lot of text on the initial pages, which would deter some potential visitors. We would



■ Javlin created a better first impression for www.C-Tech-FuelSaver.com, with Flash movie graphics reflecting the high tech sector it operates in

Javlin has carried out a similar website revamp for a customer who needed a high tech image for the fuel-saving product it sells. Here Flash movie graphics help to get

while providing a valuable service to its clients.

Marshall Vizard is not portraying itself correctly through this website. One of our designs would drastically



"The existing website's design is clunky, with weak graphics and inconsistent formatting"

NICK WALLWORK

carry out a copy revamp to get Marshall Vizard's message across more clearly so that it really stands out when the visitor first hits the page.

As far as the look and feel of the site goes, we could significantly improve the agency's image by creating a clean and simple site that is easy to navigate. The existing website's design is clunky, with weak graphics and inconsistent text formatting. First impressions are very important when it comes to website design and this is where the agency's image can be transformed.

the visitor excited about the product on offer (an HTML version is also available for lower bandwidth visitors). The new site has proved a huge success for the customer, C-Tech-FuelSaver.

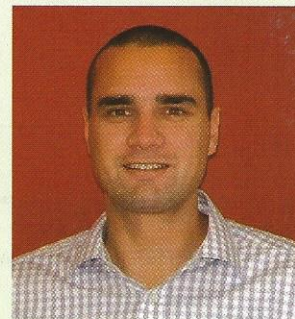
To tie in with the new-look Marshall Vizard website we would suggest creating an email newsletter for all existing clients and visitors that sign up through the site. This would be designed with the same professional look and feel and would portray the image and business philosophy that Marshall Vizard is targeting,

improve this situation. Twinned with an effective opt-in newsletter, it could easily rise above the local competition and get its unique approach across to potential clients. ■

SUMMARY

- Site redesign, working on initial new draft until design is agreed then using that as a basis for the rest of the site: £1,100
 - Content and copy revamp: £150
 - E-newsletter research, design and composition: £250 (price for first issue)
- TOTAL £1,500**

THE VERDICT



NEIL MARSHALL PARTNER
MARSHALL VIZARD

It is always interesting to hear different perspectives on how your company image is portrayed and in general I think that the three companies picked up on different areas for us to improve on.

The advice that I would like to take from Rebranded is the need for a crisp and clean layout. We already have our website address on all our stationery, literature and boards. Also, because we upload the full property information, we often redirect telephone callers to the site for property details.

"The idea of an email newsletter could work well as a method of marketing to keep in touch with old as well as new clients"

Katy Whitton has ascertained that we already advertise on a number of different affiliate programs, but believes that we could increase our own search rankings plus add more information about the company, giving a 'weightier' feel.

Javlin has given similar suggestions to Katy's, although the idea of an email newsletter could work well as a method of marketing to keep in touch with old as well as new clients.

It would keep us in their minds after the transaction has completed as well as remind them to refer us to their friends.

I think that Katy Whitton's suggestions and recommendations would provide the best fit with the company image that we are trying to portray. ■