



Net gain for engineers

Paul Harper

Many engineering companies have something special to talk about but often do not have the time or the knowledge of how to publish such information on the Internet. A low cost, template based, website implementation system that can be set up and changed by the site owner when necessary overcomes this problem.

Increasingly, business people are using the Internet to find what they want. As such businesses are expected to have a website. With the wide availability of Broadband plus easy set up options there are no economic or practical reasons not to have a presence on the 'net'.

A website will help to streamline a business: in essence it is a brochure that can change as the company changes. A site which is run correctly will be up-dated as often as a business changes. The website should be mentioned at every opportunity during the company's daily business.

Potential and existing customers contacting a company should be told:

- You can find the full technical specification on our website.
- Directions to our offices/factory are published on our website.
- All of my contact details are on my website.
- Photographs of our products are shown on the company's website.

Design costs

A web designer will typically charge about £2000 for setting up a standard site. Britnett, a specialist Internet development company, offers a pre-

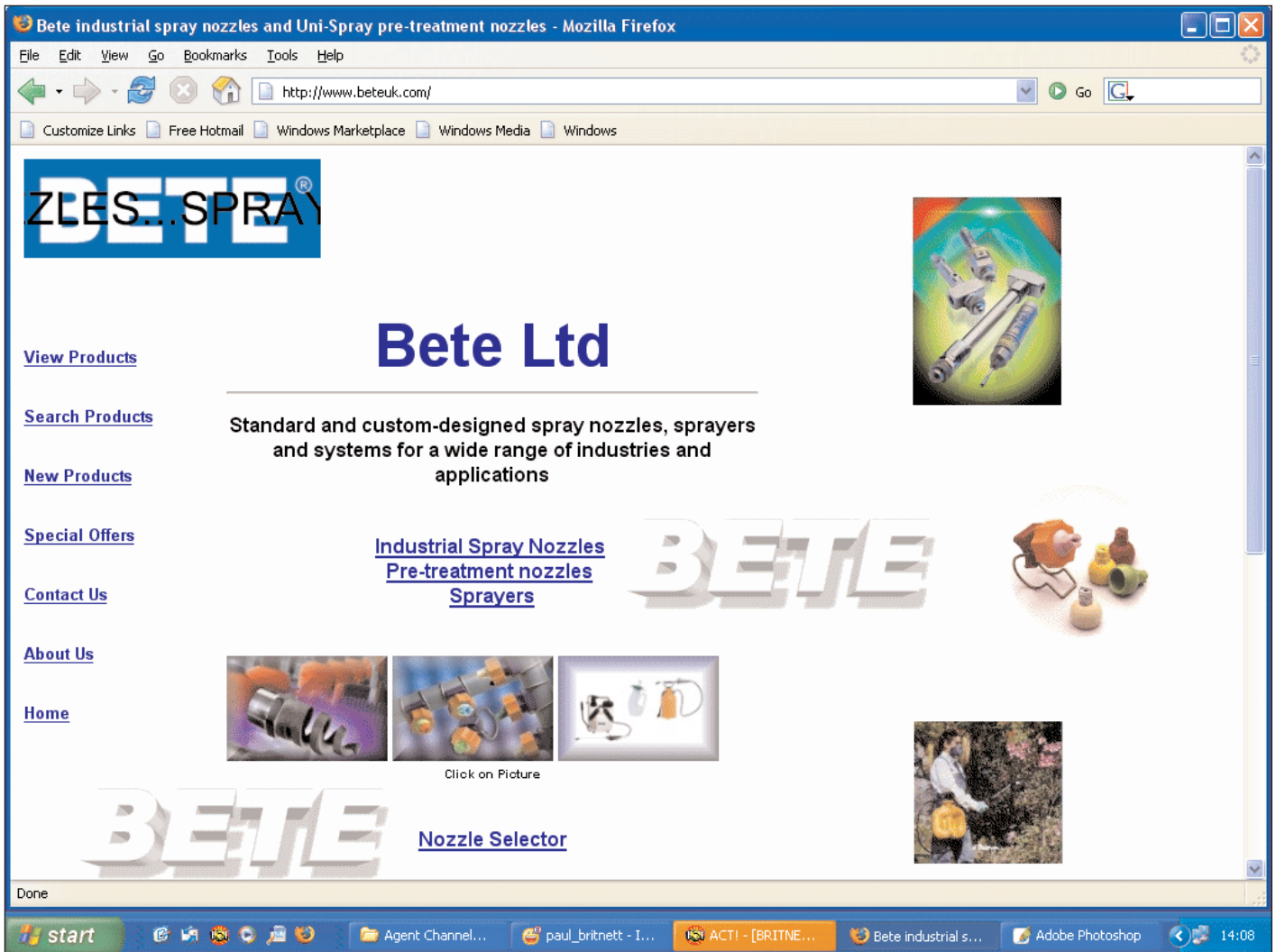
made tried-and-tested template website and publishes it on the Internet for an average charge of £900.

A company's details, logo, and other information can be incorporated and, once set up, the site can be quickly and simply edited at any time from any connected personal computer at no additional cost. If a company cannot find the time to make its own changes Britnett can make them through its network of local authorised agents who are available to help with any changes.

Uploading

Once a site has been created on a PC it needs to be uploaded to the Internet. A template website can be uploaded and changes edited in afterwards and this means the client does not have to upload files. However, if the client wishes to set up its own site from scratch it must contact its Internet Service Provider to obtain the details of the publishing procedure.

With the template system most sites are edited and ready within 21 days and the mechanics of the site will go live on the Internet within three working days.



Return on investment

A correctly run business website will start to provide a return on investment the same day that it goes live providing it is set up and used correctly. This means the website should be integrated into the business by:

- Informing all staff of the essential basics - site address, e-mail address, and what information can be accessed by a visitor to the website.
- Informing existing clients that the website is up and running and explaining to them what they will find when they visit it.
- Including the website address in all literature and every means of communication, including the answerphone.
- Publishing a FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) page on the site along with the answers.

All enquirers should be directed to the FAQ page. This will save the website operator time in explaining and allow the enquirer to print the answer - this is a great time-saver if the enquirer is simply asking for directions to a location. If the site is used in this way it will become a truly effective business tool.

In order to measure the effectiveness of a website a counter or statistics package should be incorporated which will record the number of people who are visiting the site. The package available free from Britnett shows how many times each page has been visited and which route the visitor used to find the site i.e. via 'Google' or some other link.

It also is essential that visitors to the site are asked how they found out about its existence.

Remember: a website is not only helpful in the generation of new clients it also is designed to help current clients.

Maintenance

Britnett maintains all client sites. Every month each site is scanned in order to detect obvious faults, such as broken links, and fix them. The owner should also check his or her site frequently.

Once the initial set-up fee is paid ongoing costs for maintenance are small; typically, between £20 and £50 a month for an average site.

Owners should also make sure that their websites are always up to date. Equally important is that their

businesses can be located in the most widely used Internet search engines. Buyers seeking suppliers will, for example, search 'Google' for ideas. If a company does not have a website or, worse still, it has one which cannot be found in a search engine then there is no chance of buyers getting in touch.

Every business can now make the Internet work for them. A simple and easy to maintain website can improve an engineering company's sales, development, communications, customer service and even assist in market research.

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