

This case-study charts the development of a website for a pair of ceramics artists, carried out by artcraftweb.co.uk.

Whatever your art form is, many of the activities and decisions described here will apply to the process of establishing your own website.

*Terms in italics* are explained in more detail on my website, at [www.artcraftweb.co.uk/faq.html](http://www.artcraftweb.co.uk/faq.html). I hope you find this case-study useful!



### Where do we begin?

My question to the artist is always – what do you want your new website to do for you?

- Do you want to be able to sell online, for example?
- Do you want a website that will act as your entire online 'presence' or do you want a simpler 'catalogue' site that will augment your presence on other art-sales websites?
- Do you expect to be able to update your site yourself, or do you prefer to leave that in the hands of your friendly local website developer?
- Will your website sell services, like tuition or art holidays, as well as your work?

The answers to these questions define the scope of what is needed, which has a bearing on the cost, and to clarify what your expectations are.

Another key early step is deciding on the *domain name* – or web address – to be registered. This is a critical decision.

Like naming a child, it has long-lasting implications and deserves thought in advance!

A good rule of thumb for a domain name is to consider these pieces of information:

- Your name (or)
- Your professional name
- Your art or craft form
- Any geographical factors which are especially relevant
- Terms or names for your work as used by others

We can test out various combinations of these and check for any variants that are already *registered*. There are many further guidelines that should be applied during this process – like avoiding hyphens or un-common characters or numbers if possible.

Part of the job of the web specialist is to help you arrive at a memorable and relevant web domain which is sufficiently unique to avoid being mistaken for another in the same market.

For the website described here, we chose [jeremywhiteceramics.co.uk](http://jeremywhiteceramics.co.uk) as good compromise: perhaps a little long, but memorable, including the word 'ceramics' and featuring the artist's name; we selected the *co.uk domain extension* as suitably business-like.

## Categorising the work

We want the visitor to your site to quickly grasp what you do, and be able to navigate around the whole site.

A key task early on is to find a logical way to categorise and divide your work.

This is where the 3<sup>rd</sup> person viewpoint of the web designer is a real boon.

It's vital to consider what will make sense to the visitor who may know little or nothing about your work!

The objective is to create a sense of ranges of works, rather than random arrays of pieces, to

encourage a sense of exploration, and to aid orientation for the unfamiliar visitor.

For [jeremywhiteceramics.co.uk](http://jeremywhiteceramics.co.uk), a logical classification emerged during a review of all the work made by the artists.

This resulted in 4 easy-to-understand collections of pieces, grouped by virtue of their common characteristics.

Since that point a further 'collection' has been added, and the home page will be developed to incorporate this.



## Agree the basics

At this stage we'll agree the other essential content areas:

- news (to keep the site fresh)
- events and exhibitions
- about me / us (to sell your skills and introduce a personal element)
- provide ways to reinforce sales channels or outlets
- and a home page which sums up what the site offers quickly to new visitors

We will also agree the tone of voice to be used throughout the site and decide the timescale for the work to be completed.

*Menu bar with distinct collections:*

[home](#) : [about us](#) : [mugs & jugs](#) : [flasks & vases](#) : [bowls & pots](#) : [black & white](#) : [tiles & hangings](#) : [where to buy](#) : [news & events](#) : [contact us](#)

## Decide trial layout and visual details

Equipped with the information, categories of work and the areas of additional content, we can begin to think about layout.

[artcraftweb.co.uk](http://artcraftweb.co.uk) offers a range of *templates* that can be adopted or adapted for your website.

These speed up development and help to keep the cost low.

Of course it's always possible to start from scratch, or adapt a design you have in mind.

The criteria we'll need to be aware of include:

- how often the site will be updated
- the variety of what's on offer
- the need for appropriate images
- achieving a blend of text and images
- the internet browser and screen sizes in common use
- colours and hero products to be used as 'visual signatures'
- presenting a range of work without being confusing, but without needing too many pages to show them all on
- if an existing template is suitable
- providing menu navigation options and ensuring navigation can be *spidered* by *Search Engines*
- using *CSS* to ensure consistent appearance, font treatment and to provide sub-conscious orienteering clues.

When building [jeremywhiteceramics.co.uk](http://jeremywhiteceramics.co.uk), I adapted a template I had previously created.

This offers a layout that allows for multiple pieces on one page and provides space for general information about the range.

It also enables specific text information about each piece to be shown.

Artists' websites often neglect to provide text to support the images, which is frustrating for human visitors and for search engine crawlers alike!



It was clear that the range of work was developing rapidly; I wanted to be able to update and develop what's on show each month, quickly and simply. This particular design will also permit adding online selling in the future if needed, without re-designing the whole layout.

### Gathering the 'about us' content

Buying or commissioning art is a highly personal activity – we like to know something about the people creating the things we see.

Collecting the information for this section gives me a good feel for what makes your work unique, and provides a direction for the tone of the site and for the email newsletters I create each month.

For [jeremywhiteceramics.co.uk](http://jeremywhiteceramics.co.uk) I visited the artists and collected a comprehensive library of images and information about their techniques.

Future developments may include short video clips of work being made and demonstrations being given – further ways to promote the craft and skill involved.



## Deciding images and formats

Artist's websites often use too many images on one page, or feature images which are too large and take a long time to download, or use images of low resolution.

The job of structuring a website so that pages look consistent, offer enough space for the work and supporting text, and don't frustrate visitors with slow downloads or confusing presentation is a skill in its own right. The decisions and information gathering at the early stages is essential for this part of the process.

Some balances and compromises are necessary:

- how large should the thumbnail images be to show what's on offer?
- how many images on one page?
- is one image of each piece enough?
- how should the images be laid out to give a clear sense of range and aid quick comprehension?
- is it appropriate to expect visitors to need a Flash viewer or other proprietary software to see larger images?

Which other images will be needed – to make the site look good, to support navigation, to add richness and a sense of the human creative aspect of your work?

The job of the web designer is to help answer all of these questions, while reflecting your style, your work and your personality!

It's important to consider including some images that will sell the human aspect of what you do – where and how you work, the techniques you use, and your inspiration if possible.

It's well recognised that art buyers buy most from artists with whom they have some contact or rapport. If we can communicate the uniqueness of you and your work we'll be improving the chances of web visitors contact you or coming to see your work.

Thumbnails 200 pixels high were used for the on-page images for the site.

When clicked on, these open into larger images in a new browser window of around 700 pixels high.

The images available included different backgrounds and lighting settings so I grouped like-images together and adjusted brightness and colour balance where necessary to improve consistency.



## Identify key terms used in the work

Although an art website needs to do justice to the artist's work visually, human visitors and search engine spiders both use written content to build an understanding of what you do.

And of course, it's vital to provide information about sizes, media, and prices!

To achieve a balance of images and text, and to ensure the text uses terms that visitors will be searching for in the search engines I will research your subject, and ask you to fill in a questionnaire that will give me the background needed to create draft text content for you.

## Writing draft content

A great advantage of instant web publishing is the ability to upload pages for approval, and change them while reviewing.

This can be done while on the phone or in person, making changes, adding extra information, and checking that the site looks good in a selection of common internet browsers.

When the layout and the tone of the content are settled, the remaining pages will be created and published for review.

The work required to ensure search engines can understand what's on offer is done at the stage too, including submitting what's called a site map to the search engines.

To ensure that [jeremywhiteceramics.co.uk](http://jeremywhiteceramics.co.uk) offers enough detail to reward the visitor, I researched the techniques and the background to the glazes used by Jeremy and structured the text content so that most pages included some factual information that would be new to most visitors.

## Establishing a calendar of updates

To keep your new website fresh, and to encourage visitors to return periodically, we'll agree a calendar of updates – usually monthly.

As your body of work develops, and as you discover what your customers want to see most of, we'll update the site. Keeping the site living and breathing – is vitally important. This is why I always include a year's worth of updates in the price for a new website.

Adding new work, new collections or completely refreshing all the work on the site is all possible – and we'll plan when this should happen so that the necessary development time and your images are all co-ordinated.

The site visitor statistics can tell us which parts of the site are attracting most visitors and how your general marketing activities are performing.

After 3 months, a substantial body of new work was created by Jeremy White and Godfrey Thorpe and it was agreed that these new pieces deserved a page to themselves. Adding a new page based on the existing format is cost effective, and in line with my policy of developing what's on offer as the artist's work develops. This new collection now has a distinct page, and a menu link from all the existing pages, was announced in email newsletters and linked to from news items on the 'News' page.

## Set up an email account to send 'branded' emails for professional appearance

One of the key benefits of having a website is in making your contact with your database more engaging and compelling. Regular emails, not too frequent, always relevant, will prompt your existing customers and all those people you've been in contact with to re-visit your website and see what's new. And if your database is fledgling, then your website gives you the tools and the motive to develop it!

For [jeremywhiteceramics.co.uk](http://jeremywhiteceramics.co.uk), I created an email with a similar graphical banner to the one on the website to prompt recognition.

The monthly emails contain a mix of new pieces, exhibitions, general news and invitations to special events.

They're sent from an email account connected to the web domain, so that emails appear to be received from [www.jeremywhiteceramics.co.uk](http://www.jeremywhiteceramics.co.uk) – not a hotmail account. This is an integral part of the [artcraftweb](http://artcraftweb.com) service.



## Publicising your new website

Often overlooked – create a list of all the people you've done business with and contact them. At the least, they should be on your email database. Ideally they'll agree to add a link to your new site from their site. Of course we'll reciprocate.

These might include:

- Galleries
- Private customers
- Arts councils
- Friends and relations
- Art suppliers and shops
- Professional bodies or art societies
- Teachers and models
- Online art websites where you've shown work
- Fellow artists
- Local and art publications, websites and magazines

A further step is to get in touch with local and arts listings websites and register for inclusion. Not all will be free, but many are.

The final activity is to ensure your site is registered with the major search engines – although the results of this and the search engine optimisation I always do takes time, the sooner it starts the sooner it pays dividends. Ignore those who say they can achieve instant search-engine success – there are no ethical shortcuts and unethical SEO can get your site blocked immediately.

## Summarising the key points to remember when starting out

These are my top ten points to bear in mind when planning a new art website!

1. Agree the scope of the site – catalogue, simple, sell online etc
2. Domain name – make the right choice
3. Hosting decision – protect your online future
4. Be clear about responsibilities and obligations
5. Layout decisions taken to avoid designs that will limit growth for the future
6. Classifying work so it seems logical to the visitor
7. Presenting work well, but in a manageable way
8. Ensuring frequent updates and refreshes
9. Building a sense of exploration which rewards the visitor each time they come
10. Ensuring regular updates and communications with your database of contacts

## Finally

It's my objective to create an effective and updateable website that will present you and your work persuasively.

I aim to do this without you having to know or learn the technicalities.

I also aim to help you market yourself online, and to develop your presence.

I hope this case study has given you some food for thought.

If you'd like to take that vital first step to getting online, do please contact me.

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