

Briefing document: How to assess an audience

Every multimedia product will have an audience type associated with it. That is, the group of people who are most likely to use the product. Finding out who your audience is likely to be can be quite difficult, so some research might be needed. When you know who you are appealing to, you can work with that knowledge in your design.

Steps in audience assessment

- Think about the client brief and the end product in the project you are working on. Make some notes about who you think is most likely to want to visit the website you are about to create. What categories can you think of that would describe your audience? Think of age, gender and other demographic information. Are they likely to be people of a particular social or economic status, or at a particular educational level? These factors might influence the way you present information on your site.
- If you are creating your website for a charity or good cause, the focus for the fundraising campaign will be a factor to consider. If your good cause is for animals, then the audience is likely to be very diverse – lots of different ages and types of people like animals! If you are looking at a good cause that supports children, then your audience may well be older.
- Often the key factor in audience assessment is age. A website dedicated to a rock band from the sixties is likely to have an older audience, made up from those people who followed the band in their teenage years. However, some well established rock bands also have younger followers, who may be the children of the first generation of fans! So it might be that you have two distinct age groups.
- It's easy to be influenced by stereotypes when you are thinking about audience type. You might feel that no one over the age of 25 years is interested in the latest rock sensation, but you could be wrong! Some people who have teenage children might also be embedded in the latest pop or rock culture.

- To really make sure you are assessing your audience properly, collect some data. Devise a simple set of questions and ask a range of different people you know whether they would be interested in your website. You might start off telling them briefly what you are doing ('I am about to build a website for a charity that is committed to raising money for...'). Ask them whether they would visit the site and what sort of information they would like to see.
- Ask a range of people of different ages. Use your friends from school or college, your teachers, parents and their friends. See if you can describe your audience in simple terms from the answers to the questions. So it might be 'only people over 30 would be interested in this website'.
- Use this information in your design as much as you can. It's worth looking again at the research you carried out on other similar multimedia products to see whether that helps in this task. For example, you might have found out that the websites for music acts use particular designs, images or other media that appeal to a particular age group – your age group, perhaps! Look for clues in the design that you might be able to link to particular types of audience.