

## Creating a 404 Error Page

When visitors click on a broken link, or type in the wrong url, do they end up at a Microsoft browser error page ('The page cannot be found'), or a nicely written page on your website apologising and redirecting them to where they want to go? If the latter, then you have a 404 error page set up. If not, then read on.

A 404 page is an error page which appears on your website when a visitor follows a broken link, or has mistyped an address. This page should have the look and feel of your website, apologising to them for the error. If visitors are ending up in browser error page dead ends, then something needs to be done to regain your visitor. Type in the following urls into your browser to see what we mean:

- <http://www.marksandspencer.com/404>
- <http://www.dixons.co.uk/404>
- <http://www.brittanyferries.co.uk/404>

It doesn't look good does it? Not only is it frustrating for the visitor, but you are encouraging them to leave your website for your competitors'.

A good 404 page should let the visitor know that the link they have followed, or address they typed in is broken or the page has been removed. However, it is not the visitor's fault, and you should not make them feel it is. Have a look at what not to put on your error page:

<http://www.c2c-guide.co.uk/404> - this page tells you nothing other than you have made an error, and does not attempt to redirect you back to the website.

<http://www.horseandhound.co.uk/404> - this page also tells the visitor nothing, but to try again. At least the navigation of the website is still on the page.

The following pages are good examples of 404 error pages:

<http://www.deliaonline.com/404> - this error message apologises for the error and offers assistance in finding what the visitor wanted.

<http://www.countrylife.co.uk/404> - this error page gives detailed information and advice on navigating the website, including a site map.

For more information about designing your 404 error page, check out this website:

<http://www.plinko.net/404>

You can add to your error page by offering the visitor a discount, or draw into a competition, for finding the page and keeping them interested in your website.