



# Success Factors for Online IR

## White Paper

### Synopsis:

Investors proceed through an investor journey as they move from initial needs to becoming committed long-term shareholders. As they progress, they will gather data and impressions (messages) from a number of touchpoints.

This white paper identifies the key success factors to maximise the number of investors that progress through each stage of the journey. For each success factor it illustrates the best practice principles and gives some examples of how to address that success factor.

This is the third white paper in the series. Previous white papers addressed the Investor Journey and the Touchpoints, and are available on the IRM website at [www.irmau.com](http://www.irmau.com).



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## Executive Summary

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As investors progress through their journey from identifying initial needs to becoming committed long-term shareholders, they will seek facts and impressions from the company via a number of online touchpoints.

IRM has identified ten key success factors – or best practice principles. These define the key areas in which the online communications strategy needs to perform well, to maximise the progression rates of investors through the stages of the investor journey.

This White Paper discussed the Success Factors in some detail, and illustrates sample issues that arise for consideration under each heading.

Best practice is a function of both investor expectations and the company's willingness to invest in the activities. It's unwise to be too prescriptive about what is success and how should it be achieved, because every company will see the subject differently and will have some special considerations.

Ultimately the decisions about which of the recommendations should be implemented should be made based on budget considerations, and on which are likely to most improve the investors' experience and propensity to positively engage with the company.

At IRM, we are online investor communications specialists. We understand the investor journey, the touchpoints and the success factors.

This is white paper number three in a series. Earlier white papers discuss the Investor Journey, and the Touchpoints investors use as they progress on the journey. The previous white papers are available on the IRM website at [www.irmau.com](http://www.irmau.com).

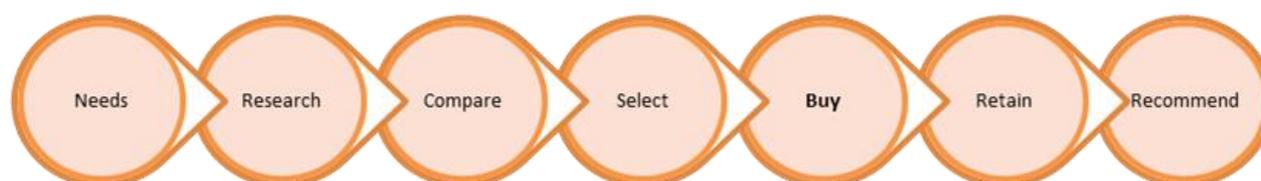
Ten best practice principles	
1	Attract
2	Appeal
3	Navigate
4	Quality
5	Mobile
6	Educate
7	Relate
8	Engage
9	Measure
10	Maintain

## The Investor Journey

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IRM is of the view that investors go through a fairly normal consumer buying process when taking steps towards a buying decision. There are a number of stages in the process, and at each stage they will make a decision about whether to progress to the next – or not. The proportion making the decision at each phase is called a *progression rate*.

We think the investor buying process looks like this:



A great online investor communications strategy will improve progression rates, increasing the number of investors making positive decisions to progress through the stages, ultimately increasing the interest in the stock and supporting a proper price.

## 1. Attract

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Maximising progression at the early buying stages means drawing the *right* traffic to the website.

Many potential investors don't even know our name. If they do, then make sure every variation of the name, ticker code, domain etc ranks at or near the top of Google search. Names of projects and senior executives should also aim to rank well. Where to bury a dead body? Page 2 of Google search.

It's harder to attract *relevant* investors that don't know you. Regularly review how people arrive, and update content to respond to their searches. What's in their mind when searching? Measure search results, and continuously improve.

Every marketing campaign is about beating competitors. Look at how competitors rank on your keywords, and beat them.

Publish links everywhere, including industry, supplier, partner, broker and other websites, in other online media, in ASX Announcements and shareholder communications.

Here are IRM's top three hints for being better at attracting investors:

Subject	Suggestion
Search Overall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>› Most investor sites mainly attract traffic where the visitor knows the company name, website URL or ticker code, or visitors come from a related website.</li></ul>
Unique and Authoritative Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>› Provide comprehensive, unique, readable and authoritative content on the subjects that the company is expert in.</li><li>› Most impact on SEO (search engine optimisation) actually comes from having something to say that is not readily found elsewhere on the internet, and is provided in a form and style that meets Google's guidelines.</li></ul>
Keywords	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>› Sites can usually be improved to attract traffic from searches of other key words.</li><li>› Develop an agreed list of keywords (other than the company name and ticker code) and use them consistently in content on many pages throughout the web site.</li></ul>

A full review from IRM will identify and discuss more than 10 additional aspects of how to *Attract* investors.

## 2. Appeal

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A significant percentage of investor decisions to progress to the next stage of their journey are not based on facts and logic, but are based on emotions and impressions. The emotional appeal must be just as good as the facts.

Use emotional / irrational appeal with impressions and messages. Design, imagery and style are key for about half of investors in early phases. Details, facts and numbers come later.

Make sure the website home page says what we do, and can be easily understood, within a few seconds. Remind visitors on subsequent pages.

The style should be confident, approachable, knowledgeable and current. Make it *better* than expected. Have great messages, deliver them well. Have a powerful investment proposition, clearly presented. Use images, videos, infographics, maps and thumbnails to reinforce messages. Include image / video galleries.

Make your social media posts informative, easy to read, and interesting. They should use the same or similar style as the corporate website.

Make messages great, deliver them well. Have a powerful investment proposition, clearly presented.

Avoid clichés, corporate speak, motherhood and meaningless trendy icons.

Here are IRM's top three hints for being better at appealing to investors:

Subject	Suggestion
Site design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>› A modern, fresh clean corporate website design should be reflected in the home page design and carried through all other pages of the website.</li><li>› Avoid looking old fashioned, out of date or amateurish in the site design, it doesn't create a favourable impression.</li></ul>
Hero Images and tag lines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>› Visitors like a set of large rotating "hero" images on the home page. The images should provide an instant impression of the company's values, products and services.</li><li>› Display a different simple statement (tag line, or elevator statement) on each image, preferably the one that is relevant to that image, to make the home page more engaging and informative</li><li>› Carry through the theme of hero images and tag lines to the banner images used in each section of the site.</li></ul>
Home Page Features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>› On the home page (and possibly in internal pages such as the Investor Welcome page) use an attractive layout to present designed promotional boxes of information about and navigation to the key parts of the site.</li><li>› Present latest news items and a relevant corporate video on the home page to keep it fresh, up to date and interesting.</li></ul>

A full review from IRM will identify and discuss more than 10 additional aspects of how to *Appeal* to investors.

### 3. Navigate

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Investors arrive knowing what they want. The two click rule applies. You have to *sell* the second click; you're not entitled to it. A "scroll down" is a click. If the site doesn't deliver here, you risk losing investors.

Navigation is critical, particularly on the top of the home page. Provide a link to every page right there. A "hover over" doesn't count as a click. Don't be cute about navigation. Investors have been to plenty of other sites, and "know" how to navigate. If you're too different, investors won't find things, and you lose traffic.

On internal pages, remind them where they are, provide full navigation, accessibility and more.

Know which pages are most visited - provide additional ways to direct investors there. Use promo boxes or infographics as navigational buttons. Clear messages will sell the next click, and encourage a decision.

Here are IRM's top three hints for being better at navigating:

Subject	Suggestion
Main Navigation Bar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>› Provide a comprehensive navigation bar on the home page and the same on every internal page.</li><li>› Include navigation to subpages not just main internal pages.</li><li>› Expand the navigation for subpages when moused over.</li><li>› Don't rely on continuous scrolling down to "discover" what's on the site.</li><li>› Make sure the navigation doesn't get cluttered even when it's a large site with many sections and pages.</li></ul>
Internal Page Navigation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>› Provide full navigation to every internal page in the section in a left-hand navigation column. Right hand navigation sometimes doesn't get spotted.</li></ul>
Promo Boxes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>› Provide alternative navigation to the key matters you want investors to notice using prominent promotional boxes, on the home page, the investor welcome page, and elsewhere.</li></ul>

A full review from IRM will identify and discuss more than 10 additional aspects of navigation.

### 4. Quality

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Content needs to be great quality, complete, and current. Well written, well presented and easy to understand. Don't be too technical or tricky with language. Leave the technical things to a downloadable white paper.

Ensure ASX Announcements are available *immediately*. Ten minutes later worsens progression rates. Show headline news on the home page.

Appeal strongly to the utilitarian, logical mind. Be the authority on *all* of the company information, good, bad or indifferent. This invites respect.

Provide *all* of the historical ASX announcements, easily found by type on multiple pages, nicely archived, searchable. Include share price data. Analysts want a download centre. Address specific needs of other target audiences.

Fully explain the business. Don't expect investors to trawl through reports listed in historical sections (e.g. Annual Reports or Presentations) to get the main messages.

Here are IRM's top three hints for better quality:

Subject	Suggestion
Be up to date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Make sure that the site is always up to date.</li> <li>› Reflect the results of ASX Announcements on the site immediately</li> <li>› Any one piece of out-of-date information creates doubt about everything else on the site.</li> </ul>
Be authoritative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› You are the authority on your business and your industry.</li> <li>› Visitors want to learn from your knowledge.</li> <li>› Make sure you present it in a firm and authoritative way which respects the likely knowledge level of the reader.</li> </ul>
Be comprehensive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Make sure that all the information you can give about the company is available on the site</li> <li>› Don't leave investors wondering and needing to go back to a google search to find out something more.</li> </ul>

A full review from IRM will identify and discuss more than 10 additional ways to improve quality.

## 5. Mobile

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A website that does not work on mobile devices is poor for about half the visitors and ranks lower on Google. It also says we don't really care about our visitors.

The website must look great on every phone or tablet (landscape or portrait), browser or screen size. Don't compromise, this is not negotiable. Mobile also means fast, without huge downloads.

Use of Investor Apps for mobile devices is increasing. Apps are attractive and gimmicky and will appeal to some investors. A great attraction is the ability to interact directly with other features on the phone / tablet – e.g. notifications, calendar integration etc. Like all new technologies, apps come with some costs, effort and risks, and are not yet pervasive for investors.

Providing all website pages responsively lessens the need for an App.

Here are IRM's top three hints for mobile:

Subject	Suggestion
Make the main website fully responsive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Provide every page of the website so that it is readily viewed on any mobile device, phone or tablet</li> </ul>
Make sure mobile menus are friendly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Mobile devices usually don't respond well to the navigation methods common for websites</li> <li>› Provide specific menu methods that suit the phone or tablet</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Consider different menu methods for portrait and landscape phone and tablets to better suit different form factors</li> </ul>
Provide all of the information on the mobile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Forget about separate mobile websites that are subsets of the full website.</li> <li>› Use responsive design on the full website to provide all the content</li> <li>› Have one single method of updating content on the site for both mobile and desktop</li> </ul>

A full review from IRM will identify and discuss more than 10 additional ways to improve mobile.

## 6. Educate

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You are expert in your industry and company. Understand the educational needs of investors and support them. If they choose to learn more, that improves progression rates.

Make offline contact easy if they want it. Be sure to respond.

Here are IRM's top three hints for educating investors:

Subject	Suggestion
Position the company in its Industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Investors love to classify companies in many different ways.</li> <li>› Make sure you provide investors with the information they need to get your classification right.</li> <li>› Understand that investors will be looking at peers in the same industry. Make sure you differentiate from them when explaining where you fit.</li> </ul>
Industry information and News	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Depending on the company's role in the industry, and whether the industry is well known and understood, provide educational material that explains the industry, uses of the products and services, market assessments and so on.</li> <li>› Consider whether there are geographical opportunities to educate. If your projects are in unusual places, provide information about those places.</li> </ul>
Non Company news	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› If there is current relevant industry or geographical news, provide links to third party news articles or to your own blog discussions.</li> </ul>

A full review from IRM will identify and discuss more than 10 additional ways to improve education.

## 7. Relate

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Blog, tweet, share, like, and post. Provide capabilities for visitors to do the same right there using your content. If they are inclined to share, help them.

For investors using social media, embed twitter feeds and other posts on the site.

Help investors understand the human side of the company with a slightly different spin on the social media posts, make it a little less corporate.

Use the social media accounts of the CEO and other executives to relate to their particular networks with the same or similar messages.

Here are IRM's top three hints for relating to investors:

Subject	Suggestion
Social Media Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Have a clear social media strategy so that people can relate to you other than through the website</li> <li>› Strategies range from “hide and hope” to “fully engage everywhere”</li> <li>› Realistically, listed companies can't “hide” because of the \$cashtags on twitter. At least have a look occasionally at what people are saying about you.</li> </ul>
Media Coverage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› It's good to have a media coverage list page. Publishing what people are saying about you adds credibility to your voice on the website.</li> <li>› Is the media coverage page up to date? Do you monitor it?</li> </ul>
Publish your Social media Icons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Make sure the website, email signatures, soft copies of reports and letterheads (including ASX Announcements) have links to your social media accounts</li> <li>› Make sure the links are correct and not broken.</li> </ul>

A full review from IRM will identify and discuss more than 10 additional ways to better relate to investors.

## 8. Engage

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Decisions in later phases require investors to be informed at the right time, *immediately* when material news is released, and in an easy and effective way for them to absorb the news.

Invite “registration” through whichever touchpoint investors choose and invite feedback. Email alerts are essential, and social media is becoming as important. Make sure emails are responsive.

Encourage offline communication and follow it up.

Continually broaden the base of people you are reaching directly through the relate mechanisms.

Consider the language issues your investors face as they try to interpret your messages. Engaging people in their native languages will broaden access to investors.

Here are IRM's top three hints for engaging with investors:

Subject	Suggestion
Provide Email Alerts service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Any investor that shows an interest in the company by providing an email address should be communicated with directly using an automated email alerts service.</li> <li>› Ensure email alerts are sent out immediately once the announcement is released. Don't be slow.</li> </ul>
Foreign Languages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Not all of your investors have English as their main language. They may be able to use English, but will be more engaged if you provide information in their native language.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Provide at least a key page for main foreign language investors in their language.</li> <li>› Google translate is one way of doing this but beware of the reliability of translation of technical information using this method.</li> </ul>
Collect email addresses from the share registry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Share registries are collecting email addresses to send shareholder communications to. They will provide these email addresses to the company to add to the email alerts list</li> <li>› The two lists are different. Share registries communicate only shareholder specific communication to people who are shareholders at the time. Investors are a wider audience wanting news information.</li> </ul>

A full review from IRM will identify and discuss more than 10 additional ways to improve engagement.

## 9. Measure

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Not measured is not managed. Measure everything you can.

Examine analytics and SEO results. Measure by these principles. Score how you are going by these principles, and how you have improved over time.

Wonder why things are as they are, and respond.

Refine messages, navigation, images, style - everything. Then measure again.

Compare with peers by the same measures.

Here are IRM's top three hints for measuring online IR effectiveness:

Subject	Suggestion
Implement Google Analytics in the website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Google Analytics is a free service that can monitor every click on your website and provide comprehensive real-time online analysis in many dimensions</li> </ul>
Count and measure engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Count how many – shareholders, email alert subscribers, followers, likes, tweets, questions from website, calls etc</li> <li>› Log the counts over time and look at the trends</li> </ul>
Measure against these success factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>› Score yourself against these success factors. Review and re-score periodically.</li> <li>› Look for continuous improvement</li> </ul>

A full review from IRM will identify and discuss more than 10 additional ways to improve measurement.

## 10. Maintain

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Make all of the online touchpoints quick and easy to update and maintain, using content management tools.

Be able to add new pages and change navigation easily within the CMS.

Have ways of keeping up to date with new technology.

Update content, messaging and navigation as news happens.

Have the ability to update content and design as separate aspects without one disrupting the other.

Institutionalise the process. Make it possible for relatively junior people to produce good quality online IR with little effort.

A website which is hard to maintain will fall behind, and progression rates will suffer.

Here are IRM's top three hints for easily maintainable online IR:

Subject	Suggestion
Website Content Management System (CMS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>› Have a CMS where it is as easy to update a web page as it is to update a word document</li><li>› Make sure the CMS is easy to use, fast and forgiving.</li></ul>
Social Media Posts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>› Have a slick internal process for posting key messages to social media immediately.</li></ul>
Automation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>› Look to automate as much as possible. Specifically, at the point of release of an ASX Announcement</li></ul>

A full review from IRM will identify and discuss more than 10 additional ways to improve maintainability.

## Scoring using these Success Factors

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There is a long list of minor suggested items that can be implemented to improve the site using the ten principles. Many of the changes resulting from the suggestions can be made simply by company people using the tools available and need not incur any costs.

To try to be more objective about the success factors, a score can be assessed for each area. While the score each time is subjective, the existence of a discipline on the scoring process, and an observation of how the scores change over time, will indicate how the success factors are being managed.

A comparison of the resulting scores with peers would be useful. Many of the items on these lists are visible from outside the company and so could be scored objectively by an outsider. Some require inside knowledge or a close understanding of the business.

In each area there could be a score out of ten. These scores should improve significantly as the recommendations are implemented. The scores might be presented like this:

Area	Score out of Ten
Attract	›
Appeal	›
Navigate	›
Quality	›
Mobile	›
Educate	›
Relate	›
Engage	›
Measure	›
Maintain	›
<b>Total</b>	› /100

Investors are worth it. Your share price reflects how they feel about you (as well as the financial results of course!).

A successful company should have an online “front door” to reflect that.

IRM regularly assists listed companies with assessing the gaps in their online investor relations strategies. If you would benefit from a discussion on this topic for your business, please contact Martin Spry by email on [martin.spry@irmau.com](mailto:martin.spry@irmau.com), or by phone on 61 2 8705 5444.