

Ethical Position statement

for Useful Web Ltd

There are a number of strands to our thinking. We have nothing against either business or profit. We do however want to feel that in whatever we undertake we are not harming other people. That is why we will only work with socially responsible businesses. There is in fact no reason to divorce ordinary human standards of ethics from business. This separation tends to happen, we think, when businesses (and indeed organisations in general whether or not they are businesses) exceed a certain size. It can happen when businesses are accountable to external shareholders whose only interest is in the level of the financial return.

The writings of Ivan Illich are key for us. Ilich analysed social institutions on a spectrum from what he called 'right-wing, manipulative' institutions to 'left-wing, convivial' institutions. He was at pains to point out that he was not using 'right-wing' and 'left-wing' in the conventional sense. This is a slightly more sophisticated analysis than 'small is good' though that is probably a good rule of thumb. Illich described 'right-wing' institutions as those who try to control their customers, who are not honest with them, and who try to make them dependent on repeat services which they supply. 'Left-wing' institutions by contrast work with their customers, do not try to coerce their behaviour, are open and honest, and are happy to see their customers be self-sufficient. In right-wing institutions rules exist to benefit those at the top of a hierarchy, usually not the customers, who must in fact conform. In left-wing institutions rules exist solely to support the continued enjoyment by all of the transactions.

The danger of the concepts of 'ethical business' or 'green business' is that these concepts can easily be hijacked by the marketing departments of large, 'right-wing' institutions and used to deceive the public. (Of course so can the phrase 'socially responsible'; which is why we are trying to offer a definition).

Many businesses will without any thinking at all be socially responsible. While we live in an economic landscape dominated by the activities and interests of large business and financial speculation the fact is that many, many, people continue to live and work in ways which are instinctively human. Many people do not regard manipulation and the mindless pursuit of money as normal. It is these people with whom we want to work. This is the enduring economy.