The Beginner's Guide to

Planning and Implementing
A Successful Website

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The Purpose of Your Website

Before you even begin planning your website, it is of utmost importance that you determine **why** you are building or redesigning it in the first place. By clarifying the purpose of your site, your web development team will be better equipped to create it, and you will have one or more benchmarks by which to measure its success.

Determine the Purpose

Most websites are no longer created as a novelty or for the sake of having something nice to look. A typical website is both informative and interactive, and serves one or more specific purposes.

Which of the following best describe the purpose of your website?

☐ To inform and solicit potential customers   ☐ To be a resource for current customers

☐ To sell products   ☐ To automate a company's internal processes

☐ To enhance a company's public image   ☐ To entertain visitors

☐ Other: _____

Set Goals

After you've clarified the purpose of your website, give some thoughtful consideration to the tangible results that your website should yield. If your website succeeds in realizing its purpose, what will that look like?

Examples:

☐ Within one year, the site will be visited at least 1,000 times every month

☐ Within one year, we will generate two leads each month via the website

☐ Within two years, our administrative staff will spend 20% less time on the phone

☐ Within six months, the site will generate $500 in product sales

Try setting two or three realistic goals:

☐ Goal #1: _____

☐ Goal #2: _____

☐ Goal #3: _____

Be Flexible

The results of most new websites will vary significantly. E-commerce sites, in particular, often take a significant investment of time and marketing before they begin to pay off. As you evaluate your site each month, give yourself the freedom to revise your goals and make appropriate adjustments to your strategy.

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Preparation

In addition to determining the purpose of your website, it's important to make sure that you are prepared to move forward.

Have you done the following?

☐ **Determine roles** – Your company should have one person who is in charge of gathering all text and photography for the website, and communicating with the development team. Of course, a single person can't always do everything, so make sure that there are support roles – for example, each department could be responsible for providing an initial draft of each page that applies to them. Although it is helpful to have several people assist in planning and reviewing your website during the design and development process, only one person should be responsible for making final decisions and relaying them to the developer.

☐ **Select a domain name** – Do not hesitate to reserve your website address before someone else does. Usually, your web developer will handle this, but you will need to be involved in the decision-making process. If you purchase a domain name on your own, it is still helpful to ask the advice of a marketing or web development expert before selecting a name. Also, make sure to save your account information so that your developer can make the necessary changes before launching the website.

☐ **Get a professional logo** – If your company is new and you do not have a logo, you will need one before your development team can begin designing your website. (If you are hiring a company to create your website, ask if they have a graphic artist on staff who can assist you with this.)

Planning

Much of the time involved in building a website is spent planning and organizing. Although your web developer will guide you through the process, here's an idea of what you should expect:

Design

☐ **Preferences**
Design specifications such as desired colors, themes, layout, menu effects, and fonts.

☐ **Examples**
Other websites with characteristics that should be avoided and/or emulated.

☐ **Site Hierarchy**
An organized list of pages that should be included on the site.

☐ **Artwork**
Logos, photographs, design files for printed materials, and any other images that will be used or referenced in the layout of the site, or on individual pages.

Content

☐ **Copy**
Text for each page of the site.

☐ **Contact Information**
Addresses, phone numbers and e-mail addresses for each location or department of your organization.

☐ **Articles**
Recent press releases, articles, and other publications that should be made available online.

☐ **Literature**
Any additional company information that could be useful during the development process.
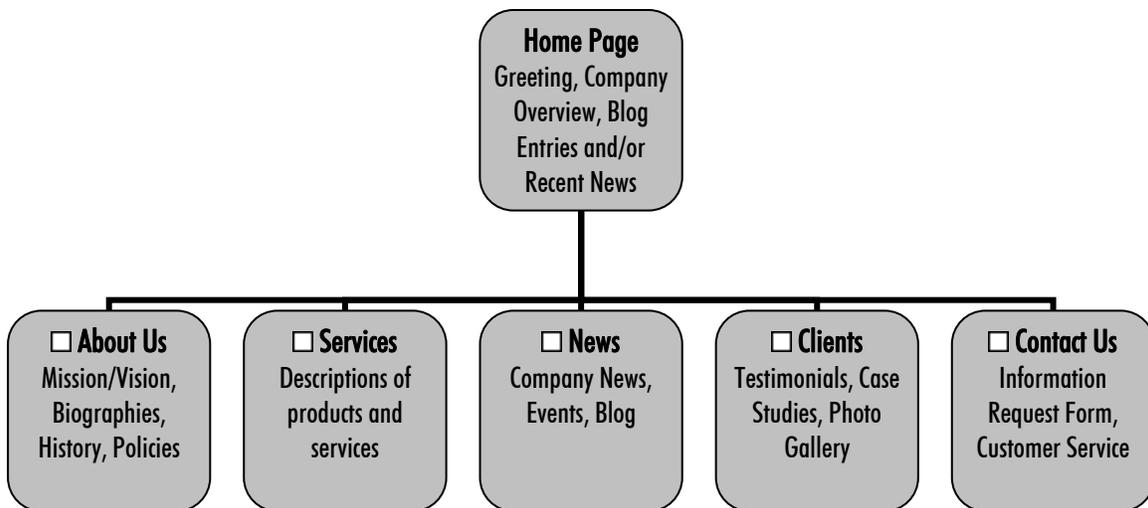
Organization

A successful website must be easy to use, which requires a simple and clear organizational structure. By organizing the information on your site before the design is created, you will save time and gain a better understanding of how you want the site to function.

Small Business Website

A basic website for a small business or will typically have five to seven sections, and a total of 10 to 15 pages. Information might be organized as follows:

Home Page
Greeting, Company Overview, Blog Entries and/or Recent News

☐ **About Us**	☐ **Services**	☐ **News**	☐ **Clients**	☐ **Contact Us**
Mission/Vision, Biographies, History, Policies	Descriptions of products and services	Company News, Events, Blog	Testimonials, Case Studies, Photo Gallery	Information Request Form, Customer Service

Many small websites can be functional and effective without being highly interactive, although an information/estimate request form is relatively standard.

Corporate/Non-Profit Website

Businesses and organizations with around 10 or more employees will typically have a larger website, with more interactive and administrative capabilities. In addition to the sections shown above, a corporate website might have any of the following:

☐ **Resources** – A collection of helpful articles, documents and other information intended to generate traffic to the website, and to act as a resource to current and prospective customers

☐ **Online Store** – Customers can purchase products via a shopping cart or a one-page order form; non-profit organizations often have a donation form instead

☐ **Members** – Many membership-based organizations have a directory or searchable database of members; these organizations often have restricted-access areas such as a bulletin board or e-mail list archive as well.

☐ **Administrative Area** – Ability to easily add and update news, press releases, event listings, and text on other pages.

What Makes Great Design

A great website must employ a design that is appealing, but does not inhibit the user from the information they're seeking. Here are some important elements of a great website design:

Simplicity – The design of your website should support its purpose, rather than being the focus of your customer's attention. White space can be effective in directing the customer's eyes to the most important information on each page.

Matching and Contrasting Color – As a general rule of thumb, try not to rely heavily on more than two or three colors as part of your website's design.

Ease of Navigation and Use – Your site's navigational menu should appear in the same place on every page, and the customer should always be able to tell where they are. Furthermore, you should never sacrifice usability for the sake of a feature that has no aesthetic or functional purpose.

Accessibility – The site should be accessible using any major web browser on any operating system. Although your development team should have this covered, make sure to test your site on a variety of computers with different settings.

Speed – Most Internet users will not wait more than 10 seconds for a website to load. If your site is heavy on graphics, make sure that a mobile or text-only version is available for those with slow connections or hand-held devices.

Attractiveness – Your website should not look like a glorified Word document, nor should resemble a brochure. It should be a colorful, eye-catching experience with a relatively even mix of text and graphics.

What Makes a Successful Website

A successful website is, first and foremost, a functional one. Your target audience must get what they're looking for — and this is what they're looking for:

Professionalism — For most business, a website is necessary in order to establish legitimacy. Conversely, to many in today's generation of consumers, an unprofessional website is the sign of an unprofessional company.

Trust — Companies that do business online can reach a far larger audience, but they must work harder than traditional stores in order to gain the trust of the customers. If you sell products online, it is vital to have a clear return policy, excellent customer service, and if possible, a money-back guarantee.

Useful Information — Odds are, your customer is looking for information that will be helpful in making a purchasing decision. As with any other form of advertising, too many websites emphasize the features or capabilities of a company, rather than benefits to the customer. Furthermore, if you offer interesting and educational content on your site, people will naturally find and return to your website.

Fresh, Up-To-Date Content — Search engines — and your customers — favor websites that are updated, and added to, on a regular basis. Make sure to add new information to your site no less than once a month. The more relevant information on your website, the more likely it is that people will find you.

An Easier Way to Do Business — Does your audience have a way contact you with minimal effort? How many steps does it take for them to find what they're looking for, and buy it? If someone has the choice of taking a risk with an online company, or buying something at the store down the street, they'll go to the store unless it's easier and safer to do business with you.

A Carrot — Offer your customer something that they can't get anywhere else. Perhaps it's a free download on your website, a significant discount for first-time or repeat buyers, or a unique product that they can customize and get delivered for free. Once someone becomes a customer, it's a lot easier to keep them.

A Solution — Ultimately, your customer has a problem or a need, and they are asking you to solve it. If your website accomplishes only one thing, make sure that it addresses your customer's number one need.

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