



Designing Your Website

Introduction

This may sound like a silly question, but it is the first one I ask my clients when starting every new web project. **Why do you want a website?**

It's not always easy to identify the purpose of things. And when something serves many purposes, it's not easy to discern between them, or to prioritize them properly. So, before we can get prescriptive about the purpose of your website — which is what we really want to do — we need to get specific about what kind of website you want.

So, as you go through these next few pages, think about your website's purpose. While I know this will take a little time, bear with me. It will give you amazing results that will give you the website you wanted, quickly and with less cost.

Make notes and jot down ideas for us to discuss. This will not only clarify and outline the website in your own mind, but it will make it easier and quicker during the design process if you know where you want to go.

Purpose

Websites have many unique purposes. But, for most websites, there are really only four simple, core purposes:

1. **Describing Expertise:** What do you do? Who do you do it for? How do you do it?
2. **Building Your Reputation:** Good website content is the first step in building a strong reputation. But without doing some offsite legwork, it's not likely to produce the results you probably have in mind.
3. **Generating Leads:** The first thing an interested person will want to do is tell you they are interested. Do you have a way for them to do that?
4. **Nurturing Sales:** Let's say that interested, informed, and engaged person gets in touch with you. You don't suppose that your website's work is done now, do you? Not at all. In fact, if you're not intentionally referring to your site in that first sales conversation, I'd bet your prospect is clicking around on their own, as you speak.

Whether your website is for business or personal interest, there are a number of things you have to consider before you start actually building your site. The first step should be deciding on the purpose of the website. Let's break down the 4 core purposes a bit further.

The purpose of the website will influence the style, website technologies, hosting, and budget costs required for your website. So, what is the purpose, or purposes of your website? This will begin to define the structure and content that will be going in. Usually, they fall into several categories:

1. **Information** so clients can see what you are all about and what are your services/products.
2. **Education:** These days, sales by education is proving effective. As you supply customers with more information, you get orders for upgrades and new products and services. You can provide up-to-date industry information on your Website in the form of an on-line newsletter, which gives people a reason to come back.
3. **Sales of products and services online:** This requires a little more work because you need a merchant account (unless you use only PayPal) and you'll need an SSL security certificate to protect your customers.
4. **Advertising your business and bringing in new clients:** This usually requires marketing and SEO work so your website shows up at, or near, the top of a Google search for key words, like "Virtual Assistant".
5. **Members Login:** Some websites require a platform for members (employees, clients, etc.) to be able to login and access information or perform certain functions.
6. **Blog/Forum:** Consider whether your website should have a blog section. There are pros and cons associated with this decision including higher maintenance costs and less control over your website overall feel.
7. **Replicated Website:** Some businesses offer replicated websites to its members so that there is consistency in look and information offered to the public, as well as providing a quick and inexpensive way for members to get their business started.

Sometimes, it is a combination of more than one. So, think about what you want your website to do for your business. Don't worry, you can always add and modify your website later as your business purposes change and grow.

Target Audience

Before beginning your website design, you need to be specific about the targets of the Web site. We define the targets before the Web site is built, and then design the Web site against those targets. This is where the level of success — and therefore the true quality of the outcome — can be better measured. The question I always ask of every client is, are you clear about your target market?

No-one will look at your website unless you have valuable content. You need to be interesting to attract attention and get others to talk about you! In order to create good content, you need to understand who your target audience is and what type of content and style they'd value.

Who will be looking at your website? Here are 2 key questions to ask yourself:

- Who is your audience and what kind of things would those people visiting your website be looking for?
- Just as important, what will your target audience NOT be interested in and therefore be mislead or turned away if they saw it on our website?

Design Considerations (Your Theme)

Every website has a feeling that portrays the “flavor” of that business. You should decide what design style you would like to have that would show clearly what you are all about, even before someone reads your website.

There are thousands of website designs to choose from. It can drive you crazy. So, I recommend you go online and just look at websites. Pick out a couple designs you like. Also, you can go to website theme stores to see what they have.

Here’s a couple website theme sites for you to look at:

Free WordPress Themes: <http://wordpress.org/themes/browse/popular/>

Theme Forest: <http://themeforest.net/category/wordpress>

Theme Roulette: <http://themeroulette.com/>

I am not suggesting you purchase a theme right now. But, these, and your own web surfing, will give you a couple themes you like. Then, we can see if we can find or build one like it for free.

When choosing, we need to pick a “Responsive” theme so it shows up well on mobile devices like iPhones, droids, and iPads.

When choosing a theme, be careful not to get “wowed” by the flashiness. This is especially important if your business targets mostly other professional organizations that generally aren’t swayed by how showy your website looks.

Navigation

Here’s the heart of your website. What do you want it to say or do? The easiest way is to outline what products/services you will be providing and write those down in the form of “tabs”. Here are the basic tabs most every website has plus some for you to consider.

- Home
- About Us
 - Our Team
- What We Do
 - Products & Services
- News and Information
- Testimonials
- Blog (if you want a blog page on your website)
- Contact Us
- FAQs

So, sit down and write out all the pages you think you will need to start out. We can always add more later. Consider any products and services you will offer, how you want to show them, and how you want people to contact you to purchase them.

Important Note: Don’t get fancy. The easier and more logical it is for visitors to navigate your website, the more likely it is they will stay, if they find what they are looking for. While great website design will certainly attract visitors and give them a feeling for your business, if they are quickly unable to find what they are looking for, they will move on. Remember, to the visitor

who doesn't know you, you are just one of hundreds, or thousands of choices they have on the internet.

Your Headline

The very first thing that should draw the eyes of your visitors when they arrive at your website is **a headline that clearly states the biggest benefit your site has to offer**. Graphics, logos, illustrations, menus, links, and other elements should never overpower or distract from this critical element. This is definitely not a place for advertisements.

Your headline should be located at the very top center of the page in a larger font size and/or color to something that naturally attracts attention. This is also the place where you will set the theme for your website. It should communicate information about what you offer and how you're going to:

- Make visitors' lives easier
- Save them money
- Save them time
- Help them in their personal lives
- Provide additional income
- Entertain them
- Make them more attractive
- Help them feel better
- etc.

It is very important that this area be visually appealing. For your headline to be most effective, your visitors must be able to absorb the benefits it shares in a glance. The average time spent by someone on the first page of a website before deciding to stay or go is only 10-15 seconds. So you not only need to write a great headline, you need to strategically format it!

Use bolding, italics, and highlighting to tastefully emphasize key points. And watch where your lines break. Make it easy to read. Unless you're putting together a scientific or technical website, write to the average reader. That means to write at a 7th grade level (yes, you heard me right). Don't use big words, especially to impress the reader. You will quickly lose them.

Videos and Photos

Most visitors to your website are looking for quick visual information. Photos and videos are one of the best ways to accomplish that. It's still true that a photo is worth 10,000 words. And, with online video quickly becoming a key means for people to satisfy their information and entertainment needs, small businesses must include videos as part of their internet marketing strategies. When a video is on a webpage, visitors spend 10% more time viewing that website.

90% of information transmitted to the brain is visual, and visuals are processed 60,000X faster in the brain than text. According to Dr. James McQuivey of Forrester Research, watching a minute of video is the equivalent of reading 1.8 million words.

But, is it possible for you to afford a video? Absolutely! There are numerous sources now available that can create a professional video for under \$100.

Call to Action

This is one of the most important components of your website. You want to tell your visitors what you want them to do...contact you, purchase something, subscribe, etc. And, don't leave it to your navigation to direct the visitor; after all, they'll only click on a link if it is what they're looking for. You must **give your visitors a strong call to action** and tell them what you want them to do.

For example, a site selling multiple products, a link that says "**products**" is far less compelling than a link like this: "**Click here now to find the best tool for the job**" (or, for the best answer to your problem).

For a service business, a link that says "About Us" is informative, but doesn't give the reader a good reason why they should care. A call to action like "Click here now to discover why over 10,000 business owners trust us" will be much more effective!

Focus on these critical elements while outlining your website and you'll have a site that will turn the highest percentage of your visitors into buyers. But remember, building and posting the site is only a fraction of what is required to get people to find you and click on your website. That's where the real work comes in, and that's where we shine.

We'll Help You Figure This All Out

To find out more about how it all fits together and what it takes to really become the local expert in your field, give us a call or just fill in the information below and we'll contact you to help figure this all out.

To your success,

Steve Olson, President/CEO
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