

How to Build your Site

Building an Organisation Context

First of all it's important to understand your organisation as you see it,

- A couple of paragraphs about your organisation
- The products you sell or services you provide
- The size of the organisation. i.e. the number of employees, a rough turnover figure (if you want to provide it - there is a lot of difference between how a £1,000 organisation and a £100,000 organisation should look!)
- Are you an international organisation? If so, which countries?
- How long have you been established?
- Describe the organisation using five or ten words (i.e. young, vibrant, technology-based etc)
- What are the unique selling points for your organisation, your products or your services?
- List a few competitors' websites.

In order to communicate efficiently with your audience it's important to analyse what you want to do with your web presence and what its purpose is.

- Organisation - Professional/Managerial/Industry Specific
- Consumer - Target Market/Demographics
- Personal - Special Interest/Activity

Once the audience has been determined, we need to establish which of the following does the site need to do to achieve its purpose?

- Entertain - Is the site intended to provide entertainment for your visitors?
- Inform - Should the site provide information as a reference tool? If so, to what degree and at what level?
- Promote - Do you want the site to promote goods or services? Who is your target audience and why do they need your product or service?

Good Web Design will enable you to develop the website to the degree that you want to interact with your visitors.

- Independent browsing - Will the site contain, in a self-sufficient manner, all the information your visitors will need?
- Directed Feedback - Will you need occasional feedback from your visitors in the form of email?
- Feedback Forums - Would your needs best be addressed by the use of custom designed forms, chat, or bulletin boards?
- Level of Support - How often will you be responding to your visitors needs? Are automated feedback mechanisms desired?

What size or level of complexity is required to meet these criteria?

- Professional/Personal - A single page website such as a résumé, curriculum vitae, or supporting a personal interest?
- Special Interest - A multi-page website promoting an organized activity or personal interest?
- Small Organisation Class- A multi-page website offering goods or services to a target market?

- Organisation Class - A multi-page medium corporate website seeking contact with a widespread audience?
- Corporate Class- A major corporate promotion/public relations website?

Architecture

So now we know you and your targets, we need to look more at the technical specifications.

First of all, the most important aspect to start planning from is accessibility. It is now unlawful for a website to be inaccessible to people with disabilities in the UK, US and Australia, amongst other countries. Even if your primary audience has no connection to the disabled, it's sometimes little understood that 20% of the UK population are visually impaired and look at the computer screen differently from the other 80%.

Accessibility needs to be considered first in the planning stage. There are a range of public standards covering the issue, but the important one is the WAI Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 1.0. A website can attempt compliance to one of three levels:

- A - 'website must'
- AA - 'website should'
- AAA - 'website may'

Level A is widely considered the minimum for legal compliance. AA and AAA are progressively more difficult to support and hence there is often a trade-off between compliance and cost.

For the corporate or public sector AA is usually best practice, with smaller websites better suited to A - AA.

The normality for websites is to have a home page that contains important summaries to both the organisation and the different content areas, and links to every section on the site. It is also usually important to have visual stimulus such as imagery or animation.

There is also the benefit of having an inbuilt search engine on the site allowing people to quickly and directly find what they need.

Visual Style

It should become apparent once writing this brief what your organisation's visual "style" is. This will be the product of previous branding, the key words that you think explain the organisation, your audience and what you are hoping to communicate.

It is important that you outline what you expect to get visually, for example, do you expect simplicity or fun? If you know of any websites that you feel are similar to what you would like, include their addresses. Please also provide us with any material that has your branding on it.

Content

In order to decide the technology to use to build the website, we need to confirm the content of the site, it's important that you place all relative information together so that simple and usable links can be created. Copy writing is a difficult process and needs full attention especially for the first page where you need to gain the viewers attention in about three seconds. Think about these points,

- Opening statement that clearly communicates what the organisation delivers
- Link to core services and products (what the organisation does)
- Link to donor relations (dedicated donor area)
- Link to media (a dedicated area serving the needs of the media)
- Link to about us section / page
- Link to news / press releases
- Easy access to contact information (full contact details include postal address)
- Website search

It's also important that you divide your content up by thinking about how much your audience will consume before moving on. Make sure that you select pieces in your text that need to stand out, quotes, statistics etc. Large documents can be either broken down into pages or summarised and then provided with a link to the full content.

It is usually easy to provide a simple spreadsheet of the content and how you want it linked together, including any downloads such as PDF files etc.

Do you have access to any corporate images? Does your organisation have an image library? In larger organisations you may find that another cost centre has already spent hundreds or thousands of pounds on photography and used it once. It would make sense to use these images if possible. If your organisation doesn't have an image library, asking employees is usually much cheaper than buying from image shops. A good number of images is about two or three per page of content. Think about providing images that amplify what your page is trying to communicate.

A good way to allow people to ask questions without maintenance requirements is to provide an FAQ (frequently asked questions) section.

Updates

Updates on websites are very important. Users will not go back to a site that doesn't look as though it's been changed in a long time.

Interactivity not only cuts out the dictatorial aspect of the website but also gives the audience the ability to see how the product or service is used and to feel more at ease in using it as well as being more at ease with the organisation itself. It could also provide the opportunity for users to discuss the product, service or organisation.

There are various different ways an organisation can do this, the first and most common is the *blog* this is similar to a diary that the organisation can keep, which allows the audience to see the changes and developments within the organisation, it also allows visitors to comment. An example of a blog can be found at www.himalayanlearning.org/news/news.php

There are two other systems, the first is a forum, which is like a discussion room, this is excellent if you think that you will have a large number of visitors that will submit comments. The second is a message board, which is a list of comments that have been submitted using an online form. For an example of a message board, go to www.himalayanlearning.org/charity/feedback.php

Maintenance

The ongoing maintenance of a website is an often over-looked aspect of the website's design. Things to think about are

- Who will be responsible for the on-going maintenance of the website?

- Do you have the skills, resources and time to maintain the website in-house?
- What happens if that member of staff leaves the organisation?

A small site may only need to be checked once a year in order to make sure that it's still running as planned.

Advertising

You should consider (ask me for advice regarding all these sections):

- Building link partners
- Search engine optimisation and submission
- Search engine paid listings (the sponsored links you see on the side of your search results)
- Email marketing - commonly HTML emails that are branded inline with the website.
- Banner advertising on high traffic volume websites.

Next Steps..

The next step is to go through all these sections and write a brief that explains each part. If there's anything else that needs to be put in writing it is important to do it now.

Lastly it is important that your organisation supplies a breakdown of the funding available for the website, the final date of completion, who is responsible for that funding and who is in charge of decisions regarding the site. Following the reply to this document a full proposal will be written and returned to you so that you can see what the outcome will be.

The next few weeks will be important stages where communication between creative and organisation is vital in order to finalise the design.

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