

OUR THOUGHTS ON EFFECTIVE  
WEB SITE DEVELOPMENT



MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

## OUR THOUGHTS ON EFFECTIVE WEB SITE DEVELOPMENT

Having planned, designed, and launched many Web Sites, the team at Writer's Block has created the followings guidelines for clients to consider when planning a new site project. These guidelines are ones that we consider internally for each client site that we create--and are ones upon which most successful sites are developed.

**Objective:** What are you trying to do with this Web site? It's crucial that you identify your objectives and goals in order to determine the direction the site will take.

**Competitive analysis:** Understanding what your competition is doing will help you compile a knowledge base that can be used in strengthening your brand and creating a differentiation that will help you compete in your market. Marketing professionals will sometimes refer back to Marketing 101 and talk about SWOT analysis—a strategy used to quickly evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats involved in a project or business venture.

**Vocabulary and message:** Whom are you trying to communicate with? Is your message being heard by the audience you are trying to reach? This is where graphic design and fundamental marketing concepts matter. You have approximately eight seconds to captivate your audience before they grow tired and leave a page. Web site visitors that leave your Web site in eight seconds or less are considered a “bounce.” It is reported that the average bounce rate is close to 50%. Web sites that heavily exceed this number are in drastic need of attention. When you are creating a Web site, always keep in mind that the content you are delivering on any page within the site will be a determining factor as to how long the user stays on the page.

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**Sitemap and wireframes:** After gaining a solid understanding of your message, it is important to lay out the road map of how your information will flow throughout the Web site. A wireframe is the road map of your Web site and defines how visitors travel throughout the site. To reduce clutter and to streamline usability, be sure that your navigation and site flow are consistent with good navigation and usability practices. Wireframes also start to show “classifications” on a Web site. Information architecture exists all around us as users of the Web and various interfaces:

- **Lexicon classifications:** A Lexicon is simply a complex way of describing labeling systems and classifications. The lexicon breaks up a Web site into various sections and labels the sections with popular verbiage such as “Resources” and “Support.” These are functions of the various navigation systems, but these labels also help define and segment various pieces of information.
- **Organizational classifications:** This is how the Web site’s information is presented to the user with respect to organization—for example, how various navigation elements are grouped together.
- **Search:** These tools, similar to how Google would search the web for content, give the user the ability to search the Web site and the content within the site.
- **Navigation:** This is how we help users move through the content, digging deeper into the site as they visit the content areas of their choice.

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**Look & feel:** Despite popular belief, having Photoshop or Dreamweaver doesn't make someone a graphic artist or user-interface designer. Having the "dorm-room" designer build your Web site can have a profound negative effect on your bottom line. Granted, you can cut costs by working with template-based solutions or hiring an inexperienced web developer, but this is not the route to take if you are serious about your Web site and the success of your business. Identifying the look and feel that will send the proper message to your target audience will have a direct effect on how visitors respond to your Web site.

**Content:** Have you ever visited a Web site and clicked on a number of things only to find the famous "Under Construction" message? Content, or should I say lack thereof, is one of the main reasons that a site fails or is never completed. You can have the best concept and layout in the world, but if there is no quality content to place into the site, at the end of the day all you are left with is dead air

## Graphic Design and Web site Page Creation

Once you have created the blueprint of where you are going to take the Web site, you now have the necessary pieces to get started on the "Concept Phase."

By using a combination of the content and information presented in the above-noted wireframes, you can start to compile how the Web site will look and feel.

## Why Custom Design Is the Smart Choice

Choosing an experienced Web-site design professional who is proficient in multiple aspects of Web design and ecommerce development to build a custom Web site could be the best business investment you ever make. Doing so ensures that your Web site will be built to reflect your company's goals and your client's needs and desires, from the ground up.

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A professional Web site developer should follow industry best-practices to ensure smooth, efficient function and a good reception by the major search engines. Well-structured Web sites are designed to be scalable, so that when upgrades or additional product lines are added, the site can easily adapt to accommodate the growth of the company.

Based on conversations, design questionnaires, and additional sources of information, a professional Web site designer will present design concepts, also called a “mock up” of the Web site, for your approval and feedback. Based on that feedback, the designer will make revisions to your specifications. Usually a round or two of revisions occurs before the final Web site creation is ready for launch live. A reliable Web site design agency will perform all kinds of testing on different platforms to ensure that the site functions efficiently and looks great via all the major browsers.

### Content Management (CMS) Tools

When planning a new Web Site development it's also vital early on to define the appropriateness of a Content Management tool. Many organizations prefer to place site development and “ownership” outside of the organization—even for more routine updates.

A key question is...”How and by whom will the site be maintained and updated in the future once launched?”

CMS tools make it far easier for the average user to maintain a site, taking burden off of IT groups, and putting control in the hands of marketers. CMS tools however, offer a large degree of control as well—allowing site “owners’ to define what can and cannot be modified on a site by individuals.

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**Content Management Tools** allow organizations wanting internal site control to be better able to...

**Manage consistent branding across multiple Web sites and channels**, delivering users a personalized experience based on the user's profile (explicit information) or behavior on the site (implicit information).

**Support for global teams and organizations and business users themselves.** Marketing operations, and IT groups within enterprises want to move site administration out of the hands of overburdened IT departments and into the hands of the individuals closer to customer experience needs. These individuals — such as marketing communications managers, regional site managers, and marketing operations support personnel — want the ability to create personalization rules, administer multiple sites, define workflows, manage navigation, and get insight into site and content usage so they can tailor content to site users.

IT staff members willing to hand off these responsibilities demand a comprehensive yet user-friendly CRM product that doesn't require excessive training or IT support.

**Improve functionality for content contributors.** Content contributors and Web Masters, no longer satisfied with stripped-down, Web-based editors, want improvements as well. These users increasingly want integration with their familiar desktop tools, such as Microsoft Word, in which they can author and edit content. These users want to better manage their workflows and tasks and want improved search to help them find and reuse content. Workflow has become increasingly important as enterprises attempt to use it to improve CRM adoption by content contributors.

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## e-commerce, Lead Management & More

In planning a site development, one should also consider expansion and functionality beyond standard web presentation and functionality. A well planned web development effort should be able to accommodate the addition of, for example, various e-commerce applications and web store capabilities. Likewise, consideration should be given to integration with lead management systems, and other data exchanges into and out of the Web Site.

## Pulling It all Together

An excellent Web site designer will always be researching industry best-practices and working to stay on the cutting edge of Web development. Working with an agency that delivers great Web-site development skills with high-power search-engine-optimization abilities makes for a powerful combination for your business.

The overriding message of this article is the importance of creating a solid Web-site foundation for your online business, from the ground up, by designing with the customer as the focus and the search engines always in mind.

Keeping practical Web-site design principles in mind and planning thoroughly will put you and your new Web site on the road to online success.