

Creating a Website

An overview of the website development process

If you're ready to create a website and want to know more about the process and what you can do to facilitate a successful website, this article provides a general description of some of the basic steps involved in setting up a website.

Website development is a collaboration between you, as the client who provides the content, and your website designer. In addition to designing and developing the website, the web designer may offer suggestions and help in identifying and editing your content, especially to assure it is sized appropriately and will be consistent with the site design as it evolves.

The following activities explain in general what's involved in developing a website, with the goal of helping someone new to website design understand the process so that there is improved communication and workflow between the client and the web designer. These activities are listed approximately in the order they will be done, but, in reality, the order is not carved in stone and sometimes things will be done in a different sequence.

1. Define your audience

To start developing your website content, first think about who will be using your site. This will help determine what to include and how to arrange the site. The following questions may help define your target audience:

- What is the purpose and goal of my website?
- What do my visitors want to know, what are they looking for?
- What benefits do they want?
- What do they want me to do?

Think about the service or products you offer and who is most likely to need/use it, and write down the characteristics of these users in terms common to your business or service. The resulting list of audience profiles may suggest that you organize your website in multiple sections to serve groups with similar characteristics. Using the characteristics of your target audience groups will help develop a website that will effectively deliver desired information to the intended audiences.

2. Define the purpose

To help organize your thoughts, develop a focused vision of what you want your website and viewers to accomplish. Create a purpose statement that will guide creation of the strategy and content of the site. The following questions may help you determine the site's purpose:

- What is the mission or purpose of my business or service?
- What are the short- and long-term goals of my website?

After you define your purpose statement, develop measurable objectives to help track progress and determine the success of the site. The following questions may help you determine measurable objectives:

- How will I know (quantitatively) if the site is successful?
- What are the consequences if the site is not successful?

Creating a Website

An overview of the website development process

3. Identify and register a domain name

You can check for available domain names on www.whois.com or on any web hosting provider's website. Once you find an available domain name that you like, you can register it on the whois website or on your web hosting provider's website. You should expect to pay an annual fee for the registration of your domain name as well as a fee for web hosting service.

4. Secure a web host

In picking a company to host your website, you should consider things like how much space your website will need on the host server, how often you will be making updates, whether you want the host to provide email accounts, and the availability of the host's customer service support (VERY IMPORTANT!).

It's a good idea to check out several web hosting companies and compare their costs and services before you decide which one will best fit your budget and needs.

5. Create the content

Information to include on your website is similar to what you would include in a brochure about your business or in a résumé about yourself.

Some things to consider are information about the nature of the business (services and/or products offered), your philosophy and objectives, biographies and experience of personnel, prices for services/products, client testimonials, business location, contact information, links to blogs and social media (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter), and links to related information such as newsletters, other industry websites, and articles of interest.

Once you've decided what to include, gather or create the material and provide it to the web designer. This includes all your text, photos, graphics, videos, etc. If you don't have graphics in mind, perhaps the web designer will suggest some as the design evolves. Remember that marketing on the Internet is very visual and websites should be colorful and include interesting images to keep your viewers' interest.

6. Develop keywords for search engine optimization (SEO)

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is a term used to describe the strategy of building a website that can be found by search engines as people search the Internet. SEO is an important consideration in developing a website, and keywords are one of the more important ingredients of SEO.

Google and other search engines look for keyword matches in websites to find businesses and services that satisfy the search queries. Your website will be listed among the search results when the keywords in your website match the keywords in the search query field. In addition to looking for data matches in your website content, the search engines also look in the website code for keywords in the page titles and page descriptions.

Creating a Website

An overview of the website development process

Keywords should be identified before you write the copy for your website so that you can be sure to use the keywords in your text. To develop your list of keywords, first consider all the possible words and phrases that you think people will use to look for your business or service on the Internet. Then look over the resulting list of words and phrases, and select those that you think would be the most likely to be used by people who search the Internet for your service or products.

This smaller list will become the list of keywords for your website. It should be a rather short list, perhaps 5-10 keywords and keyword phrases, and no more than 15. Each keyword phrase is considered one keyword. Again, remember to use your keywords throughout the text as you write the content of your website. The web developer also will use your keywords in the code when your site is developed.

7. Organize the information

As you identify the information that you want to include in your website, try to group the information, photos, graphics, and videos into categories. Each of these categories may translate into a separate page, or section of a page, of your website.

For example, here are some categories you may want to consider in organizing a website:

- Home page
- About the business (history, what it does, what are the benefits, etc.)
- About the owners/employees (photos, experience, résumés, training, specialties, etc.)
- About the facility (equipment and other amenities)
- Business and/or owner's philosophy/history
- Business location, if customers need to find you
- Services and products offered
- Fees, prices, and schedules
- Testimonials (customer/client comments)
- FAQ
- Contact information
- Store information (if products are sold)
- Links to a blog, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, other social networks
- Links to newsletters
- Links to related websites or other information of interest to your customers

8. Create a wireframe and storyboard

Once the website information is determined, wireframing and storyboarding are typically done by the web designer in collaboration with the client. These processes help identify what is on each page and how all the pages will be linked together.

Wireframing defines the “what” of the site. It is the process of developing and diagramming a site structure so that the site will match your viewers' needs. A website wireframe is a basic visual guide to suggest the structure of the website and the relationships among its pages. This can be created by paper and pencil, or on the computer using a variety of software products.

Creating a Website

An overview of the website development process

Storyboarding defines “how” the website works. It involves recording the description, purpose, and title of every page in your site and then linking these pages together to create a visual development model. This model diagrams how viewers will navigate to and from internal and external pages.

A wireframe and storyboard are blueprints for the development of the website. This planning process allows the site content and navigation to be determined before production begins, which is very helpful because it is much more time-consuming to change underlying design elements such as navigation after coding has started.

9. Develop the design

The web designer will study your business and consider your input in order to develop a proposed design for your site. This design probably will go through several modifications as you and the web designer work together to create a design you like.

You should review a few websites of businesses like yours to help you think about how you would like your site to look. What you like and don't like will help the website designer create a design that will appeal to you. And, since the website appearance is an extension of you and your business, it's important that you like how it looks! The design includes things like the appearance of the website pages, navigation categories, colors, fonts, graphics, photographs, and other details to make the pages easy to read and tell your story in a compelling and visually pleasing manner.

Gather up examples of all the places where your company name and logo are used. The web developer will want to display your company name and logo on your web pages in a design similar to how it appears on your identity materials (business card, letterhead, brochures, newsletters, signage, etc.), using similar colors, typestyles, and proportions.

10. Build a prototype

After all the information has been identified and gathered, the website wireframe, storyboard, and design will be used as a guide for creating a prototype of your website. Your entire website will be created in a test environment so that you can review it and approve how it looks before any coding starts. The website prototype will be revised as many times as needed until both you and the website developer are satisfied with how it looks and how it works.

Often the website designer and developer are the same person, but if you use a larger firm to do your website, you may find that the designer will turn over the production of your website to a developer at this stage of the website development.

11. Code the site

After you have approved the prototype of the site, the website developer will create the code that is used to enable the site to appear on the Internet. As with the prototype, you will review the actual website in a test environment when it is complete and ready to be published. Again,

Creating a Website

An overview of the website development process

the site may be revised a few times before both you and the website developer are satisfied with how it looks and how it works.

12. Upload the site

Once the website is finished and approved, it will be uploaded to your web hosting provider's server. Once the files are transferred, the website is published on the Internet and is available for web browsing.

13. Maintain the site

After your website has been launched, you should continue to "work it" to keep the content fresh and current. Adding new information from time to time will keep your viewers coming back. Your website designer may offer to maintain the site for you, or he/she may develop a design that will allow you to make your own changes to areas of your website whenever you need to update information, such as changing prices, services, personnel, schedules, etc.

14. A final note

This article was created to help people new to the process of website development understand what to expect and be better prepared to work with a website designer. It is strictly an overview and is not intended to provide enough information to fully explain the procedures and strategies of developing websites.