



Web Site Planning

Do you have a web site now or need a new one? Is your current system out of whack? Have your users changed from when you first launched your web site? This document is designed to give you a basic understanding of the steps involved in web site development and design. It is a general overview and we suggest you contact a web professional to discuss such items as focus groups, user interface design and back-end processing when appropriate.

Each site whether already in existence or completely new, must start with the basic questions:

1. Who will be using the web site or who is using it?
2. What is the purpose of the web site? Informational? Revenue producing?

In every case, a web site is related to revenue. Whether it is in the form of a sales contact that gets followed up by a salesperson or a non-profit sharing information and in an outside way soliciting donations (revenue) to help people or organizations in need. Think at it from some different perspectives: Educational institutions that are not on the web or have online registration may 'lose' attendees. Support-based sites can 'lose' customers if they do not maintain quality FAQs, etc.

Who Will Be Using Your Web Site Or Who Is Using It Now?

Steps for evaluating your web site starts with identifying who your users are and why they are coming to your site. Or who are the users you want to have on your site. These are called use-cases and can be looked at in this way by using a simple table for a corporate web site:

User Type	Reasons for visiting	Information they want	What you want
Primary Users	Prospect	Product Information	Name, phone and needs
	Current clients	Client access area	Track their needs
Secondary Users	Press	News Releases	Up-to-date new information
	Stock holders	Company information and news	Stock evaluations
	Future investors	Company history	How to invest, benefits, etc.

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You can break this down further by identifying what “web pages” a user will want or need to visit and where you would like to “direct” them. Once you complete this process, whether it is on your current web site or a new one, it will drive what we call the Information Architecture, or your web site content and site map. It will influence the content you have or don't have.

Basic Functional or Viewer Requirements

The next step that you need to consider is what are the basic functional and technical requirements of the Primary Users. Are they mostly on dial-up or do a majority of them have broadband access? For a corporate web site, the primary user most likely has broadband access through their company (table above), but if your primary users are traveling sales or technical professionals, then they may be logging in via dial-up access outside of the office more frequently. Here are some basic technical requirements:

Sample Technical Requirements

- Site download time based on 28 – 56k modem speeds. Average download will be 7 – 10 seconds maximum.
- Site will accessible using all the most used browser versions of Netscape and Internet Explorer versions 5.5 and higher.
- Graphic and visual elements will take into consideration the access the Primary users are using and will be designed to be highly visible so as to correctly guide the user. Standard is 800 pixels wide by 600 pixels high.
- Site programming will use basic JavaScript and HTML 4.0.

Planning the Project

There can be a great deal of functional and technical requirements that deal with hosting, application development, application and database environments, etc., but for now, we will keep it very simple.

After you have looked into your site at this initial depth, you can start to move toward the planning process and use a macro approach.

Follow this outline to begin to evaluate timelines and requirements for a basic web site:

Step I – Planning

This first step is sometimes considered the most important as it sets the foundation on which a web site is developed. It will include the following checklist of items:

1. Target launch date
2. Obtaining a domain name (www.yourname.com)

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3. Determining user scenarios, or 'who' will be using your site
4. Outlining content for the site based on user scenarios and developing a site map
5. Determining how and when the site will be updated and with what type or content

Step II – Content

Step II is the creating of and organization of content. After you build a site map, content is written and organized based on that map. This can be done in any word processing program such as Microsoft Word. We suggest that you have at least one other person edit what you have written; we can always act as the third party editor as well. Some guidelines to consider:

- Approximately 300 – 500 words can be seen without scrolling in most browsers and computers
- Long scrolling pages are very tiresome on readers' eyes
- Bullet points or short intros (one sentence) are great for grabbing the reader and making them read on or helps them to decide if this is the information they needed

Step III – Design

Step III is concerned primarily with developing the visual image or corporate identity of the site. Many people start with a business card and need to translate that into an identity for a web site. Here's what happens:

1. Concept meeting to understand what you desire in web site colors, look, navigation elements (buttons, text, etc.)
2. The development of two or three samples page designs
3. Review of these designs by you and revisions as necessary
4. Finalization of a design for the site

Step IV – Development

This is all done by iCita. We code the site and put it in a secure location on the Internet for you to review periodically. We require your feedback immensely at specific times to move the process along.

Step V – Testing and Launch

Based on the criteria set by what people that will be using your site, we test the site in a variety of browsers and operating systems to make sure it works and looks great. The major ones include: Internet Explorer, Netscape and AOL.

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A more complicated project may include:

- Planning
 - Define of the scope
 - Develop high-level functional requirements
 - Create user-scenarios
 - Develop Information Architecture or Site Map
 - Develop technical requirements
 - Pinpoint key milestones
 - Align Critical Path
 - Organize project meetings regular updates
 - Allocate resources and high-level determination of tasks.

- Creative
 - Align creative concepts to functional requirements and information architecture
 - Create design comps for any new design and map to site map
 - Develop navigational aspects relating to an Internet or Intranet
 - Decide on utilization of web visual effects such as Flash and DHTML
 - Link with corporate visual identity

- Technical Development
 - Evaluate technical and functional requirements
 - Determine application development environment
 - Determine development tools and programming languages
 - Look at database access and integration to existing content management systems

- Testing
 - Evaluate testing criteria based on functional requirements
 - Test sequences based in multi-browser and OS environments
 - Determine system security requirements based on test criteria and user-base

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Summary

Currently, each project determines what type of preparation and planning needs to take place. Sometimes you need to evaluate current content, where other times you already know it needs to be changed and can move forward. By utilizing this document as a general outline of tasks, organizing a project will proceed much easier and with more confidence.

Our experience at iCita comes from building tried-and-true technology solutions. Our passion is entrepreneurial excellence. We have worked hand-in-hand with large telecommunications and travel-based organizations optimizing their Internet software models to bring substantial sales opportunities one-step closer to their customers. If you need us to assist in any way, we will always make ourselves available.

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