

2011

Website Planning Worksheet

Educate Yourself and Develop a Plan

Your website is an extension of your business onto the Internet. Whether you want to sell products or services online or merely provide potential or existing customers with information about your company, you will want your website to be consistent with the mission of your business. It is up to you, the expert on your business, to convey the image and information that you want to provide to the visitors. This worksheet will educate you on the overall process of creating a website including mention of the variety of features available.



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INTRODUCTION

Your website is an extension of your business onto the Internet. Whether you want to sell products or services online or merely provide potential or existing customers with information about your company, you will want your website to be consistent with the mission of your business. It is up to you, the expert on your business, to convey to the image and information that you want to provide to the visitors. This worksheet will educate you on the overall process of creating a website including mention of the variety of features available.

Our job will be to use our expertise and experience in this field to provide you with the guidance and consulting you need to proceed with the successful development, maintenance and promotion of your website in the most organized, cost effective and efficient manner. As with any project you undertake there are always budget constraints. When budgeting for a website project people without experience in this field often have difficulties understanding and forecasting the costs associated with certain features and functionality. Do not limit your brainstorming during the completion of this worksheet to your own perception of costs. Let your ideas run wild, but also maintain a consistency with your goals. When we meet with this worksheet in front of us, we will work to develop your ideas and aspirations into a plan that is consistent with your budget, as there many paths and approaches which will allow you to achieve your goals.

It is a good idea to be thinking ahead of what you want your website to accomplish. We suggest looking forward roughly two to five years. If we have a firm idea of your future plans with your website and/or business, we will guide you in a direction allowing for the smooth addition of extra functionality down the line without completely redesigning the site.

If you have any questions during the completion of this worksheet please don't hesitate to contact us.

Let's get started!

STEP 1: DETERMINE THE PURPOSE

Every website has a general purpose it is designed to serve. Outlining the purpose in the very beginning is essential to the smooth and organized development of your website. The first step is to become educated on the various types of websites.

There are three general types, and hybrids that combine features of two or more of them. Please read the brief descriptions of each type below and make selections that match your goals. Keep in mind that you can choose one or more of the selections below depending on your plans over the next two to five years. You can always add components and features to your website as time goes on.

INFORMATIONAL/BROCHURE

This is the simplest and most common type of website. Potential customers who visit the site can only browse. Information flows in one direction – to the visitor. There is not any data gathered from visitors; the only interaction they have is through their navigation of various sections of the site. This is the best type of site for content and information that doesn't change frequently.

The purpose of this type of site is to increase awareness, to develop an online presence and/or brand, to provide information about your organization or business and the products/services offered, and to inform visitors of how they can contact you.

INTERACTIVE/DYNAMIC

An Interactive/Dynamic website has many levels of complexity, but in the most general sense, it accepts input from visitors and processes that input in order to accomplish various tasks.

Information can flow in one or two directions – from the visitor to the website (input) and/or from the website to the visitor (output). Data is submitted through the use of forms that can be emailed to your company, gathered and stored in a database for retrieval at a later time, used real-time to provide responses to the clients input, or submitted to an online component or system for processing. Typically Interactive/Dynamic websites use a database to store data that is provided on the website, to visitors, to the website administrator, or to an online component or system. A more simple type of interactivity can instead use email to allow visitors to submit data to the company through an online form (one way information flow).

Keeping in mind that these information flows go through the public Internet, the concept of security becomes very important. A security risk assessment of the data is first needed to determine the privacy concerns from both your company's and your visitor's perspective. The outcome of this assessment will be used to develop a Privacy Policy and determine whether extra measures such as data encryption will be necessary.

The purpose of this type of site is to automate and/or organize a certain set of functions online, to increase awareness, to develop an online presence and/or brand, to provide information about your

organization or business and the products/services offered, and to provide online and offline methods for visitors to contact you.

E-COMMERCE

An E-commerce website, the most complex of the three types, provides visitors with the ability to buy or sell goods and/or services through your company, electronically through the Internet. Developing an E-commerce website involves the use of many different components that can either be purchased from a third party and implemented by us or developed and implemented specially for your needs. This type of website has all the characteristics of an Interactive/Dynamic website, except it adds the functionality of a payment or exchange system. The information gathered and presented through the website is typically stored in a database that is securely linked to the website. The presentation, placement, order and inventory tracking, selling, and payment of goods and/or services is all done through the website, on the screen, as an interactive and automated process.

Goods and services are presented using an online catalogue that provides the visitor with the details of each offering. When a visitor clicks to buy a specific product or service, that item is then placed in a virtual shopping cart, which is a designated temporary space for each visitor. The visitors can view/edit/add/delete items in the shopping cart as they browse, until they are ready for checkout. When the visitor proceeds to checkout, the order information is gathered from the shopping cart and moved to an empty space in the database. The visitor is then prompted to select payment and shipping or fulfillment options. There are several options available to accept online payment, all of which vary in functionality, and development and implementation costs. To protect the order and payment data from being intercepted, the credit card details must be submitted through the website securely, using a method of encryption called a secure socket layer (SSL). Once this information is captured and stored, the transaction is either processed and cleared by your staff at a later time using an ordinary swiping machine or telephone, or cleared over the Internet using a third party clearinghouse that contacts the customer's bank. Once the payment is approved or declined a confirmation is either obtained by your staff or sent through the website. A receipt of payment is then generated and sent through the website to the customer. The final part of this process alerts the website owner that the payment is authorized and order fulfillment commences. The company is notified securely through an online system or by email and proceeds to fulfill the order. During the fulfillment process a website owner can also provide a tracking feature whereby customers can check on the status of their order. This is done by providing the customer with a unique order id number that allows them to access the status through your website.

The purpose of this type of site is to expand your storefront securely onto the Internet, to provide clients with the ability to buy or sell goods/services online 24 hours a day, to increase your customer base in spite of geographic restrictions, to increase business awareness, to develop an online presence and/or brand, to provide both general and detailed information about your organization or business and the products/services offered, and to provide online and offline methods for visitors to contact you.

1. What is the general purpose of your website? _____