

Seven Steps to Creating a World Class Website

Introduction

In the development of a website, it is essential that a system be followed in order to ensure appreciable levels of productivity, consistency, positive results, and a smooth work process flow that would define the discrete stages of your work, thereby opening the grounds for professional delivery and presenting your client with value for their investment. The outlined steps below are purposed to create such a system that would effectively fulfill the above objectives.

In a website development project, effective communication between the client and the project-handling party are key requirements to the objectivity and completeness of the site. In this regard, any other information that the client may believe to be useful, but is not mentioned in this document, should please be passed across as deemed fit.

Step 1

Ensure that you understand the objective of the web site. Meet with the client and interview him strategically. Such information that should be elicited from the client are:

- What is the name of the client's business/company/enterprise?
- What is the nature of the business/company/enterprise for which the website is to be built? What kind of company is it? What do they do? Background, profile, services offered, contact details, etc.
- Apart from the natural propositions that a website offers, which are: providing an online presence for the client; and boosting the client's image/profile; is there any particular functionality that the web site is supposed to have? Is there a particular objective that the client demands that the site provide? [**Example 1:** A client might want other parties to advertise on his site. **Example 2:** A client might desire that interested visitors for a particular cause register on his site, or send emails to the company. **Example 3:** A client may want to offer a polling/voting service on his site. **Example 4:** A client may want a form of news on his site etc].

- Are there any particular desires of the client for the site?
[**Example:** Any particular set of images or videos or sound or material wanted on the site?]
- Is there any of the client's business services that should be effectively operational on the website?
- About how many email addresses would the client want for his site? [An email address for a website would be like this: "something@thesite.com".]
- What are the client's plans for managing the website's content and for maintaining the website, after it has been delivered? Are there any such plans?
- What is the client's budget for the website, relative to his/her desired overall quality of service? This information could help you have an appreciation of the grade and sophistication that the client has in mind. All in all, it is very important that whatever you provide for the client is of appreciable quality.

If, after meeting with the client the web site still seems to have no objective (being that the information provided is not sufficient, or that no information is provided at all – either situation an unlikely case), make one or more and if necessary and feasible, present such objectives to the client. **Make sure that there is a purpose behind the web site's existence.** The site should **do** something. This is very important. Develop the concept of the whole web site. Imagine it in your head. Imagine how visitors to the site would be browsing the site. Imagine the comfort and ease they are experiencing and imagine their problems being solved. Imagine the web site doing what it should do, no matter what that is (profit-making, advertising, profile-boosting, online presence, social meeting point, selling a product ... could be anything so long as that is the defined purpose of the web site). Think of how the visitors to the site are contacting the company either by phone or by email as a result of being on the site. Think of how the visitors would like to come back to the site and see what's happening or what's new. Just imagine the overall effect of the new web site. By doing this, you are able to picture what elements you would need to put in place in order to achieve the objective of the web site. You will have a better picture of how the web site interface should be; the kind of colors that would be predominant; the

overall look and feel of the web site; and the structuring and syntactic organization that would support an effective back-end operation and functionality.

Step 2

[This step **may** be overlooked, but is better it is followed] Get a pencil and plain A4 paper. Sketch out a sample structural design of the web site's layout. Prepare a minor storyboard for the home page of the site (and/or all major pages). Ensure that the image of the web site that you have in mind is what is represented on the sheet of paper, at least to a good extent such that you can actually 'feel' the web site 'coming out' when you look at the sheet. Indicate the different 'kinds' of major page structures there would be. In most cases, there would be either one or two 'kinds' of major page structure for the whole site. Indicate where images could be, where text could be, how text should be structured, and also indicate where some kinds of special effects might be. This sheet of paper would only act as a guide in the web site interface design process, as the design would most surely be reformed on screen, but a foundational design prototype is required to set a direction which you can conveniently follow.

Step 3

Using a graphic design application, create an interface design of the home page of the web site. Where the site structure is such that there are sub-web sites within the main web site, create an interface design of each of the sub-home pages within the main web site. A site's home page is the main root in the document tree structure that every web site possesses, and designing the interface enables you to have a clear concept of how the other pages in the web site would be, as most would be reached via links from the home page. With the home page interface design, the designer can virtually 'see' other pages and how they would relate to the home page, each other, and the rest of the web site. To the best of your knowledge and constraint limits, work on the home page interface design till it takes the form that it is expected to take when being viewed online. (This is not always feasible, but should be done to the best possible state, still being flexible in design to allow for future changes).

Step 4

In some cases, it may seem like a good idea to at this time (after designing the interface for the home page) create the actual home page using HTML and other web development tools, but it is best to finish up the 'interface design stage' before going to the 'web design and development stage'. Graphic interface design requires consistency and focus. If you design one page's interface, and you create the corresponding web page, and then come back to design the next page's interface, there could very possibly be a break in design flow and concept continuity and the designer may be required to go back into his thoughts to re-kick the design concept engine. This could take a lot of mental energy and may be a discouraging embarkation. So in the light of this opinion, the next step would be to create graphic interface designs for each of the other web site's pages as well.

Do this for all the main pages within the site. In most cases, the number of pages in a web site could be so large that designing each of the pages would be a very difficult task. By careful web site planning and content structuring, a number of web pages could have the same template (skeletal structure) with only the content and a few other objects differing. This strategy could be extremely helpful in web site design and development. After designing one page that would serve as the 'skeleton' or template for other pages, the designer may decide not to create interface designs for those similar pages, but just go on to the creation of the related web pages and replace the content and other site elements differing from page to page. All these interface designs should be flexible to make room for future improvement tweaking. Use reusable symbols if you can or must. They come in very handy in achieving consistent design paradigms.

Step 5

In the graphic interface designs there may be some sections of an interface that are required to be objects which are not solid graphical objects but multimedia objects or other objects of a different format. These objects should be created or developed using the appropriate application. For multimedia objects, macromedia flash or swish max could be used. For applets, Java could be used, and so on. After the graphic interface design, the other objects should be created to fit the predefined space allocated to such objects in the

graphic interface design.

Step 6

Now that the interface designs are complete, it is time to create the actual web pages. Don't just jump into your HTML editor and start typing away. Before you create the corresponding web page for an interface you should look at the elements discretely and predetermine how each would be represented, using the appropriate web language. Having a mental overview of the way the web site would work would go a long way in planning the page coding and structuring of the elements that would make up the web page. This way, your coding and content structuring process would be much easier, and your web site comes out looking more professional. Do this for all the pages you have designed and intend to be present in the web site.

Step 7

When you have finished creating all the web pages, you are now ready to host the web site. After hosting the web site it should be thoroughly tested for flaws in the functionality and navigation. When tested satisfactorily and errors fixed, the web site should be tested again. Bugs always crop up in unexpected places and only by testing the web site through natural or induced usage would you discover the broken links and code holes. Fix all errors you can find and when satisfied, you can inform your client that her web site is ready for use. You may want her to visit the web site and give you feedback on her thoughts on what she might want to be changed or improved, by her own standards. In a number cases and circumstances, you may have to refuse an extent of modification that the client demands. Otherwise if you can handle it, or if you can devise a means of acquiring commission for working on the client's post-web site development demands, go ahead and make her happy. After all, that's why you are in the web development business.

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