

Website Planning Guide

The creation of an effective website involves careful consideration of a wide range of strategic, creative and technical issues.

This guide is designed to aid the web strategy planning process by providing a step-by-step approach to defining an effective eBusiness strategy. After completing the steps contained in this guide, you will be well on your way toward creating a web strategy that will help your company produce measurable business results.

Step 1: Define Goals & Objectives

What will be the purpose of your new website? Before starting a web project, it is important to step back and take a broad view of your company's goals and objectives. An effective website can help you achieve a number of business goals. Some examples include: marketing and attracting new customers, enhancing customer service, selling online, improving sales force and distributor productivity, etc.

It is extremely important that you align your company's eBusiness objectives with your overall business and marketing objectives to ensure you are on the path for success. To define the goals and objectives for your new website, please complete the exercises below.

What are the primary objectives for your website?

(Please check all that apply)

- Marketing and attracting new customers
- Improving brand or company awareness
- Selling online
- Enhancing customer service
- Improving communication with existing customers
- Fostering internal communication and collaboration among employees
- Improving sales force and distributor productivity
- Streamlining collaboration with partners
- Other:

What are the short-and long-term goals for your website?

Short-term:

Long-term:

How will your website fit into your overall business strategy?

How will your website fit into your overall marketing strategy?

What is the allocated budget for this website development project?

What are the schedule requirements for this website development project?

When does the new website have to be live?

Step 2: Identify Your Target Audience

It's time to focus on the most important thing that will make or break your website: your target audience. Only by meeting their individual needs will your website be successful in spurring them into action: requesting information, placing an order, signing up for a newsletter, or just bookmarking your site for future reference.

Take a moment to brainstorm about your target audiences. Who are they? What goals do you have for them? What information or feature will each audience group need? By targeting specific audience groups, you will be able to meet their individual needs.

Audience Group #1:

Your goals for this Audience Group:

Information & feature needs for this Audience Group:

Audience Group #2:

Your goals for this Audience Group:

Information & feature needs for this Audience Group:

Audience Group #3:

Your goals for this Audience Group:

Information & feature needs for this Audience Group:

Step 3: Analyze the Competition

The Web has been called the great equalizer in that it has leveled the playing field by providing companies, even small companies, the opportunity to compete with their largest competitor. An

effectively designed website can make a small company look large. Also, a poorly designed website can make even a large, successful company look small and insignificant.

It is important that your website stand out among your competitors. Your site needs to make a great first impression and follow up with valuable information and features to successfully convert visitors into customers. How can you ensure that you stand out? Start by reviewing the websites of your competitors.

Who are your top competitors? Please spend time reviewing your competitors' websites. You can learn much from your competitors' online successes and failures.

Competitor #1:

Website address:

What do you like about their website?

What do you dislike about their website?

What makes your company different and better than this competitor?

Competitor #2:

Website address:

What do you like about their website?

What do you dislike about their website?

What makes your company different and better than this competitor?

Competitor #3:

Website address:

What do you like about their website?

What do you dislike about their website?

What makes your company different and better than this competitor?

Competitor #4:

Website address:

What do you like about their website?

What do you dislike about their website?

What makes your company different and better than this competitor?

Step 4: Analyze Popular Websites

From tens to hundreds of thousands of dollars have been invested by companies such as Yahoo!, Amazon, Dell and others to make their websites meaningful and attractive for users. Analyzing these sites for best practices can reveal ideas and strategies that could be very beneficial for your website.

Popular Site #1:

Website address:

What do you like about this website?

What do you dislike about this website?

What can you include from this site to make yours better?

Popular Site #2:

Website address:

What do you like about this website?

What do you dislike about this website?

What can you include from this site to make yours better?

Popular Site #3:

Website address:

What do you like about this website?

What do you dislike about this website?

What can you include from this site to make yours better?

Popular Site #4:

Website address:

What do you like about this website?

What do you dislike about this website?

What can you include from this site to make yours better?

Step 5: Review Your Existing Website

While your website may need significant improvements, there may be aspects of your current website that are working and that should be included in your new and improved web presence.

Please take a close look at your current website and answer the questions below. Please be as specific as possible. This information will go a long way toward determining how an updated website can better meet your needs.

The Good

What do you like about your current website? What has been working?

The Bad

What do you not like about your current website? Where have there been problems?

The Feedback

Our customers and prospects are often the harshest critics and give us the most insightful praise. What have other people said about your website?

Step 6: Consider Specific Site Content & Features

Now that you have worked out the goals of the new website and who your audience is, it is time to make sure that you provide your audiences with the content and features they desire.

When completing the questions below, please keep your target audiences in mind. Your new website is for them, not you. All content and features should focus on the needs of your customers and prospects. Your new website should make it easy for customers to do business with you.

What content will be presented on the website?

Where will content come from? Will it be new, re-purposed or both?

Will content be personalized for specific audience groups? If so, how?

How often will you add new content? Who will update the content?

What features and functionality should you include on your website?

(Please check all that apply)

- Online catalog of products
- eCommerce capabilities / Online sale of products
- Lead generation capabilities
- Online customer service features
- Password-protected areas / “Members Only” content
- Intranet: employee communication and collaboration
- Extranet: business partner communication and collaboration
- Interactive demonstrations / presentations
- Content management tools / Non-technical web publishing system
- Permission-based eMail marketing programs / eNewsletters
- New employee recruiting / Career opportunities
- Discussion forums
- Investor relations / press relations features
- Search engine marketing programs
- Integration with internal databases / applications / legacy systems
- Other:

Step 7: Identify Keyword Search Phrases

What are the top 10-20 keyword search phrases that a prospect would type into Google Search if they were looking for your products or services?

Step 8: Define Your Metrics

We have made a lot of progress in this guide. We know your overall goals, who your target audience is, who your competitors are, what kind of feedback you have had about your existing site and how your site will serve your target audiences.

Now it is time for one of the most important steps of the planning process – defining your success criteria.

How will you know if your website is a success? By defining specific measurable results you would like your website to achieve. Some examples of success measures include number of leads generated, online sales goals, number of newsletter subscribers, search engine ranking, increase in website visitors, customer service efficiency improvements, etc.

Please list the top five measures for your new website in order of importance.

Success Measure #1:

Success Measure #2:

Success Measure #3:

Success Measure #4:

Success Measure #5