a client & beginner's GUIDE to WEBSITE design
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why do you need a website?

To start, write down a few reasons to why you think you need a website.

- Do your customers ask you if you have a website?

- Do you sell products or services that they might want to inquire on first before hiring you or making a purchase?

- Is your business new and in need of marketing?

There are many reasons why a business like yours might need a website. In today’s world, the phone book is becoming smaller in size and lost in the sea you call your junk drawer. Don’t let your business drown in that same sea. You should at least have a basic website that gives your potential customers a way to find you, contact you and read about what you can offer them.

show your expertise

One of the main reasons to have a website is to show you are knowledgeable in your particular market. People like to do research when they are thinking about hiring or making a purchase. With so much information available online, it makes it easy to choose between businesses. If your business doesn’t have anything out there, you might not be considered. People are too busy these days to physically visit each business they are interested in and talk to their representatives. Granted not all people prefer to research online. This is why it’s important to know your target market too!
why are you redesigning?

So you already have a website? Congratulations! You’ve already taken that first step into the online world. But what now? Keeping up with the speed of technology is no easy task. Chances are your website could become outdated within two years of building it. Designing a website that allows for flexibility and change is key. Most businesses large and small don’t have the budget to redesign their website every two years. But, a small budget should be allotted for updates and redesign projects.

common reasons for redesigns

1 - The design is outdated or doesn’t match our branding strategy.

2 - Our business wants to integrate a blog into our website.

3 – Screens are wider and we’d like to take advantage of the extra space.

4 – We need a way to do “x” for our customers and our technology doesn’t allow for “x”.

5 – Our Content Management System is too complicated for our employees to use. Simplify it please.

what are your goals?

What are you trying to accomplish with your website? Are you trying to acquire new customers? Are you trying to give your current customers more of a reason to stay with you over your competitors? Are you trying to find a way to make it easier for your employees to complete their work internally? Do you need a contact form to make it easier for your customers to give you specific information when contacting you? Are you looking to start selling your products online?

Whatever your goals are, make sure you can pinpoint them before starting your web project. Your designer or developer will then be able to offer you more solutions to solve your problems. That is what they do best. If they don’t know what your problems are. They won’t have anything to solve.

design briefs

Every good designer or developer uses some form of a design brief. Whether it’s a physical document or a phone call discussing the items on the brief, it should be done before your project begins. A design brief contains questions about your project needs. You should discuss your target market, brand, likes & dislikes (if you already have a website), your competitors & their websites (if applicable) and more.
A web designer needs to understand your target market. Your target market describes every aspect about your customers. Here are a few things you should know about your audience:

**know your target market**

1-Age Range & Gender
2-Location
3-Education Level
4-Income Range
5-Lifestyle
6-Household Size
7-Stage in Life
8-Values

**budget considerations**

Yes, as much as you’d rather not think about it, every web project costs money. And yes, you generally pay for what you get. There is more to making a website look “pretty” than you think. It also needs to be functional and appropriate for your target audience. You also need to be able to use it and manage it easily. It isn’t something you can learn how to do overnight as many common misconceptions out there may lead you to believe.

**budget for web design project**

The best way to budget for a website is to talk to a professional and have them give you an idea for what it might cost. Depending on your needs, a website could range anywhere from 1,500 to 250,000+.

**Items to Consider:**

1-Web Design
2-Web Development
3-Photography
4-Illustration
5-Content & Writers
6-Video
7-Blogging Cost
8-Maintenance & Updates
If you're working with a small budget, what items are essential for you to do business properly? The more functionality you are looking for, the more it will cost. The more advanced the design elements are, the more time to build etc. Make sure you have a budget in mind first. From there, your web team can help create a site that will remain within your budget as much as feasibly possible.

**timeline**

When estimating any website project there are a few items you need to factor in. Most businesses forget to factor in two important and often time consuming elements.

**These include:**

- Time for Reviews & Feedback
- Time for Revisions
- Time to Test and Analyze

Working with a project manager can help to decrease the time it takes to reach a launch date. Photography, illustration, and content writing can often be done at the same time as the design of the website is being created.
what does a web designer do?

A web designer can have many roles. Often times they are assumed to be programmers as well as designers by those who don’t quite understand the differences. Some web designers are jack-of-all-trades and can perform development tasks. Others stick to their strengths and are responsible for the front-end tasks only.

Front-end tasks include all of the elements that make up the visual components of a website. HTML, CSS, JavaScript, and jQuery are a few languages that can be the responsibility of a web designer.

A web designer is responsible for putting together page designs and making the designs come to life on the screen in the form of HTML & CSS. They also may have experience with Flash but that isn’t always the case.

When hiring a web designer, you shouldn’t expect them to develop and program a website too. Make sure you inquire first and understand their personal limitations. In today’s world, most web designers tend to have a pretty good handle on CSS. Otherwise they would be considered a graphic designer, rather than a web designer. But, like mentioned, always ask and don’t assume.
what does a web developer do?
The back-end tasks require programming knowledge such as PHP, ASP, JavaScript, AJAX, Perl, C#, .Net, Java etc. These tasks often include working with a database and all server-side operations that go on behind the scenes. When a user orders a product, submits a form or does a search it calls upon the server to perform such tasks. These tasks all require a developer.

Developers don’t design like pros too, unless you’ve found a hybrid genius. But in most cases looking for two candidates that are experts in their particular areas is best. With so many different programming languages to learn, throwing in usability design, typography, CSS and HTML and more isn’t an easy workload.

what does a project manager do?
A project manager is responsible for keeping all tasks on schedule. They make sure each individual component to the project is being done to your expectations. They can be essential to any mid to large size web project for a few reasons.

why hire or designate a project manager to work on your team?

1- Allow for all communication to go through your project manager
   This helps to decrease the time spend communicating back and forth between different team members so they can stay on schedule and get work done.

2- Organize meetings and phone agendas
   Project managers can help to keep a team on task by putting together a list of items to accomplish in a meeting or phone call. This helps to save time, keeps questions from being overlooked, and to keep discussions moving when they get off topic.

3- Setting up project milestones & deadlines
   They are responsible for working with all team members to build a schedule with each specific task that should be done by a particular date. Certain tasks can be done simultaneously and can help shave days off the timeline.

There are many software programs that can aid in project scheduling.

These include: Microsoft Project, Basecamp, DeskAway, Intervals & more.
freelance vs. agency/studio vs. in-house

freelance
Freelancers are generally professionals who work on a contract basis with multiple clients. They generally work by themselves and/or with a network of other freelancers who they will sub-contract duties that they don’t have the time or expertise to do themselves. Freelancers can work from any type of location, which is often the appeal to this type of work.

+benefits
1- Less overhead costs which translates into less costs for you!
2- Specialized skills can allow you to build your team based on the best of the best, rather than a combined team of average skills.
3- You don’t have to pay a freelancer benefits, spend money on their equipment, or use up valuable space for your full-time employees if they are working off-site.

-drawbacks
Less resources available to utilize on-hand. Usually more resources will require additional contracts with other freelancers such as a photographer, developer, illustrator etc.

agency/studio
Working with an agency generally gives you access to many different people, technology and resources. They can consist of anywhere from two to thousands of people and work with multiple clients. An agency resides at a physical location, whereas a freelancer may work from a home office or a shared office space with other freelancers.
+benefits

1- More resources at your disposal.

2- From different areas of expertise to robust technology and conference room space — an agency can offer you all the bells and whistles you may be looking for. If you’re able to find a photographer, copywriter, designer and developer all for one package deal, this can save time in trying to find them individually.

–drawbacks

1- More expenses due to more employees & more overhead (studio space, utility costs, etc.)

2- If you are using an agency for multiple areas (photography, writing, design etc.) you end up putting all your eggs in one basket.

in-house

Don’t forget to take advantage of what you already have in-house. Bring up the idea to your internal team members. See if there is room in their day-to-day schedules to handle a potentially big project. Consider hiring temporary contract teammates to help ease on the extra workload.

+benefits

1- Utilizing the team you already have assembled will most likely increase employee moral if done properly. Don’t expect them to put in extra hours so you can squeeze in additional work, unless you plan on paying for it. That will only cause unhappy workers.

2- This option can be cost effective if you have the resources available to dedicate to the project.

3- You will also save time from having to educate an external team on your company goals, missions and processes.

4- Another benefit is that you may be able to squeeze more revisions and changes into the project.

–drawbacks

1- Additional strain on your employees’ workload.

2- Longer timeline to reach a launch date due to multiple tasks also on their plate.

3- Less resources and technology may be available internally.
what to look for in particular candidates

- **Communication of Knowledge**
  Ability to communicate their skills & knowledge effectively from the get-go. If you aren’t aware of what your candidate should know, have someone internally that is knowledgeable in that particular area to sit in on the interview.

- **Flexibility in Schedule**
  Ability to set a schedule that works well with yours.

- **Quick Communication**
  Should reply within 24 hours during business days. Otherwise they should let you know ahead of time when you can expect to hear from them again.

- **Communicating Often**
  You should expect your team members to keep you updated on the goings-on of a project.

Before hiring them to work on a large project, give them a smaller one to tackle to see if they would be a good fit for your team. This way you’ll save yourself money, time and frustration if they don’t work out.
how do we review? when?

These questions should be answered up front between all team members. You should know when and how you will be reviewing your project deliverables before the project begins.

“Communication is key no matter what the size of the project is.”

When setting up a project schedule, consider breaking down the tasks into different milestones. This makes a large project more manageable and gives a sense of completion throughout the entire project, rather than just at the end. Each milestone should have a reachable deadline. Communicate with the leads responsible for getting the particular tasks done within each milestone. They can tell you how long it will take and when to set review dates.

Don’t forget to factor in holidays, vacations and other projects that may be going on internally. As you can see, all of the factors and # of people involved can make it impossible to get everyone in a meeting at the same time.

Once you have some preliminary dates setup, send them out to everyone involved in the team. If a team member could attend a meeting, but doesn’t necessarily need to be there, set them as optional on the meeting requests and make sure they know what the expectations are when sending. It’s helpful to alleviate the number of meetings on their schedule so they can get some work done too!

who should be involved in the meeting?

The more people involved in the decision-making, the longer it will take for a project to move forward. If the project affects many different departments in your organization, make sure those particular department leads are involved on their specific areas.
There is no need to waste their time by including them on all steps of the project. It drags out the project timeline and keeps them from getting other work done. Only involve the people who need to be involved. If you still end up having a large group, try and have more internal meetings before meeting with any external partners. This will save you money by cutting back on the meeting time with these partners/vendors.

**meeting expectations**

Someone should be selected to run every meeting. They should have a brief list (at minimum) of all topics that need to be covered. There should also be an end goal to each meeting. It’s very easy for a meeting to get off topic, especially with a large number of people involved. Your meeting leader should be responsible for getting the meeting back on task and keeping track of time.

It’s common for external vendors to send meeting agendas out to make sure you understand what needs to be included in a particular meeting from their end.

Even if the meeting is a brief conference call between three team members, everyone on the call should have a general idea what is going to be covered and what they should have prepared for it to be effective.

**“Emailing a quick bulleted list out beforehand can make a pointless call an effective one.”**

**TIP** Make sure when sending out meeting invites, to include a meeting agenda. Give the team members enough time before the meeting to prepare their materials or information. A common mistake is to send out an agenda the day of a meeting. Chances are your team also has other meetings and items to accomplish that day and won’t have a chance to properly prepare.
At the end of each meeting or conference call, it’s important that every person involved understand what his or her takeaways are. What tasks do they need to accomplish before the next meeting? Which people do they need to contact in order for the next steps of the project to go smoothly? By when should they accomplish said tasks? The meeting leader should quickly go around the room and make sure each team member knows what their next objectives are.

Nowadays, many designers, developers, writers, etc. work remotely with their clients. There are many different ways to communicate effectively when working with an external team.

**Here are a few great solutions for holding virtual meetings:**

- **GoToMeeting**
- **WebEx**
- **Adobe Connect**
- **Fuze Meeting**
- **InterCall**

**Skype** is also a great tool when working across the country or with team members overseas. You can easily video chat or make a phone call at no cost. Free is great when international calls can get expensive.

**online project managers**

Not everyone has an exceptionally large budget to work with and can afford to hire a project manager. Another great second is to take advantage of an online project management system. Many web development companies and designers use them to help them communicate, stay on schedule and organize their projects when working remotely. They are also great to see where time is being spent, keeping track of outstanding invoices, and keeping in touch with all team members without clogging up email in-boxes.

To the left is an example of the time spent on a project in a particular area. You can see the weeks where this area was heavily focused on and weeks it wasn’t. A project manager can analyze data like this to determine weak areas of the team or ways to pick-up the pace.
**design brief**
A document with multiple questions about your business.

**example of design brief questions**
1. Who makes up your target market?
2. List your main competitors.
3. What are your goals for this project?

**HTML**
**Stands for:** HyperText Markup Language
Consists of different tags combined to create the structure of any website. The tags are put together in pairs with the content of your website filling in the spaces in between.

**CSS (Style Sheet)**
**Stands for:** Cascading Style Sheets
These documents contain the colors, fonts, layout and overall appearance of a website. They are separated from the HTML structure to reduce repeating the styling of similar elements on multiple pages. A style sheet may only need to be altered once to have an affect on multiple pages of a website, hence having a cascading effect. A style sheet can control the layout of a website. Some web designers choose to separate the colors and fonts in a separate style sheet than the layout elements. There are also different style sheets that apply to printing a web page or to view a webpage on a mobile device.

**PHP**
**Stands for:** HyperText Preprocessor
It allows for dynamic web content to be displayed and/or interacted with on a web page.
CMS
Stands for: Content Management System
A CMS allows it’s users to edit, delete and manage the content of a website from a visual interface. A successful CMS requires no knowledge of programming languages, CSS or HTML to easily update a website. A CMS can be open source or built from scratch depending on the budget of your web project and the needs of your organization.


SEO
Stands for: Search Engine Optimization
Planning out and writing a website’s content to improve the likelihood of it showing up for relevant search terms in search engines such as: Google, Yahoo & Bing. SEO can be a part of the following tasks: Keyword research, content writing, web design, web development & blogging.

alt tag
Alternate text used to describe an image. Used by search engines and screen readers in place of an image.

Example of HTML: <img src="example.jpg" alt="example image">

title tag
Text used to describe the webpage in the top of the browser window.

Example of HTML: <title>This is your page title</title>

call to action
A button, arrow or other graphic element, which entices a user to perform a particular action.

Call to Action Examples

Example of Usage: A button appears to be clickable, causing the user to click on the button and bring them further into the website.
**hero**

A common term used to refer to the main image on a homepage or landing page. Below you’ll see an example of the hero area highlighted in orange.

![Hero Section](image)

**promo area**

An area on a website which can be used to promote products and/or services and is typically changed out frequently. A promo area is typically used to showcase graphics.

**exit page**

When looking at web analytics (data statistics from your website) an exit page is the last page a visitor may see before exiting your website.

**Example:** On many e-commerce websites, the shopping cart is a popular exit page.

**landing page**

A page on a website that contains specific and direct promotional content or information that a user is directed to from clicking an advertisement or other external link.

**drop-down**

A drop-down can be one of two elements: A drop-down menu is a navigational menu that has sub-menus or categories below it. When clicked on, the sub menus “drop down” and are then visible to the user. A drop-down field is found within a form on a website. It acts similar to a drop-down menu, but it requires the user to choose an option from multiple choices.
**flyout navigation**

A flyout navigation menu contains multiple links to different pages and/or categories on a website. It’s typically contains multiple columns, whereas a drop-down menu may only display one column below the main tab.

**rollover**

A rollover is an action that happens when a user places his or her mouse over a particular element that has a rollover effect applied to it. The mouse action causes the element’s appearance to change into a different image, color or font style.

**input field**

An input field is a blank area where a user would input specific text based information. They are found within a form on a website.

**optimization**

This term is used to refer to the reduction of size of an element to be more ideal for web use.

**Example:** Images used on a website should be optimized to a smaller file size to decrease the time it takes to load the page they reside on.

**white space**

This term is commonly mistaken for actual “white” colored space. White space could be red, green or any color. It refers to the space around elements. White space allows the elements to stand out to the user. If your designer says your website needs more white space, that means there are too many elements crammed in too small of a space. Having too much white space can also cause elements to be pushed too far down the page. There should be just the right balance of space and elements to form a successful web page design.

**style guide**

A style guide is a document that includes all of the colors, fonts, and branding guidelines for a website, brochure, book or complete brand.

**TIP** A style guide is often a great guide to supply a web developer so there are no questions about the technical specifications of a design. It also can save them time from having to go back and forth with the designer.
Above is an example of a style guide.

**comp/mock-up**

Refers to a representative sample or preview of the design for a website, book, brochure, etc.

**Example:** For a website, a comp would be the non-functioning design sample of the homepage. Or, it could be a design sample the developer would use to setup the link colors on a particular section of the website.

A designer would supply you with design comps to show you what the website would look like before a developer begins to code it. Giving feedback on design comps, rather than coded sample pages will save you time and money, especially when there are changes that need to be made. They act as visual plans.

**UI**

**Stands for:** User Interface.

A UI designer focuses on the usability between a website and it's users. They make sure the targeted user can use the website with ease by designing elements to make their experience easy.

**Example:** The UI of the website allowed the user to easily find the product they were searching for and make a purchase.
UX

**Stands for:** User Experience.

This term encompasses UI. It includes all of the emotions, feelings, moods etc. associated with the use of a website’s UI.

**Example:** While using Sarah Lynn Design’s UI to find work samples, the user experienced happiness, a sense of clarity and no feelings of frustration while completing the task. The UX of user “A” was relatively good. If they felt confused, frustrated and lost, their user experience would be poor.

wireframe

Very crude and simplistic drawings and/or layouts of a webpage, which typically have no design applied. Wireframes are used in the preliminary stages of a website design. They allow for designers to focus on the UI and the layout of content first before applying any design. This is a critical step in any mid to large size website that has a lot of different elements and/or content. The design of a website can often distract from it’s true purpose of displaying information and content effectively. Many designers do this step first to avoid missing any crucial elements or information. Wireframing can save time in development by allowing for items to be missed in the planning or design phase rather than in the final stages. It typically costs more to rework an already designed and developed web page than to catch a mistake in the planning stages.

**Wireframing Programs:** [Omnigraffle](https://www.omnigroup.com/omnigraffle/), [Axure](https://www.axure.com/), and [Pidoco](https://www.pidoco.com/).
Above is a very basic example of a wireframe using Omnigraffle.

**branding**

A brand encompasses all messages, promotions, actions, products etc. that a particular business releases to the public. A common misconception is that a logo design is a business’ brand.

To retain consistent branding for your business, it’s important to keep the same level of design across all of your promotional pieces that are visible to the public.

**common file types**

*.psd*
Adobe Photoshop file format – Often used for photography editing, website designs and various other graphics
.eps
Stands for: Encapsulated PostScript
A common vector file format allowing a graphic to be resized without altering the quality or resolution. Designers often request this type of file when needing a business’ logo if used on multiple mediums or large formats.

.ai
A vector file format used for Adobe Illustrator. A vector file can be resized to an infinite size without any data loss. This is ideal for large graphics and certain types of printing such as screen printing.

.jpg
This file extension is used for JPEG files.
A JPEG is created with lossy compression. Lossy compression removes portions of the data of a particular file allowing it to be easily viewable on the web in a smaller file size. Photographs are generally good candidates for this type of compression.

.gif
Stands for: Graphics Interchange Format.
A simple graphic, typically not a photograph is a good candidate for this type of compressed file. A GIF is created using lossless compression, which reduces the size of the file without removing any of the original data. GIF also supports animation. You might hear the term animated GIF occasionally. Some designers may use an animated GIF in email design or in simple web banner ads.

.png
Stands for: Portable Network Graphics.
This file type uses lossless compression and is similar to a GIF. The difference is a PNG allows for transparency and can’t be used in a CMYK (print) color space. It’s meant for use on the web. PNG does not support animation.

.swf
Stands for: Small Web Format.
File format for displaying animations on the web. A SWF is created by the program Adobe Flash and can’t be edited. To edit a flash file, you need the original .fla extension file.
the power of color

Orange could be your favorite color, but it doesn't necessarily mean it's your customer's favorite. So how do you go about deciding on a color palette for a website or new business' branding strategy?

Colors have different driving forces, certain cultural meanings that should be taken into consideration before just choosing your favorites.

Below is a guide to color meanings.
color & branding

Having consistent color usage throughout all your marketing materials is essential in creating a brand that people will remember. If Target started using blue instead of red, their customers wouldn’t recognize their messaging as Target, the brand they know and love. Setting up a color palette and style guide that can be used specifically for your brand is a great way to ensure consistency. Make sure you deliver that guide to all vendors that may be developing creative assets for you.

hue

A color such as: green, red, blue, purple, etc.

saturation

The level of white present in a particular color. A pastel color palette would be considered lightly saturated. Whereas a bold color palette would be highly saturated.

value

The lightness or darkness of a color. The value of the color can change the meaning dramatically. For instance, dark yellow can look dirty and dingy, whereas bright yellow has the opposite effect.

typography

There are two main categories of fonts — if they had to be put into two groups. Each type (no pun intended Laughing) has its best uses. Other font groups might be: Hand drawn, comic, script, retro, typewriter, western, grunge, and many more. Let’s take a look at the two main groups, sans serif and serif.
sans serif type
Type without ("sans") any fancy tails or squiggles on the ends of each of the characters. Best used for large amounts of text for its ease of readability. Below is an example of four different sans serif fonts.

There are thousands of different sans serif fonts. Yet, even the slightest alteration in style can give your website a totally different look.

serif type
Type with extended characters. They come in a variety of styles from bracketed and rounded to slender and sharp. The slightest change in serif type can make a dramatic difference to a set of type. Serif fonts are best for page titles or very short sections of text. Below is an example of four different serif fonts.
leading (commonly known as line spacing)

Leading is the distance between two lines of type. For larger blocks of text, increasing the line spacing can help make your content more readable. Also, try increasing the leading between paragraphs to break-up large blocks of text. Below is an example of how leading can affect a body of type.


Large Amount of Leading

Small Amount of Leading

kerning (commonly known as letter spacing)

Rule of thumb = the more space between letters, the easier the word is to read (to a point of course!) There should be an equal amount of space between letters. When there isn’t it makes the text more difficult to read as well. Below is an example of how kerning can affect type.

kerning

Small Amount of Kerning

Large Amount of Kerning

Adjusting the letter spacing can completely change the look of your type. It’s another way for designers to make website’s unique to their owners.
web safe fonts

There are a number of web-safe fonts available for you to use on your website. Web-safe means that the font is available on most users computers. PCs and Macs have different standard fonts available on their respective systems. This is why you should set three different attributes when declaring a font family in your website’s CSS. If the first font isn’t available, the browser moves on to the second font and so on.

Example of CSS: font-family: Arial, Helvetica, Sans Serif;

sans-serif web safe fonts

Arial
Comic Sans
Impact
Verdana
Trebuchet MS
Tahoma
Lucida Sans Unicode

serif web safe fonts

Times New Roman
Georgia
Palatino Linotype

@font-face

So what about the thousands of other fonts? Good question! Browsers now support the use of the selector @font-face. This allows you to host fonts directly on your server and then reference that font in your CSS font-family declaration. No matter which browser your customer is using, the font will look as you intended it to (give or take a few pixels in certain browsers :)

Below is an example of what that might look like in your CSS:

```css
@font-face {
  font-family: "ArvoRegular";
  src: url("fonts/Arvo-Regular-webfont.eot");
  src: url("fonts/Arvo-Regular-webfont.eot?#iefix") format('eot'),
       url("fonts/Arvo-Regular-webfont.woff") format('woff'),
       url("fonts/Arvo-Regular-webfont.ttf") format('truetype'),
       url("fonts/Arvo-Regular-webfont.svg#webfontau9vOdr1")
       format('svg'); font-weight: normal;
  font-style: normal;
}
```
As you can see it’s still a little messy, due to the different ways the browsers handle web fonts. Each font style (IE. Bold, Italic, etc.) needs to be declared as well as hosted on your web server, adding to the size of your CSS file.

Currently, W3C (an international web standards organization) is working towards standardizing the WOFF web font format. Currently Firefox and Chrome support this format, due to its small file size and the ability to add a license to it.

**further @font-face resources around the web**

- The [@font-face rule and useful web font tricks](#)
- [@font-face](#)
- [@font-face Font Kits](#)

**white space**

Alas, the infamous term white space. You might have heard this term thrown around loosely once or twice. For a definition, check out Chapter 4 Terminology. Depending on your industry and site goals, white space guidelines can vary drastically. Adding space around important elements can allow them to stand out on the page. It also makes text more readable because the eye has less to take in at once. The more you cram into a small area, the harder it will be for your user to process each individual piece.

Real estate on a web page is extremely important, especially for e-commerce sites. There needs to be a fine balance between using white space and pushing important content too far down the page. Your designer can provide you with their recommendations based on your particular needs.

**screen resolution**

An important factor to consider when creating a website design is the screen resolution you should be targeting. Today, the standard screen size is higher than 1024 x 768. But many users with larger screens don’t maximize their browser window to fill the entire screen. I recommend you take a look at [W3school’s screen resolution trend chart](#) to see the current sizes. Your web designer should be able to give you recommendations as well. Consider your target market and what screen size they may be using.

A good way to find out demographics if you are starting a new business is to use an online tool called [Quantcast](#). Simply type in a web address similar to your business and take a look at their site’s demographics. This will give you a close idea of what your typical buyers might be like.
the fold

When working on a website design, one item to take into account is the fold, or where the bottom of the browser window is. Many users install toolbars on their browsers and don’t maximize the browser window as mentioned previously. Therefore the fold could fall only 500 pixels down your web page, rather than the standard 768 pixel mark. The web has been around quite sometime now and many older customers are beginning to use the Internet more frequently. Most users do know how to scroll down a page without any issues. But, that doesn’t mean you should bury important elements too far below the fold.

Below is an example of where a “fold” would be located in orange. The important information is all above the fold for ease of usability (circled).

Online retailers often struggle with the fold phenomenon and their call to actions, such as the add to cart button. Your customer shouldn’t have to scroll very far to be able to perform a crucial action such as adding an item to their shopping cart. Often times there is a logical flow to product page. You choose the size, color and quantity attributes and then click an add to cart button. Even if the button happens to fall below the fold, the user would still need to select all preceding options before performing that final action.

All that said, it’s an important factor to consider but if the process and flow of the page makes sense while scrolling, the fold of the browser window isn’t going to affect conversion as much as one might think it will.
optimization for speed

Please wait while your page loads...

Your designer, visually, may have the best collection of work you've ever seen! They've even come highly recommended by other businesses in your area. But their sites load extremely slow. Or maybe you don't recognize their speed issues because you're using a high speed Internet connection. Too bad your target market is still using dial-up or a basic cable connection.

“Speed can cause your customers to leave your site within 4 seconds. Don’t make them wait. You wouldn’t want them to wait in your physical store, why not consider their patience level online too?”

3 quick tips to decreasing load times

1-optimize all images throughout your website
Save all images at the exact size they appear on the website at 72 dpi. If you can create the graphic in CSS rather than using an image, do it. Don’t cut corners and slow down your website when you don’t need to.

2- limit your use of Flash
If you don’t have another option, make sure the movie is fully optimized and tested. Make sure you have a loading bar to show the user something is happening so they don’t decide to leave before it’s done loading.

3-use external CSS files and avoid inline CSS when possible
When you include CSS directly in an HTML file, the browser has to load additional code every time a page loads. A browser is setup to cache reusable items such as CSS and JavaScript code. When a browser caches a file, it refers to it locally, rather than downloading the file from the server each time a new page loads.

YSlow is a great add-on for Firefox to determine how well your site’s performance is. It grades your site on content, CSS, HTTP requests, images, and more.

illustration & photography
Illustrations & photos can really bring a sense of personality to your website. But, not all styles or shots are ideal for every business. When working on a website team, it’s important to always think about your target market and what they would want to see, rather than what your personal preference is.
understanding the process

Each designer, agency, studio may have a different process for reviewing work with their clients. For a successful experience, as mentioned before, it’s important to understand how the process will work before it begins.

A few questions you should consider asking are:

1. How many revisions or rounds of reviews will there be?
2. How will our review sessions be run? Online? In person? Via a phone conference? Where will they be held?
3. What will we review in each session?

how-to give effective and constructive feedback

Feedback can really make or break the effectiveness of a design. From a designer’s perspective, it can be easy to take criticism the wrong way. Reviewing sessions should lead to improving a website’s effectiveness not the other way around. There is always a fine line between personal preference and trying to focus on the end goal – the targeted user. Designers can help to improve review sessions by asking questions that can lead to constructive comments. You can also improve your reviewing sessions by commenting in effective ways. Below are a few do’s and don’ts to giving feedback.
what to avoid
When reviewing a design, it’s important to avoid statements such as:

1. “I don’t like it.”
2. “It doesn’t work for me.”
3. “I don’t like green.”

what to focus on
Instead, try using more descriptive language such as:

1. “The background texture you used doesn’t fit right because it looks too rugged for the style of products we are selling”.

2. “The layout on this page isn’t showcasing our most important elements and may be confusing to our older users.”

3. “Our company colors are shades of blue with small accents of green. Can we utilize less green and focus more on using different shades of blues?”

the more you give, the more you shall receive
Don’t be afraid to give too much feedback. The more questions brought to your team’s attention in the beginning, the less time will be spent later on fixing and/or redesigning missed or inappropriate elements.

Start from the top of the page and work your way down, making sure to cover all elements, from fonts, colors, photos and illustrations, to spacing, layout and user interactions. If something is missing, make sure in the next review session it is covered.

You can see how important it is to immerse your team in your business’ goals, practices and target market before the project begins. Researching competitors is also a critical step in designing. If your designer doesn’t know who your competitors are, they wouldn’t know why you want them to change the entire site to blue instead of green, the color scheme your direct competitor is using.

ask questions
If you aren’t sure whether a particular design element should be used or changed, ask the designer why he or she did what they did. There should be a reason for everything they’ve done. This will help ease any tensions when giving negative feedback. If they are unsure or have their facts wrong about your business, you can then correct them and improve the design at the same time.
examples of questions:

1. “What happens when the user clicks on “x”?”
2. “Why did you choose that particular photo?”
3. “Will that particular area of content be easily updated by our staff?”
4. “Why do you think the title font you selected fits our target market?”

TIP
Be specific as possible when asking your questions. Also, brushing up on some design terminology will make your review sessions and comments that much more effective.
site testing

Before launching and/or coding a website, it’s essential to test your website. This process can be extensive, depending on the size of your website and the number of interactive elements there are.

If you’re looking for some great checklists to go through before testing a website, a great resource to start with is Launchlist Pro. They offer interactive checklists that can be shared with multiple users. Great for making sure your website is exactly how you’d like it before it’s visible to the public.

types of testing

traditional usability testing

In this method, team members observe participants as they walk through a wireframe or design comp. They are then asked to perform certain tasks and the results are gathered and analyzed.

Gathering Data: Ask your user testing very specific questions so when analyzing data you know exactly what to adjust. This method is less interactive compared to the next type, paper prototype testing.

paper prototype testing

Another form of testing requires more team members to participate and is also a more interactive approach. Three members are necessary: One to act as the computer, one to talk the user through the actions they should perform, and another to record data.

Paper prototypes could be simple sketches, wireframes or fully designed comps. I suggest a rougher prototype to save you time in the designing process if many elements need to be adjusted.

Gathering Data: You will need to have pens, markers, post-it notes, tape and other tools that will allow your user to interact with the prototype. For example, if there task was to add an item to the shopping cart and they can’t find the button, they would be able to draw or add a button where they would assume it to be located.

Following the development of your new website comes multi-browser testing.
testing in multiple browsers
What browsers should you be testing in? Good question! First and foremost, you should set your sights on the most widely used browsers on the market today.

**Those include:** Mozilla Firefox, Internet Explorer, Google Chrome and Apple’s Safari.

Here are the current [browser stats](https://www.w3schools.com) from W3schools.com.

Keep in mind, different markets trend differently. Using [Google Analytics](https://www.google.com/analytics) on your website is a great way to learn more about your customers and which browsers they are using. Don’t assume that since you don’t know anyone who uses Safari on a regular basis that your customer doesn’t either. It’s better to focus on the browsers that have more of the general market share and then gather your specific market’s data and adjust from that point.

**Adobe’s Browser Lab** is a great tool to use to see how your website looks in different browsers. It delivers static screen shots of any page you are testing. The downfall to using this tool is that you aren’t able to see any interactive elements and how they play in the different browsers.

launching
When choosing a launch date, make sure all members of your team can be available to test and review the live site. You should plan to test out the website before and after launching. Have a plan for how you will receive feedback from those testing the site. There are many different software solutions to track and resolve errors. A few are listed below.

**Test Management Solutions:** [DevTest](https://www.devtest.com), [SpiraTest](https://www.spiretest.com), [Traq Software](https://www.traqsoftware.com).

create a buzz

Put up a coming soon page on your website in progress. A great way to keep your customers in the loop is to send them an email notification when the site launches to the public. You can include a email input field directly on the coming soon page.
“We all like to be “the first”. The first to know about a hot new product or a classy new restaurant. Give your customers this opportunity with your new website!”

Use social media to communicate with your customers before the site launches. Tell them about the great features it will have and why they should get excited. You can even use social media as a way to find out what features your customers would like to see added on your website. It’s easy to setup a Facebook page or Twitter account.

You can use traditional marketing techniques prior to launching your website to gain more followers and fans. The more information your customers can give you directly, the better your end product is going to be.
who will update the website?
Again, having a plan from the start about who is going to do what is essential, even after the website is complete. If you are going to utilize your internal staff to update and maintain the website, make sure they have the knowledge to do so properly. Don’t sign-up for a CMS that is complicated and requires knowledge of HTML and CSS to update.

how will you keep your website fresh?
Are there areas on your site that you can easily change throughout the year to keep your visitors engaged and coming back? Many businesses opt to have a news section on their website or a blog. This allows them to constantly have fresh content and share news on new products, services and happenings at their business.

“inspire. engage. intrigue.”

Hire a designer to help you with changing promotions. Keeping your site fresh and engaging is ESSENTIAL in today’s state of the web. If your customers come back and see there isn’t anything new or interesting, chances are likely they won’t be back again.

how-to stay in touch with your customers
Consider integrating your website with social media outlets. It’s a great way to let your customers know that you have new content or offerings that they should take a look at.

To get you customers to follow you on Twitter or like your business on Facebook can be a challenge. Offering discounts, giveaways, and showcasing their comments on your website or next email promotion can help to entice sign-ups. Twitter is a great place to offer personalize customer service. It’s a free option in place of a live chat.
“no matter how awesome you think your hold music is, we all hate waiting.”

Many times, interacting with customers on Twitter can be faster for them then being put on hold on the telephone. It’s also much less frustrating as you don’t have to hang your head on your phone while you wait.

Email newsletters are an excellent way to communicate with your customers. Below is an example of our welcome newsletter. It lets customers know what they can expect to hear from us. We have also integrated social media into the bottom portion of the email.

Don’t forget traditional print methods! A postcard can speak wonders in today’s world of jam-packed inboxes.

Whichever medium you use to alert your customers to your changing content, make sure you do it in one way or another. It’s essential to the growth and success of your website.

backup

Make sure all your hard work is protected. Keep a backup of your site in multiple locations. It’s also important to back-up your data regularly. This includes all files that are often changing such as product descriptions, images, customer comments and reviews, blog articles and news feeds, etc.

Ask your external team if they save their clients sites and for how long. It never hurts to be too safe.

Here are a few backup solutions that may work well for a small business: IDrive, Cabonite, & Mozy.
tracking goals & results

Utilizing [Google Analytics](https://www.google.com/analytics) can help you track the success of your website. All it takes is a little piece of code inserted into the footer of each page on your site. The footer is a better place for this type of code as it doesn't need to display to the user so it can load last, as a website loads from top to bottom. You don't want this code taking precedence before any other crucial elements visible to your customer.

Like mentioned earlier, [Google Analytics](https://www.google.com/analytics) can tell you all sorts of data about your visitors. What browsers they are using, how long they stay on your website, whether they are new or repeat visitors, where they are clicking on your web pages, how much money a particular page is bringing in and more!

![Dashboard](https://www.sarahlynndesign.com/images/dashboard.png)

**Dashboard**

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<th>Visits</th>
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<th>Avg. Time on Site</th>
<th>% New Visits</th>
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**Congrats!**

You’ve completed the client’s & beginners guide to website design! You should now be prepared to take part in a website design project.