**Factors to Consider When Planning a Website Design (or Re-design)**

If you have been asked to develop a website for an organization, chances are that you will put some things under consideration when planning the new website (or a re-designed website). The following are some of the factors:

**1. Site purpose**

Like a mission statement, a website’s purpose gives the primary reason for the site’s existence in the world. Whether for education, advocacy, service provision, community organizing, etc., the main purpose of the site will ultimately inform design and content decisions.

**2. Target audiences**

Frequently you will ask organizations, “Who is your target audience?” and they’ll respond, “Everyone.” While it is understandable the logic behind that answer, it’s a simple fact that you cannot design with “everyone” in mind (that’s why there are so many different kinds of cars, clothes, computing devices, etc.). If you identify and design to your top two audiences, the site is more likely to accomplish your organization’s goals.

**3. Site objectives**

Like the objectives in your organization’s strategic plan (and if you don’t have one of those, you have bigger concerns than your website!), the objectives for your website outline the main goals of the site.

For example; what actions will this audience want to perform when they visit your website? What actions does your organization want this audience to perform when they visit your website? Be sure to re-visit your objectives during the design and content creation processes to ensure they are being met.

**4. Responsive, mobile-friendly design**

Responsive design means that a website’s design automatically re-sizes to fit the screen size on which it’s being viewed. Unfortunately, it can be difficult to retrofit an existing site with responsiveness; and it’s mostly more cost effective to do a complete re-design. The days of two separate websites – one for viewing on a monitor and one for viewing on a mobile device – are over.

**5. Fresh content/Up to date content**

Imagine if museums never changed up their exhibits. Why would you ever return after your first visit? We go back to museums over and over because of new exhibits and programming – new stuff to see. We go back to websites if we know the content will change and there will be new stuff for us to view. Work on a content strategy for your site that will ensure people keep coming back.

**6. Engaging/Interactive content**

It’s a documented fact that people only read about 20-28% of the text on a web page. Hence the shift to shorter blocks of text, lots of photos, and use of multimedia on websites. The great thing about non-text content these days is that all you really need is a decent smartphone and you can quickly create your own photo and video content.

**7. Features**

Features are the elements that make a site dynamic and interesting, like donation buttons, online forms, embedded video or podcasts, online quizzes, social media buttons/integration, links to other sites and all other manner of gadgets and widgets. It’s important to figure out as many of these in advance as you can for the sake of a more coherent design. (As opposed to figuring out later that you really wanted social media buttons and now don’t have a good place to put them without removing or squishing other elements.)

**8. Search engine optimization (SEO)**

48% of Internet users start their online experience with a search engine. This means you’ll want to make sure your site is optimized for search. While there are companies who do SEO and nothing but, their services tend to be beyond the budget of most nonprofits. Fortunately, there are quite a few SEO tasks you (or your web developer) can Do It for Yourself (DIY).

**9. Site maintenance**

There are two main costs associated with a website design project: the cost for site design, and development and ongoing site maintenance costs. Site design tends to be a lump sum cost. Site maintenance can vary greatly, depending on the developer.

A website developer can do websites using Dreamweaver, and clients either learn that complex software or pay the developer to do their updates. Others have moved to the open source content management system like WordPress about seven years ago and this has changed this.

Now, many clients do their own updates and they rarely need the developer for anything after site launch. Another site maintenance concern to think about in advance: Which staff member(s) will be responsible for maintaining your site after launch? Will that person be responsible for uploading content that others create, or is that person doing it all?

**10. Accessibility**

By this it means compliance of an organization’s website with legal requirements such as Section 508 of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). While it is important for all websites to be accessible, the nonprofit such as the public sector especially has a moral obligation to this. Inclusion and social justice should be part of web developers DNA, which should carry over in the design of websites.

**11. Budget**

Depending on your budget, there are different tools available in the web design market today. The most appealing tier, of course, is one that is completely free. Platforms such as Wix offer a quick wizard approach to web design, where site owners can use an intuitive building-block approach that bypasses the backend coding knowledge that you might otherwise require. Following the no-coding, free tool thread, Google Web Designer also allows site owners to create HTML-5 based designs that are compatible with any device.

If your team has graphic designers, you cannot go wrong by investing in paid options like Photoshop and Illustrator. The ability to take a vector-based approach to design will give you control that you need over branding and marketing collaterals. With coders in your team, premium options like Codestar and Xfive.co are added to your pool. With access to PHP scripts, WordPress and Javascript, speaking in code definitely helps you take it a step further in customizing your site.

**11. Competition**

As you sketch out the architectural plans to build your site, don’t forget to take a look around at your competition. The nature of your industry and the purpose of your site (e.g. e-commerce, creative content, etc.) will leave broad strokes over your web design that can act as a form of guidance and direction. Doing market research on what works for your competitors, and what can be improved on, can put you ahead of the competition as you build your site from scratch.

Studying competitor websites can give you a good sense of some of the weaknesses in the design that you might be able to overcome. A simple repositioning of functionalities to give added attention – like moving the Shopping Cart to a more visible location – can already improve the user-friendliness of your site over your direct completion. Having said that, remember that revolutionary and transformational design goes beyond simply improving on one’s competitors. The complete reconceptualization of an industry standard can leave a lasting impression on consumers. As a survey tool, for example, TypeForm displays questions one-by-one as though it is a human interaction, rather than a typical survey form. This creates a much more visual and interactive survey experience that is memorable for both researchers and respondents alike.

**12. Design Language**

While it may be convenient to pay someone to build the initial version of your website, it is important that site owners have some basic knowledge of website design language. In the event that there is a glitch in the backend when new elements are introduced, the owners themselves can scan through the template and identify the problem before the website is offline for too long. This shared knowledge is important, especially for start-ups and small businesses that may not yet have the luxury of having specialists in their team.

In a nutshell, the web development languages that entail building the structure of the site include HTML, CSS, Javascript, PHP and other programming languages. The intertwining of web development with web design (which includes Photoshop, Illustrator work and design principles) then creates the final output. Understanding the basics of both will give site owners the flexibility to be more specific and directive in the creative process, rather than overly vague and general.

**13. Exposure**

At the final stage of the design process, site owners should carefully review the platforms for visibility and exposure of their website. In the vast ocean of web pages, optimising your visibility is an important part of your marketing strategy. With Google as the dominating search engine, striving for good placement in the search engine is a worthwhile investment of time and money. Registering your site through Google Search Console, using keywords in your page titles and meta descriptions and following Google’s SEO guide are just some of the ways that you can keep your website afloat. Remember to take your time to consider the exposure and visibility strategies before your site goes live!

**14. Architecture**

You know what your website is for, and you know who it is for. You know the look you want. That is all well said and good, but just imagine trying to build a house just from a collection of pictures, with no blueprint!

Plan the layout of your site ahead of time, and incorporate this into the design. Write a sitemap; be familiar with your hosting options; and decide on a content management system. How easy will your website – and its new design – be to maintain? Who will be able to add content, and how long will it take them? What can be changed, and where? Will the design break if the content changes? If your backend is a mess, the frontend may never be fully realized, and you may find yourself facing another redesign in a year or two.

**15. Hosting Service**

The first step in any web development process is choosing a hosting service. You can find many different options for hosting services, so you must do your homework before signing up with any particular provider.

The most common hosting services are shared hosting and dedicated hosting. Shared hosting allows the hosting of multiple websites on one server. Dedicated hosting provides space on a single server for each site.

Both types of hosting offer various benefits and drawbacks. For instance, shared hosting offers lower costs than dedicated hosting. However, it limits how much storage space you have available. On the other hand, dedicated hosting gives you more control over the resources allocated to each site.

**Elements of a good web design**

There are some basic elements of web design, each one of these fundamentals contributes in their own way to the overall user experience. Therefore, you must make sure that a single element doesn't let down the entire website.

Here are the elements to web design:

1. **Content**

There is no denying that 'Content is King'. It plays a massive role in Search Engine Optimisation (SEO), and is one of the main reasons people visit your website.

You really need to focus a great deal of effort into creating first class content for your website, which should include videos, relevant news/information and high-resolution imagery to make your website ‘stickier’. This will ensure you keep your users on your website for longer.

1. **Usability**

Great usability will never be noticed by the end user, but bad usability instantly stands out. Your website must be easily navigable, intuitive, accessible and mobile-friendly.

The user should know where they are on the website at all times and be able to find where they want to go with little thought. They should also be able to access any page they need without having to view the whole site. Your site should try to anticipate what your visitors are thinking and help them to fulfill their needs with as little effort as possible.

1. **Aesthetics**

In this day and age, having a visually impressive website across all devices is crucial. However, you must maintain your brand image. Your website must reflect who you are as a business, and visually connect with the audience. The visual appeal of your website not only contributes to your brand awareness but also increase your credibility.

1. **Visibility**

If you had the most aesthetically pleasing and user-friendly website on the web, it would still be unsuccessful unless it could be found. Your presence and visibility through digital marketing campaigns including SEO, social media and email marketing is vital to the success of your website. It’s important that you understand how to be found, what platforms to target and how to utilize your content. Thousands of factors have an impact on where you appear within the search engines, so make sure you have a plan in place!

No matter how informative, beautiful, and easy to use your website design is, it's useless unless it's web-friendly. It is important that your web designers know the keys to making your website work on all the major browsers, and that they utilize meta tags, alt tags, are fully versed in SEO (Search Engine Optimization). Many factors affect your search engine placement and visual appearance of your site, so make sure your web designers know their stuff.

1. **Interaction**

Your website must engage with your audience, hold their attention, direct them through the stages of your website and finally encourage them to contact you.

Your website isn’t just there for show, it is there to help you generate leads, increase sales and grow your business so ensure your website engages with your visitors in the correct way.

1. **Navigation**

The website design should be easy to navigate and the menu items should easily be accessible from any page. The viewer should always know exactly where they are on the website and have easy access to where they would like to be. A site map is a great idea and will be used if available. This sounds elementary but most websites could be improved in this area. Remember, there is a ﬁne line between an interactive menu and an annoying one, so functionality should be the idea.

1. **Information Accessibility**

Not all visitors to your website are interested in, or have the time to peruse the entire site. They may need to access only a phone number or address, or just a certain bit of info. For this reason, it is important to place key information in plain sight, in an area that is easily accessible. We have all had the experience of not being able to locate some needed information on a website, and the result is always a frustrated visitor. The experience is annoying at best, and a disgruntled visitor will not stay on your site very long and is unlikely not to return, much less do business with you.

1. **Intuitiveness**

A great website anticipates what your visitor is thinking and caters directly to their needs, and has elements arranged in a way that makes sense. If a visitor is searching for one of your products or services on a search engine or directory where your site is listed, it's important that your website have a landing page that is directly relevant to what they searched for rather than forcing them to filter through all of your information. Remember, the shortest distance between two points is a straight line.

1. **Turnaround Time**

The number one complaint of website design customers is the time it takes to get the site up and running. Unfortunately, a ﬁrm that takes unusually long to complete your website is par for the course. The longer it takes to complete the website, the more business - and value - you lose. A website that is not on the web is not and working properly isn't going to bring you any business!

1. **Conversion**

Your website can be the most important client generator your business can have, and must place the primary emphasis on bringing in new clients and making additional services available to existing clients through increased awareness of all the services you offer. Providing them with the tools they need to do business with you in an easy and enjoyable way will increase your website conversion and bring you the kind of success you seek.

**Factors to Consider When Choosing a Web Host**

Choosing a web host for your website is a big decision as it is an important foundation to ensure the success of your business. With the right web host, you can greatly improve and boost your website performance. Choose wrongly and you will end up causing all kinds of headaches as well as unnecessary expenses.

Below are some of the factors that you need to consider when choosing the right web hosting provider for your business.

1. ***Understand the needs of your site***

A quick Google search will show you that there are tons of web host providers out there. But before you can even consider any of them, you need to know the needs of your website.

The first step towards choosing the right web host is to identify what your needs are for your website. Ask yourself questions such as “what type of website am I building?”, “Do I want to use WordPress?”, or “How much traffic am I expecting?”

Now, these questions might seem basic, but are actually important. Why?

Because the more detailed you can be, the easier it will be for deciding which hosting provider will be right for the job. Going for WordPress? Consider a managed WordPress hosting provider. Building an online store? Look at hosting providers that specialize in eCommerce.

If you are a complete beginner, here is a quick tip:

Always go for a shared hosting plan with a trusted company. Since shared hosting is cheap and easy to maintain, they are the perfect choice for new and smaller sites. Plus, they free you from worrying about backend issues such as maintenance and security and lets you focus on building your website.

1. ***Look at server reliability/uptime scores***

When Amazon went down for 30 minutes in 2013, it cost them $66,240 per minute in revenue. Suffice to say, staying online is very important for your website and in order to do that, you need to look at how stable your web host provider is.

Now, there are plenty of server monitoring tools that you can use to track a web host but generally, a look at their uptime scores is more than enough to tell whether a web host is stable or not. The industry standard today at 99.95% uptime and anything below 99% should be avoided. Of course, premium accounts will offer better server stability with some managing 99.99% uptimes or even better.

1. ***The ability to upgrade your server***

Hosting plans come in all shapes and sizes today but if you are just starting out, odds are you will end up with a shared hosting plan. If you do, then it is recommended that you choose a provider that allows you to upgrade your server down the road.

The reason being, even if you opt for a really good shared hosting plan, there is still a limit to the resources you have available. Once your website grows bigger and attracts larger traffic (above 30,000 unique visitors), then a shared hosting plan will not be enough to accommodate all that bandwidth.

A hosting provider that allows you to upgrade your plan will be a lot more useful than having to find a new host and migrating your entire website.

If you’re a beginner, here’s a quick tip:

A Virtual Private Server (VPS) or dedicated server plan offers greater server resources once your website outgrows the shared hosting plan. Be on the lookout for web hosts that offer the flexibility to scale up when your website demands it.

1. ***Research the signup and renewal price***

There are 2 different prices that you need to know with web hosts – the signup price and the renewal price. In most cases, what you pay initially for a plan might not be what you pay when you renew. More often than not, the renewal price will be significantly higher depending on how much offers/discounts you were given.

Unfortunately, it is standard practice for hosting companies to hike up their renewal pricing and unless you intend to change your web host every 2 to 3 years, there’s no way to avoid it. Instead, try to go for web hosts that are reasonable with their price jumps (nothing above 100%). For example, if the signup cost was $5/month, then it shouldn’t go above $10/month when you renew.

If you’re a beginner, here’s a quick tip:

Always take a look at the ToS of the web host on their policy for renewal rates. You can find their ToS usually at the homepage and a quick keyword search (renew or renewal) should help you find it.

1. ***Do they have a refund policy/free trial?***

Using a web host can be a costly endeavor. Especially if you are just starting out and don’t have a big budget to work with. That is why a hosting company that offers some form of refund policy and/or free trial period can greatly help reduce your costs.

With free trials, you can safely test out the hosting plan and opt out if it doesn’t fit your website’s needs. Should things go wrong, choosing a hosting provider with good refund policies will make sure that you don’t lose too much money.

There are some that charge a cancellation fee when you cancel your account during their trial periods. Our best advice is to avoid these providers. Instead, go for companies that offer money-back guarantees with prorated refunds after your trial period is over.

1. ***Do they have the essential features?***

While most hosting companies do offer all the basic necessities for a website, you should always check if they offer other essential features such as one-click installer, file manager, and Domain Name Server (DNS) management.

*One-click installer*

A one-click installer is a great tool to help you install applications such as WordPress, Drupal, Joomla, etc in an easy manner. This is especially useful if you’re not good with the technical aspects of web creation.

*.htaccess File Access*

If you want to make site-wide administrative changes, you will to be able to access the .htaccess file. With it, you can edit and modify all sorts of parameters including password authentication and management.

*FTP/SFTP Access*

Most hosting provider will offer some form of file manager which tends to be quite limited. With FTP/SFTP access, you will be able to handle and move large amounts of files on server safely.

If you are a beginner, here is a quick tip:

You should ignore Disk Space and Data Transfer Capacity when you are just starting out. Most shared hosting plans offer server resources (RAM and processing power) that is more than enough for smaller websites. But when it comes to storage and bandwidth, you can easily use third-party platforms such as Imgur, YouTube, Google Doc, to handle your images, videos, and documents

1. ***Having backups for your site***

Backups are essential for a website. Even with all the security measures in the world, your website will face some kind of crash, failure, virus, or hack that will take your website down, or worse, nuke it entirely. That is where a good backup policy comes in handy because you can always revert back to a working website should an accident happens.

A good web host provider should be able to restore your full site (or at least a huge chunk of it) with very minimal downtime to avoid any significant losses.

Some of the key questions that you might want to ask your web host about backups include:

* Do they conduct regular full backups?
* Can you manually backup your site via the control panel?
* Can you use programs to create auto backups of your site?
* Can you restore the backup files yourself or do you need the support staff to do it?

1. ***The quality of customer support (live chat or telephone)***

There will be times when you are faced with a server issue that you just can’t solve by yourself. This where a good customer support team will be essential. Ideally, you would want to settle with a hosting provider that gives you good and responsive support either via live chat or telephone. That way, you can immediately resolve your website issues.

Research on a hosting provider’s support team reviews either on social media platforms such as Facebook or on social forums to get a better idea of the quality of their support team.

1. ***Quick server responsiveness and speed***

With Google now taking mobile page loading speed in consideration for their rankings, it’s clear that having a fast loading page is important for your website and business. It is recommended that you go for hosting providers that can offer you a stable and fast server speed to ensure that your website loads fast and smoothly. This will not only improve the overall user experience but will also help your SEO rankings as well.

Check on a web host’s speed and server responsiveness by testing their Time To First Byte (TTFB), using tools such as Bitcatcha and WebpageTest.

1. ***Ability To Add Domains***

With growth comes diversification. While you may be starting with a single website and domain name, you will soon realize the need for multiple websites, domains and subdomains in popularizing your site. Therefore, before signing up with a particular service provider, consider their different packages, paying keen attention to whether they allow for running of multiple websites on a single web hosting account.

Find out the cost of the unlimited website and subdomain packages and compare it to the rest of industry players. In short, take the time to choose a web host that provides different service plans that allows you to add new domains that allow you to scale over time.

1. ***Account Limitations***

Every hosting company has a set of terms of engagement whose violation results in extra charges, temporal or permanent discontinuation of your hosting service. For instance, did you know that some hosting providers prohibit the use of excessive amounts of CPU to run computationally intensive and scripts exceeding two seconds on their servers?

Either of these actions can see you charged extra or your site pulled down indefinitely and without a refund. Take time to go through these terms and only sign up for the service if you intend to abide by their dictates. Most importantly, avoid companies without clear terms of engagement arguing that account limitation and suspension decisions are at the discretion of the company's management.

1. ***E-Commerce And Email Options***

You stand to receive more feedback and even subscriber conversions if you have your email linked to your websites domain name. In this case, when looking for the right web hosting company, chose one that provides email hosting for your website’s primary email.

**In Summary**

When choosing a hosting company, take your time and weigh all the options. You can save a lot of time and trouble if you just be more mindful on how you choose your web hosting provider.

Just keep the following factors in mind before when you look for a web host:

* Your website needs
* Their uptime scores/server reliability
* How flexible are their plans
* The signup and renewal pricing
* Their refund policy/free trials
* What features they offer
* Backups for your website
* Quality of customer support
* Server speed and responsiveness

While there are many more factors when comes to choosing a web host, the ones listed above should help you greatly in deciding on the right hosting provider for your business and your website.