Building A Website

Before we begin the project

Why does the Client need a website?

We need to *know the client's business goal and site objective* so that together we can figure out the most effective ways a website could help. Establishing what the objective of a site is in terms of measurable business impact also means we can assess the final product once it’s complete, to see how successful it was at meeting client needs.

Who will be using the site?

We must think about the client's and the visitor's needs; *who is it that will be visiting the site, and why would they be there?* If the client has an existing site we should see any statistics they have so we can get a clear understanding of how the current site is being used, where it succeeds, and where it might be improved.

Does the client need a strategy to deal with non-desktop devices?

The answer to this will depend in part on the answer to the above two questions. Remember the options:

- No strategy; desktop only.
- Two physically separate websites, one for mobile, one for desktop.
- One website with multiple fixed-width designs (adaptive).
- One website with multiple fluid designs (full responsive).

There are cost implications to each - does the client have the budget? If it looks tight we will have to *design for fast implementation* in addition to other design constraints (i.e., less custom design elements and more site-wide reusable templates and assets).

What is the budget?

This is imperative. Without this we can't be realistic in our proposed solution.

Other things we might want to see:

- Current website URL
- Current website Analytics
- Competitor companies / organisations

Our process for working on the project

Once the above has been looked at and we know the answers…

1) Initial discussion between the client and the team members who will work on the project

An open discussion for any and all ideas and thoughts related to the site. At this stage we are aiming to establish broad requirements and directions – nothing is too crazy and everything is relevant. Talk can range from specific technical objectives to favourite colours and anything in between.

Document this as soon as possible, if not during the meeting itself.

2a) Establish a suitable visual look and feel through "mood boards"

We will do some research based on the results from the initial discussion; looking at other websites, brands, and products, as well as anything else we've seen recently that we think is appropriate. This research is used to collate examples of visual styles we think might work for the client.

We share these examples with the client, discussing which elements they like and which they don't. This informs our artistic direction before we do any actual design work.

2b) Organise website content

While the design team are working on the mood-boards the web team can work with the client to establish the content that will come to form the website.

What are they going to want to talk about? How much is likely to be said about it? Will it be all written words, or will there be pictures and video's too?

Website's exist only as a means to present content, and site visitors are only there because they want that content. That means we need to have a strong grasp of what's going on the site and how it will be organised before we do any visual design work.

The content doesn't have to be final completed copy, but the more accurate it is the better it will be for the design overall.

3) Creation of a Blueprint

A blueprint is a bare-bones version of what the final website will be, a plan we can work from. It has no visual design and no real content – but it allows you to click through to the various pages and sections we propose the site should have. Each page lists what type of content would be on that page, and any functionality it would have (like a contact form).

It is important the client is happy with the website blueprint, *we require the client to sign-off on it*. The client would be saying "the final website will have the same navigation structure, and each type of page would do as described here".

This means there would be no surprises for either party in the future development of the site, and everything will have been considered.

Do not proceed with any website without sign-off of a blueprint!

4) The design and build process

At this point we know what visual styles you like and will be appropriate for the project, we know what content is going into it, and how it's all arranged structurally. Now it's time to work on the visual design…

Note that visuals provided to the client for this purpose are stored in the /dev/4_visuals directory, and consist of HTML pages where the design is a background image on the element. This allows the client to *see the design in the context of their browser* as though it was a real webpage. We do not send flat JPGs to the client, they can be mis-understood and mis-interpreted. Always provide the client with a URL to the visual as a webpage, never a JPG, and never a print-out.

Traditional "computer only" Websites

At this stage the designers will take the signed-off blueprint and apply their design ideas to those pages. This work takes the form of a picture, and is not a working web page. The designers would then get feedback from the client about the look and feel of those pages, working with them to create a design for each page that works well and looks great. Once the client is happy with that picture of the page they'd sign it off. With everything now established and agreed we would build the real web page to reflect the signed off designs as closely as possible.

For websites involving responsive designs

The workflow is a little different than for ‘computer-only’ websites due to the nature of responsive websites.

A responsive website changes its layout and design when viewed at different sizes, this allows a pleasant experience for everyone regardless of the size of their screen – from a mobile phone to a big computer. Because of this flexibility, we can’t provide a flat picture of what the site will look like and then build a real page to match the picture.

Instead, the designers create a mock-up of how the pages might look at full 'desktop' size, so the client is happy with the general idea, but the client does not sign-off this design.

We then adapt this large design as we build the smallest version of this page, and ask the client to sign it off when they're happy with it at that size. Once signed off we build the next size up, and ask the client to sign that off too. And so on, until we reached the largest version of the page. In this process the design and web team work closely together throughout.

We do it this way is because a change to one size will often impact others. We need to mitigate that risk, so we get sign off at progressively larger sizes, as we go.

5) Once the build is finished

- We test the site against our go-live check-list. *Do not skip this step*. /dev/0_documentation/3_go-live-checks.pdf
- Once the list is OK, request client sign-off of the complete project.
- Put the website live for the world to see.

At this point we will arrange training for the client so they can learn how to use the content management system and administer the website.

In some projects this training can happen earlier to allow the client to put content in themselves ready for going live later. Which way around this is done varies from project to project, depending on which is appropriate.

- Let Accounts know the site has gone live.
- Accounts will arrange the payment and any SLA / Support contract.
- Arrange a de-brief for a month or so after the live date - book it in the calendar.

The purpose of the de-brief is to allow time to pass after a project ends, and then objectively look back at the entire project noting what went well, what could be improved, etc.