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# Planning More Effective Milestones in Web Design Projects

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Planning More Effective Milestones in Web Design Projects

By [Chris LeCompte](#)

Most successful web design projects are organized into a system of milestones with each one representing a critical piece of the project. Milestones are simple in concept, but they can be tricky to nail down.

For example, how specific should we get with the milestones? If we get too specific, we risk breaking the project down into a chaotic mess of little chunks. However, if we aren't specific enough, the deliverables become unknown and nothing gets done.

Finding the right balance is key. It takes practice and persistence, and it demands a lot of discipline from the designer or project manager. Milestones also vary from project to project. Larger projects require more milestones while smaller projects may only need a handful.

In my experience with many small, mid-sized and large projects, I've created a base list of milestones that I typically work with and adjust for my projects.

The first step is to think of a project in three large parts. The first part is what I call "pre-heavy lifting." During this phase, the client needs to become acquainted to your project management style and systems, collateral should be collected and analyzed, research must be conducted, and some initial wireframing and site mapping should begin.

The second phase is where the heavy lifting begins. Initial mock-ups will be created and finalized, coding is completed, the content management system is setup, and an initial prototype of the site is furnished.

The final phase of the project cycle occurs after the heavy lifting has been completed. Using a final prototype of the site, you will need to conduct compatibility and error checking tests, and integrate any final client change requests. The site should then be launch-ready and afterwards will need to be reviewed once again.

Now that you have a clearer understanding of the three project phases, let's take a closer look at the types of milestones that make it all happen.

## The Pre-Heavy Lifting Phase Milestones

Don't design anything and don't code anything. As the first phase, you should concentrate on getting to know your client and the project at hand. Here are the typical milestones I use to keep me on track.

- **Project Setup:** The project has been setup in relevant systems (e.g. any online PM tool) and is ready for client interaction.
- **Client Onboarded:** The client has been contacted about the project procedure and given access to the project management system. Sometimes I'll have the client complete a quick survey so that I can gather more details about their vision.
- **Collateral Collected:** All essential marketing and creative collateral has been collected from the client. Collateral can include logos, graphics, brochures, literature and other marketing copy.
- **Site Map Complete:** An inventory of any existing content has been created and the site map for the new site finalized. Furthermore, the client has reviewed and approved the site map.
- **Wireframes Approved:** Wireframes have been completed for at least the homepage and a single subpage, and the client has reviewed and approved them.

## The Heavy Lifting Phase Milestones

This is my favorite part of the project. Once you have a firm grasp on the project and a vision of its completion, you can get to work.

- **Initial Mock-ups Created:** The first mock-ups for at least the homepage and a single subpage have been designed and shown to the client.
- **Final Mock-ups Created:** Based on client feedback, the mock-ups have been finalized and accepted.
- **Site Shells Created:** A site shell is what I call a static page that has been coded

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from the design. This is completed when all of the HTML, CSS and JavaScript has been written and checked for errors.

- **Content Management System Setup:** Server space has been partitioned and the CMS of choice has been installed and configured.
- **Initial Prototype Developed:** The site shells have been integrated with the CMS and all of the content pages have been setup.
- **Content Delivered:** The content needed for the web site has been finalized and received from either the client or a copywriter, and is ready for insertion.
- **Final Prototype Available:** A working prototype of the web site complete with content has been finalized and is ready for client review.

The Post-Heavy Lifting Phase Milestones

Once you reach this phase of the project, you're in the home stretch. All of the hard work is done and all that's left are finalizations and launch procedures.

- **Client Review Completed:** The client has thoroughly reviewed the final prototype and has provided you with a list of changes to complete before launch.
- **Client Changes Addressed:** The changes provided by the client have either been addressed or completed to the client's satisfaction.
- **Site Compatibility Confirmed:** The prototype has been confirmed to work with all major browsers and operating systems. Any problems have been fixed or resolved.
- **Pre-Launch Review Completed:** A review for any lingering errors and problems has been done and the site has been cleared for launch.
- **Site Launched:** All actions needed to launch the site have been completed and it is working properly on the domain name.
- **Post-Launch Review Completed:** An additional review for errors and problems has been completed and any necessary fixes applied.
- **Client Training Conducted:** Training necessary for the client to properly update their site via the CMS has been completed.

Milestones Are Just the Beginning

There are two areas I didn't cover in this post that I consider vital to a project's success: timelines and to-do lists. As you hammer out solid milestones, they need to be reinforced with timelines that are realistic and doable. Many projects assign insanely short and impossible timeframes that only hamper the project and throw it into chaos. To-do lists may seem somewhat elementary at first, but they're essential for breaking down milestones into easier, more workable chunks.

Milestones are dependent on both of these areas, which is why I'll be dedicating future posts to cover them.

In the meantime, I'd be interested to hear about some of the other milestone techniques out there. How do you organize and manage your project milestones? Do you even use milestones? Leave a comment and let me know!

Chris LeCompte is a web designer and Project Manager based out of Northern Virginia working at his own company. Chris runs his own blog: <http://www.clecompte.com/>.

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[...] written in the past about planning effective web design milestones, so now I want to delve into the actual elements that make up a good milestone. Milestones should [...]

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