

02 Site Planning & Design

1 Preparing To Start a Website

1.1 Defining the purpose

The first step in creating a website is to determine exactly why you are creating a website, or even if you need one. What is the website for? Is it to provide information about an organisation? Is it to sell something? Is it a personal website you're doing just for the fun of it? The answer to this question will determine all of the other design considerations. A website that is intended to sell a company's products will obviously be designed differently to one that is intended simply to provide information about a government department's activities.

Professional web designers learn from experience that most clients haven't really decided what they want in their website. They don't know why they want a website; they just know they want one. It's important to get a clear picture of what you want to do before doing it. Having a good web development strategy will ensure you're creating a purposeful website rather than creating a web site just for the sake of it.

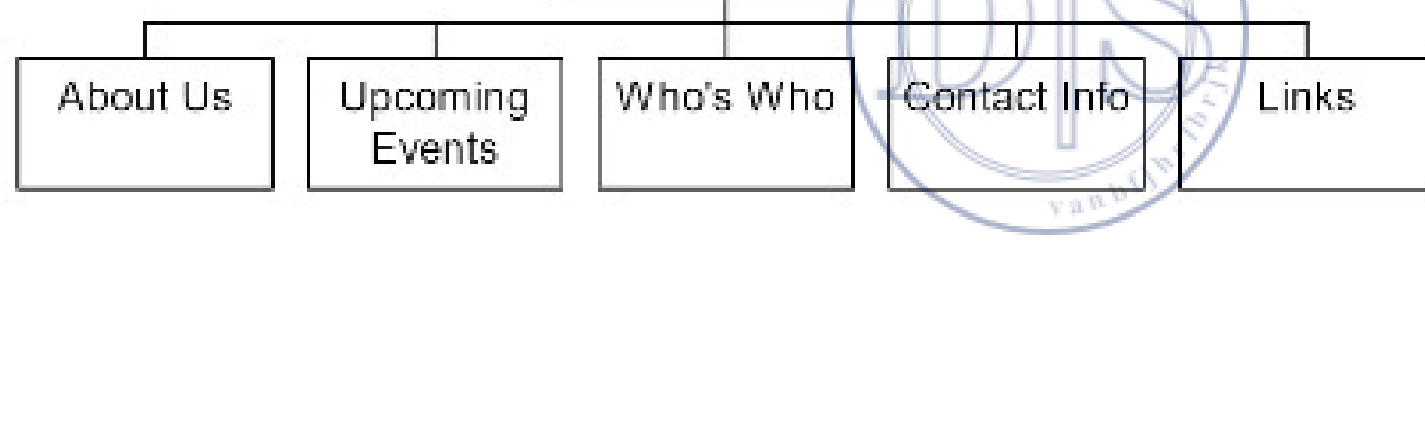
This leads us to our golden rule of computer design:

The first thing you should do when you're going to do something on the computer is turn off the computer!

IE. Plan it out before you start doing it and don't make it up as you go along.

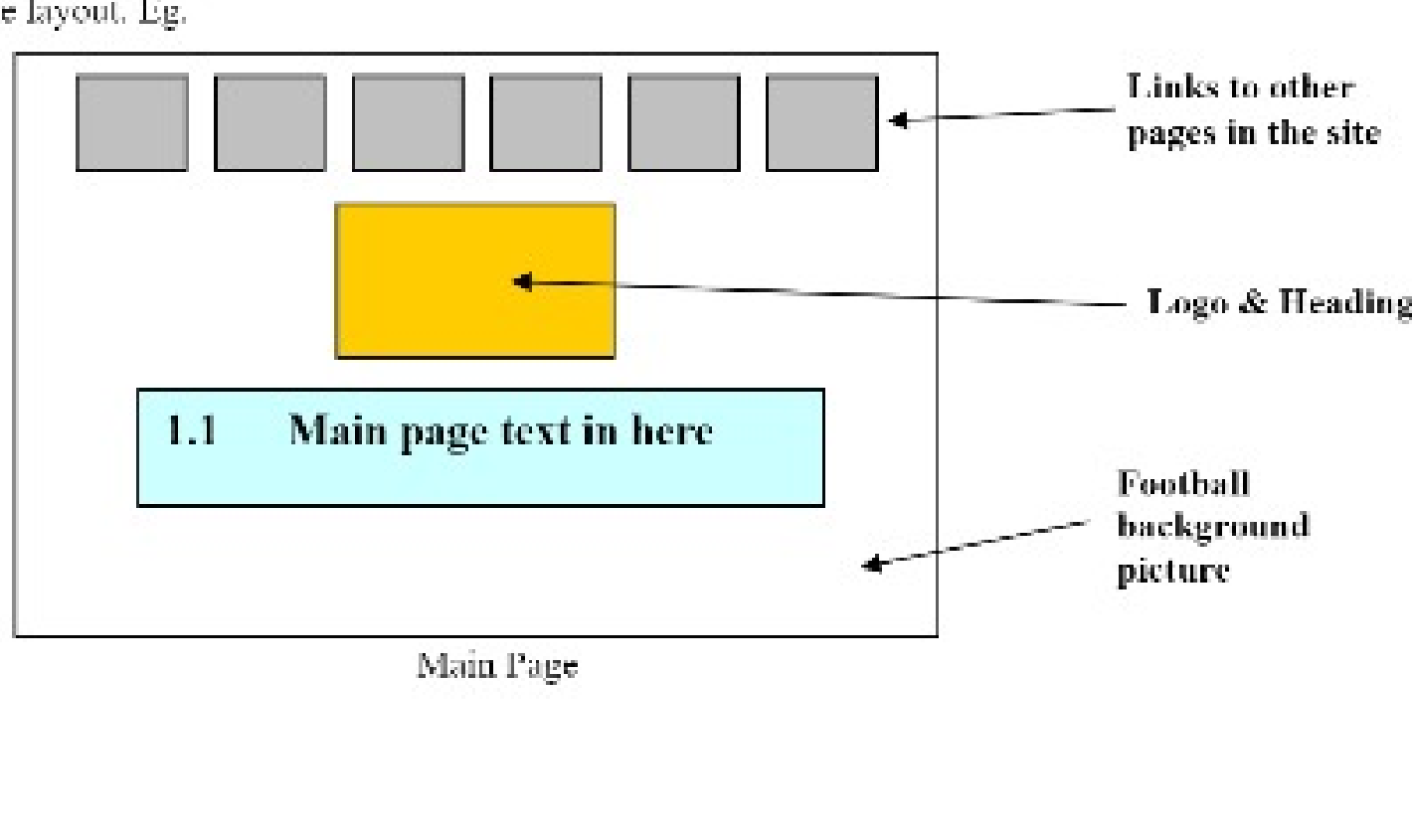
1.2 2.2.2 Determining the site's structure

A good idea once you know what the site is for is to decide upon what will go into it. Make a list of all the things you want to include and then decide how they will fit together. It can help to draw up a map of the website such as the one below to help you visualise how the site will be structured.



1.3 Decide how the site will look

This is another important stage in planning a website. It is good to have a consistent look throughout the site. If your business or organisation already has logos and colours that are used on stationery etc, use them in the site design. Again it can help to draw up a diagram of site layouts until you have one you like. It doesn't need to be fancy, just enough to give you a good idea of the layout. Eg.



2 Design Considerations

There are many things that need to be taken into account before you begin to create html documents. Some of these are listed below.

- Many visitors to the site may be using older web browser software and may not be able to see the great design work you've done using the latest technologies.
- Some things that look great in one of Netscape's browsers might not look so good in one of Microsoft's browsers and visa-versa. Some things may not even work at all.
- Those great looking graphics you've spent hours designing may take too long to download. If that's the case, many visitors won't wait long enough for it to finish loading. They'll go somewhere else.
- Make it easy for people to get from one area of your site to another area. Later on in the course, the instructor will give you a few tips on creating a good way for people to get around your site.
- Try to find that elusive balance between a boring website and an excessive website. Use fancy features in moderation. When you are learning html, there is always the temptation to try and cram every feature you learn into a single page.
- Are they intended for an intranet (a company's private network) or the Internet in general? There are differences. E.g. on an intranet, you are less concerned with download times and you also have a better idea of what software and hardware will be used to view the site.

Tip It's a good idea to test your website often in a web browser to see how it looks. It's an even better idea to test it in several different web browsers to make sure your site looks good in each one.

3 Choosing an Editor

You may be surprised to find that one of the most widely used html editors is Windows Notepad. It has everything you need to write html, after all, all you need to do is edit text and save a file with a .html extension. E.g. index.html

However, many specialised html editors provide you with features that allow you to quickly perform common functions, such as inserting an image in your document. Basically, they save you a bit of extra typing.

Some of these editors are free, some aren't. Some are little more than notepad with extra icons while some are as complex as a word processor and help you to take advantage of the latest html standards.

When you are starting out it is a good idea to try out several until you find one you like. You can also read reviews in magazines and websites or ask other people what they recommend. The exercises in these exercises refer to the free version of Homesite (There is also a professional version now owned by Macromedia which is an excellent editor). The free version is no longer supported by its creator but is available from <http://www.oneil.com.au/pe/html/hs12set.exe>.

Some other popular html editors for Windows are HoIMetal, WebEdit, and Australia's own HotDog Pro. Many Macintosh users choose BBEdit as their preferred editor.

Many WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get) editors such as Microsoft Frontpage and Macromedia Dreamweaver have a built in HTML editing utility. Recent versions of both programs allow you to edit in split screen mode with one half showing a design view and the other half showing HTML.

There are a few things you might like to consider when choosing an editor:

- Price** – Editors vary in price and there may even be a free editor that suits your needs just as well as one you'd have to pay for.
- HTML support** – does it provide support for the latest html standards and if so, does it make allowances for future standards?
- Interface** – Is it easy to use and easy to learn? Is it easy to get to or customise the features you need? Are the features laid out neatly?
- Extras** – Does it have extra features that may be useful? Some examples of extra features that may be useful are
 - HTML validation utilities
 - Spell checkers
 - Site management tools
 - Uploading utilities
 - Utilities for estimating download time
 - Features to help with image maps
 - Features to standardise and neaten HTML layout

Some editors, such as the latest professional version of Homesite, contain all of these features and more.

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HTML Intro Revision Questions

- What does the abbreviation W3C stand for?
- Write down some things you think are good to see in websites?
- Write down some things you think should be avoided in websites?