

Client questions to ask before creating an Adobe Muse site

Before you start a website, even before you put pencil to paper, there are a few things to think about.

Below is a list of sample questions and expectations for your client-to-be (whether it's you or a paid client). Some of these questions may be pertinent to your situation and some may not.

1. WHY are you creating this site?

Your boss "nominated" you to redo the entire company website, but before you begin be sure to ask questions like these: Is this site for information? To sell things/services? Create a Web presence for your business? Keep your friends and family informed? Document your travels? Help others?

A website is about communication, so you need to figure out exactly what each site is meant to accomplish.

2. Briefly describe what the company does

This can include adjectives that you think describe the company or should describe the company in order of relevance / importance. Also list the top products and/or services your company sells.

3. Competitors

Are there any websites/companies that you would consider your competition? It's helpful to get a list of the company names, web addresses, and terms that describe what they do and/or sell.

4. Favorite Sites

Ask the client to list a few of an industry's websites that they like, in terms of design (aesthetics) and ease of use/navigation. This will provide a sense of what qualities the client looks for in a site.

5. Least favorite sites

Ask the client to list a few of an industry's websites that they don't like, and why. This will provide a sense of what features the client does not want to include in a site.

6. Selling points

Ask the client to make a list of ways in which their products and services are better than the competition.

7. User goals

Why do you think people will visit your site? When people don't know you exist, why would they find you or happen upon your site? Why would they come back? If they do know you, why would they take the time to visit your site?

8. Target Audience

Write down your intended audience's background, interests, skills, and knowledge.

When someone visits a website, they're looking for information, to be entertained, or to buy something. A website can have more than one goal, but it's important to define them at the outset. If you don't have any clearly defined goals for your site, how are you going to be able to tell if you're successful?

Determining the target audience is also very important, because how the site is designed and built is determined by them. Suppose you are building a site for first graders learning to read. You would attack that site design and navigation much differently than you would a site for a company like Ford.

9. Technical

How technically savvy is your audience? This is a question that I pay particular attention to. I may know how to create a Flash site, for instance, but if my client is the public library system, I can't be guaranteed that the computers will be configured to play Flash content.

If your client goes so far as to tell you which browsers and versions of browsers their audience has, all the better. This usually only happens when you are building a site for an intranet (inside a company).

10. Accessibility & Usability

Will web visitors have any special needs, such as hearing/sight impairment, language differences, mobility issues, or reading difficulties?

When you are creating a website, you need to make sure your content is accessible for end users AND for search engines.

11. Site Goals

What are your goals for the website in terms of your company goals? How is your site supposed to help your business? What is the purpose of your site?

12. Site Analytics

What are your goals for the website in terms of popularity and exposure?

This question has dual purposes: The first is to help set numeric goals for the site that can be tested with common analytics (like Google Analytics, for example). The second is to gauge the sense of reality of the client: If they expect to reach a million page views their first month, they'll let you know their expectations via this question. This is the time to talk some sense into them so they aren't disappointed and don't set their expectations too high.

13. Site Features

What features do you think your website should include—such as a calendar, blog forum, login, price comparison chart, contact form, etc.?

Some clients want the moon. By stating the goal of each feature, they may realize they don't need the moon. Other clients may not know what is available to them. Although they may not ask for a contact form at the initial contact, you are unlikely to have a sole proprietor client who doesn't want a contact form after reading this questionnaire. This question helps define which features are necessary even if they weren't originally thought of, and which ones sounded good originally, but really won't help.

This is where your expertise comes in. Even if you are designing the site, it is helpful to know WHAT can be done and what can't.

14. Things to avoid?

Do you have any definite remarks on what you DON'T want to have on your website, such as Flash content, etc.? The client's willingness to share why they don't want a feature will lead to a better understanding of user experience tastes.