

HOW TO PREPARE FOR RELAUNCHING YOUR WEBSITE

A website redesign project can seem overwhelming. Because your company's website touches so many different parts of the business, these projects can easily become unwieldy nightmares. The purpose of this document is to help you prepare for that first kick off meeting, organize a website redesign project and avoid certain common pitfalls. Think of this document as a Getting Started Guide for redesigning your website.

Poor planning and coordination may result in blown budgets, missed deadlines and unhappy management. For this reason it is vitally important to work with your agency to develop a plan with clearly defined phases that describe objectives, resources, responsibilities and timelines. Additionally, this plan needs to be effectively and consistently communicated to internal constituencies, such as upper management, IT departments and marketing; as well as external resources, such as contractors and vendors.

This paper assumes that you are the person tasked with bringing the project in on-time and on-budget; you already have a web development agency; and you haven't had that first kick off meeting yet.

MANAGING YOUR AGENCY

Your web development agency is an ally in achieving a successful website relaunch. Effectively engaging with your agency can help you avoid conflicts and meet deadlines. Their specialized expertise can inform and direct your interaction with other departments. The keys to successfully engaging your agency are:

- ✓ Gathering internal feedback from all key stakeholders
- ✓ Facilitating approval cycles
- ✓ Communicating timelines
- ✓ Delivering clear, consolidated feedback to your web agency at each phase of the web development process

GETTING STARTED: ADOPT A BIG PICTURE POINT OF VIEW

Embracing the big picture will help alleviate the anxiety that comes from seeing the project in terms of innumerable tactical activities and specific tasks. So believe in the big picture - it will get you through.

So exactly what big picture should you embrace? Here it helps to have a left-brain / right-brain approach. Your intuitive, holistic, subjective thinking right brain should learn to see your website from your customer's point of view. Your logical, sequential, objective left brain should see your project as a series of phases, specifically: Assessment, Strategy, Development and Launch.

Considering a customer-centric, right-brain mind set will help you avoid mistakes such as creating lengthy online forms that indulge the every curiosity of marketing, but are so burdensome to visitors they increase the abandonment rate of your conversion funnel.

A left-brain focus on methodology and process can help you avoid problems. Perhaps the biggest pitfall in a website's development occurs when essential new requirements are discovered late in the project. This can disrupt development, complicate content interdependencies and create duplication of effort. The best way to avoid this mistake is to conduct a thorough assessment.

There may be many steps to conducting a comprehensive assessment, such as stakeholder interviews, usability testing, and web log analysis, but it all starts with the kick off meeting. The kick off meeting serves as an opportunity to discuss and fully define project requirements.

Remember:

- ✓ Organize the project into phases: Assessment, Strategy, Development and Launch
- ✓ Learn to see your website from your customer’s point of view
- ✓ Be prepared for the kick off meeting

PREPARING FOR THE KICK OFF MEETING

To facilitate your engagement at the kick off meeting, it is helpful to have completed a general assessment of your company’s objectives, requirements, and resources. Key assumptions are revealed in the kick off meeting that shape the perspective of all parties, persist throughout the duration of the project and impact results.

Before that first kick off meeting be ready to:

1. Prioritize objectives
2. Identify key stakeholders
3. Identify target audiences
4. Prepare a market overview
5. Prepare brand presentation
6. Present vision for home page
7. Review of current website
8. Identify status of content and assets
9. Share a long term roadmap

PRIORITIZE OBJECTIVES

Understand what is driving the current project and how that relates to the larger objective of the website. Can you describe why your company’s website exists in five or less words? Certainly not adequately, the corporate website serves many needs, but if you had to, what would you say?

- ✓ To generate demand
- ✓ To attract investors
- ✓ To sell products

You might be surprised how often executives struggle with this question. Yet, it is paramount that all parties understand and accept the hierarchy of goals served by the current website and those that are driving the redesign project. New objectives often surface during projects, and they may be very worthy, but they can also create complex interdependencies that threaten achievement of the original purpose.

IDENTIFY KEY STAKEHOLDERS

It is not uncommon that projects are plagued by having too many stakeholders, while at the same time not having enough of the right stakeholders. If the primary objective of the website redesign is to address issues with infrastructure, then it is important to engage with the head of IT. If the objective is aesthetic, then it is helpful to engage the Chief Marketing Officer (CMO).

Developing a coherent, unified design “by committee” can be the greatest challenge of all. It is very helpful for designers to have direct feedback of key stakeholders. Great designers are great listeners, but they can’t listen if they don’t have access. Having direct feedback from the ultimate decision makers is invaluable.

Alternatively, gathering feedback from numerous sources whom are not directly responsible for driving the vision of the website can confuse the design process.

In the kick off meeting it is crucial to identify key stakeholders and approval workflows.

Be prepared to provide:

- ✓ Stakeholder contact information
- ✓ Approval workflow for separate project components

IDENTIFY YOUR TARGET AUDIENCES

To adopt the point of view of your websites users, you need to know who those users are. While public websites are wide open to anyone who drops by, no experienced marketer would design a business site for everyone. Write down a list of your target audiences, in priority order, and list the content and experiences you wish to deliver to each audience. If you have mature infrastructure and systems, continue the lists with the business outcomes you wish to receive from each of the target audiences: registrations, sales contacts, or even simply specific activities such as downloading certain content assets. Be prepared to describe your audiences and their needs during the kickoff meeting, along with what you hope to deliver to them and receive from them in return.

PREPARE A MARKET OVERVIEW

It is likely the agency was chosen because they have some track record of success serving your market segment or industry. Yet, it is also important for the agency to understand your market from your company's perspective. What is your company's position within the market? What differentiates you from your competition? What are your marketing challenges?

Also, being able to speak to your competition's web presence and what you like or dislike is hugely informative for web developers. It is also helpful if you can identify comparative websites from outside your competition that convey the attributes or sensibilities you want your website to exhibit after the redesign. Be prepared to:

- ✓ Present market overview
- ✓ Identify competitive company's websites
- ✓ Identify comparative company's websites

PREPARE BRAND PRESENTATION

Be prepared to speak to your company's brand qualities and attributes. What are customer's perceptions of your corporate brand? What is the ideal perception? How do you segment your

customers? Are there any persona based customer profiles that describe your target audience? Discussing brand can become an all consuming topic on its own. To facilitate the kick off meeting focus on addressing the following topics:

- ✓ Brand identity
 - *Strengths and vulnerabilities*
 - *Positioning*
- ✓ Customer segmentation
 - *Motivations and needs*
- ✓ Brand heritage and organizational values

PRESENT VISION FOR HOME PAGE

Because the home page gets more views than any other page on your website, it represents your company's face to the world. It plays a central role in presenting your company's brand and guiding visitors through your website. Because the home page is so central to the any redesign, requirements for the home page design should be addressed in the kick off meeting with all the key stakeholders present. Be prepared to address the following questions:

- ✓ What are the pain points with the current home page?
- ✓ What is working on your current home page?
- ✓ What are the content priorities for the new home page?
- ✓ What are the strategic goals for the home page?
- ✓ How do your business objectives map to your home page goals?

REVIEW OF CURRENT WEBSITE

Be prepared to describe the current website. This is an important part of the meeting and it will take some preparation to have all of the following information prepared.

1. **Create a visual site map** - A visual site map is a document that shows symbols for web pages and website sections and lines between the symbols that shows links between content.

It isn't required to show every page of your website, but for the purposes of planning a visual site map is very helpful. You may simplify your visual site map by showing sections instead of individual pages where it makes sense. Put your homepage at the top of the document and secondary pages (usually represented in your website's main navigation) are organized on a lower line.

There are a number of applications that can be very helpful when creating a visual site map, but even a piece of paper and pencil can get the job done. Popular tools for creating visual site maps include diagramming tools such as Visio and OmniGraffle, but for simple visual site maps PowerPoint will do in a pinch.

2. Review Website Infrastructure - Be prepared to review the website infrastructure with regards to the following items:

- ✓ Web platform (ex. LAMP, .NET, J2EE)
- ✓ Applications (ex. CRM, marketing automation, etc.)
- ✓ Custom scripting
- ✓ Hosted services
- ✓ Publishing systems (ex. CMS)
- ✓ Data center
- ✓ Web developer tools

3. Lead Generation - Be able to share what content on the site is restricted and what content is available to everyone. If there is content that requires a visitor to fill out a form or provide a password, be prepared to review in general terms the restrictions or permissions that are necessary to access content and where on the site this content resides.

4. Review History - Each website has its own legacy. How did the site evolve? Where are the pain points with the current website? What is currently working? Do you have any reporting such as website analytic reports or website surveys? How much traffic does your website see in a day? Are there any identifiable trends?

IDENTIFY STATUS OF CONTENT AND ASSETS

Prior to the meeting develop a thorough understanding of what new content will need to be created, and what existing content will be repurposed. Also identify what existing assets can inform or support the design process including, brand guidelines, image libraries, collateral and source design files. You should be prepared to answer questions such as:

- ✓ What percentage of content on the new site will be new?
- ✓ What existing content will be repurposed?
- ✓ What internal resources are available for writing, editing or reviewing new content?

SHARE A LONG TERM ROADMAP

Websites, like your business, are ongoing concerns. So don't think of a redesign as ever completely done, rather just a significant evolution of your company's web presence. When considering requirements for the current project it is important to consider future business initiatives, product lifecycles, and infrastructure requirements outside the scope of the current project. Designing a successful user experience that ties together the multiple product lines, customer segments, and solution messaging can unravel if two months after the redesign a major acquisition changes the whole equation. Significant product launches may be served if the new website's information architecture is built to be extensible. Prior to the kick off meeting think about where you want your website to be in two years and be prepared to consider:

- ✓ Do you have plans for international expansion?
- ✓ Is there a major product launch on the horizon?
- ✓ Do you plan to add a forum, community, blog or other social media?
- ✓ Is there a desire to add a Content Management System?

COMMON PITFALLS

UNDERESTIMATING CONTENT DEVELOPMENT	Probably the most common challenge when redesigning a website is the development of web copy. Consider the level of resources and time for development, editing and approval, and then double it.
STAKEHOLDER ABSENCE	Website development suffers when approval cycles delay the momentum behind the project. This often happens when key stakeholders aren't available.
FEEDBACK DRIP	The complexity of design and web functionality can create a wealth of valuable feedback, but critical comments can be lost when it is provided as streams of emails, phone calls and meetings. For critical components, aggregate and deliver feedback in a single comprehensive document.
SCOPE CREEP	When critical requirements are missed in the assessment phase of the project, major disruptions to timelines and budgets occur. The key to avoiding this is conducting thorough assessment of stakeholder requirements.

PLANNING AND METHODOLOGY

At the risk of being redundant, break your project into clearly defined phases. It is vital that all stakeholders and content contributors understand their role at each phase of the project. Your web agency can help you define the activities at each phase that are critical to your project's success.



To learn more about the variety of services AtreNet can provide to help you plan and organize your next website relaunch go to: <http://www.atre.net/services/rapid-relaunch.html>