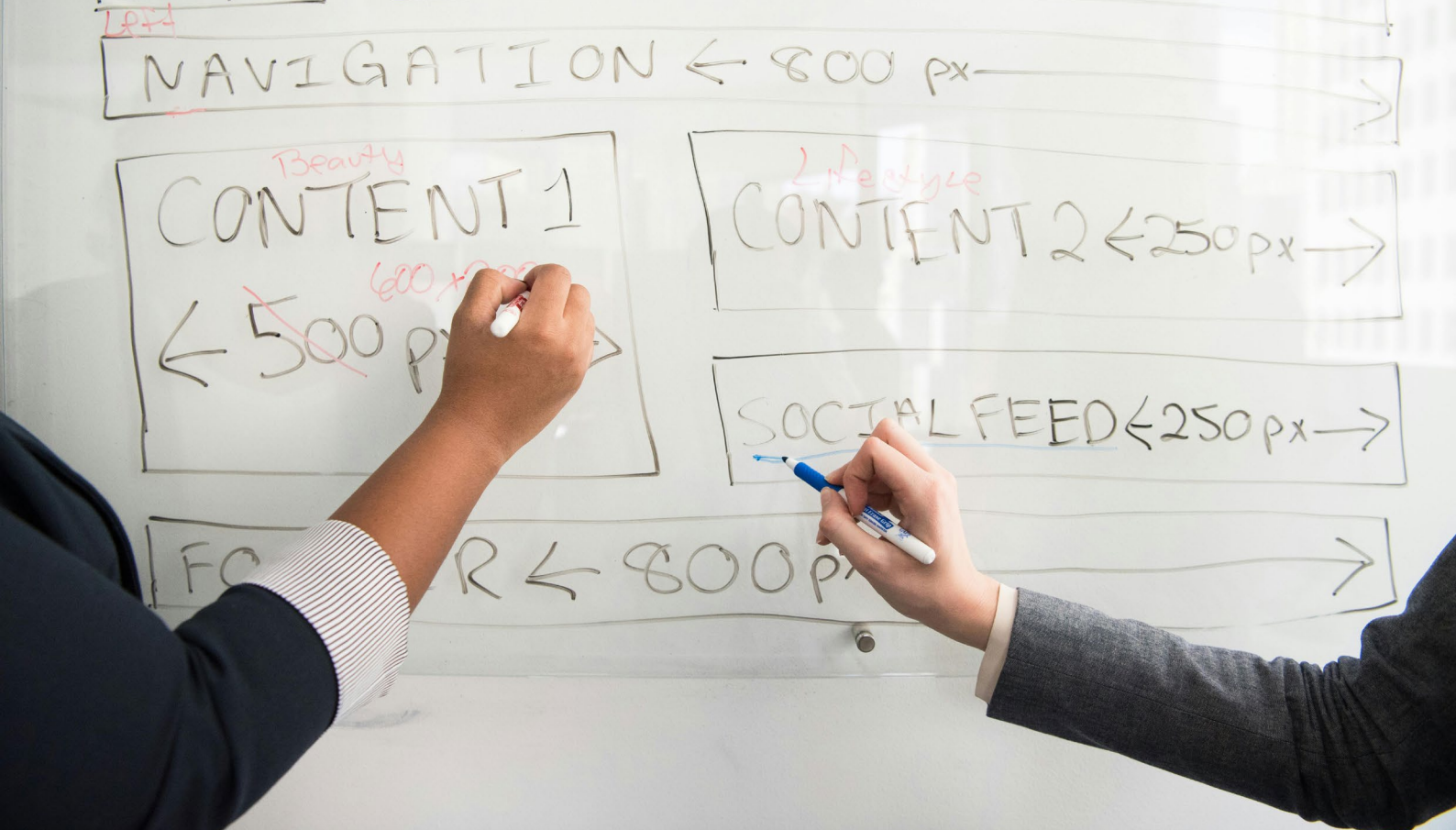




# HOW TO PLAN A WEBSITE THAT WORKS



Planning an effective website is like planning the perfect home for your family.

When you plan a house, you have to decide on many things, like the overall style and layout, the number of bedrooms and bathrooms, room colors, flooring type, and countless other items. Decisions made while planning your house will determine how functional and enjoyable your home will be in the years to come. A good builder will guide and advise you on proper strategy and planning for your home.

So, think of your website as your digital home. A place you must feel confident taking your customers to and comfortable living in as well. Just as planning a house requires time and seemingly countless decisions, it takes time, focused effort, research, and decision-making to plan a website properly. Like a good builder, a good website development partner will lead you through the proper strategy and planning for a successful website.

# YOUR DIGITAL HOME BUILT RIGHT

The best websites successfully align three key concepts — brand, goals, and user needs.

Take a look:

## **Brand:**

- Who is your target audience?
- What do you want them to feel?
- What are your colors, logos, and imagery?
- What is your company's mission and what do you stand for?
- What words are associated with your company?
- What is your brand's personality, voice, and tone?

## **Goals:**

- How will your website support your overall strategy?
- What role will it take in sales and marketing?
- What are your revenue expectations for next year?
- What kind of clients do you want to work with?
- What kind of talent do you want to attract?
- What actions do you want your visitors to take?
- What metrics will you use to measure success?

## **User Needs:**

- What are your visitors trying to learn from your site?
- How do they prefer to interact with your site?
- What content will make the most impact on your visitors?
- How can you provide a personalized experience for them?
- How do your company's products or services help your customers?
- How will your site facilitate a seamless user/buyer's journey?

# PLANNING YOUR WEBSITE

Now that you know what you need to unify, the question is: How do you align your branding, goals, and user needs? The answer: A great deal of diligence, patience, and organization are needed to fully understand how these three elements fit together. Here are some critical steps in the planning process, which we will dive into deeper:

1. Evaluate Your Current Website
2. Talk to Your Team
3. Talk to Your Customer
4. Determine Your Messaging
5. Determining Your Look
6. Document Everything

## EVALUATE YOUR CURRENT WEBSITE

Your company needs to ensure you are constantly growing and always looking for opportunities to improve. Your current website probably has sections that function well and some parts that need improvement. Before starting, knowing what works and what doesn't work on your website is essential. You must ensure that every change is a step forward, not backward. How is this done?

While you can guess based on personal preferences or experiences, the best option is user testing. Your website's success is dependent on your users' opinions and experiences. See what your users think about your current website. Your users may regularly access or visit parts of your website you want to change. When evaluating and planning for your new site, remember that your legacy content may need to be updated, cleaned up, or completely removed.

This "spring cleaning" for your current website is a content audit. Go through your site page by page, focusing on usability and current business goals. A suggestion when doing this – the first time you go through it, make no changes — just take notes. Wait a day, and then come back and make changes. Doing this will allow you to be focused and maintain consistency when improving the user experience. Remember your three core

components:

**Brand:**

You must know where your brand is now before you make plans for its future.

**Goals:**

Building on what you have already done to accomplish your goals is easier than starting from scratch.

**User Needs:**

Improve user experience by building a foundation to alleviate pain points.

## TALK TO YOUR TEAM

Help your team understand how a new website can better help them meet their sales, marketing, and revenue goals. You will need buy-in. Get it from your boss, your assistant, your sales team, and your company as a whole. Speak to executives, managers, and long-term employees about your company's history, culture, and plans.

**Questions to Ask Your Team:**

- What do you like or dislike about the current site?
- What goals do we want to achieve with a website redesign?
- How does our website fail to meet our needs or the needs of our users?
- How can we better convey our brand's messaging?
- How can we show our differentiators through the redesign?
- What content strategy do we need?
- How do we envision the user journey on our new site?
- What technology should we consider for the redesign?
- What outcomes will define a successful website redesign?
- What feedback have we received from users and how can we incorporate it?

Again, remember your three pillars:

**Brand:**

How do your employees view your company and thus, the company site?

**Goals:**

It is imperative to know where a company wants to go before developing a plan to get there.

**User Needs:**

Put your stakeholder in the shoes of their target market. Ask them what is most important from that perspective. These questions will provide valuable insight and be a foundational reference when those same stakeholders want to use overly complicated industry jargon on their homepage.

## TALK TO YOUR CUSTOMER

The most important thing about your product or service is what your customer thinks, and the ideas your customers like will succeed. The ideas your customers hate will fail, no matter how clever they might be. Get to the root of user needs by speaking to the sources. Set up customer interviews. These should be with people similar to your typical customer — your primary buyer personas. Outliers will always buy a product or service, but you should not focus on them. A website built for all personas is built for no personas.

**Questions to Ask Your Customer:**

- What was your first impression when you visited our website?
- Did you find the information you were looking for easily? Why or why not?
- How would you rate the ease of navigation on our website?
- What did you like most about our website?
- What did you like least about our website?
- Is there anything on our website that doesn't work the way you expected it to?
- How visually appealing is our website?
- Did our website load quickly enough for you? If not, where did you experience delays?
- Were there any content or features you felt were missing on our website?
- How likely are you to recommend our website to a friend or colleague?

- Did you encounter any issues while using our website? If so, what were they?
- How easy is it to understand the information on our website?
- How does our website compare to others you've used in the same industry?
- Would you return to our website in the future? Why or why not?
- Do you have any suggestions for how we could improve our website?

And of course, the three components:

**Brand:**

It is easier to build on what people already believe about you than trying to change their minds. Learn the positives users see in your brand and accentuate them.

**Goals:**

The better you know what your user hopes to accomplish, the better you can align this with company goals.

**User Needs:**

Learning about your customers' experience firsthand helps you put yourself in their shoes and allows you to design a site that is intuitive and delightful to your users.

## **DETERMINE YOUR MESSAGING**

If your site is like some out there, a portion of your content is likely old or outdated. Some sections of your website may need to be cleaned up, rearranged, or thrown out completely because they are no longer focused on your current goals, brand, or user needs.

What should you do, then? Keyword research. It won't pay dividends for you the day you launch your site, but wait a few months. You'll start seeing which keywords your potential customers search for in Google Analytics. Then wait a year. Now, you're starting to rank for some of the more competitive keywords because of your focused content. Before you know it, your traffic and customer base are growing slowly.

A content strategy based on keyword research focuses on many elements of user needs.

It answers questions like who is your target market? How are you going to use your calls to action? Do those offers make sense for that target market? Outside of this, you also want to ensure your tone is consistent. Should your brand be playful, professional, sarcastic, or concise? Whatever you choose, like your website's visual style, consistency is the key to a winning content strategy.

How this impacts your three cores:

**Brand:**

Consistency in your tone and word choice will help build recognition and familiarity with your brand.

**Goals:**

Increased traffic and better conversions are typical results of a well-developed website plan.

**User Needs:**

Why should your user listen to you? Choosing content that is interesting and relevant to your user is the only thing that will keep them coming back. Without valuable content, everything else is useless.

## **DETERMINE YOUR LOOK**

Once you have everything else sorted out, it is time to circle back and make your website beautiful. “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder” may come to mind here. Make sure the choices you make here are beautiful not just to you but make sense for your company and are appealing to current and future customers.

Use or create a style guide when thinking about the look and feel of your site. The style guide primarily focuses on traditional branding and dictates your website's exact colors, logos, and fonts. Consistency from your digital world to your real world is crucial for user experience. Additionally, your style guide should address web-specific elements such as layout grids, button styles, and form design to ensure a cohesive appearance across all pages.



Incorporating responsive design principles into your style guide is vital, ensuring your website's appearance and functionality adapt seamlessly across different devices and screen sizes. Establishing a comprehensive style guide enhances brand recognition and streamlines the design process, facilitating more efficient collaboration among your design and development teams.

Your three cores come into play here, too:

**Brand:**

Consistency across all mediums leads to recognition and familiarity.

**Goals:**

A well-developed visual image will help with recognition, talent acquisition, investor confidence, and a cohesive company culture.

**User Needs:**

A well-planned visual strategy builds proper expectations for your user.

## DOCUMENT EVERYTHING

Now that you've done all the hard work, don't waste it by not documenting it. Priorities will change, and stakeholders will forget what they agreed upon. Having a well-documented rationale for your planning decisions is crucial.

Our bosses, teams, and we can quickly forget the lessons we have learned. Our plan needs to be presented, maintained, and updated regularly. Setting up a process that makes sense for your business is crucial. Documentation is a tangible reference that can guide the project's direction and ensure alignment with the company's branding, goals, and user needs. It helps track changes, decisions, and rationales throughout the redesign process, making it easier to understand why certain choices were made. This is invaluable for maintaining consistency and coherence in your messaging and design, especially when multiple stakeholders are involved.

Documenting your strategy, objectives, user research, and design decisions also facilitates onboarding new team members, allowing them to catch up quickly and

contribute effectively. It enables you to measure the success of your redesign against predefined goals, providing insights into what works and what doesn't. In turn, this documentation becomes a learning tool for future projects, helping to avoid past mistakes and capitalize on successful strategies. By investing time in thorough documentation, you're building a roadmap for your redesign that keeps everyone informed and focused, ensuring that your revamped website effectively resonates with your target audience and supports your business objectives.

Finally, remember the three core components:

**Brand:**

Putting it on paper is the only chance a brand has of building consistency over time.

**Goals:**

People may forget the goals and plan over them if it is not written down.

**User Needs:**

The end user will be pleased when everything you planned and documented for them is implemented.

# GET YOUR PLAN IN PLACE

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No website can ever be great without a proper plan. While a detailed plan is always recommended, not everyone has enough time or budget to engage in a thorough planning process. In those scenarios, our team can help out! We have several website implementation packages that fit anyone's timeline or budget and are happy to assist in custom retainers or projects.

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