

It is our goal to help make the process of web design as easy as possible. Because of this, we have created a few pages with important information that assist in this process. Please feel free to print these pages or fill them out on the pc. By following this guide the gathering of information and images will be streamlined resulting in a more professional, cost effective, relevant site. Please feel free to email this document to anyone in your organization that may be able to provide any of the required information below. We are happy to be of assistance and please feel free to contact us!

This document was designed to help you with the many decisions involved in designing a web site. We understand that this process can be difficult at times, however if the steps below are followed you will be well on your way to owning a successful web site!

Overview

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I. Purpose of site

It is very important that you have a clear understanding of what your web site's purpose is. It will help you decide how many pages your web site should have, which features you need to accomplish your goals, and how you want to interact with your visitors. Please describe the purpose of your site below.

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II. Competition

Once you have defined the purpose of the site. You should start searching the web for sites in the same field as yours. These sites will be your competitors and you want to look them over carefully. Note what online services they offer. What are they charging for similar products? What features are on their site? Do they have online payment capabilities?

List at least 5 web sites that are related to your site below. Pick sites that have features you might like on your site, have similar product/services as yours, or look similar to the way you want your site to look.

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

The next is to determine how your site differs from your competitors. Are your prices lower? Do you offer a better refund policy? Do you provide superior customer service? Or maybe you offer a service that your competitors have not thought of yet. Try to list as many differences as you can find between your business and the ones above.

III. Pages

At this point you should decide how many pages your site is going to need. In this step you are going to define the purpose of each page. This will also include naming and detailing the kind of information that will be on each page. Below is a short list of the most common web page names.

- Home
- Services
- Products
- Order
- Portfolio
- Gallery
- Links
- Resources
- About Us
- Contact

These are just a few possibilities. You should already have a good idea about your pages from the research you did on your competitors' web sites. Below, list the pages you need and a brief description of each page.

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
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7.
8.
9.
10.

IV. Look and Feel

Your web site will be representing you or your business. That being said, your site should be more than just an online flyer or advertisement. You should make your visitors feel comfortable, and welcome. Your site should be organized, well written, and attractive.

The colors you pick for your site should be appealing and easy on the eyes. Try to pick colors that complement each other. For instance: Purple and green are NOT good choices for your web site! Take another look at our site (and others) and try to see how we use color to help "sell" (or at least bring attention to) specific areas.

The basic layout of your pages is pretty much up to you. Our goal is to capture the “feel” that you want for your site. Do you want a “fun” site or a “no nonsense” site? Or maybe you just want a “comfortable feel” for your visitors to enjoy. Just keep your navigation simple, keep your pages neat (too much clutter or massive amounts of information can run people off of your site), and be consistent.

Please list or describe your vision of the site (features, colors, and layout).

V. Content

In the digital world content is king. This by far will prove the most challenging for you to acquire and organize. In this section we will help you locate potential information for your site as well as give you pointers on how the content should be written for the internet.

Do you have any existing written material such as?

- Hard copy brochures
- Client Presentations
- Customer Letters
- Informational flyers
- Case studies
- Customer testimonial letters
- Product brochures
- Forms
- PDF files
- Articles or other informative topics
- Links or resources
- FAQs

Once you have compiled all the content for your site, the task of writing for the web begins. The following tips will help you avoid common mistakes and streamline the writing process.

- **Write relevant content.**
When writing for the web it is important to only write on topics specific to the site or page. Your potential readers and customers want information. If you don't give them what they are looking for, they will find it elsewhere.
- **Put conclusions at the beginning.**
Think of an inverted pyramid when you write. Get to the point in the first paragraph, and then expand upon it.
- **Write only one idea per paragraph**
- Web pages need to be concise and to the point. People do not read web pages; they scan them, so having short, relevant paragraphs is better than long verbose paragraphs.
- **Use action words**
Tell your readers what to do. Avoid the passive voice and keep the flow of your pages moving.
- **Use lists instead of paragraphs**
Lists are easier to scan than paragraphs, especially if you keep them short.
- **Limit list items to 7 words**
Studies have shown that people can only reliably remember 7-10 things at a time. By keeping your list items short, it helps your readers remember them.
- **Write short sentences**
Sentences should be as concise as you can make them. Use only the words you need to get the essential information across.

- **Include internal sub-headings**
Sub-headings make the text more scan able. Your readers will move to the section of the document that is most useful for them, and internal cues make it easier for them to do this.
- **Make your links part of the text**
Links are another way readers scan pages. They stand out from normal text, and provide more cues as to what the page is about.

Always, Always, Always

- **Proofread your text**
Typos and spelling errors will send people away from your pages. Make sure you proofread everything you post to the Web.

VI. Graphics

When choosing images, graphics and logo for your site quality, relevance, and size matter. The typical format used on most websites today is jpeg, gif and png. Each format has its own advantages and disadvantages. When choosing images for your website, there are some general rules that will help in choice.

- **Quality**
High detail images will have more impact on your users than low quality or grainy images.
- **Size**
Not all of your visitors will have fast internet service. The smaller the file size, the faster the picture is downloaded and displayed.
- **Relevance**
Every image used in your site should be carefully chosen. They should directly tie into the site as a whole or to the particular topic.

VII. Writing Effective Titles and Headlines

Keep your title short.

Three to six words is the ideal length, and at around ten the maximum limit. Major search engines give high relevance only to the first set of words you use in the title, and they display only up to 8-10 words in their search engine result pages.

Do not try to make the title "smart", by using irony, word play or other "journalistic" approach.

The title to be built must be thought of as a label for your article. Inside newspapers the reader is already captive and searching, within the page, for items of possible interest. On the Internet, headlines are often displayed out of context. The reader is searching for your content and will only get to it, if your label is appropriate, serious and well thought out. On the web, readers often don't get the chance of applying background understanding to the interpretation of the titles they are presented with.

The title must be a "label" or summary of the content.

Does the title accurately describe the full content of the page? If the answer to this question is yes then you are doing a great job of titling your content for the Web.

Headlines have to stand on their own.

Think of it in this way: if somebody was to read that title without the associated text would that person be able to tell what the article contained? Headline text has to stand on its own and make sense when the rest of the content is not available.

Is the title representative of what a typical reader would search for in a search engine?

If the answer is yes again, then go for it. If not, put yourself in the shoes of your reader and type the search you would write in Google, Yahoo or MSN. If you were to search for an article containing the same content you are about to publish; what would you write in the Google search box?

Strike first.

Make the first two or three words in your title keywords that are highly representative of your specific content. Make sure those words are the important information carrying units of your title. Have them focus on the concept, topic or theme of your content.

Proper names, products, brands and services names go last.

In general, leave product names in the end of the title as people who are searching for products or services by name will often want to go to the original manufacturer web site. If on the other hand you are providing review, analysis or commentary on specific products, people, organizations, you may want to associate qualifying keywords before the product name.

How to verify and test the quality of your titles.

Test before writing the title.

Go to the three major search engines (Google, Yahoo and MSN) and type the title(s) you would like to use.

Check the quantity, quality and relevance of the articles that come up when searching with your new potential title.

Evaluate whether your title is good by looking at the type of content it brings up. In areas where there is lack of content, little or no relevant content may indicate a problem with the title. If there is already a significant amount of content available, you will need to see if there are titles changes that can differentiate yourself from those.

Test against Google.

Verify if AdSense ads (those text ads displayed on the right side column of Google page results) do appear. If they do appear and are of great relevance to the topic you are covering, then you have written a good one. If Google ads don't appear it may mean that your title may be too specific, long, not clearly expressing a specific topic/theme. What you want to avoid, is Google ads coming up with content clearly not relevant to your topic/theme. That is clearly a sign not to go with the selected title, as it maybe ambiguous, badly worded or interpreted in completely other ways from what the ones you had intended to.

A few personal tips.

You can never get a great title down in one shot. Please realize this.

You need to allow time and refinement in your title writing process as the title matures with your better understanding of it. Write it down right away, however bad it is and let it sit. Then keep writing your content and from time to time get back to it. Edit it and improve it. Try out new solutions. Experiment with it and test the new combinations in the search engines. At this point your title will automatically emerge from you investigation as only a few titles can stand the matching with the criteria detailed above.

VIII. Writing Effective “Home” Page

Home pages can be tricky, simply because your page not only has its own job to do, but also has to support a group of second level pages. The tips below are the best approach to writing the home page.

Use your principal home page headline to communicate your site’s underlying value.

This is job one. When first-time visitors arrive at your site, they have a purpose in mind. They are looking for something. The job of your headline is to communicate quickly and clearly the primary value and purpose of your site. That is to say, you need to let people know what your site is about, and why it is better than all the competing sites that offer similar products or services. This is a tough job at the best of times. But it gets harder when you burden your headline with extra duties. So stay focused. Understand what your visitor is looking for. Communicate your promise and value quickly and clearly.

Use some short introductory text to clarify and expand on your headline.

Not every value title can be communicated completely in ten words or less. You may be able to get close. But if you have a business that offers a number of different product or service categories, you are better off keeping your headline simple, and then using some short introductory text to expand on your message and clarify. Place this text directly beneath your headline, so there is a natural flow from one to the other. Don’t make your readers have to search for this clarifying text. In other words, be aware of the eye-path of your readers. If you want someone to read a block of text immediately after reading your headline, place it within the same column, with the same margins, one following directly after the other.

Help visitors find what they are looking for.

Unless you have a single product or single service, you are going to have to help people find the second-level page that best matches their immediate interest. If 80% of your visitors end up going to just three or four of your second level pages first, make links to these pages easy to find on your home page. This sounds obvious, but home pages are often cluttered with too many featured links. Use your navigation links to provide access to all areas of your site. But make a feature of the links that best serve the needs of the majority of your visitors.

Make your first-time visitors feel comfortable and confident.

When visitors come to your site for the first time, they will feel unsure about you – unless you are a nationally recognized brand. They will need reassurance. They need to know they can trust you. And they want to know that you really can give them what they are looking for. There are numerous ways to build trust, including the use of third-party seals from organizations like the Better Business Bureau Online. But a major factor in building trust will be the tone of your headline and other text on the page. Your home page is rarely a sales page. The selling will take place on the second or third levels. So on your homepage, avoid hype. Write simply, clearly and honestly. Make your page and your text useful and helpful.

Concluding thoughts...

Clearly, there is a great deal more than can be said about writing home pages. But these points cover the most important issues. When writing the home page, aim for clarity and simplicity. Stay focused on helping each visitor find your product or service. The home page should quickly inform the user what the site is about. The user should be able to quickly find what they are looking for and you want to make them feel comfortable and confident that they have come to the right place.

IX. Writing Effective “About Us” Page.

Think of your Web site's "About Us" pages as your calling card. When a prospective customer visits your site, chances are "About Us" is one of the first links clicked on. What the user reads here will certainly influence the decision of whether or not to use your business. The primary question is, "Can I trust this company?" You can answer this question on your "About Us" pages by showing visitors that you have a solid track record as a reputable, experienced and customer-focused organization. Your "About Us" pages should include:

- A brief overview of what you do, including the benefits you offer to customers, and how those benefits distinguish you from competitors.
- Your company history.
- Profiles of executives and other key managers.
- Testimonials from happy customers.
- A list of awards and other recognition you have received.
- Press releases and other resources for the media.
- Information on how to contact you.