

Web design

At the start of a new or redesign web project, an important first step is to define the objectives for the web site. What actions do you want visitors to take when they land on the web site? Typical objectives may be...

- generating leads
- selling product
- providing company or product information

The objective setting phase will then help you define other aspects of the project including:

- What **content** is needed to convey the objective? Is it readily available or to be created? Is it in digital format? What graphics and photographs currently exist? Content is the most important element of a web site.
- How will the **design** of the web site complement the content? Are there existing branding elements to be integrated with the web site? Have you searched the web for designs that you like and don't like? How is visitor usability impacted by design? The design of a web can greatly impact the cost. Consider using a template that can be customized for your needs, to reduce design costs if budget constraints dictate.
- **Functionality** planning determines how the site will work and what software development is necessary. Is there extensive content that would be better managed in a database and then dynamically pushed out to the web site (a dynamic web site) or does the content require only minimal or moderate content changes and can be a static site? What actions do you want your visitors to take based on the objectives you set? (Download a presentation or demo? Sign up for webinar? Join a mailing list or blog?) Do you need signup forms? Customer forums? Ecommerce? A content database?

Here is a link to a [planning guide](#) that may be helpful.

There are two other important factors to consider in web design, adherence to standards and maintainability.

- **Adherence** to the standards as published by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) is critical to ensure compatibility across multiple platforms and browsers.
- Determination of **site maintenance** is a necessary component of site planning. Will you use an outside source to update the site, or maintain it yourself? What software and training is needed to maintain the site? One popular, affordable software solution is [Adobe's Contribute software](#).

Social media

Social media refers to the various interactive communication forums and technologies that bring people together, usually focused around a particular topic. Think of them as places to build relationships, like a corporate cocktail party. For the sake of simplicity, this document includes blogging as one of the social media technologies. Others do not include it as such.

Everyone, every organization, should be doing something with social media today. The concept of dynamic forums for communication is not going away and will only evolve. If your customers of today are not using social media, your next generation of customers certainly is. So get on board and start. Suggestions...

- Think of your time investment in social media in thirds. One third finding and reading. One third responding or posting. And one third creating your own content.
- Pick one of the tools below and go. Spend 15 minutes on the first third for a few weeks. Then add the 2nd third. See what results you may be achieving. You may not decide to develop content in terms of a blog, but you may decide facebook is where your audience is or twitter. Then create content for this medium.
- Realize that once you get started, content is often written for one medium (for example your web site) and then re-purposed to a blog and then to a twitter or facebook link.

While there are many tools and web sites for social media, this summary focuses on the top four used by businesses today.

Blogging: a dynamic, interactive communication channel that facilitates conversations between business and their customers and potential customers.

Key business reason to use a blog...

- blogs can serve as a website for small businesses
- blogs can be used to easily set up ecommerce for a startup business
- they can serve as vehicle to create buzz about a new product or service
- they can provide product specific content, FAQ, knowledge bases

In addition to serving as an interactive, customer driven, communication vehicle, blog postings can serve to improve the number of inbound links to your web site. And the more inbound links a web site has, the better it can rank in search engines.

Blogging requires the use of specialized blogging software. There are two approaches, hosted and server software. Hosted blogging solutions give the new user the ability to create a blog very quickly and most often, inexpensively. The blog is set up on the hosting server and will use their URL in the name. Optionally, a server solution includes software that runs on an organization's servers and allows the blog to use your domain name in it.

Twitter: free micro-blogging site that allows members to send and read messages of not more than 140 characters, called Tweets. Members can join other members groups to be able to see their postings. One major advantage of twitter is message can be received over email or over cellular phones.

Key business reason to use twitter... send quick update messages to followers that directs them to new, more detailed content on a blog or website.

LinkedIn: a business network system providing the online version of a business cocktail party for both business intelligence and business development.

Facebook: a social networking service that lets you connect with friends, co-workers, and others who share similar interests or who have common backgrounds.

10 best practices for social media:

1. Go to twitter.com and facebook.com. Sign up for an account using your company name if you have not already. If you do not, someone else will. You do not have to use the account, just reserve it.
2. Set up a [LinkedIn](https://linkedin.com) account
3. [Set up Google reader](https://www.google.com/reader/) (or other blog reader if you prefer) and make it your homepage. A reader is what you need to follow multiple blogs. If you do not have a google account, set one up.
4. Use [Twitter search](https://twitter.com/search) to monitor conversations about your organization. Run the search from twitter search and then click the RSS box and then add to your Google Reader. You will be able to check automatically.
5. Set up Google alerts for your company and have them send you any updates weekly.
6. Add to all corporate marketing tools the links to where people can find you in social media networks. Include this information in your email signature as well.
7. Tips for blog content
 - keep the content short and to the point
 - use your own voice, create a personality that readers will want to be with
 - include useful links to resources, including your web site using keywords
 - comment on other blogs as well as writing your own
 - use humor
 - create a great offer that gets the reader to take action
 - ask questions, disagree with postings, create a conversation
8. Tips for tweeting
 - Keep a casual, friendly tone
 - Answer questions directed to you in a timely manner
 - You do not have to follow everyone that is following you
 - Offer valuable content
 - Provide links to other sources

- Ask questions, they mostly likely will be answered quickly

9. Tips for LinkedIn

- Use the tools at LinkedIn to find people you know
- Add a photo, it helps
- Send out a connection request once you have met a new person in person
- Get recommendations and give recommendations
- Review your account and spend some time each week connecting
- Find LinkedIn groups to join

10. Check out the training resources on Lynda.com under SEO and blogging and the wealth of information at Hubspot.com.

Resources:

- Blogger.com (hosted blog software)
- HubSpot (hosted blog software for a fee and great free marketing content)
- Wordpress.com (blog software for your server)
- Technorati (social media search engine)
- Google Blog Search (search for topical blogs)
- Lynda.com (overall training under blogging)

Email marketing

Email marketing can be a very effective channel to retain loyal customers as well as reach out to new clients. While the low cost and flexibility is appealing, it is highly recommended to only use 'in-house' lists. These lists, vs. rented lists, are developed as "opt-in" lists. List members decide they want to stay in touch with you as an existing customer or perhaps a future one. The most effective email newsletters are the ones with highly focused, rich content sent to "opt-in" lists.

10 best practices for email marketing:

1. Define your audience and what unique content they desire or need.
2. Use a reputable (not lowest cost) email service company.
3. Define membership acquisition strategy....how are you getting people to join?
 - a. Is your sign up box visible on the homepage?
 - b. Only ask for email at first, you can always ask for more information later.
 - c. Are you collecting emails through other channels as well?
 - d. What offers can you make to encourage signup?
4. Subject lines are critical. Think action words.
5. Make sure your privacy policy is visible on the web site.
6. What action do you want your readers to take after viewing the newsletter?
 - a. Have you set up measurable landing pages with an enticing, visible offer?
7. Pay attention to coding. It is more challenging to have html be correctly displayed by the wide variety of email clients than it is for web browsers.
 - a. Use a few simple tables instead of external CSS which will not be supported.
 - b. Use inline CSS for minimal styling.
 - c. Think text and fewer graphics. Many email clients will not show graphics.
 - d. Use absolute link referencing and test before sending.
8. Be regular with emails but not overwhelming, perhaps 1/month or 8x/ year.
9. Promptly reply to any feedback, good or negative.
10. Use the evaluation tools provided by the email service company to monitor what is working and what is not.

Resources:

- [Top Ten Reviews](#) recommends [iContact](#) and [Benchmark](#) Email as the top 2 providers.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

SEO is the practice of refining the content and structure of a web site so that it can perform better (rank higher) in “organic” or “natural” searches. In the case of google, SEO is how your site can move up in the ranking of sites (SERP, search engine rank pages).

Key steps of a SEO campaign:

- The first phase of SEM is defining your objective for investing in SEM. What is the business objective you are trying to achieve? What are the key performance indicators (KPI) of that you want to impact? For example:
 - traffic
 - ranking
 - inbound links
 - pages indexed
 - conversion rates
- Define your audience. Who comes to your site? What do they want? Why should they buy from you?
- Competitive research, what are they doing? How are they attracting visitors?
- Keyword analysis and selection. This is the foundation of SEO.
 - Brainstorm a list of keywords using your experience, marketing knowledge of your customers and industry.
 - Use keyword generation tools to create more from this initial list.
 - Conduct a volume analysis to understand expected search volumes.
 - Analyze the difficulty of achieving ranking based on these search terms.
 - Consider the relevance of the resulting list to your business.
 - Narrow the list to 10 to 25 terms to start optimization of major site content. Move up to 100 keywords.
- Optimize your site based on the keyword research. Consider the best practices list below.
- Evaluate the inbound links to your site. Links from trusted sites carry weight (Google page rank). Use a reverse link lookup in Google (link: <http://www.yourdomain.com>) to see what pages are linking to you. Take this number with a grain of salt but it is a start.
- Consider the use of blogging and social media to increase the number of inbound links to your site. If you are not using some of these tools, why not? Your competition and your customer are.

15 best practices for SEO:

1. Consider SEO a process that is iterative, time-consuming and beneficial over the long term.
2. Keyword research is important, don't rush through it.
3. Pertinent content always wins. Are your keywords embedded in your content?
4. Do not try to "trick" the search engines, it will backfire.
5. Make sure you have text on your homepage and not all graphics or worse, Flash.
6. Page titles are critical. No more than 68 -70 characters. Important keywords first. Unique titles to every page if possible.
Consider this format... Major keyword | Major keyword | Secondary keyword | Brand
7. Use keywords in your H1 tagged titles. Consider also H2 and H3 title tags.
8. Meta keywords do not matter. Let it go. But the meta description tag is important in how your page description reads in the page ranking. Pay attention to it.
9. Make sure your internal links use appropriate keywords in the link text.
10. Check all image alt tags for appropriate keyword usage.
11. Do you have a keyword rich site map?
12. Find trusted sites (not link farms) that you can submit your site address to with appropriate keyword rich links.
13. Check your site file names and folder structure for adding keywords.
14. Register your site with major search engines (Google, Yahoo, Ask, Bing) and directories (Open Directory Project for example).
15. Spent 15 minutes a day on some social media (blog, LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter).

Resources:

- [Search Engine Watch](#)
- [Hubspot.com](#)
- [SEOMoz.org](#)
- [Google keywords research](#)
- [Word Tracker](#) for keyword research

Pay Per Click (PPC) advertising

This is a web marketing tool that can drive visitors to your web site in response to a small text ad placed on Google or Yahoo. PPC refers to the structure of this program in that you are charged only when someone clicks on the ad and visits the site. You are not charged for impressions (views of the ad), only if someone clicks. This gives you a specific tool that is very measurable. PPC campaigns are based on selecting keyword phrases that you think search engine users may be using to find your product/service. Small ads are created and bid prices are set. The budget you have set determines the placement of your ad in the list of ads displayed. Generally the more money, the more the ad will be displayed. And if your ad copy engages the visitor, they will click on it and come to your web site landing page.

Because of the vast number of organizations competing for PPC ad visibility, start with a targeted campaign. Use very specific keywords or for a time specific event or opportunity. Begin with Google but also try Yahoo and Bing.

Key steps of a PPC campaign:

- competitive research
- open up a google adwords account
- keyword analysis and selection
- create text and submit ads
- develop landing pages for web site with compelling offers
- test impact of different ads
- monitor campaign performance
- ongoing reporting and optimization

10 best practices for PPC:

1. Define the goal of the PPC campaign? How does it relate to your business and marketing objectives? Can it be measured?
2. Start with 2-4 word keyword phrases ("torso keywords") when doing your research for better volume/cost tradeoffs.
3. Spend some time at your competitions' sites, what are they doing?
4. Create a compelling landing page with a clear offer for the ad to click to.
5. Set up analytics for each landing page to measure.
6. Experiment with budget amounts.
7. Create 2 to 3 ads with slight variations to test for effectiveness.
8. Experiment with geographic targeting and time of day.
9. Don't rule out [vertical search engines](#) for specific targeting.
10. Monitor, measure, and tweak.

Resources:

- [Google Adwords](#)
- [Hupspot.com](#)
- [Google keywords research](#)
- [Word Tracker](#) for keyword research

Web analytics

Web analytics is the process and set of tools used to analyze the effectiveness of a web site and web marketing tactics. It is an essential element in any web undertaking. The importance of defining measurable outcomes that support the overall objectives of the organization cannot be understated. Every web site, landing page, SEO, PPC, and email newsletter released can and should be measured in terms of its expected outcome.

If it did not achieve the stated goal, learn why not. In reality, it is not always possible to make the time investment to measure and analyze. But select a few of these from the list below and implement.

5 best practices for analytics:

1. Define every action and investment in terms of "expected measurable outcome".
2. Then define how it will be measured, email signups?, webinar signups? etc.
3. Open a Google webmaster's account. It is a wealth of information and tools.
4. Learn the web traffic tools provided by your hosting firm for site traffic.
5. Analysis leads to business decisions. If you are not making decisions with the data, stop collecting it.

Resources:

- [Google Adwords](#)
- [Google Webmaster](#) tools