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Advertising · Marketing · Public Relations

Web Site Project Checklist

A successful web site is as much about the details as it is about the big idea. Many small factors contribute to a site's effectiveness or lack thereof. To help you get started thinking about it, we've put together this checklist of factors to keep in mind. Details will vary from site to site, but this general list will apply to most business sites. We likely will be updating this list. Check for updates at www.duncanmccall.com

Purpose

Yes, you probably do need a web site. But not "just because."

- Do you have a clear picture of the goals of the site? In other words, when it's working great, what specific outcomes will occur?
- Have you determined how to measure the success of the solution (increased traffic, reduced phone calls, etc)?
- Do you own the domain name? Have you registered alternatives and misspellings?
- Do you have a clear picture of who you are trying to reach? Is it everyone? Your customers? Is your intended audience regional, industry specific, company size specific, etc.?
- Do you know the key reasons why the target user chooses your company's products and/or services (cost, service, value)?
- Do you have special features in mind like eCommerce shopping cart, blogs, RSS feeds, forms with emails, newsletter signup, autoresponders, landing/call-to-action pages, etc.?
- Is the site designed to meet the needs of your visitors rather than your organization's needs?

Content

Good, relevant content sets a web site apart from the competition and helps with search engine ranking.

- Do you have professional quality photography? You might need images of products, staff, storefront, office, etc.
- Do you have professionally written copy that tells a story and consistently reflects the voice of your brand?
- Does the copy's tone adjust appropriately to the context—for example, sales versus customer service?
- Does the content meet user needs, goals, and interests?



- Is the content timely and relevant?
- Are the major headings clear and descriptive?

Design

The visual usually gets the most attention.

- Do you have a logo? (And we don't mean scanning a logo off your business card.)
- Do you have trade dress guidelines or graphic standards?
- Does the design present critical content "above the fold"?
- Is the navigation system easy to use and understand?
- Does the design have an adequate text-to-background contrast?
- Is the font size and spacing easy to read?
- Are Flash and other add-ons used sparingly?
- Is the home page understandable to visitors in about five seconds?

HTML and CSS Coding

Proper construction of a site means faster loading, better search engine performance, less effort for maintenance, better usability and accessibility and broader compatibility across platforms and devices.

- Does the HTML and CSS meet web standards and pass validation checks?
- Has it been tested in older browsers, on multiple platforms, and at various screen resolutions?
- Does the site fall back gracefully on browsers without Flash or Javascript?
- Has a traffic-tracking package (such as Google Analytics) been installed?
- If the site is a redesign, are old URLs being redirected to the updated pages?
- Do the forms have anti-spam features?
- Has the site been validated in Google Webmaster Tools?
- Does the site work well when printed?
- Does the site have custom error pages?

Accessibility

It's good practice to make your site accessible to people with varying disabilities, such as impaired vision, hearing, or motor skills. Many of the same techniques also improve accessibility in various browsers and operating systems.

- If images, Flash, or DHTML is used for the main navigation, is an alternative provided by clear text links?
- Is navigation structured in an unordered list?
- Are navigation aids, such as site map, skip navigation link, or breadcrumbs, used?



- Is there anywhere in the design where color alone is used to convey meaning?
- If graphics and media are used to convey meaning, is a text equivalent provided?

Content Management

Content Management Systems add considerable functionality, but there are some considerations.

- Do you have a plan to keep the site updated?
- Are the URLs user and search engine friendly?
- Will the CMS generate dynamic site maps for automatic summation to the search engines?
- Are you being locked into the vendor of a proprietary CMS?
- Is the CMS free open source software prone to security flaws?

Search Engine Optimization

Real SEO starts at the beginning with site design. It's much easier to build a site to be search friendly from the ground up rather than fix it later.

- Do you have a list of key terms? (If you were using a search engine, what words or phrases would you use to find your site? Which of these words or phrases is most important?)
- Are target keywords used in general content?
- Does each content page contain a good amount of honest information about the subject?
- Is the information on each page well structured in the markup?
- Do content pages have unique titles?
- Are meta tags being used according to current standards?
- Is an XML site map set up?
- Is the site configured in Google Webmaster Tools and Yahoo! Site Explorer?

Technology

It just needs to work!

- Will the site be hosted in a bunker with tape backups, serious connectivity, monitoring, and power backups? Or on a spare computer in your back office?
- Does the server run a Linux/Unix and Apache environment? We're convinced it's more secure, stable, and faster than IIS.
- Have you considered using a separate email server if you need a large number of addresses?



Marketing

Your web site should not stand alone.

- How do you plan to encourage repeat visitors and referrals?
- Are you encouraging visitors to sign up or otherwise start a relationship with you?
- How will the new site design work with your other identity and marketing materials?
- If you are sending emails, are you complying with anti-spam laws?
- Does your site easily integrate with social networking sites if that's a concern?

Proofing

We always proofread and test, but you should too.

- Have you checked spelling, grammar, etc.?
- Have you tested all of the links?
- Have you tested the contact forms?
- Have you checked names, titles, phone numbers, and other contact information?

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