

This paper has been produced by
1st Interactive Design Limited
to help you ensure you get the best out of your investment.

Here we recommend what you should take account of when
planning a new web site or improvements to an existing one.

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Introduction

So, you have decided you need a new or improved web site that demonstrates your company's pedigree and will help to improve your profitability and success.

Then you need to give it the best possible chance of success and a good return on your investment and there's no better way to start than with effective planning.

A web site, like any other project needs considered thought, commitment and careful planning.

How you can help us to get it right for you

To help us advise and propose effectively to you to meet your requirements and agree the scope of the project it is helpful to have some understanding of the following:

1. An overview of your company.
2. The business objectives and background to your project.
3. What you expect from us as a final deliverable.
4. Your main competitors and your perception of their strengths and weaknesses.
5. Current web sites whose function and presentation appeals to you and why.
6. Your project success criteria, timescales and approximate budget.

Later on we will need to understand the following:

1. Who are the intended users and what are their needs?
2. Who will define and who will agree the final specification?
3. What budget is available?
4. Who will manage the development project?
5. Who will manage the ongoing support?
6. Are there any future considerations which will affect your planning?

These questions need to be asked so that your new system meets the requirements of internal and external users, while succeeding in achieving your business goals for the site.

We will be more than happy to discuss these issues at planning meetings with you and help you organise the information required.

To expand on the above:

1. Business goals. These should be clear and measurable. These could include:
 - a. Increasing revenue from direct internet sales;
 - b. Reducing administration by providing easy to find information for internal and external users
 - c. Servicing a new business direction
 - d. A marketing avenue for a new product
2. Intended users.
 - a. Are they internal or external?
 - b. What information will each of these users expect to access, and what extra, if any, resource will you need to provide it?
 - c. Will there be separate and securely protected subsystems for different classes of user?
 - d. What other existing avenues of relationship with your company are there for these users and will your new site have any unwanted impact on these relationships?

Final Specification

This should have a board member representation so that there is some guarantee that the aims of the web site are in line with company strategy, although control may well be through a project manager reporting to a board member.

Budget

The budget should be realistically set to meet all projected and associated costs and balanced against the business gain expected.

Management

Both management of the project and ongoing operational management should be under the supervision of a high profile manager to ensure initial and continued success.

Future Requirements

Some attempt at future proofing should be made so you need to check if there are any future needs your identified users are likely to want and if so do you need to plan for it now so your new site can be expanded later to include it?

This could be the subject of a separate project to research future needs including technology such as support for linked external client databases. Research can be general market research using existing databases of research information of various categories, or customised research using personal or telephone interviews or a questionnaire. Using these methods you can determine needs for skills and environmental or personal development to meet business requirements.

The following list details suggested areas to explore:

1. Are the users office-based or away from the office when they need access to the Internet?
2. Are they frequent and regular or intermittent users?
3. What types of device do they use to access the Internet? E.g. mobile phones, including text, smartphones and PDA's.
4. Will you expect access from other countries, and if so is there specific language, national and cultural requirements?
5. Will some users have low Internet connection speeds or other Internet access problems?
6. What amount of training will be required to ensure the user can make effective use of your new system?
7. Will some users have free-range or shared access i.e. access in public or shared spaces such as by WiFi in airports, stations or hotel lobbies or Internet café.

You may well need some help in finding answers to some of these questions and that is where our experience and knowledge can help.

Once you know the answers to the above questions it would be worthwhile to carry out some modelling by producing some user testing situations to verify user reactions in advance of development. This will help to identify any possible pitfalls, unwanted user reaction or system flow or logic problems, and help you to produce an effective site specification and technical brief.

To effectively manage both the development and operation of your web site you may need to consider the following:

1. Staff who will be assigned to the project, their experience skills, availability and competing demands on their time.
2. How your organisation operates and will interact with web site functions.
3. What material content you will need to prepare on a one-off and regular basis for the site.
4. What tools (such as e-mail, pdf documents) your staff use, and skill and training levels, and how they access the Internet (laptop; desktop; smartphone; office network).
5. Third parties working on the site and their relationship with your own people (graphic designers; copywriters etc.).
6. The availability of other resources (current web services; support staff; meeting rooms).
7. Related projects and important events such as a marketing campaign or a key board meeting or people who may have an impact on the project. This includes decision-makers, content signoff, brand managers or consultants.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss any aspect of a proposed web site development with us please get in contact by calling 0871 2884 665 or at <http://www.1st-interactive.com/contact.shtml>