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Web Site Check List

Collecting your materials and getting ready to create your site.

Creating an Internet presence to promote your business is fast becoming more of a requirement than an option. Once you've decided to establish your business (or yourself, if you're the "brand") on the Internet, you will want a Web page that reflects you and your business to your satisfaction. Here are a few tasks – fun tasks! – to complete as you plan your Website.

One of the key parts of a Web site is establishing its "look and feel." If you're moving an established business online, you may already have a "look and feel" to your business. Or you may be creating your look and feel from scratch.

To determine the "look and feel" of your business, answer these questions:

- a. What colors and letter shapes (fonts) are your customers used to seeing?
- b. If you're starting new, what colors and fonts would you like them to see?
- c. What do you want to say to them? Is your overall image serious, light-hearted, professional, whimsical, etc.?

Don't expect your best ideas to come from your first thoughts; good Web design takes some time to get right. The more "substance" you can communicate to your Web designer, the better chance you have for your vision and the final design to resemble each other!

I suggest that you start keeping track of your thoughts. Use whatever means you normally use for idea generation - a written journal or notebook, a standard manila file folder and loose-leaf paper. You can even create a special folder on your computer and use a word processing program such as Microsoft Word for your pages.

You will want to track six overall subjects and create a page or so for each subject. Label your folder/file/notebook "My Web Site" and then label each subject as follows:

Purpose and Goals
Target Audience
What I Like
What I don't Like
Web Site Pages
Other Thoughts

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Here are some ideas about how to approach each subject.

1) Purpose and Goals

- What is the goal of your site? What are you hoping to achieve with your Web site?
- What do you want visitors to DO at your Web site? Will your call-to-action be filling out a form, calling an 800 number, or buying a product NOW?
- Do you want to attract a larger audience? Provide an existing customer base with more information?
- Generate leads to be followed up by your sales team?

2) Target Audience

My copywriting friends always say this: "If you call out to everyone, you call out to no one." Figure out who your target audience is and design your site to be exactly what they need.

- What is their age? What is their income? Gender?
- What sort of Web interface will appeal to them?
- How can your product or service solve their problems? (And of course you'll need to consider what their problems are first!)

3) What I Like

Browse some Web sites relating to your service or business. A good place to start is Google.com or Yahoo.com.

- Take note of the Web sites that appeal to you.
- What do you like about them? The Layout? Colors? Navigation? Fonts?

Layout - think about how you want your Web site to look. Take notes of Web sites that you find appealing.

Colors - Choose your colors wisely. If you have existing marketing materials, you will want to send them to your Web designer for scanning and color sampling. It's important to maintain your existing branding and corporate look as you move online.

- Elegant business-like colors include dark, rich colors such as navy blue, burgundy, scarlet, deep purple.
- Fresh, healthy colors include bright orange, pale yellows, blues and greens.
- Loud, high-impact colors include vibrant colors such as bright shade of yellow, bright red, purple and black.

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We recommend choosing one color as the primary color of the site and one or two complimentary colors. If you don't chose to have a white background, make sure your text color does not conflict with the background you select.

Navigation - Keep it simple and you won't lose your Web site visitors. Do you like your navigation across the top? Left side? Right side? Nice buttons or text links?

Fonts - Use an easy-to-read font for the majority of your text. Fancy fonts and special fonts can be used for headings, subheadings, special announcements, and news.

Be considerate of your visitors – don't use a font that's hard to read – or they may just "click" and be gone! Identify several sites that use a font you like.

4) What I Don't Like

Knowing what you don't like is just as important as what you like. Write down things that bug you and share them with your designer so he or she can steer clear of them!

Be specific. What don't you like about a Web site? Visually loud? Difficult to read and understand? Is the navigation unclear?

5) Web Site Pages

Here's what I usually recommend to start, the basic pages. If you've got ideas for additional pages, great! And, of course, more pages can always be added later.

- **Homepage** - This is the first page of your Web site. This page is the "first impression" someone has of you and your business. (And you know what they say about not getting a **second** chance for a **first** impression?) The homepage must clearly state what your site is about. It can include a mission statement and link to your other pages for more information.
- **About Us** - This page is about you! Include your resume, your pictures, your biography, and your services.

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- **Resources** - All your links to other Web sites go here. It's good to trade links with other people in your industry - but only from qualified sites.
- **Services** - Use this page to tell your visitors about they types of services you offer
- **Products** - If you sell products, this would be a good page to have. You may have more than one page of products depending on how many you have. Companies with many products will probably want to investigate online shopping carts.
- **Contact Us** - Usually all your contact information goes here, along with a form for your visitors to fill out. When your visitors fill out the form, it's instantly E-mailed to you.
- **Testimonials** - Nothing sells like existing happy clients. Show off your letters here.
- **And more** - The sky's the limit when it comes to thinking of all the great content you can present to your visitors. You're not restricted to just these pages!

6) Other Thoughts and Ideas

Write down any other thoughts and ideas that you have for your Web site, no matter how small or simple!

Do you want your navigation buttons to change when the mouse rolls over them? Do you want a copyright statement at the bottom of your pages (recommended)? Do you want a Flash movie added to your Web site?

How about a message board? Polls? Any other special features? Add these to your "Other Thoughts/Ideas" worksheet.

Once you've filled up your journal with your thoughts and ideas, it's time to hand those ideas - and the copy (text) for your pages - over to your designer.

Your designer will be most impressed with the information and clear insight you're able to provide. You'll also save a lot of time by clearing up questions regarding your design before they ever crop up.

Just like creating a plan for your business strategy or marketing efforts is important to success, creating a plan for the creation and design of your site is highly recommended for a successful Web site launch. Put your best foot forward on the Information Superhighway!