

Beginning Your Website Project

HELP US TO HELP YOU DEVELOP A SOLID PLAN!

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Developing a new website... even reworking an existing one, can feel like an overwhelming task. Where do you start? Below are a ten things to think about before diving in. The suggestions below may make you feel like you're doing our work for us – but really we are just narrowing the focus and solidifying the details of your project. There's nothing better than getting it right the first time! Considering these ten points will save all parties time, money and will result in getting your new or updated website launched on schedule. And to top it off, the biggest benefit of this approach is that the resulting website will better reflect your organization's personality and goals.

- 1. Tell us what you like.** Set aside time to do some web research. Review different websites including your competitors, websites related to your industry, and possibly websites that have nothing to do with your products and services. Tell us what design elements you like in regards to design, layout, navigation, function, colors, patterns, font families, and other aesthetics.
- 2. Tell us what you don't like.** If you already have a website and we're talking about an update or total redesign, tell us what you don't like about the existing website and what's currently not working for your company and clients. While completing #1 above, if you find a website with blatantly awful design/content/structure, note it so we also have examples of design elements you dislike.
- 3. Write your website content.** Have at least a rough outline of the content you want on your website. Think about your current customers and the customers you want to attract – how will your website help them and what do you want them to do? First you may need to consider what pages will be in your website. InfoPathways will work with you to develop a Site Map; the skeleton of the site's structure and pages. Write (or if you already have it, copy and paste) your content in a word editor like Microsoft Word or Note Pad and email it to our development team. We'll format the text to improve its visual appeal and readability both for the user and the search engines. As the website nears completion, you can send us content revisions, if needed. If you are not necessarily a fan of writing, consider hiring a copy writer to assist in the development of your content.
- 4. Collect your imagery.** Send us your logo, related graphics, and photographs you want considered during the design process. However, keep in mind that first impressions can make or break your message.
 - Graphics: Is your logo strong or might it need some freshening up to fit with the times?
 - Photographs: Do you have high quality photos with good lighting and visual appeal? Consider purchasing stock photos or hiring a professional photographer.
 - Other: In branding yourself, you want a consistent look among your logo, website, advertisements, brochures, handouts, business cards, post cards, etc. If you have any design material that should be considered in your website design, please share them with us to help conceptualize the final website design.
- 5. Function over design.** After reviewing our suggested Site Map, reconsider the navigation menu of your website. You want to structure the hierarchy of your navigation for ease of use. What do your clients expect or need from your website? It needs to be easy to use so your website visitors can find what they are looking for within a few clicks, if any! When planning the hierarchy of your pages, remember that if a visitor cannot find what they need quickly, they will go elsewhere.
- 6. CMS.** Will you need a Content Management System for your website where you can update specific website content on your own? A CMS can add to the cost of the project, but if you need to make updates often, you will likely recoup

your costs in a reasonable timeframe. However, some updates should be filtered through your website company not just because the cost makes more sense, but your time is more valuable when applied to your specialty. Let us know what you want to take charge of and what you want us to handle. We'll talk to you about your options and expected future maintenance expenses.

7. **Incorporating other elements.** Other elements could be as simple as a graphic image that needs to be incorporated, logos of partnership companies that should be noted, or other items. It could also be a bit more complicated, like Facebook and Twitter apps to connect your social media or setting up a Blog. Another thought would be incorporating email marketing such as Constant Contact and a 'Join Our Email List' sign-up box or and setting up visitor tracking with a solution like Google Analytics. Do you need any widgets like "Get Directions" or "Check the Weather"? Many of these elements affect design. Some affect cost. Let's try and figure out everything upfront so there are no surprises.
8. **Involving your team.** Asking for input from your team with consideration of what the website should provide and look like can be very beneficial. Complete group discussions before starting your website development – it is a great brainstorming opportunity – who knows what your website needs more than your team? Consider interviewing your most loyal clients – ask them what they would like to see on your website. Firm decisions will help your website's design and content fall into place. During the development of your website, select one person at your company to be the lead contact for the website. They need to be available and have the authority to make decisions and provide imagery and/or content in a timely manner.
9. **Domain and hosting details.** Launching a website can be quick and simple. However, it can also be a nightmare.

If you do not have a website yet, we need to decide on your domain name and where you would like to host the website. Think of your domain as your address (the name of your web page) and the hosting as the monthly rent (where the website is housed). You can host with InfoPathways if you would prefer to keep everything in one place and support a local company.

If you already have a website, you need to at least know where your site is hosted and how to access the account (your login and password). Your domain name may be managed with a separate company. If you are not in control of these accounts, it is likely your current/previous web team is. If this is the case, ask them kindly for the information (the account and FTP information). Some web developers do not let go easily and this is where the nightmare can begin. We have experience in helping with account retrieval.

Having your information upfront will help us stay on track with your target launch date. If you are 100% unsure of where the site is located, we may be able to learn something by looking up your website at Network Solutions.

10. **Launch goal.** Choosing a reasonable launch date is crucial and it is important that this date be flexible. In ideal situations, websites can be completed by the initial launch date goal, but keep in mind that your part and our part may encounter unexpected hurdles that include additions and/or deviations to the project. Time management is also a big hurdle that we see a lot of clients struggle with. Make sure you have time to complete your part; writing and editing content, collecting photos and responding to your web designers and developers with feedback. Our experience tells us that launch dates are missed more often due to the time it takes finalize content. We'll work together to keep your project moving.

Give us a call at [InfoPathways](#) – together we can brainstorm great ideas and solve your website challenges with the help of these basic stepping stones!