

Planning and preparation are vital for effective Web page design. Few things are harder than "repairing" unplanned Web sites. Elegance is not created on the fly but derived from careful planning. The rule of thumb: plan twice before implementing once. An experienced acquaintance once said "A computer is not the design tool, but the execution tool in a well thought out project". The design of simple, clear Web pages always takes more effort than creating pages without purpose.

Every Web page should have a single well-defined purpose. A Web page's value is set by how well it meets its purpose. A good page matches its style, presentation, and layout to this underlying motivation. Invariably, design problems occur when pages try to meet several purposes or do not match the purpose to page. Web pages that attempt to satisfy more than one purpose end up confusing the viewer. In the end, they do not satisfy any purpose well. A single purpose, in contrast, provides both a unified theme and a coherent goal.

Deciding on a message before writing the page keeps the page focused for the readers and the readers focused on the subject. Gathering your Web content before hand and carefully planning how the content will be represented within the Web site is the first step to designing a Web site project. In this module you will learn some simple steps in how to prepare for your Web presence by learning how to obtain Web content, storyboarding, and flowcharting.

Getting Web Content

The first step to strategizing the design of a Web site involves answering a few practical questions.

- Who is my target audience?
- What message does the Web site need to convey?
- What are my client's needs?
- What type of Web sites does my client like and why?

Targeting your Audience

Are you developing an online magazine, community Web site, coffee shop, maybe even an educational site for pre-school teachers and parents? Take the educational Web site for example. To give you some ideas on how you can target the kind of audience that will visit the Web site. Your client wants you to develop an educational Web site sponsored by their pre-school that offers extended educational tips to teachers and school information to parents. The client wants the Web site to offer incentives for both parents and teachers to visit the Web site.

It would seem that the target audience for this Web site would of course be pre-school teachers, parents (single or married) and potential parents that are considering enrolling their children into the pre-school. The information you gather will need to reflect this.

What message does the Web site need to convey?

Once you have the audience targeted, you can easily establish what the Web site will need to convey. In the example of a pre-school Web site, you may want to offer the viewers lesson plans, activity tips, policies, payment plans, job openings, menus, calendar events, and staff credentials. You can even reserve a page to display students art work so parents can log on and see the work their children has accomplished. Focusing on the audience enables you to decide what type of material to offer on the Web by answering the simple question “What would this type of audience be interested in when it comes to the type of site you are aiming to develop?”

Here are some tips on how to obtain content for your Web site:

- Find out if your client has any print material you can use for the Web site.
- Research using books and other Web sites to gain additional information for your page content.
- Do a survey on what the target audience would like to see on your Web site.

TIP ICON: In the next lesson, you will learn more about developing quality Web content for your Web pages. This lesson focuses more on obtaining content for your Web site.

What are my client’s needs?

If you have a client (you may be your own client), it really pays to listen carefully to what the client wants. Ask a lot of questions, offer ideas to your client, and listen carefully to the client’s answers and demands. You would be amazed how easy it is to develop an

entire Web site (a good one too) that does not meet the client's requirements. Most of this can be avoided by simply defining the client's needs and wants before hand. What exactly do they want to offer their viewers? What colors, tones, and other design elements do they like? What type of resources would they like to offer, if any? Try to make a general list of questions before meeting with the client about the Web site in case the issues are not addressed from the client themselves.

What type of Web sites does my client like and why?

You could say that this is the second part of the previous question. Getting an idea of what other Web sites a client likes can really help when you begin to layout and design their Web site. You can almost ensure that the client has already scoped the Web looking at other Web sites to determine what type of Web presence they are seeking. Ask for a few URLs of the Web sites they like the most. Ask them why they specifically liked these Web sites and how they want their Web site to reflect the same type of look. Often you will find that clients visit their competitors and determine what they like and don't like from these Web sites. Research other Web sites that offer the same type of Web content as your clients to make sure you can offer a competitive edge with the site that you design for your client.

Storyboarding

Once you have established your audience and goals it's time to start producing ideas and establishing layout. This can be done effectively through storyboarding. Storyboarding allows you to suggest layout ideas on paper or other means before you sit down at your

computer and begin designing a Web site. A storyboard can be as simple as some scribbles on several napkins of what you think each page should look like. Or else it can be a full color proposal or presentation on professional paper or other renderings that can be presented to a client. If you are doing the storyboarding for yourself, one effective way of storyboarding is to grab a screen shot of a fully maximized Web browser window, edit it in a paint program to remove the window contents, and print. This will give you a better idea of the placements of your Web elements relative to the Web browser window.

TIP ICON: A storyboard is only to help you in the layout and organization of your Web site content. Do not confine yourself to the structure of the storyboard; its only use is to help you organize the Web site's content. It is very rare the finished Web site looks the same as the storyboard you used.

If you are estimating that your Web site will be 10 pages long, print 10 copies of an edited screen shot, each printed screen shot acting as a single Web page. Gather all of your information that you have accumulated in reference to the Web site and begin to organize the information into piles that are relative to each other and that should belong on the same Web page. Once you have grouped your content, label the printed screen shot pages with respective names and place it in the appropriate "pile" of information. You can then begin to sketch in the organized information in the manner in which you would like for it to appear on the Web page.

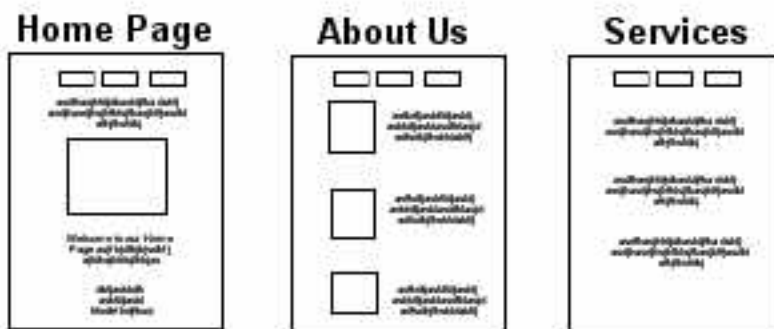
It is at this stage you might find that some of the information is not enough, meaning you will either research for more information, add the information to another page or you will

remove the information all together. In contrast, you might find that you have too much information, and find it necessary to eliminate the information as well.

Once you have a well-planned Web site you can now begin to implement your plans, which will move you into the next lesson where you will learn basic design skills that will help create quality Web pages. Below is an example of what a storyboard might look like before the actual Web site is designed.

<INSERT IMAGE M1L1FIG1.TIFF>

Figure 1 - Example of a storyboard



Flowcharts

When your viewers access your Web site, how will they move around easily within it?

You will need to develop a navigational system for you viewers. Creating a good navigation system will reduce the chances of your viewers becoming confused and discouraged when trying to access more information from your Web site. Providing links to all of your Web pages in a systematic format will allow your viewers to view other pages within your Web site easily.

Typically, readers are used to reading in a linear format. Meaning that they read from top to bottom and left to right. Hypertext changed all of that, allowing readers to jump at will, reading what they wanted by clicking random hyperlinks with no systematic format. This can leave your viewers lost or confused.

To avoid confusion you can use a flowchart to help you create the navigation flow of your Web site. This can be accomplished by using the sheets of your storyboard. You can take the storyboard and arrange them in a navigation manner that seems most logical. Request feedback from different sources on how they would navigate your Web site, allowing them to arrange the storyboard as they deem necessary.

Summary

Planning a Web site project before the development process is essential in quality Web design. There are many steps in the planning stage, the ones mentioned here can help you establish your own techniques. Storyboards and flowcharts are useful tools that assist developers in strategically laying out Web sites.