

## Wise Website Planning

Websites are like a too small closet – we keep shoving in the new without taking out the old. Pretty soon we can no longer find what we’re looking for. We keep telling ourselves we’ll sort through the closet, or organize it better. But we never have time.

If a website is unorganized or a home page is cluttered, prospects just aren’t sure where to go, and let’s be true to human behavior – when faced with too many choices on a computer screen, the easiest choice is to jump to another site. Valuable prospects may end up having a better experience on your competitors’ sites.

On average, a company’s website needs a refresh every two-to-three years. Here are the planning and implementation basics.

**Planning.** Develop a realistic project schedule. Briefly describe each activity, choose owners, state dependencies, and establish deadline dates.

**Reflection.** This is the most important step. In order to develop the navigation, data is needed. What are the goals of the website? Who are the target audiences? What are their profiles? What are they looking for? What are the brand promises and key messages? What is working on the current site, and why? What isn’t working; why not? What content is out of date; what content is current? Your web stats are an excellent source for trends and anomalies. Look at it – ask questions.

**Wireframe.** With valuable data now in hand, sharpen your pencil and develop how you want visitors to navigate your site. Once you are satisfied that the wireframe achieves the goals, socialize it. The objective is to receive approval to move to the next step.

**Design / Write.** Experienced marketing communications managers prefer to brief designers and writers at the same time. They’ll be working in concert and are dependent upon each other, so get them thinking like a team from the get-go. Review the company’s branding guidelines, brand promise and key messages. Walk them through the navigation. Listen to their concerns. Answer their questions. Listen to their ideas.

**Test drive.** Once the site is complete, take it for a spin. Note any change requests and submit them to the designer.

**LIVE.** Upload your site to the public. Immediately verify that it has uploaded as you expected.

Be sure to regularly check your web stats to see if visitors are navigating the way you intended. Also, continue to add new content, but, be sure to keep it organized. Every time you are asked to put something new on the home page, ask yourself these two questions: Is this on brand and is it in line with my website goals?

## About the Author

**Irene Crosby, Founder and Principal of Target Insight,** is an accomplished marketing communications consultant located in Ottawa, Ontario. Services include marketing communications strategy development; hands-on implementation of marketing communications activities; website planning and project management; and copywriting. Irene works with CEOs, VPs, and marketing managers to develop and executive communications plans that resonate with target audiences, engage customers, and drive business. Her 20 years of experience span high tech, life sciences, education, health care, insurance, financial services, and the public sector. Irene is adept at managing projects and keeping clients up-to-date every step of the way—no surprises. *You and your customers deserve insightful communications.*

**STEPS**

- Action plan (dates, details, dependencies, owners)
- Reflect
- Develop wireframe > socialize > approval
- Design site > socialize > approval
- Write content > socialize > approval
- Test drive
- Go LIVE!
- Track web stats > tweak

**RESOURCES**

- Internal subject matter experts (SME)
- If you insource your web design and writing, be certain to talk with these key team members
- External SMEs (customers, channel partners, etc.)
- Data: web stats, brand guidelines, all completed feedback forms from the current website, customer survey, competitors' sites

**HOW TO GET DATA FROM SMEs**

- One-on-one talks
- Facilitate discussions

**TIPS**

- Ask the designer to develop three home page concepts + a secondary page for each. Pick the one that best meets the goals of the website.
- Ask the writer to craft search engine optimization (SEO) data and include it at the end of each new content page. When the file is sent to the designer, s/he has all data needed. Saves time and money.

**INSOURCE OR OUTSOURCE?**

Planning involves identifying dates, details, dependencies and owners. Owners are important.

- Do you have people on your team to delegate these roles to: project leader, researcher, wireframe developer, designer, and writer?
- Do they have the time to take on this project?
- Do they have the experience?

If you can say “yes” to each of these questions – you’re in a great position to start your project.

If you said “no” to one of these questions, you do have options. You can outsource elements of the project to an experienced marketing communications consultant.

Most will be able to seamlessly develop the action plan, complete the research, and develop the wireframe. Again, most will be able to write for you as well, but if not, they’ll have a strong network of writers to recommend. Most will not be able to do the design; however, if you have your own designer, they can easily work with the designer. And if you need to outsource the design, again, they’ll have a network of seasoned web designers to recommend depending on the unique needs of your website.

**My brazen plug!**

I have planned and implemented many, many website projects in diverse industries:

- High tech
- Life sciences
- Government
- Not-for-profit
- Health care

**Learn More**

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