Vital Checklist for Website Redesign

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Introduction

Embarking on a website redesign project is never an easy undertaking – such projects can be cumbersome, intimidating, and expensive. Getting approval to start the project is the first hurdle, but once you do then comes the work of evaluating your project needs and establishing a strategy for execution. Regardless of whether you are outsourcing the project or handling it internally, for the average marketer or business owner knowing *what* needs to be taken into account for a successful website redesign is a foreign concept.

We've created this Website Redesign Checklist to help you focus your thoughts and formalize them into a clear framework. By answering the following questions you should be on your way to developing a comprehensive RFP or project-scope plan that has the potential to lead to a redesigned website that delivers on your organization's core goals and objectives.

Site Goals and General Questions

Assess your responses to the following questions first to guide the rest of the process. Include all relevant internal decision makers in the discussion so that you ensure each department or division's needs is being addressed in the planning stages.

- Why are you redesigning the site at this time?
- What are your goals for the project?
- Do you have timeframes or schedules that must be adhered to? (If so, you may need to evaluate whether they're realistic in comparison to the project requirements you compile with the questions in the other sections of this checklist.)
- What is/are the purpose(s) of your site (brochure, informational, transaction-oriented, lead-gen, etc)?
- Can you rate / describe your current levels of satisfaction with the site's performance, design, functionality, and content? And how do you want/expect those levels of satisfaction to change with this redesign?
- How will you define and measure the success of the project?

Performance Questions

Based on your analytics data and sales / lead-conversion results, assess how your site is currently performing and determine what strengths and weaknesses it has that should be addressed as part of the redesign. Your goal should be to augment what is working to sustain it or make it work better in the redesigned site and to undo, fix, or replace, what's "broken" so that those weaknesses don't exist on the new site.

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- How are you currently tracking site performance / what analytics suite are you utilizing? Are you satisfied with the data the product collects and the reports you're able to generate or do you need to look into a new solution or more training on the solution you have?
- Where does the majority of your current site traffic come from? Are those traffic sources economically sound for your overall business objectives (i.e., if the majority of your traffic comes from paid sources are you able to justify that expense based on positive ROI? Or is the present traffic model not self-sustaining and does your site need to receive traffic from other / different sources in order to demonstrate a positive ROI?)?
- Does your current site have clear Goals / Points of Conversion?
    o If not, what should those be on the new site?
    o If so, are the current ones sufficient to carry over to the new site or should they be revised? How are they performing presently? Understanding that we all want to continuously increase our sites' performance, is your overall conversion rate weak and in need of serious consideration or does your current site perform relatively well?
- Who are the various audiences your site is geared to? Can you prioritize the importance of each of those audiences relative to your bottom line? Does the current site adequately address their needs relative to their levels of priority?
- What websites do you consider competitors of yours and how does the performance of your current site measure up against them?
- Is Search Engine Optimization (SEO) performance a concern for the new site? If so, how does your current site rank for your most important keywords (and have you researched and created a list of most important keywords and SEO objectives or do you need help formulating what those should be?)? What needs and/or does not need improvement relative to your current site's overall SEO performance?

Design Questions

A website redesign project may or may not always involve a full overhaul of the site's aesthetics. Do you need to start from scratch or are their design elements (such as core branding) that can or even must be maintained as part of the redesign? Is the "design" component a complete redo or simply a refresh? Understanding how drastic your design changes need to be is important to the overall level of priority Design takes within the overarching project scope.

- What do you like about your site's current aesthetic?
- What do you dislike about your site's current aesthetic?
- Do you have brand guidelines to adhere to or is rebranding part of the project? Is your logo set in stone or is it one of the elements you will be redesigning?
- Are there any colors or fonts that must be used?
- What tone do you want the site's aesthetic to evoke?

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- What kinds of imagery are you seeking – realistic photography (stock), realistic photography (of your actual staff, building, products, etc.), abstract or artistic images, etc.? Regardless of style, do you already have the images you would like to include on the site or do you need to gather them, schedule a photo shoot, etc.?
- Given your particular site's audience(s), what design elements could enhance their overall experience with the site?
- What other websites do you strongly like the aesthetics of and why?
- What other websites do you strongly dislike the aesthetics of and why?
- What role, if any, do you want flash to play in the redesigned site?
- Do you utilize landing pages for your online marketing initiatives? How do you design them presently? Will they need to be redesigned to mesh with the new site? Do you need the flexibility to create new ones "on the fly" in the future?
- Have you conducted any a/b or multivariate experiments to determine the performance of your present design choices? Do you want to explore means of doing so with the site's future design?

Functionality Questions

Site functionality may be the most open-ended area of consideration. What does your current site do that you like? What doesn't it do? What *must* it do? And what amount of resources are you willing to put forth in order to achieve your functionality goals? These are all questions that can be answered by exploring some of the following areas of functionality and understanding how they may or may not be relevant to your unique business model.

- Forms and Lead-Generation:
  - How many forms do you need and what is the function / purpose of each?
  - Do form results need to be saved to a database, sent via email, or both?
  - How often do you need to create / add new forms on the site?
- Tools and Interactivity:
  - What tools / interactivity do you currently offer on the site that needs to be carried over to the new site (widgets, calendars, lookups and search functionalities, maps, client logins/portals, interactive demos, etc.)?
  - What new tools / interactivity do you need to build as part of the redesign project?
- Ecommerce:
  - Will you be selling products through the site? If so, how many different stock-keeping units (skus) will make up your online inventory?
  - Are you currently selling products?
    - If so, will your order fulfillment, shipping options, shopping cart features, inventory management, credit card processing, etc., remain the same, or are you dissatisfied with any aspect of the process and require it to be revamped as part of the redesign project?

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- If not, do you have particular project requirements relative to order fulfillment, shipping options, shopping cart features, inventory management, credit card processing, etc., or do you need guidance and recommendations for how to address those aspects of ecommerce functionality?
- Newsletters and Email Marketing:
  - Do you currently engage in email marketing? How do you collect email addresses and how do you maintain and segment your list? Do your email creatives mesh well with your site's overall aesthetic and branding? Will they be impacted by your redesign and need to be redesigned in kind?
  - Do you have a newsletter and/or want to integrate one on the site?
  - Do you store archived / previous versions of the newsletter on the site?
  - How do you distribute your newsletter? How can a site visitor sign up for it? Do either of these answers need to change with the site redesign or are you satisfied with the ways you are currently handling them?

Content Questions

- Do you presently have a Content Management System (CMS)?
  - If so, are you happy with it?
    - If not, what aspects of it do you like and not like? Do you need assistance selecting a new one that better suits your usage requirements?
  - If not, how often do you need to edit, update, or add content to your site and do you think a CMS might be helpful as a result of that frequency?
- How can your site content be more of a resource to your visitors? What kinds of content would be useful to them and do you have the means to regularly update the site with it?
- Do you have social media / multimedia content (videos, images, webinars, whitepapers, press releases, social media links, interactive widgets, fan boxes, blogs, forums, etc.) and how will it be incorporated into the site?
- Do you have or want a blog or forum on the site?
- Do you have content on the existing site you definitely must keep or that you definitely want to revise or do away with?

Conclusion

Too often we encounter site owners who are dissatisfied with the results of previously planned site redesign projects, because they didn't properly take into account all their project needs before starting down the path of redesigning their sites. In the case of all of the questions within this Website Redesign Checklist, answers may beget additional questions or discussions of pros / cons and best possible strategies for your business; remember to be open to feedback, but qualify it based on the source.

Online strategy is never "one size fits all", but there are some tried and true best practices that can go a long way in helping you create a successful redesign. By devoting the time to developing robust answers to these questions, you can set the stage for your redesign project's scope and core requirements to be well defined and understood by all those involved in the project, thus creating the potential for your newly redesigned website to actually hit the mark and achieve your goals. Depending on how savvy your team is when it comes to online strategies relative to marketing, site performance, SEO, design, functionality development, and content creation and management, you may or may not need to outsource all or part of the site planning and execution to a firm or firms that can work on your behalf to ensure that your unique needs are met and delivered on in each of these areas. Be realistic in knowing what strengths your team does or doesn't have so that you can get the redesign right the first time and be happy with the results.

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