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How to prepare for a website

Web projects require careful planning. Often organizations find they know they need a website, but aren't quite sure how users will interact with it, what their needs will be, how they will handle the project internally, and how their staff will manage the site on an ongoing basis.

It is in the planning stages that these issues should be considered. Addressing them at an early stage means that the ultimate system that is produced is a good fit, for both external and internal site users, and matches the overall organizational aims in developing a system in the first place.

Define the Objective of your Site: Is it to generate more income? Develop name recognition? Enhance company image? Sell products to consumers or wholesalers? Develop a national or global market for your business?

Define Your Audience: Think expansively. Will you be selling products to the public? Providing business-to-business services? Offering expertise to other professionals in the field? Who are you not reaching now? Who, besides direct customers, might view or use your site? Competitors? Suppliers? The general public? Design your web site from the perspective of your audience; not your organization. Jot down scenarios in which different types of visitors come to your site and try to think about how you would address each of their needs.

Pinpoint a Unique Concept: What's your competitive edge? How is your company different? Do you plan to compete on price, quality or service or the uniqueness of your product or ideas? Will you do a better job of marketing than your competition? Can you bring to the table special products, knowledge, contacts, sources? Think about this and plan your site with that in mind.

Research Similar Sites: See what's out there. Look at similar organizations or businesses, sites dealing with similar services, products or even your supplier's web sites. Make lists of content, features, and design elements you like and don't like.

Consider Site Features: This could include special forms, a shopping cart, a content management package or special graphic elements.

Make a Budget for the Site: A web site should be integrated into your existing and long-term business goals and not considered a one-time marketing expense. Budget for the initial cost of site design and development, but also keep in mind that you'll want to update your site just like you make changes and updates to your business.

Consider your Marketing Strategy: You'll probably want to coordinate your online and print media design plans. Will you be using print advertising to advertise your site? Sending targeted emails or newsletters?

Assemble Site Content: Inventory the content you already have in printed brochures, flyers or newsletters. Collect graphics or photos you have for logos, signs, posters, products, staff or personnel. Get your product database or other materials you want on your website and we'll put it together. Or, we can design graphics, compose the content, and create other material for you. Read more about what we can create for you.

Set a Target Date: Set up a schedule of when you plan to review, write or provide site content, who you have to meet with to make decisions and a target date of when you want the site to be up and running