



A website brief in 8½ chapters

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We can make website development hassle-free, but you are more likely to get what you want if you know what you want. Here is our guide to working up a brief for your new website. It might also help you with clarification of your values, branding and other communications.

1. Your organisation

Good website design is part computer programming, part graphic design and a lot of business research. A designer will need a good understanding of your organisation and its goals.

What are your values and goals? If you already have a website, what do you like about it? What is successful? What don't you like?

2. Website goals

What do you want your new website to do for you? This might be to provide information about your organisation; sell products; or increase revenue through donations.

If possible, choose one primary goal. Other goals could be secondary and/or longer-term.

3. Your audience

Who is your target audience? What might a typical visitor look like, and what typical task might they perform on the website?

What action do you want them to take? For example, pick up the phone to you, or donate money. How will you capture their interest and encourage them to take this action?

You may have several audiences. For example, a charity website may target the users of its services *and* potential donors.

You could also ask:

- What do these people care about? Why are they interested in you? What trigger would prompt them to visit your website? Why would they be enticed to return?
- What do they currently think and feel about your organisation? What do you want them to think and feel? How will your website help achieve this goal?

4. Competitive positioning

With which other organisations do you compare yourselves?
How does your organisation resemble, or differ from, these organisations?

Look at their websites. What would you like to imitate, and what do you want to be different?

5. Look and feel

Scour the web for any sites that you like and that fit your organisation and the project, and sites that you dislike. Why do you like a particular site? What works? And the reverse.

Consider their colour schemes, layouts, structure and navigation, and functions. You are building a sort of scrapbook to give to the designer, who should be able to add their own ideas, and experience of what works and what doesn't.

You could also ask:

- What adjectives describe how your target audience should perceive your organisation and website?
E.g. creative, fun, caring, down to earth, hard-working, calm, technical.
- What specific visual goals should your website convey?
E.g. welcoming, inspiring, up-to-date, beautiful, connected.

6. Functionality

First, what type of website do you want?

- A brochure or static site – provides information about your organisation; cheap to develop; less flexible as you will have no access to update.
- A content management system – allows the user to log in to edit text, upload images, create new pages, etc; could provide extra functionality, such as an online shop or community forums.
- A web application – 'the next Google or Facebook or...'; more expensive!

What will the site actually do? E.g. registration to download documents; online shop and donations; posting to moderated forums; galleries of photos and videos.

Do you need any related functionality? E.g. email newsletters.

7. Responsibility for the project

Who is responsible in your organisation for decision making and authorising the project?

'Design by committee' is usually a recipe for disaster. It is better to give one person the responsibility for the direction of the website and for liaising with developers. Many people can be involved in usability testing, with careful management of the feedback.

8. Time and budget

When do you want your website to go live, and what is your budget?

Note that there is a 'project triangle' of scope (or quality), time, and cost. These are interrelated, and you cannot have it all: good, fast and cheap. If time and cost are limited, then you will need to decide what parts of the work are most important.

It is advisable to have a firm requirements specification and avoid 'scope creep', which will increase costs. Ensure you are happy at each sign-off stage of the project, especially with the structure and design before the site is built.

Delays in completion of websites are often caused by delays in providing content. So it is advisable to have your content ready in advance. This is also very helpful in designing the site structure.

8½. After the launch

OK, the ½ is a bit of a cheat, but it's best to think about these things at the beginning too.

If the new site is a content management system, who will update the content, and what documentation and training will they need? What statistics do you want regarding who uses your website and how?

Please call on **Websites Ahoy!** if you need any advice.

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