

Planning Before Designing

By Jason Olson

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Four key questions need to be answered before any designing can begin:

*Q1. Who is your target audience? Start by being as specific as possible and describe your target audience. "Self-employed professional women" is better than "women." If you're hoping to attract this particular type of woman to your site, then you don't want to design your site to make it attractive to women working on an assembly line or worse yet, teenage boys. After you have this specific target audience selected, try to identify some common characteristics within this group. Do they all have a certain level of education? Hobbies? Career goals? Family goals? Now, from what you have discovered about your target audience, create your web site as if you are designing it specifically for her. Try to imagine what would make her want to visit your site, and what would make her want to come back.

*Q2. Why is your web site needed? Summarize the main purpose of your site. Perhaps the site is to increase sales. Maybe it's to let people know you exist. It might be to promote a product or service you offer. It could also be to gather visitor information or obtain feedback. Whatever the purpose, make it clear to the audience. Don't let them feel that they're wasting their time by visiting your site.

*Q3. What will you be placing on your site? Make a list of what you will need to place on your site in order to meet the purpose of the site as you answered in Question #2. Some sites need to contain graphics to convey the message, others might need video clips, and some might need an order form. At this time you should also determine if, when, and how this material will be updated.

*Q4. Where will the pieces of information be placed? You must now determine how the pieces of information will be arranged on your site. The number of pages, how the pages are linked, and the navigational structure of the site can have major impacts on how long visitors will stay at your site and also if they'll come back. Avoid slow downloading pages by breaking up the information and spreading it out over multiple-interlinked pages.

Another key thing to remember is...be consistent. Make your visitors know that they are still on the same site. Place navigational buttons at the same place on each page, use the same color pattern throughout the entire site, make your contact information easy to access, etc.

With search engines and other web sites sending you traffic, not every visitor will start with your home page. So, make sure that each page has a link to at least your home page preferably all pages) and that each page tells the visitor where they're at and what you have to offer.

Proper planning before you begin designing your web site will save you time in the end.

Jason Olson (mailto:jason@ultimatewebdesigning.com) is the owner of Ultimate Web Designing (<http://www.ultimatewebdesigning.com>) which offers web designing, web hosting, search engine strategies, and search engine submission. To make searching for the search engines easier, visit our 100 Search Engines page (<http://www.ultimatewebdesigning.com/100searchengines.html>).

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