10 Steps to Plan an Effective Website

Anyone can make a pretty website, but an effective website requires the right planning.

Anphira | Web Design & Development

The Video

Before you get started with this workbook, there's an accompanying video. You can do the workbook without the video, but don't you want the best chance of success at planning an effective website?

Click here to open the video >

How Can I Use This Plan?

After you complete this workbook you'll have a plan for your website, but how is that useful to your business?

There are three main ways you can use your plan:

Audit an existing site: If you have an existing website and you'd like to audit it for how effective it is, you need a measure of effectiveness. By taking a step back from your existing website, you can plan an ideal site for your business, then compare your existing site to that ideal.

Build a new site: If you don't have an existing website and are considering building one, you want to give yourself the best chance of success. Investing time now in a proper plan for your site can produce significant return down the road.

Remodel an existing site: If you are considering a remodel of your existing site, it's probably because your current site isn't producing the results you want. So you need to take a step back from your existing site and create a plan for how a remodeled site can produce the results you want.

Step 0: Get in the Right Mindset

Before we start, it's important to get yourself in the right mindset to complete this workbook. Most people when they think about their website do so from the perspective of their business. They think of their website as an extension of their business.

Your website is a marketing piece for your business, it is not your business.

Even if your site is eCommerce selling your products or services, your website is still not the same as your business.

Since your website is a piece of marketing material for your business, you need to treat it just like you would a brochure or banner, or even a whole booth at a convention.

Your website should positively connect with your target audience, just like a booth at a convention should attract your target audience. Your website should provide useful information to your target audience.

And most importantly, your website should get rid of people not in your target audience. People who aren't in your target audience aren't going to buy your products or services, so the faster they leave your site, the better.

After all, you want your website to an effective marketing piece for your business, if your website is bringing in the wrong types of people, it's not doing its job.

Now for the remainder of this workbook, you need to remember to think about your website as a marketing piece for your business, not as your business.

This is not a quick process. But, building an effective website that will market on behalf of your business for years to come isn't something you want to just throw together.

Step 1: What's the point?

Now that we've discussed that your website is a marketing piece for your business, what sort of marketing piece is it? What is the whole point of your website existing?

Remember, this isn't why your business exists, this is why your marketing website exists.

What's the point of having your website?

No, not because everyone else has one. There should be a real need that your website fulfills, otherwise it has no purpose.

What business or personal need does it fulfill?

How about a secondary need?

And a tertiary one?

Really dig deep here and keep asking why else? why else? Put real thought into this.

Result: Goals for website.

Step 2: Who does it help?

You need to define your target audience, and that audience should be specific. This is the audience for your marketing website, not for your business.

Your website may not target the exact same audience as your business as a whole.

Who is the audience for your website?

Who does this directly benefit?

Who does it indirectly benefit?

Who else has rules that you need to abide by?

Who do you want to avoid or get rid of?

Result: Target audience, stakeholders, and excluded audience.

Step 3: How much?

How much money do you realistically have to spend on this website?

For a website, you'll need to account for up front costs and recurring costs.

Up front: design, development, licenses, images, logo, copywriting, etc.

Recurring: Hosting, domain registration, email, newsletter service, maintenance fees, content creation, recurring license fees, etc.

When considering costs, you need to factor in both time and money. If have little of one you're going to need much more of the other.

Result: Realistic budget in both time & money for both up front & recurring costs.

Step 4: Freedom vs Responsibility

You have two basic choices, open source or closed source platforms.

Open Source systems allow for a great deal of freedom, but that freedom comes with the need for regular maintenance, security checks, and more.

Close Source systems limit what you can do with the system, however they have dedicated support which handles your maintenance & security.

A closed source system will come with a specific set of features available. If you are confident that you don't need more than that now or in the future, then it could be the right choice for you. Also, you need to understand that your design options will be limited to the templates they provide.

Generally speaking, many businesses start with a closed source system for their first website and then find after a few years they have outgrown it and move to an open source system.

Click here to read a detailed breakdown on closed source vs open source >

Result: Website platform.

Step 5: Requirements & Integrations

What functionality do you need for your website and what systems do you need to integrate with?

Some common functionality needs include: eCommerce, membership portals, photo galleries, contact forms, online chat, etc.

Some common integrations include: website analytics, email newsletters, customer relationship management (CRM), shipping solutions, payment solutions, etc.

Integrations can also be related to functionality, for example if you have an eCommerce site you may need to integrate with your preferred payment vendor and shipping system.

Result: List of functionality requirements & integrations.

Step 6: Visitor Accomplishments

In step 1, we discussed the goals of the site. Now we need to turn those goals into tangible actions that can be measured on a website.

These goals are also known as SMART goals. Specific, measurable, agreed upon, realistic & time-based.

In order for a goal to measurable on a website, it needs to be trackable via an analytics or other measurement tool. For example, analytics tools could track how many newsletter signups you get, how many times a contact form is filled out, and if you have phone number tracking how many times the phone number is called.

For your primary goals, you should have multiple (3-5) methods for these goals to be accomplished. Because, think about it, do you really only want people to have ONE chance at success?

Result: List of 3-5 measurable actions for visitors to accomplish.

Step 7: Visitor Welcome

Everyone wants their targeted audience to feel welcome on their site, but you need to define specifically what "welcome" means.

For example, if you run a yoga studio you probably want people to feel calm & serene.

Now that you've thought about how your target audience should feel, what are specific design elements that can accomplish those feelings?

In our yoga example, soothing cool colors, and peaceful imagery would be good.

If you aren't sure what design elements to use, spend some time on Google image search browsing images and looking for common elements used.

Result: List of emotions for visitors to feel & specific design elements to accomplish that.

Step 8: Visitor Wants

Time to step back and walk a mile in their shoes of your target audience. Why are they at your website? What question did they ask Google that led them to your page? Why are you the best answer to that question?

Think about the point of view of your targeted audience and determine what content would solve their problems, and why it's the best solution for your targeted audience.

Here you need to research and brainstorm lists of questions that people would ask when interested in what you offer.

You then need to take that list of brainstormed ideas and put into a planning tool. Google Adwords has a keyword planner, and there are many other tools out there. You'll need to set aside time to really research your key phrases (composed of multiple words) and find the right targeted matches to your audience and your business.

Remember, you want to be the best answer, so you probably want lower competition key phrases, at least to start off.

Result: List of specific and targeted key phrases for your audience.

Step 9: Targeted Content

Now that you have your specific key phrases to target, you need to think about what specific content you can deliver which will best match those phrases.

Remember, search engines want to give people the best results, so you need to have content which answers specifically target key phrases better than everyone else.

You also need to separate out your key phrases. Each page of targeted content should only match a narrow set of key phrases.

For example if you offer yoga group classes and private personal training, those should be on separate pages as they match separate sets of key phrases.

Result: List of landing pages and the content for those pages.

Step 10: Put it All Together

Now that you have goals, actions, integrations, and targeted content you need to combine them into a logical website structure so that visitors can easily get to the location they want and accomplish the specific actions you want them to.

Now you'll want to make a list of your pages and each page should include specifics for:

- audience members targeted (which part of your larger targeted audience)
- key phrases it targets & corresponding content it delivers
- design elements it uses
- goals to be accomplished with their specific actions
- functionality & integrations it needs

Besides the target pages, your site should also include basic pages: home, about, contact, privacy policy, and a useful 404 page. Site wide items are included as a separate item, do *not* include site wide with your home page.

Result: List of pages with their corresponding specifics.

Summary

This workbook takes several hours and can take several days to complete depending on the size of your needed website and the number of goals it needs to accomplish.

While I know that this seems daunting, if you have patience and break down the separate steps it can be accomplished.

If you really want an effective marketing website, you need to invest up front in a proper plan or you won't see any return on investment from your site.

What's Next?

Now that you have your plan you can implement it:

Audit an existing site: Take your plan and compare it against your existing site. Do you have the right pages? Are those pages targeting the right audience and do they provide the right content to that audience?

Build a new site: Now that you've developed a plan for your new website you can take that plan to a web developer for actual implementation.

Remodel an existing site: You can take your plan and your existing website to a web developer for redesign of your site.

A Note on Closed vs Open Source

In Step 4 you decided if you were going with a closed source or open source system.

Closed Source: If you decided on a closed source system, you can go on with development without a professional web developer, although you will likely find things less painful if you hire a good developer. With a closed source system you will take your list from step 10 and evaluate the available site templates against that list to pick the best match for your website.

Open Source: If you decided on an open source system, I strongly recommend a professional web developer as you need to ensure that your website is built properly to continue to provide value to your business for years to come. You will also need a website maintenance plan going forward or a developer to do it for you.

About Anphira Web Design & Development

Anphira specializes in WordPress development for select private clients and some of the top SEO & Marketing agencies in Tampa, Atlanta, Denver, Los Angeles, and Melbourne Australia.

Anphira develops over 50 new WordPress websites per year for SEO & marketing agencies and maintain hundreds of active WordPress websites.

We seriously know WordPress.

We know what makes a website succeed or fail. From planning to design to build, we've seen a lot over the years and want to help your business get an effective website that can provide real return on investment.

We are not a marketing or SEO agency. We love development too much. If you are looking for one of those, we can recommend a few that we work with regularly.

If you are interested in becoming a private client or are an SEO & Marketing agency looking for a new developer, contact us here.