5 Must-Ask Questions for Getting Your Website Right

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Rebuilding a website is no easy endeavor. Fortunately, if you ask the right questions at the onset of the project, you will keep your team on track and your soon-to-be new website on the road to exceptional.

1. What is the purpose of our website?

This is the most important of all the must-ask questions – for example, is the purpose of your website:

- To sell products and/or services?
- To provide information?
- To automate tasks formerly handled elsewhere (e.g., lead generation)?
- To reach new customers?
- To better serve current customers?

The purpose of your website will inform the answer to almost every other must-ask question on this list and throughout the redesign process – which is why bringing clarity to purpose upfront is essential to building a website that meets your firm's needs.

Additionally, you'll likely discover that your website has multiple goals and prioritizing these upfront will assist in answering the next questions.

2. What do we want our website visitors to do?

Once you determine the purpose of your website, carefully think through all the actions you want your website visitors to take, including the ultimate desired action.

Interestingly, it helps to work through the sequence backwards. Start with the final desired action (e.g., you want your visitors to make a project inquiry) and think backwards through all the steps that may lead to that action.

Remember that the sequence your website visitors go through might not occur in a single visit – especially, if your firm has a complex sales process and/or a high-dollar-value offering.

Whether your desired final action happens in a single visit or several, understanding what you want – and need – your visitors to do will help you develop a results-generating website.

For example, most A/E/C firms have longer buying cycles, and their websites should focus encouraging repeat visits and making content and meaningful calls to action available at the right time in the prospects' decision-making process.

3. How should our website be organized?

Your website's organization (information architecture) should be directly informed by its purpose and the actions you want your visitors to take. This approach will help you avoid one of the biggest landmines: sacrificing clear for clever.

It can be very tempting to try and stand out from the rest by using "unique" structure and navigation. However, only by making your website highly intuitive can you deliver a truly excellent user experience. This is especially important in today's "on the go" digital world. Those who don't have time to guess at what might be behind each clever area of navigation will move on – and likely to the website of your closest competitor.

Keep in mind that visitors may not enter your website from the home page and, therefore, you need to strategically guide them along the decision-making path to your desired action from any entry point.

In short, don't put obstacles in the way of desired actions, always opt for clarity and make sure your website's organization is a reflection of your unique visitors' needs.

4. What should our website look like?

The easy answer: Your website should be a direct reflection of your brand.

However, if your corporate image is outdated and/or not in alignment with the latest evolution of your brand, you must address that before tackling the website project.

After all, what's the point of pouring money into a new website design if you know that your whole identity needs to be revamped?

But beyond being a reflection of your brand, design influences everything about an experience and it's the single most important driver of action.

Everything from your overall visual organization of information to how you design calls to action impacts what your visitors will do and take away – more than you, or they, might even realize.

5. Should we redesign our website in-house or outsource?

Although in many ways it's now easier than ever to build a website, it's more complicated than ever, too. Digital trends and associated marketing disciplines constantly evolve, so before answering this question, assess the skillsets, expertise and prior experience of your internal team in these areas:

- User Experience/Information Architecture
- Digital Branding and Marketing
- Graphic Interface/Design
- Content Strategy/Copywriting
- Digital Marketing
- Front-End Coding/Programming/Content Management Systems

It's important for your website team to be skilled in all of these areas in order for the new website to achieve your marketing objectives, be well-organized, easy to maintain, on-brand and overall 100% functional.

Additionally, be realistic about the time and resources commitment involved – can your firm afford to have its entire marketing team focused on a single project for months?

If your internal team doesn't have all the skills or the time commitment, consider outsourcing options for the entire, or a part, of the project.

About the Author:
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