

HOW TO WRITE A WEBSITE DESIGN BRIEF



Welcome back to Interact!

In order to have a successful site, you need to be clear about what you want it to achieve and be able to communicate these objectives clearly to the team who will help you create the result. Herein lies the importance of the **website design brief**.

A good website design brief aims to:

- ▶ Help clarify the direction of the site and allow different people within the organization to give their inputs. It allows all stakeholders to take ownership and give their approval.
- ▶ It helps achieve consensus in the team so that time is not wasted in redefining goals later since these have been set.
- ▶ It reduces the ambiguity on communication to the design agency – verbal communications can be lacking in this respect.
- ▶ It serves as a reference point for all parties to ensure that the aims of the project have been met. Timelines and quantifiable goals are clearly defined so that the team can work towards them.

IMPORTANT: Like any tool, the website design brief is a set of objectives and guidelines that clarifies your priorities and needs for the site. You should leave the creative angle open as much as possible so the real experts in the field can contribute freely and meaningfully.



Elements in a creative brief

▶ Summary

A brief overview of the project which includes:

- What is the main purpose of the site?
- What are the secondary goals?
- What are the long term goals?

Example:

I want to start an e-shop selling watches. The main purpose of the site is to sell watches to the US market. The objectives are to:-

- Gain recognition in the US market for the company.*
- Enable hits onto the site.*
- Generate a mailing list of potential clients.*
- Ensure sales are achieved with a minimum of fraud.*
- Ensure that the site adds considerably to the bottom line of the company.*
- Ultimately market the products globally.*

The above summary clearly identifies that the site has to be an e-commerce site. It needs to take payments online and in the initial stage, the marketing will be targeted towards the US market, hence search engine marketing will be involved. The transaction currency will be US\$ with considerations for multi-currencies once marketing globally becomes a priority. It is also important to find out the fraud policies of Pay Pal and World Pay.

In addition, it pays to keep in mind what other marketing programs will be used to drive website traffic as well as research to identify what watches sell well online if the site needs to generate further revenue.

▶ Current Situation

What is the status quo and what is not working which is instigating the change?

Examples:

I have a site that was initially created with a lot of content but it was not receiving good website traffic because it was not search engine optimized.

I have a company that started off selling children's clothing. However I have now expanded my range to include maternity clothes and children's toys. My website needs to echo this change. I am also thinking of allowing online sales.

I have a company that has recently merged with another. Due to the merger, the product offerings have changed considerably. However, this change is not reflected in the current website.

► Goals

Articulate the goals of the project.

- What is this site supposed to achieve?
- How will this site achieve these goals?
- How will the site allow the target market to perceive your company?

These are very important to answer before copy or design of a site is determined.

Examples:

You might like the look of a flash site, however, unless you are an entertainment company that wants to "show off your work" a flash site might not be the most beneficial for your needs. It is hard to do Search Engine Optimization/Marketing in flash, also it takes considerably longer to load and sometimes the moving elements of the site might be quite annoying to the target audience.

Suppose you have a site that sells products on line. Your goal would be to maximize sales. Now if you get a lot of hits and enquiries but not enough conversions then there is a problem and this needs to be addressed. What about the site is not making people finish their transaction?

► Deliverables/Requirements

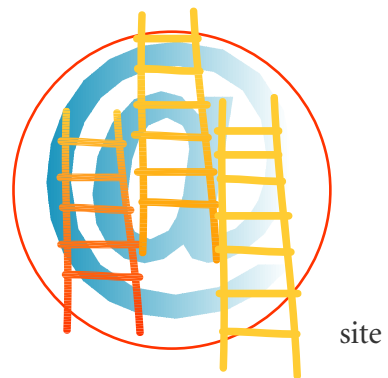
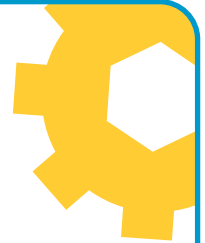
Describe the details of the project and what is to be achieved.

- What are the key features of your site?
- What elements are imperative to your business and what would be just nice to have?

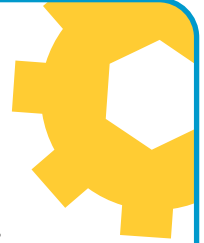
These are important elements to be communicated to the design and technical team and will affect the costing.

Examples:

- *How many webpages do you need?*
- *Is it just an information site or do people need to be able to get in touch with you or transact on line?*



- Are people going to subscribe to a Newsletter?
- Are you going to build a database?
- Do you want a flash or an HTML site? Suppose you are looking to launch a product and want to show off the design of the product, you might want a flash site. However, this would mean that it would not be easy to search engine optimize the same. Which is more important to you?
- Do you want your customers to be able to book on-line?



► Target Audience

Who is your target audience, what are their demographics, tastes, usage patterns, age, gender, online preferences. You are creating a site so that your customers will visit it. Hence you need to know the likes of your customers to determine who will come to your site and more importantly, keep them coming and recommending their friends.

Examples:

Suppose you are a financial company which specialized in wealth management where your clientele were savvy investors who wanted details of products that were available and the ability to make their own decisions as to which product they would invest in. The look and feel of your site would be more informational and categorized according to the product offerings.

Now, as your business has metamorphosised and grown, you are catering to clients in a lower income bracket, not as aware of financial tools and hence not able to recognize the different products, but they know their risk reward matrix. Hence the site would now have to be constructed differently. The emphasis of the site would have moved. Alternately, you would have two areas on your site, one sub-area for the high net worth individual and another for the commercial clients.

► Communication Strategy

How do you plan on using your site to communicate with your audience?

Is it going to be through the copy, through visual imagery, through points to action on your homepage?

How will you measure the success and effectiveness of your site? Is it going to be through revenues, hit rates, conversion to sales, leads generated?

► Calls to Action

An effective site compels the audience to interact with it at some level. This could be as simple as filling out a form to get a newsletter. Whatever the calls to action may be, they should be readily available and evident to users.

► Competitive Positioning

Who is your competition and how are they positioning themselves?
Will you be following the competition or differentiating yourself?
How do you plan on doing this?

► Stakeholders

Important considerations include:
Who is in charge of the project?
Who needs to be involved in the implementation?
Have the powers that be agreed to the changes that you are implementing?

This direction should be agreed upon by all prior to the site design because it will affect the deliverables.

Example:

You are a company that sells electronics and have a site that explains all the products that you have, their functionality, costs etc. You have now grown and there has been considerable research growth in the company along with the fact that you are about to go IPO. As a result your site can't just be only product oriented. It needs to communicate financials, the prospectus, research work that is being performed, the in-house expertise that you have etc. Revenue generation from sales is not the only thing that is important anymore. Shareholders will want to know about the management of the company, what kind of research you are doing that will help expansion etc. All of these additions will affect the construct of your site. All the stakeholders need to agree on your vision of how you are going to create the site and the importance given to different areas.

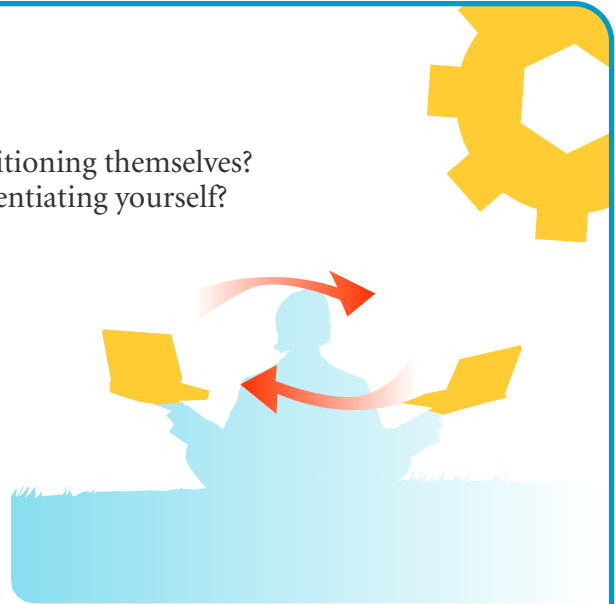
► Final Target Message

When people leave your site, what is the impression that they should leave with?

► Timing

What is the implementation timeline for your site?

This will, to some degree, determine the complexity of your site. If your site needs to be up within one week vs one month it will affect the complexity and deliverables. What are the milestones to be achieved and by when? Make these quantifiable.



► Who should write the website design brief?

The best person to do this is the one who is requisitioning the site. You know what you want to achieve. After the initial draft, you can then approach the marketing/web development company to help refine the brief.

This may all seem very intuitive; however, we cannot stress the importance of this single document. It is like an anchor, that once set appropriately, grounds the rest of the team on focusing on the most salient points of your site. It defines the project, enables the project plan to be developed and is the main point of reference for the designers, developers, programmers etc.

So spend some time on this. It will save you a lot of heartache in the future.



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