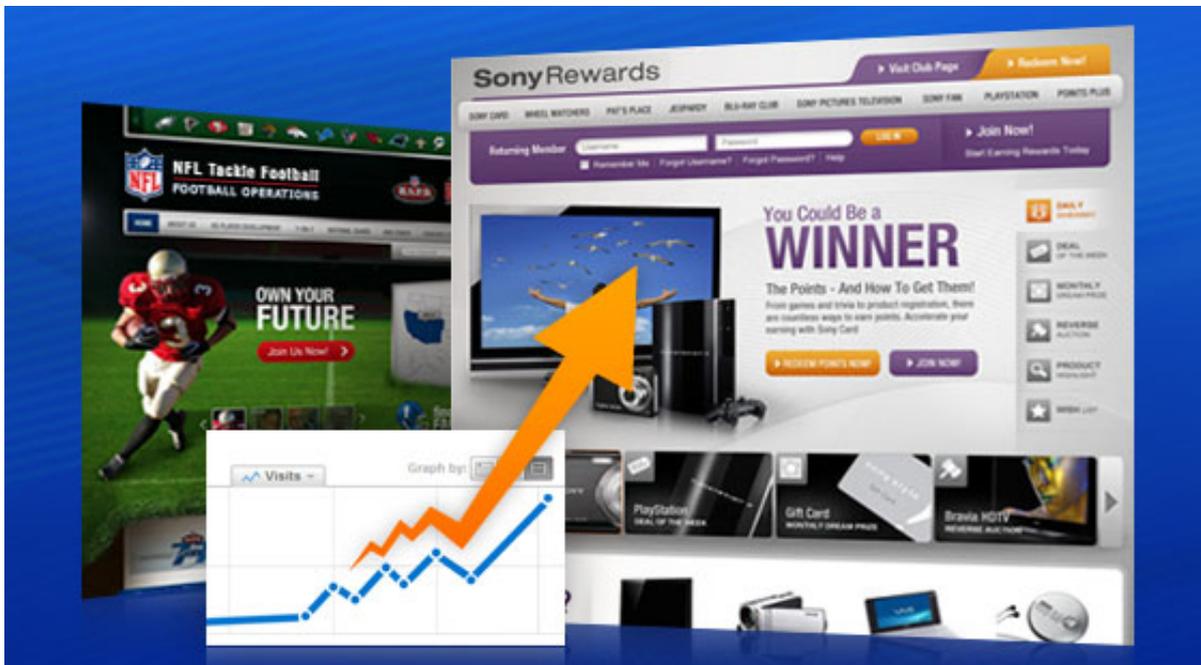# How to Build a Successful Website

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This is a guide meant to help you create a successful website. There are many ways of going about developing a website that can lead to success and this is one of them. You may share your own methodology below, in the comments section.

1. Understand what elements your website needs in order to succeed.

Your Goals and Your Website's Purpose:

Why would someone want to visit your website?

The common approach to websites is to simply build one and wait. Most folks treat their websites as an online version of their brick-and-mortar business. That is not the way to create a successful website. Your website must provide real value and give people a reason to come back. What will a user get out of visiting your website? Will it help them better understand your products and services? Will it help them understand your differentiating points? Make a list of reasons why you believe someone should visit your website. If you can't come up with any, then there might be a problem. You should start developing a few creative ideas. This thought process helps identify areas of opportunity.

Here are a few ideas to get you going:

- **Create a useful tool.** Feature a tool on your website that your visitors

would take advantage of by coming to your website. A good example of this is the Sherwin-Williams Color Visualizer (https://www.sherwin-williams.com/visualizer/). It's a tool that anyone planning on painting their home would want to use. Another similar tool, built by Blue Fountain Media, is the Broadway Nails "Try Our Nails" tool http://www.broadwaynails.com/try-our-nails/ , perfect for anyone looking for the right nails for their skin tone. The tool should be useful to your customers and also help to sell your products/services.

- **Create a valuable resource center.** As a business owner, you are an expert in *something*, even if you wouldn't call yourself one. That means that you can produce content that can benefit your customers. At Blue Fountain Media, we've been writing content that we believe will help our potential customers better understand the field of online marketing and web development. This very article you are reading is part of that content. You are reading this because it is in some way useful to you, and we wanted it that way. Instead of hoarding our knowledge, we've made it readily available, thus adding purpose to our website.

What action do you want visitors to your website to take?

You don't want visitors to come to your website and leave without taking any kind of action. That will not help grow your business. What you want instead is for visitors to come and take some sort of an action on your website. In web lingo, this is called a "goal". A goal can be considered any step taken by a user that helps your business. That may be the submission of a "Contact Us" form, the purchase of a product from your website, or a look-up of your nearby locations. Make sure you have clearly defined what that primary goal is, that you want users to take. It will be key in understanding what elements your website needs in order to accomplish this goal.

Here are some common examples of primary goals:

- Phone call
- Purchase a product
- Sign-up
- Submit consultation request
- Download something
- Donate
- Click on link to another website or advertising

You may also have secondary goals, which tend to provide less immediate results and are more long-term in value. **Here are some examples:**

- Download a white paper
- Sign-up to an e-newsletter
- Subscribe to an RSS feed
- Share a page with a friend
- Bookmark a page

Understand your clients

- **Purchase Decision Process**
- What steps do your potential customers go through when choosing a service/solution provider? There are most likely web entities where their search begins. Next, they probably make a short list of vendors who they are considering. In this phase of the decision-making process, what factors do your clients take into consideration? Is it your pricing, your reliability, or many factors combined? Make sure you have a grasp on what these factors may be so as to highlight them through your website.
- **Terminology**
- You must speak your customers' language. The words you use to refer to your services/products are crucial for making your website relevant to your customers. Many website owners make the mistake of using insider terms in their website copy, which has the potential to alienate customers who are have not yet dealt with the products/services in question.
- One strategy that we recommend to clients is not only list services/products, but to also list the problems that those products/services solve. What are some of the reasons why a customer would want to use your company?

- **Technology**
- Depending on your customers, they may typically use dual-monitored desktop computers, on-the-go laptops, or mobile devices when visiting your website. Most likely it will be a combination of these. Keep this in mind and ensure that your website does not conflict with the type of technology they are using and rather complements each one.

Understand your competition

If you've been in business for some time already, you've most likely come up with a whole list of competitors and what they have been up to in terms of marketing, selling points, etc. When building a website, it is key to also assess their online presence as well as identify some online competitors who you'll be up against. Make a list of some of your products/services and search using those words in a few popular search engines, like Google and Bing. List competitors that you find in "organic" search results as well as the under the "sponsored" results. Look at what language your competitors are using in their messaging as well as how they are packaging their services/products online. It may be different than what they do offline. While searching also look out for directory sites that may list you and your competition. See if you have any prominent competitors on these websites as well. How are they selling their services/products? What are they doing that you may want to adapt as well?

Here are some specific items you should look out for when evaluating your competition online:

- Pricing
- Wording
- Service/Product Packages
- Website Features (newsletter sign-up, contact forms, e-commerce)
- Content Elements (homepage, about us, case studies, service/product descriptions)
- Search engine rankings for keywords
- Sponsored search engine advertising copy

2. Implementing what you learned

Plan your primary content

If you thoroughly researched your clients and have a firm grasp on the factors that clients use to assess your company, plan a number of pages that you believe your clients will definitely want to visit before completing your primary goal(s). For example, as a service provider, if you know that your clients need to know details about of your services then you probably need service detail pages. Your clients may also want to see some of your example work. They may want to see testimonials from other past clients. Your client roster, if impressive, can be beneficial as well. For the time being, don't worry about your home page.

Here is how we planned out Blue Fountain Media's primary content, based on what we know about our potential clients:

1. We made a list of content sections that we already knew clients were interested in, based on our previous website's traffic patterns.

- **Portfolio**
- Importance in Purchase Decision: High
- Primary Purpose(s): Meet Client Capability Requirements
- **About Us**
- Importance in Purchase Decision: Medium
- Primary Purpose(s): Increase Trust
- **Case Studies**
- Importance in Purchase Decision: Medium
- Primary Purpose(s): Show Value
- **Services Detail Pages**
- Importance in Purchase Decision: High
-

Primary Purpose(s): Meet Client Capability Requirements
- **Client Roster**
- Importance in Purchase Decision: High
- Primary Purpose(s): Increase Trust
- **Press Mentions**
- Importance in Purchase Decision: Medium
- Primary Purpose(s): Increase Trust
- Etc…

2. We made sure that we had specific pages for each of these content elements, but also found shortcuts to help our customers. For example, on our service detail pages, like our Ecommerce Design page, we made sure to not only include specifics about the service, but to also show samples, case studies, clients, and testimonials. That way we could compress the number of pages that a typical potential client would have to visit if they wanted to have all the information they require before hiring us. Why force a visitor to visit 10 pages when you could extract the most relevant information from those 10 pages and place it all on one? Our Ecommerce Design page only showcases clients that we worked with on ecommerce projects, only ecommerce samples, and only ecommerce testimonials.

3. As referenced earlier, there is what we call a "goal" that you desire users to complete. The percentage of visitors who completed this goal is called the "Conversion Rate". Ideally, you want to have conversion rate that is not only high but also results in good quality leads. Make sure that your website has those goal pages/elements and that it is easy to get to those goals from the pages that help form your customers' opinions. You will find that on our Ecommerce Design page we have multiple links to our Request a Quote page, which makes it very clear what the next step is in the process of hiring Blue Fountain Media.

After having completed your content requirements, group your content together into sections. For example, a page about your company history and another one about your staff members can go under the same section: About Us (or an alternate name).

Plan your secondary content

There is content that is meant to improve your immediate conversion rate (when a visitor comes to your website and completes a goal within one or two sessions.) But there is another type of content that keeps the user coming back for more time and time again, or helps bring your current clients back, in an effort to sell or upsell them over a longer period of time. This type of content can be considered your secondary content, meant to help increase your long-term sales. One good example of this is a company blog, that provides helpful information to visitors.

Here are some good example of secondary content, which help in long-term sales strategies:

- Blogs
- Newsletters
- White Papers
- Events Calendar

Plan your design

Once you have a firm grasp on the types of content sections your website will need, it's time to lay them all out on the table (figuratively or literally). Consider your home page as a menu to the key content pieces of your website. A safe page layout is to use bits of important website content. In this planning phase, you are not to be deciding where to put what, but rather what to feature on each page. The design planning phase involves no design at all, in fact. It's simply a phase where you decide what will go on what page.

Below is an example of the beginning of a basic corporate website design plan:

- **All Pages**
- Main Navigation: Home, About Us, Services, Blog, Contact Us
- Footer: Privacy Policy, Terms of Use

- **Homepage**
- Main Message.
- Summary
- Clients & link to Clients page
- 3 Services & link to Services page
- Latest blog posts
- **Services Pages**
- Brief explanation of services
- Links to service details pages
- Client logos with link to Clients page
- Prominent link to Request a Consultation page or Contact Us
- Etc…

5. Execution of your successful website

Creation of an original, effective design

The design process begins with the creation of "wireframes". These are simple boxes that depict various website elements. The purpose of wireframes is to eliminate roadblocks created by aesthetics and to think through the functionality and purpose of website elements.

Once it is clear where each of your content pieces will be located relatively to others on your page, then begins the "mock-up" phase of your website. A "mock-up" is a design of your using a program such as Adobe Photoshop. It is not a website, but rather an image compiled of various layers and text. The reason mock-ups are created is to provide designers with full flexibility while still coming up with a design for a website. Otherwise, coding a website where the design has not been finalized ends up costing more time and money as it takes much longer to make coding changes than it does to make design changes in Photoshop. Be sure to always finalize your design before coding it.

A designer will take a number of elements into account when creating your website.

Below are a number of elements that go into the design of a successful website:

- **Aesthetics**
- Your designer should take a look at your other marketing collateral, your log, etc and plan with you whether or not you wish to have continuity with your website or if you are hoping to start from scratch anyway and whether your website should be the first step in that direction. If you are serious about your brand identity, you may want to consider a branding identity design package of some kind. That is much different than the design of a website. It involves gaining and in-depth understanding of your business values and the message you wish to pass through the visual elements of your corporate collateral. A website is merely a part of that larger message, which is your brand identity. Once issues revolving around your brand identity have been laid to rest, a designer will come up with a color scheme, font(s), and design rules to match your brand. Many times, designers will first begin to design the interface of website before creating these rules. It is difficult to make rules for a website that is not yet designed.
- **Calls-to-Action (CTA)**
- Forgetting calls-to-action is one of the most common and fatal errors made by website owners. A call-to-action is any website element that incites a use to take a desired action (to get a user one step closer to completing a goal) such as a button or link. You will notice that Blue Fountain Media has a consistent call-to-action throughout our website: "Request a Quote". After doing testing with and without the button, we have found that it greatly increases the number of requests that we receive when we show the button permanently.
- Be sure that you are using the right calls-to-action. If you know that your website visitors need to see more details about your services before hiring you, then don't use your home page call-to-action to link to your Request for Consultation page, but rather, link to your Services page with a call-to-action that reads "Browse Our Services". That way you not only incite your users to take an action on your home page, which is already a feat to accomplish, but also, your users are going to the very page that they need to go to next in order to assess your qualifications! On your services page is where you then need strong calls-to-action to your Request for Consultation page.
- **Messaging**
- Make sure that each of your pages is easy to understand and clearly identifies its purpose. Your home page should

provide your clients with an understanding of what your company's purpose and differentiating value is. It should take a visitors no more than 3 seconds to grasp your company's purpose. Avoid being cryptic or too limiting when describing your services/products.

- **Usability**
- Your designer should create an interface that is easily accessible for a variety of users, which fits most modern-day monitors, and has an easy-to-use navigation. Text should be legible at a distance, with sufficient contrast and necessary sizing. Ideally, text should not be displayed on long lines as it becomes difficult to read on a computer.

Front-End Coding

Luckily, when it comes to front-end coding, best practices are much easier to identify and treat. Front-end coding is the phase in which your interface design becomes a usable website through the use of html code and CSS (cascading sytle sheets). Most of these best practices can be found [here](#).

Generally, although techniques and standards evolve over time with the Internet, there are various practices that do not change:

- Use as little code as possible. This means getting rid of redundancy, inefficiency, etc.
- Be descriptive in the code. Tags should be named properly and mean what they say
- Page load time should be optimized through the use of various techniques such as gzip, CSS consolidation, and usage of ETags

Back-End Development

It is a good idea to keep your website content up-to-date. It not only helps with search engine rankings but also makes visitors feel like they are about to hire a professional company that cares about its online image and will put that level of attention in to their project as well. Ideally, you should not have to html coder every time that you need to make a content edit or change a photo on your website. That is why it is a good idea to develop a content management system (CMS) for your website. It will allow you to control the content of your website without needing to learn any html. More advanced systems allow you to create new pages and subpages, remove sections, rename menu items, etc. Typically, the more features, the more expensive a CMS becomes. Choose features that you feel you will really need.

Below are some common CMS features that are good to have:

- Text/image editing on content pages
- Sub-page creation
- Title tag editing
- Meta data editing
- Form data capture

Quality Assurance (QA)

When your website has been fully developed, start testing every link, button, and form to make sure that all is in working order. Your web developer should be testing the coding of the website to ensure that the website looks good in all recent browsers and computer operating systems.

We can help you plan your website, blog, or social media presence. To speak to us about our services, request a quote or contact us: 212-260-1978.