



**THE Website
Development
Workbook
FOR SMALL BUSINESS**

Get your small business online.

**Develop an effective website plan
by following this step-by-step guide.**

Developed by:

 **In-Formation-Design**

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INTRODUCTION

“Most people don’t plan to fail; they fail to plan.”

- John L. Beckley

You developed a business plan when you started your business, didn’t you? Starting a website is no different than starting a business. You, and your web developer, need to understand what the objectives are, who the target customers are, what the structure will be.

We at In Formation Design have developed this workbook to assist our clients in going through the planning process required prior to building their website. However, this is a valuable tool for any small business to use in developing their website plan. The workbook is designed to guide you through the thinking process required in order to develop your website plan. With your completed plan, you will be prepared to talk to the web designer of your choice, or even, if you have the technical skills, to build your own site.

Company Overview

To Do:

Let’s start out with some basic information about your company. If you are going to hire a web designer to develop your website for you, they will want to know who you are and what you do.

Company Name

What We Do

What We Do Differently or Better Than Our Competition



WEBSITE STRATEGY

In order to develop an effective website for your business, it is important to start with a strategy. Many businesses decide they want a website, but do not have a clear vision of what they want the site to accomplish. They will start out with something, and then decide to add other elements to it later on. This can lead to costly re-design, or a poorly functioning site.

Website Purpose

To Do:

What do you want your website to do for you? What do you want visitors to get out of your site? You will likely have more than one objective that you would like your site to achieve. Make a list of all of your objectives below, and then rank them in order of importance (#1 being the most important objective). To get you started, there are some possible objectives listed below. Include those that apply to your site in your ranking. You may have other objectives that are not listed here - add your own objectives to the list, and include them in your ranking.

RANK	OBJECTIVE
	To be a marketing tool, providing information on our company, products and services to potential customers, in order to encourage them to contact us to develop a business relationship.
	To increase sales of our products by developing the website as a key distribution channel, selling our products online directly to our customers.
	To be a corporate communication vehicle, providing financial, and other relevant corporate information, to company shareholders and potential investors.
	To be a customer service mechanism, allowing us to engage in effective two way communication with our customers, resulting in increased customer satisfaction and retention.
	To be a convenient tool for our existing customers, providing them with 24/7 access to a searchable database of "how-to" information on using our products.

Website Target Audience

To Do:

Identify the target audience for your website. Is it your existing customers? Prospective customers? Are they individuals or other businesses? What are their demographics? What are their concerns? What motivates them?



WEBSITE IMAGE

The look and feel of your website will go a long way in portraying the image of your company to the site visitors. It is important to enhance your brand identity by maintaining a consistent look in your website to that of other marketing materials - logo, business cards, letterhead, brochures, etc.

These Words Describe the Look and Feel of Our Website

To Do:

Think of some words that describe the feeling you would like your website to impart to its viewers. Should it be warm and friendly? Cool and contemporary? Write your descriptive words in the spaces below and/or check off the suggestions here that apply to your business and your website.

✓	affordable	✓	approachable	✓	casual
	cheerful		conservative		contemporary
	cool		corporate		down-to-earth
	exclusive		expensive		experienced
	folksy		formal		friendly
	fun		helpful		high-tech
	modern		personal		serious
	traditional		trustworthy		warm

Corporate/Logo Colours

To Do:

What are your corporate colours? If you have a colour scheme already established in other marketing materials, generally your website should follow the same colour scheme. Your web developer will need to receive a digital copy of your logo or wordmark in order to incorporate it into your website. If you do not yet have a logo or corporate colour scheme, do you have colours in mind that you think enhance the feeling you have described in the previous exercise?



COMPETITION

Before starting your business, no doubt you looked at the competition in your area or your field, to learn what they were doing, and how your business would be different or better. The same goes for launching your website - you can learn a lot by reviewing the websites of your competitors.

To Do:

Take a look at the websites of some of your major competitors. Look at their site through the eyes of a customer. How does their website meet the needs of the customer? What do you think they are doing well? What could they do better? Write down your comments on each site below. Are there some valuable things that they are doing that you can apply to your website? Are there things they are doing poorly, or are missing out on, that you can improve upon in your website? At the bottom of this page, write down what you have learned and how you will apply this to your website.

Company Name:	Website Address:
What they are doing well:	What they are missing or could do better:

Company Name:	Website Address:
What they are doing well:	What they are missing or could do better:

Company Name:	Website Address:
What they are doing well:	What they are missing or could do better:

What We Have Learned and Will Apply to Our Website



INTERACTIVE ELEMENTS

At the simplest (and least expensive) end of the web development scale is what is often referred to as the brochure site - so called because it is basically the online version of a printed brochure, containing static information. If your website objectives are focused on providing information to viewers, then a brochure site will be sufficient. If your objectives include such things as direct sales you will need to include some interactive programming.

To Do:

Interactive elements can add to the success of your website, as people do like to interact with a website. Note, however, that the interactive elements to make your site dynamic require programming. This will increase the cost of your web development project, versus a static brochure site. It will probably also increase your hosting cost, as you will require the appropriate "back end" services on your web server in order to run the desired application.

You will need to provide your web developer with as much detail as possible on the interactive elements that you wish to have, and how you will use them on your site.

e.g. if you want to have an online store, things you will need to define include: how many products you will be selling, in how many categories, what is your "payment gateway" for credit card processing.

When your developer understands your requirements and your budget, they can advise you on different options that may be available.

Think about the interactive elements (if any) that you would like to have as part of your website. Write down below the elements you want to have and how you will use them on your website.

Interactive Elements We Require

Some Interactive Elements and What They Do

Form - Forms are used to collect information from the viewer. A simple form will e-mail the results to you - a common application is a "Contact Us" form. More complex forms may write information to a database.

E-mail Newsletter - An e-mail newsletter can be a good way to keep in touch with clients and prospects. If you are planning to have an e-mail newsletter you may wish to have a system installed on your website which will allow people to subscribe/unsubscribe and to manage sending your newsletters.

Bulletin Board/Forum - Allows users to "converse" with each other, by typing their message in the forum. Messages are saved and can be browsed. Can be useful as a customer service tool.

Live Customer Service - When you are online you can activate this service, so that viewers on your site can click a button which will open a "chat" screen where they can converse with you, or your customer service representative, in real time.

Shopping Cart - If you are planning to sell products online, you will need a shopping cart system to process the customer orders.

Poll - A multiple choice question, like "Do you prefer apples or oranges? When the viewer makes their selection they can see the results of how other people have "voted".

Quiz - A number of questions will be asked. When completed, the program will tabulate the results and present back information on the screen related to the results. e.g. a "which product is right for you?" quiz.

Events Calendar - Produces a calendar or chart format on the screen, allows you to enter and update events that would appear on your website.

Site Search - Viewers enter keywords into a search box in order to search the site for pages containing those words. Very useful on large sites (over 100 pages) to be able to more easily locate information.

Web Log - A "Blog" is an online journal which allows the owner to make daily (or as desired) entries, which can be viewed on the website. Started out as a personal feature, but many businesses now have them also.

Content Management System - If you want to be able to update and maintain your website yourself, there are many options (with varying degrees of sophistication and cost) that can be installed to allow for relatively simple online editing.



WEBSITE NAVIGATION SYSTEM

A typical small business website will consist of a home page with links to a number of main pages. Where there is additional information to provide, these main pages may include links to secondary pages.

To Do:

Take the main content areas that you developed in the previous exercise, and write them in the boxes here. Sequence them in the order you would like them to appear on your site. Although people can click on any link on a page, if they are browsing they will usually click on the first link, so try to organize your sections to follow the thought process that the person will follow when deciding on your product or service.

To make your site easy to navigate, it is preferable to keep your web pages to the size of 1

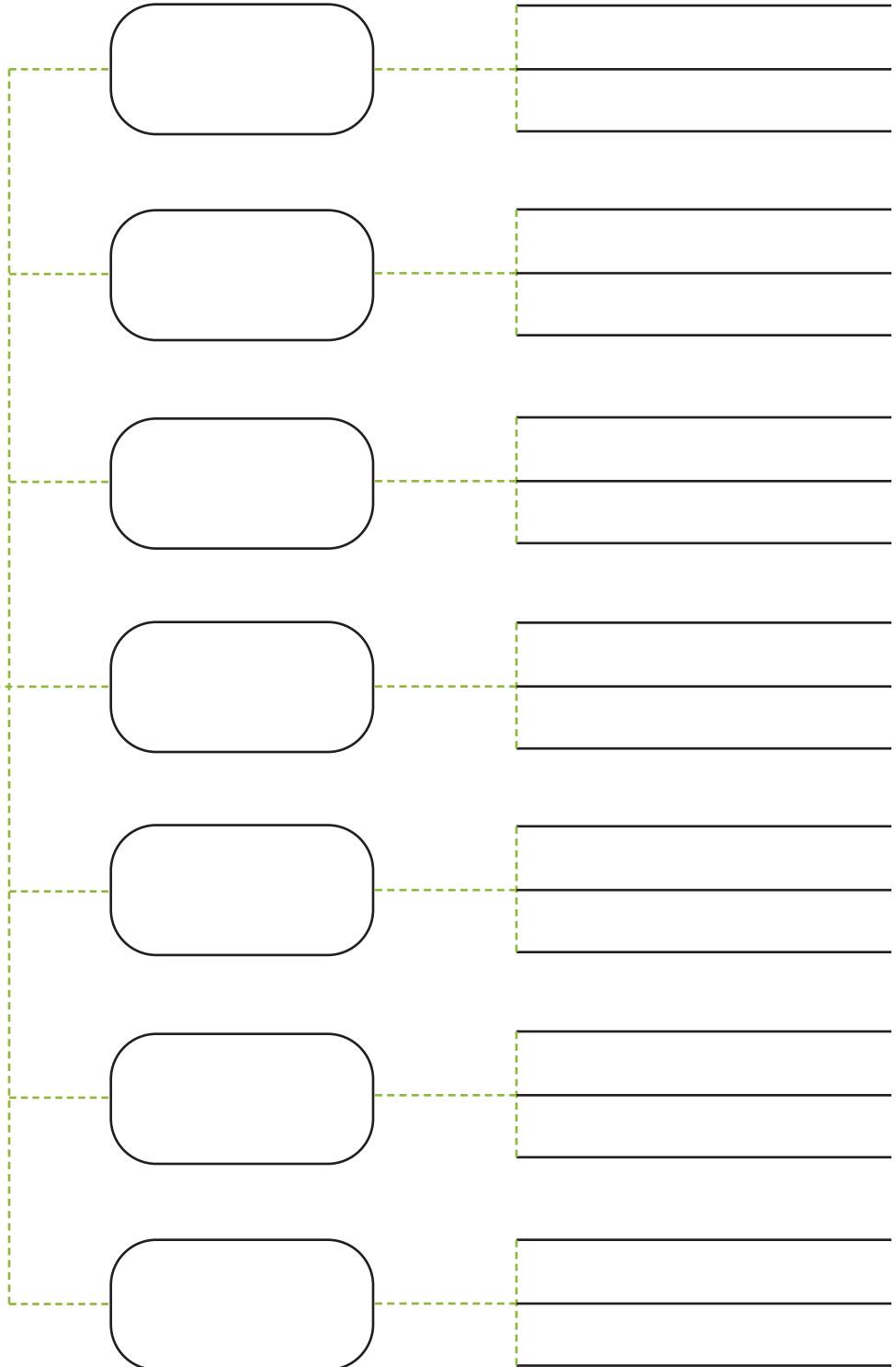
HOME PAGE

or 2 letter size printed pages. If some of your sections contain a lot of information, split them up onto additional secondary pages. Think about which (if any) of your sections will require multiple pages, and write those page links under Secondary Pages, next to the Main Page they will be linked to. For example, if you are including articles on your site, you may have a main Articles page which includes links to a separate secondary page for each article.

If there is not enough space here, draw out your site map on a blank sheet of paper.

Main Pages/Sections

Secondary Pages





HOME PAGE

Every website has a Home page: this is the page that loads when someone types your domain name (e.g. www.yourcompany.com) into their web browser. Your Home page is the most important page on your site. In the few seconds that they are going to give it, your Home page must establish your business as being relevant to the viewer. In those first few seconds, it should be clear what your site is about and what's in it for the viewer.

Home Page Do's and Don'ts

Do include a brief summary of what you offer and how your products or services will benefit the customer. The viewer should be able to figure out at a glance if the site is relevant to them. Use language that is customer focused in order to get your message across.

Don't put your whole site on the Home page. Many sites make the mistake of wanting to put all their information on one page so that people will be able to find it. This is not effective - too much information just confuses, you need to separate your information into digestible chunks. The ideal Home page for a small business site would fit on one screen, so that the viewer can see all the information without having to scroll. If they determine that it is relevant, then they will choose from the menu selections in order to learn more.

Do make your service area clear. People from anywhere in the world can view your site, don't make them guess whether you offer your products or services in their area. One way is to include your business address on the Home page. Whether you ship goods worldwide, are a consultant operating in Toronto, or have a repair shop in Hoboken, say so.

Don't include your mission statement on your Home page. A mission statement is an internal measurement tool - customers don't care what your mission is, they only care what you can do for them. If you must include your mission, you could do so on your About Us or Company Information page.

To Do:

Think about the target audience you have identified for your website. What are the problems they are looking for solutions to when they come to your website? What information are they looking for? What is the most important information to have on your Home page in order to meet their needs? What will entice them to click on your menu links to go further into your site?

Information to Include on Our Home Page
