



TrueNorth Marketing, Inc. • 185 N. Water Street • Rochester, NY 14604 • 585.423.9440 • www.true-north.biz



# Web Site Redesign Considerations

By Bradley Foust,  
Web Specialist, TrueNorth Marketing, Inc.



**Has your business grown beyond the capabilities of your current web site? Do you feel as if your web site is no longer communicating your company's products and services or value proposition competitively? If so, you may want to consider a redesign of your web site to meet current business growth objectives, trends in your industry or take advantage of new web site and online strategy and technology benefits.**

## **What is the Definition of a Good Web Site**

The definition of a good web site can mean many things to different people. When we talk about how the word “good” applies to web sites, it mainly depends on the perspective of the individual qualifying it. A graphic designer may define good based on the quality of the visuals. A developer may define good based on the functionality of a particular application or feature employed by the site. An end user may define good based on the speed or logic in how the information they are looking for is accessed and their questions are answered. A marketer may define good based on a site's ability to achieve marketing and business goals established at the outset.

The technicians that helped bring web sites to the general public ruled the Internet during its infancy. The main objective was function and communication. Sites were built in difficult programming languages to reproduce text and color in various browsers. As time went on, the Internet moved into a highly visual stage where the designers took over the Internet. It was flooded with creativity and designs that broke free of the technical “standard”. As the Internet continued to grow we watched it evolve into a global marketplace and e-commerce flourished. Common amongst all of these evolutionary steps was one flaw: each evolution tended to focus on only one aspect of good: technical versus graphical versus commercial.

Today, experienced designers, developers and marketers understand what “good” really means: **collaboration**. Not being exceedingly good in one area, forsaking all others, but being good in all areas. Creating a web site that is visually engaging, useful, communicates clearly and offers benefit back to the core business it serves is the defining moment in achieving a really good, even great, web site.

And now all of these elements can be achieved in a myriad of ways, whether it's through e-commerce, online customer service, chat rooms or forums, or simply an informative web site showcasing a company's products or services.

# collaboration



## Begin with the End

The most common trend when revising a web site is to base the redesign on the inclination that the site is dated in its design and content. This translates into an ineffective web site that is incurring cost with hosting fees, yet not able to justifying the expense by supporting sales and marketing efforts.

And so, in many cases companies summon a web site design firm, advertising agency or developer to help them redesign their site without a clearly defined and achievable strategy for what they need in a successful redesign.

### **When considering a web site redesign, look at your end objectives first.**

Successful web sites are built on sales and marketing goals established before the site redesign has begun. These goals must be specific, realistic and measurable. They should not be technology or graphic-design based. The goals should be based on business challenges and customer interactions. It is important to review both of these aspects in detail to create a clear picture of what will be needed to make your web site redesign a success. Establish what you want to achieve and create the best strategy for how to get the desired results.

The Internet is a rapidly changing landscape and will continue to keep or even exceed the pace of advancements in technology. From hardware to software to platforms to browsers a redesign solution must accommodate and plan for change. Solutions must meet today's business needs and speculate for tomorrow's to avoid major modifications.

How user's today browse and use the Internet can tell us what the future holds for the Internet. By assessing marketplaces and audiences, possible future needs and trends can be identified early in the redesign process and in some cases actually implemented, only to lay dormant for future use. This strategy allows for a company to avoid costly "technological generation gaps" when updating their site over time or in phases. An analogy would be this: a consumer buys a software package that is version 1.0 and never upgrades it until version 6.0 hits the marketplace. Chances are the consumer will need to buy the software at full price because the 6.0 upgrade only works from version 5.0.

The true test to a strategy put forth online comes when it is time to update a web site. It is incredibly important to have a long-term maintenance strategy in the redesign process. When creating a structure or even the design of a site, there is a balancing act in an acceptable update and maintenance task level. Defining the role and skill set of those who will maintain the site will make such decisions easier throughout the redesign process.

Focusing on the end objective helps create the starting point. Implementation of the correct technology, content management system and tools ensures long-term success and satisfaction with the site.



## Multiple Interests and Skill Sets Project Management

Even the smallest of web sites share a number of considerations that a large-scale site faces in a redesign. Not only do you need to identify your business objectives and clearly identify customers' needs, there are usually a number of skill sets involved in the project that are highly specialized.

Most web site project teams include any or all of the following positions:

- Sales and/or Business Development
- Marketing
- Advertising Agency or Graphic Designer
- Development/Application/IT
- Project/Resource Management
- Other specialists such as Photographers, Animators, etc.

It takes experience and organization for a redesign collaborative to successfully merge their talents. In most cases an advertising agency can supply most of the skill sets and resources required. They are also best equipped to manage outside vendors because of their ability to understand their role. In addition, ad agencies are extremely adept at time management, project management and managing customer and vendor needs and expectations throughout the process.

### Project Management Considerations

A company will usually select an agency that fits their redesign needs through a "Request For Proposal" or "Agency Presentation". The award can go to the agency that is the most technically proven, the most creative, or the most experienced in the company's marketplace. All of which are correct, but of course, the perfect fit is an agency that excels at all three categories.

***The first month of the project is where most redesigns fail.***

**The agency that can't establish leadership in project management over the collaboration during the first month won't be able to deliver a successful redesign. Poor project management at commencement will lead to missed requirements, missed deadlines, gaps in deliverables, and unexpected outcomes that do not meet client expectations.**

Every redesign project is a custom job that requires different skills. It can be difficult to judge abilities. You should focus first on an agencies ability to communicate clearly, has experience and demonstrates leadership. Select a team that has strong external and internal communication skills, clearly defines roles at the outset, add excellent customer service to that and you will find the team that will integrate seamlessly with your company to help you succeed.





## Great Sites Are Built On Solid Foundations

The foundation of a web site is like a structurally sound flex-space office building: good architecture with a navigation strategy. If both of these considerations are durable and flexible, you will have a long-lasting web site.

To achieve these goals we look at how to organize the content that will be presented on a web site in the most efficient and effective way. The architecture must be:

- Easy to maintain
- Easy to navigate
  - East to reach the goal
  - Multiple ways to reach it

The site architecture provides the **four cornerstones** of the entire web site:

- **Functionality:** how a site will work with the various Internet browsers
- **Navigation:** the links used to move from one point to the next within the site
- **Design:** how the navigation interface will look with graphic design elements
- **Development:** the programming involved to make the site usable online

## Appropriate Visual Representation

As mentioned, everyone has his or her own idea of what looks good. When considering visual aspects of the site, maintaining branding elements and messaging and using relevant graphics to the target market are the key quantifiers for determining good visuals.

Creative is a very difficult aspect to quantify. Many companies find it difficult to translate good visuals into a positive return. It's easier to see the lack of direct tie to ROI than it is to understand the need for good and appropriate visuals.

Think of it this way: Have you ever gone to a web site looking for something and when you get to that site, you find it ugly? What did you do? You left. We all do. Now if we all have different opinions on what good is then how do we all usually agree when bad is bad?

Through that fuzzy logic we see that creative or visual representation is quantifiable and is definitely measured. So how do you establish good and appropriate? First you look at your Branding. If you have it, use the guidelines and tools provided by your marketing team for the best graphic design solution.

If you don't have branding or graphics standards in place, use the marketing materials you have and distill them down the most common elements. Use these color schemes and graphics or photography for visuals. If you don't have branding or a graphics standard in place for your company, use the web site redesign to your advantage and develop one as a part of the site design.



Once you have come up with a Graphical User Interface design or GUI using your business colors and graphical elements, you then identify what relevant content, graphics and photography will be identifiable by your audience. Audiences are groupings of users that share common interests that you identify with your product or services. With your GUI and content and graphical elements defined, you can now set up page template guidelines and requirements for your visual presentation that will structure a successful design.

## Developing for the World, Focusing on the User

The Internet can be seen as a Global Marketplace. Unlike printed materials there are an infinite number of variations of how, why and when a user will land on your site. A user can be anywhere in the world with an Internet connection that will be in various languages, platforms and browser software. All of these things make developing a web site a great challenge.

An experienced developer knows that there are core sets of standards that help maximize the breadth of an audience a web site can cater towards without extensive investment in time and resources to cater to all users. The objective is to develop a site to work on the majority of Internet browsers (Explorer, Netscape, Mozilla, Firefox, etc.) unless the project calls for a specific instance. The idea of developing to the majority is to collect the largest possible audience. This allows for a site to expand past its targeted audience, reach out to new potential users as well as serve the entire targeted audience.

***In order for the redesign strategy to be measured for success, you need to have these three aspects defined when developing the site:***

1. Browser Usage (percentage of users using what browser software)
2. Platform (what type of PC used)
3. Language

Typically the browser and platform information are base standards. A review of overall Internet use will show that the majority of users are found to be on Windows or Mac using Internet Explorer, FireFox or Mozilla (Safari). If there are specific needs geared towards an application used in the redesign, this needs to be pointed out at the beginning due to possible effects of who can or cannot use the site based on technical requirements.

Language is a separate issue. Normally a web site in the U.S. will be English and more and more sites are adopting a bi-lingual strategy to include Spanish. Language is a particularly challenging aspect to development. Translations mean variable word counts, copy lengths and even which direction the copy flows. All have implications in development and design. If multiple languages are required in redesigning a site, understanding these effects early in the project will be a key element to successful implementation.



## Developing Intelligently for Longevity

Choosing what programming language or even how to develop appropriate databases will directly effect how long your web site can potentially remain in use before becoming obsolete. Technology and how we use it changes rapidly, however, the languages and processes employed for utilization evolve a bit slower. The idea is to bridge past the known pitfalls to extend the life of the web site past typical life cycles.

By developing in programming languages that are flexible with customizable functionality a web site can last much longer than other sites with limited functionality. Typically, we find that a site that is developed with intelligent database-driven functionality will last closer to 7 -10 years where another less advanced site might last only 3 years. Sites with such longevity require content maintenance and visual upgrades but the core development remains the same and is usually easier to update more frequently.

A database-driven site may change significantly in the eyes of an end user, but the core components will remain intact depending on upgrades, edits and needs over time. The idea is to maintain the foundation for as long as it is viable. We prefer to see that the needs of the web site's objective drive the change in the development rather than the need for a newer technology to support obsolete practices.

## Beyond the Redesign, Making the Site a Continued Success

You have your brand new web site, redesigned and built to support the strategy and plan you established. You have deployed the site online and now are ready to start seeing the return on your investment. The first lesson learned by many companies who think that just redesigning a site is all they need happens within the first month of the site going live.

Where are the users? Where are the customers? Where are the leads? The truth of the matter is that you have redesigned your site because your old site not only did not meet your needs, but it didn't meet their needs either. When you put a new site up, you now have that site legacy to push past. Think about how many users have gone or not gone to your old one. Why would they come this one? How would they know to do so?

What we are talking about is e-Marketing. You have to get the word out and make sure users know where you are and that you have a new web site that provides new information, a better product or service or a new benefit to your customers and prospects. With the vast number of sites out there, you can't just rely on faith that users will find your site.

### Key ways people get to your site:

1. Referral, Word of Mouth
2. Marketing and Advertising
3. Search Engines



You have to have a marketing or advertising plan and work diligently with it to gain exposure when you first launch a web site or a redesigned site. There needs to be a big push on all fronts to get people to your site and sales strategies must include driving customers and prospects towards the site. There is also a strong need for Search Engine Optimization (SEO). Combined, these things will help push your web site past where it was and get people interested.

Never assume your web site will function autonomously and be successful. Maintain your site, keep information and products fresh, and stick to your advertising and sales strategies for keeping it top-of-mind.

### Does Your Web Site Qualify for a Redesign?

The Internet grew up so fast that many people don't truly understand it or its benefits. This is very common even today where the Internet is considered first amongst all marketing and communication strategies. There are ways you can help validate the need for a web site redesign before you start redesigning your web site.

#### Ask yourself the following questions:

- Does my web site represent my company accurately with its current content?
- Does my web site look professional and/or reflect my company's image?
- Does my web site serve my company beneficially?
- Is my web site lacking in the functionality that I find useful on other sites?
- Does my web site require too much technology to accomplish my preferences?
- Does my web site communicate to the correct customer audience?
- Does anyone see my site through search engines?
- Is my web site easy to use and easy to navigate?
- Do I know if my site is effective? How do I go about finding out?

#### • *Does my web site represent my company accurately with its current content?*

If you answer 'no' to this question you are moving towards a redesign. If the site doesn't visually represent your company's image or communicate your company information correctly you are not taking full advantage of what the web has to offer you.

#### • *Does my web site look professional and/or reflect my company's image?*

Your web site should be designed to be synergetic in look, feel and content with all of your other communications materials that your company uses for sales and marketing. If you want a customer to perceive that you are a professional and highly qualified company to do business with, make sure your web site conveys that image. To a visitor, an unprofessional web site translates to the perception of an unprofessional company. This is a major consideration for a site redesign.





*Does my web site serve my company beneficially?*

Your site should sell your products or services and or educate customers or potential customers about your company. If you answer 'no' to this question you are again taking another step towards needing a redesign.

*Is my site lacking in functionality I find useful on other sites?*

Do you wish you could navigate your site easier, put news and press releases up or any other extended feature you find useful on other sites? If you can come up with even one addition you would like to see to your site, you are looking towards a redesign.

*Does my site require too much technology to accomplish my preferences?*

By technology we mean are you making users fill out extended forms to collect their information just so they can ask you a question or view a PDF? Perhaps your monthly costs on your site seem high because you are paying for technology you don't utilize. If either of these are true or anything similar, you are looking to redesign.

*Does my site communicate to the correct audience?*

Audience refers to the users you are focusing on selling your products or services to (age, gender, profession, location, etc. can define audiences). If you aren't communicating or don't know if you are communicating effectively, you are looking to redesign.

*Does my site say what I want it to say?*

Perhaps your branding message has changed, or even your mission statement. Is your web site communicating the correct information? If not, you are looking towards a redesign.

*Does anyone see my site through search engines?*

You hear about Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and you don't know what that means or perhaps you search for your company on Google and you don't see it. You are moving towards a redesign.

*Is my site easy to use?*

Do you have customers or potential customers expressing discontent when using your web site? Do you yourself have a hard time getting around on your web site? If you can't answer yes to either of those questions you are moving towards a redesign.

*Do I know if my site is effective? How do I prove it?*

Do you have an Analytical Stats Package that you use on your web site? Do you know what an Analytical Stats Package is? If all those are no, you are moving towards a redesign.



## Aspects of Evaluation and Discovery

To begin any web site redesign, yourself or an agency must evaluate your existing site. To evaluate a site correctly one must review the following aspects:

- Overall Strategy
- Functionality
- Download Time
- Ease of Navigation (Usability)
- Usefulness of Content
- Overall Visual Presentation
- Contact, Support & Feedback Level
- Search Engine Optimization (SEO)
- Information Architecture

A standard approach to evaluating an existing web site would be considered as a 'discovery' phase. The initial phase in which an agency will evaluate the current web site, establish business objectives, conduct a competitive analysis and define the marketplace and audience.

The evaluation of the current site is meant to benchmark where the project starts. It also establishes areas of potential growth as well as identifies areas of strength. This in turn helps adjust requirements and needs in a more efficient manner.

It is important to also do competitive analysis. You will commonly find that the competition has either attempted or is currently doing things that have come up for the redesign of your site. By analyzing what they have done or are doing you can quantify the return or even discover a more effective way to accomplish the same goal.

All the information collected during the discovery phase of the redesign helps designers focus in on specific needs and requirements. It is important to redesign a solution against the unique set of circumstances and requirements brought forth by the discovery phase.

## Online Business Questionnaire

This questionnaire is a helpful tool to get a better understanding of your business objectives online and to what extent you have already begun to execute online. Not all questions will be relevant. But answer as many of the questions as you can to the best of your ability.



**Your Business & Market Landscape**

*The following questions are geared to help formulate your intentions online. It will also help determine what you have done so far and provide direction on how to help make your new web site a success.*

What are your top 3 online business objectives for this year?

- 
- 
- 

What would you like to be best known for online in the next 3 years?

Who are your primary audiences or target markets both online and off?

What is your customer value proposition for the web site?

What is the most important feature on your web site for your users?

Is your business seasonal? If so, which season is peak and which is off-peak?

In what languages do you market and/or sell your products or services?

What are the top 3 things your visitors say your web site does best?

- 
- 
-



What are the top 3 things your visitors say need improvement on your web site?

- 
- 
- 

What are the top 3 things that set your web site apart from the competition?

- 
- 
- 

Define your Audience:

Age:

Location:

Occupation:

Gender:

Product Markets:

Related Industries:

How do you drive traffic to your site? Select all that apply:

- Banner ads on other web sites
- Affiliate programs
- Links from other web sites (ie. Suppliers, partners, clients, etc.)
- Printed collateral with URLs
- E-mail campaigns
- Direct mail campaigns
- Search engine ranking (pay per click marketing)
- Vortals: Vertical industry specific search engines (GlobalSpec, ThomasNet, etc.)
- Viral marketing
- Permission marketing
- Offline advertising
- Offline PR
- Promotions
- E-mail/Newsletter sponsorship
- Online PR campaigns
- Other, specify:



**eBusiness**

*The next series of questions will help determine technical requirements you may have or need for your web site.*

From the list below, please select what type fits what you want your web site to be:

- Brochure/Informational
- Industry / Market Portal
- Catalog or E-Commerce
- Community
- Network/Extranet
- Application

From the list below, select the main objectives for your site. Select all that apply:

- Drive significant amounts of content
- Collect information/build customer database
- Drive sales online
- Provide customer service
- Provide an intranet or extranet for internal or channel use
- Provide downloads files/literature
- Enable troubleshooting of products/services
- Process transactions
- Interface with legacy back-office systems/databases
- Drive Traffic to the transactional site
- Build brand awareness and loyalty
- Drive sales to brick and mortar/telephone orders
- Entertain
- Other, specify:

Do you currently have performance data reports from the current web site that you can review?

Are there sites you feel are a good model for your web site? List the URL:

How often will you add new content?

- Daily
- Monthly
- Semi-Annually
- Unknown

Who will update your content?

- In-House
- TrueNorth
- Other, specify:



Will your site (any part of it) be database driven? (ie. sustain sales, content, or account information push/pulled to/from the site in real-time from databases)

Will your web site require integration into existing processes within your business? (ie. connected to internal databases, billing, inventory, etc.)

If a database already exists, what is it?

- Legacy software, specify:
- MS Access
- Oracle
- MS SQL Server
- Unknown
- Other, specify:

Do you see a need for personalization of your site for individual user segments? (ie. Commercial, consumer, target market specific, etc.) If yes, explain the need:

Will your site have multimedia needs?

- PDF
- DOC (MS Word documents)
- Video
- Audio
- Flash

Will your back-end logistics and accounting systems support your web site plans? (Integrate the site into existing systems.) What systems we will be integrating.

Do you have an in-house customer service department to handle online and offline inquiries?

What tools if any do you have to measure site statistics? (Tracking software, purchase tracking, etc.)



What will be the criteria to measure ROI? Select all that apply:

- Increased site traffic for new users
- Increased repeat traffic
- Leads generated
- Lead conversion (leads resulting in sales)
- Increased market share
- Revenue growth by market or region
- Supplier satisfaction
- Supply chain optimization and cost savings
- Automation of internal process and controls
- Increased internal communication
- User feedback
- Other, specify:

How often will you want to measure ROI?

- Monthly
- Quarterly
- Semi-Annually
- Annually

If you are looking for an e-commerce site, will your product catalog and variations be supplied in database form, excel or other digital format?

Do you currently have hosting for a web site? Do you require new hosting and/or domain name services?

Will your hosting provider support ASP, ACCESS and/or SQL (MySQL) Databases?

**If E-Commerce:**

How many products will you have on the new site at launch?

Do you have an existing customer database (log ins, passwords, order histories, etc.) stored on a current site or in a database or excel file that will be transferred over?

Will you have separate pricing based on different customers or groups of different customers?

Do you have a secure certificate and payment gateway to accept and process credit cards online?



**Visual Preferences:**

***These questions are for us to begin to understand where you are at visually. Establish existing visual trends or standards as well as learn of new avenues you may be pursuing through the new web site.***

What is the essence of your brand? What should people think and feel when they hear the company name or see the company logo?

List web sites you like and why:

List web sites you dislike and why:

What should the tone of your web site be? Select all that apply:

- Conservative
- Subtle
- Loud
- Fun
- Classy
- Technological
- Industrial
- Sophisticated
- Cutting-edge
- Other, specify:

The content will be:

- New
- Repurposed
- Both new and repurposed
- Unknown

What level of graphic design do you expect to have on your site?

- Simple graphics (template and colors, focus on quick download time)
- Medium graphics
- Heavy graphics (visually dynamic with more download time)
- Other, specify:



Do you have corporate branding regulations that will apply to the site?

Do you need new graphics and/or photography? Describe what needs you may have.

If you are looking for an e-commerce store, will photography for each product be available? If not, include product photography in your scope of work or RFP.

Do you have existing marketing materials for reference for visual style?

Do you require copy writing for the site? If so, include it in your scope of work or RFP.

**WEB SITE RFP's: Many design firms and developers have different technologies that they prefer to use for web site design. It is important when you have a web site estimated that each firm is quoting your site apples-to-apples in all aspects in order to make an informed decision on scope of work and costs associated. It will also eliminate wasted time in asking for quotes from firms that cannot meet your technological needs in either hardware or software, but try to sell you on fitting into theirs.**

**If you would like TrueNorth Marketing to provide you with a scope of work and RFP document to use for competitive bids, it will help dramatically in time-savings and unexpected outcomes when comparing estimates for your web site redesign.**

**We hope you found this document informative and helpful in evaluating your online presence and please contact Bradley Foust at TrueNorth [brad@true-north.biz](mailto:brad@true-north.biz) if you have any questions, or would like to arrange a free consultation meeting to review your questionnaire.**