

# WEBSITE PLANNING GUIDE

## 6 CRITICAL ELEMENTS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE WEBSITES

Your website is the engine to the car – without all the parts working simultaneously and it built correctly, it will not run.

In today's high-speed, ever changing digital landscape, your website should come first. Here are 6 important areas to understand before getting started on a new website.



### 1. STRATEGY IS THE KEY

Identifying your goals and objectives upfront is the first step in building a successful website. It is critical to undergo an in-depth discovery process to define your audience and goals before you kick off the project. This will help set up your new website for success and ensure all stakeholders, designers, developers and marketers are working towards the same common goals.

**OTHER CONSIDERATIONS & SECONDARY OBJECTIVES:** Providing valuable resources to users will help increase engagement and build trust. This includes consumer education materials, customer reviews, product renderings, videos and other high-value content.

#### COMMON QUESTIONS TO ASK DURING THE DISCOVERY PROCESS INCLUDE:

- 1 Who is your target audience (age, location, occupation, income, etc)?
- 2 What are they looking for and what do you want them to do?
- 3 What are your calls to action and how will your sales process work with the website?
- 4 Who are your competitors and what differentiates you from them?

#### PRO TIP

Ask your prospect agency who the top performers in your space are online and see if you get a quantifiable answer.

### 2. PUT THE USER FIRST

Gain an implicit knowledge of your online customers' behaviors and cater to them in every way. Your website should tell a story through content and easy-to-navigate pathways that guide users to your (if done right; their) objective. This is done using a variety of strategies including advanced design elements such as animations, clear call-to-actions, content and messaging, different desktop and mobile device experiences, and other visual aspects discussed more in section 3.

Here's why

74%

**INCREASE TO CONVERSION RATE**  
when you update site speed from  
**8 SECONDS TO 2 SECONDS.**  
SOURCE: VENDESTA

85%

**OF CONSUMERS**  
will abandon a site due to  
**POOR DESIGN.**  
SOURCE: VENDESTA

### 3. CONTENT IS KING

Creating relevant content that engages your customers is a sure way to leave a lasting impression. Understanding your audience enables you to craft more effective content that caters to their needs and desires. Interactive elements, such as animation, leave your visitors with a lasting impression, boost engagement, and increase goal completion. From informative embedded videos to custom graphics, a successful website is loaded with rich visual content. A blog feed can serve as an effective tool in attracting more leads for your business. Frequently adding new content to posts or pages can also lead to increased visibility and rankings in search engines like Google.

50% of SALES ARE LOST

Because consumers can't find the content they're looking for.  
SOURCE: VENDESTA

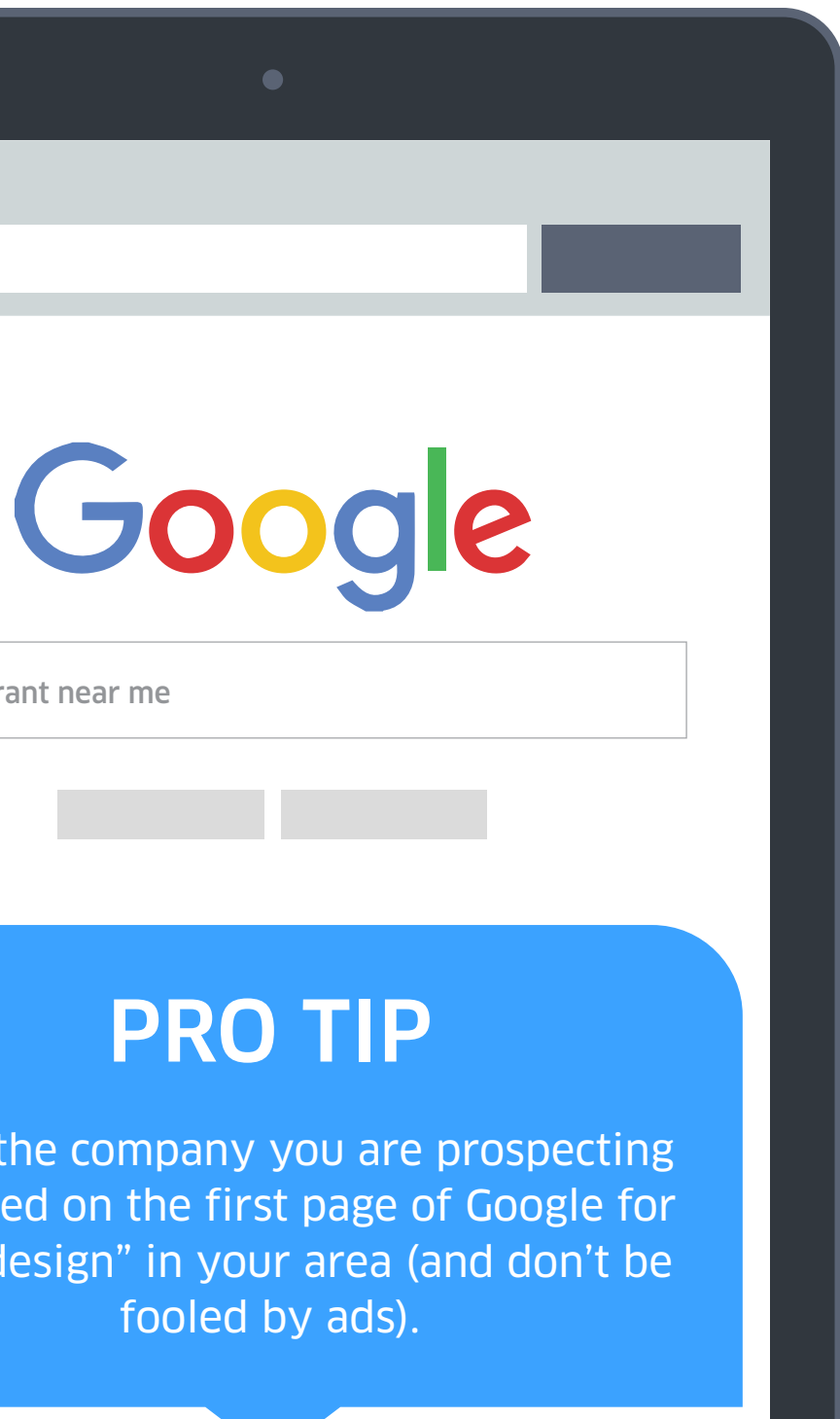
#### PRO TIP

The number 1 reason web design projects get held up or fail is due to lack of content.



### 4. VISIBILITY IS A MUST

If you are going to spend the time and money building a new website - what good does it do if no one sees it? In order to gain visibility and traction when your website launches, it is key to build in a solid SEO strategy as part of your website design or redesign. This means employing a thoughtful, multifaceted approach that covers everything from the tech-heavy aspects of your website's infrastructure to creative, targeted approaches to keyword and content marketing. These powerful tactics give your business the upper hand in search engine results pages (SERPs), such as Google.



#### PRO TIP

See if the company you are prospecting is ranked on the first page of Google for "web design" in your area (and don't be fooled by ads).



68% of all organic clicks go to the top three search results.  
SOURCE: eCONSULTANCY



97% of consumers looked online for local businesses last year according to a consumer research study.  
SOURCE: BRIGHT LOCAL



75% of search engine users never scroll past the first page of search results.  
SOURCE: MARKETSHAREHITS LINK.COM

### 5. OPTIMIZE FOR EVERYONE

You must deliver a consistent experience no matter what device or browser your customers use. Does the mobile-optimized version of your site align with the desktop version? How about on retina displays? Optimizing your website to display cohesively across all major devices and screen sizes enhances brand recognition, improves user experience and increases engagement. If you want to reach people on mobile, you've got to start with the basics – a mobile optimized site. Though it seems obvious, a Google study found that 96% of consumers have encountered sites that weren't designed with mobile in mind. It also found that when it happens, it can be bad for business – 48% reported feeling frustrated and annoyed.



97% of MILLENNIALS ARE MOBILE USERS & 20% of them don't even use a desktop computer.  
SOURCE: GOOGLE

#### PRO TIP

New devices are constantly being released and browsers change often, how will you keep up? Maintenance after your project is completed is very important, make sure your partner has a specific post-launch plan for you.

### 6. CHOOSE THE RIGHT PARTNER

The web design market is inundated with contractors and agencies selling a wide range of services, making it extremely difficult for businesses of all sizes to make decisions and understand the value of one company's work to the next. It's crucial to choose the right partner. Here are some things to think about when doing so:

#### ✓ CREDIBILITY

Reviews are good, referrals are better. Online reviews are something all businesses seek so it should be no surprise there are a ton of contractors and agencies with great reviews. You need to learn how to find great referrals.

#### ✓ TEAM

Professional agencies are the way to go over contractors (who often flake out or disappear), but are often times very expensive. That said, it's important to understand what you are looking for and what's in the market.

#### ✓ PROCESS

Strategy and due diligence are absolutely key to having success when building a website. This process should be clearly defined upfront.

#### ✓ CUSTOM VS PREBUILT

Many contractors and small agencies use pre-built themes and templates, which allow them to cut corners and save on time. This can work as a "band aid" but inevitably, if you want something professional it should be custom designed.

#### ✓ HOSTING

An agency or contractor who wants to or requires you to "host" your website with them should be a red flag and could mean serious risk down the road. You want to ensure you own and control your website and hosting.

#### ✓ POST-LAUNCH

What happens after the site is built? It's important to understand what happens after your website is completed because that is not where the work stops. It is critical to keep your website up-to-date, fast and secure. Look for a good answer to this question before you commit.

#### ✓ COST

The million dollar question! Web design and development work is very difficult and often times very subjective making it very difficult to understand the difference between a 3k, 10k proposal and a 20k proposal.