



Tips and Tricks for Building Your Website

September 24, 2020

Presented by:

SJB DBE Supportive Services, The Louisiana Department of Transportation, and Little Dog Marketing

Questions to Ask Before you Get Started

Who are your customers? This is hands down the **most important question** to ask yourself. You must always keep their perspective in mind.

- What are their demographics (location, education, level of income, gender, age, lifestyle, values, decision making habits, etc.)?
- What problems or pain points resonate with them?
- How are they influenced?

Who are you? After you have defined who you are trying to reach, how do you present yourself in a way that best communicates who you are?

- Develop your Brand - Every touch with the outside world that your company has needs to be a branded experience.
 - Brand Development Questions:
 - Brand Vision – Where are you going? What are your goals?
 - Purpose and Promise – What is your fundamental purpose behind your business? What value does that provide?
 - Position – What do your customers and potential customers think of you? What would you like them to think of you?
 - Personality and Core Values – How do you want to present yourself? What principles shape you and your company's culture?
 - Differentiators – What sets you apart from the competition?
 - Brand Elements Include:
 - Thinking through the above questions will help you develop the types of brand elements you want to consider.
 - Tone in messaging – Are you casual and friendly? Are you all business and super professional?
 - Where will customers experience your brand? What types of marketing media and platforms will you use?
 - Logo, Colors, Fonts, Images, Slogan/Tagline, etc. – How can you use these elements to solidify your brand? Many of you may have branding elements

already chosen. If so and they fit your brand, roll with what you have. Take what you have and work in elements around it to sure up your brand message.

What are your goals for the website? How can your website work for you? Your goals can be considered for a more purposeful design.

Terms to Know

Getting a Started

Domain - The name of the website that people type into a browser to visit it.

Registrar – The company used to register your domain name. Some examples include GoDaddy or Network Solutions.

Hosting – The web servers where your website files are housed, served, and maintained. A web server is a computer running web server software connected to the internet that allows visitors to access a website through an Internet-connected web browser or mobile device.

Design

Content Management System – a backend of your site where you can update content and make changes.

WYSIWYG – Stands for “What You See Is What You Get.” It’s the interface inside a content management system that automatically applies styles to text and graphics and allows the user to see what the content will look like on the front end. This allows site owners to edit content in their website without coding knowledge.

User experience (UX) – The interaction a user has with an interface. Every aspect of the web design and development process—from layout and copywriting to design and functionality —affects the user experience.

Slider – A rotating banner of images that is sometimes placed on the homepage of a website. It is a “slide show” type format that can highlight different content and include images or video.

Responsive design – A website that adjusts to the screen it is being viewed on, whether desktop, mobile or tablet.

Search Engine Optimization

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) – SEO concerns increasing your site’s likelihood of being served up to web browsers that query relevant keywords. SEO ranking can be improved by helping search engines understand the information on your website in order to rank higher in organic search results. This includes having title tags, meta descriptions and ALT tags for images on your website.

Keywords – These are the words and phrases that people would enter into a search engine to find the products or services you offer. Incorporating these keywords and phrases in your web content make it possible for people to find your site via search engines. A website that is well optimized for search engines "speaks the same language" as its potential visitor base with keywords for SEO that help

connect searchers to your site. Think like your customers. How are they searching for your services? Are they local?

Title Tag - A title tag is an HTML element that specifies the title of a web page. Title tags are displayed on search engine results pages (SERPs) as the clickable headline for a given result, and are important for usability, SEO, and social sharing. The title tag of a web page is meant to be an accurate and concise description of a page's content. It is important to create one of these for all applicable pages on your site and to use the most relevant keywords. [include graphic]]

Meta Description – The description below your page title on search engines. It is important to create one of these for all applicable pages on your site and fill it with relevant keywords.

Example of Title Tag and Meta Description from a Google search result:



Best Practices

Registering for a website domain

- Research available domain names from a registrar site. Many website development platforms will give you the option to buy your own domain as well.
- Many companies go with their company name.
- You can also search for domains that use your SEO keywords.
- Keep it simple and concise. Don't make it too long.
- Try for the .com domains first.
- You generally pay an annual fee to maintain ownership of your domain. This varies depending on the value of the domain name.

Hosting options

- This is usually an annual fee charged to house your website on a server. The cost varies depending on the provider and the level of security and technical support available.
- Many website development firms have hosting options; however, registrars and content management systems also have hosting options.

Get organized – Write out the pages you think you will need. Organize them in a way that make sense.

Branding – Incorporate your branding elements such as colors, logo, image styles, fonts, etc. Be consistent.

- Colors: Stick with one to three of your chosen brand colors. Don't throw in random colors. This can look messy and inconsistent, which can be perceived as unprofessional or untrustworthy.
- Fonts: You may not always be able to match the fonts you use on your logo or elsewhere, but you can find something similar usually. Use fonts that are easy to read and keep them consistent throughout your website. You can use more than one, but make sure all page headers have the same font, color and size; all section headings are the same font, color and size; and all paragraph/body content uses the same font, color and size. Again, this lends to your legitimacy.

Consider your target market – Why are they on your site? How can you get them to the information they need as fast as possible?

Keep it simple – Again, you want this to be easy for your site visitors. Don't over think things.

- Avoid long narrative texts.
- Use bullet points.
- Use informative pictures or graphics.

Images and graphics – Try to use clear images and avoid downloading things from Google Image Search. Use stock photography that fits with your branding or use your own photos. Hire a graphic designer to create a custom (and branded) graphic or chart if needed.

Search engine optimization (SEO)

- Include keywords in the page names (web address), title tags, meta descriptions, website content, image file names, etc. Many content management systems have SEO tools where this information can be entered for each page. Additionally, do your keyword research. Google has a keyword planner tool that will help you research the best words to use: <https://ads.google.com/home/tools/keyword-planner/>
- Fast-loading pages – Slow loading pages are frowned upon by Google. There are several reasons for a slow page load, including having large images that are not compressed properly, custom fonts, bad code, low bandwidth or server issues. Keep things simple and don't go too crazy on the one-off customizations.
- Updating content – Google likes it when you have changing content. Reword your pages every now and then and/or create a blog page where you can post updated content regularly.
- Submitting your site to Google: <https://search.google.com/search-console/welcome>. Do this once your website is complete and maybe once a year or so after you've made some content revisions.

Is it Ok To DIY?

Yes, of course. However, if you don't have a knack for design or writing, it may be a good idea to get someone to help or hire a company.

Tips for using a website developer or design firm:

- To save time and money, do your homework. Know what you are looking for. Provide examples and ideas (even if they are hand sketched).
- Share with them all your branding concepts and elements.
- Share with them your goals for the website and the best practices listed above.
- Be sure they offer a content management system that you can access to make content changes.
- Be sure SEO is part of their process.

Tips for doing it yourself:

- Research website development platforms.
 - Do they have a user-friendly content management system?
 - How customizable is the site?
 - What limitations do they have?
 - Will you be able to meet your goals?
 - Is there an option for inputting and updating SEO terms?
 - Is there technical support available if needed? How much??
- Ask for help when you need it.
- Get input from a variety of sources (creative people, analytical people, business-minded people, customers, etc.)