

Web design build questions to ask new clients

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What do you want the web site to do for your company?

(is it to just promote brand awareness and for people who hear about them and then go to their site, will people be finding them through search engines, is it existing clients looking for support or news, are you selling online, are you offering downloads, company reports etc)

Who is your target audience (age / level of internet experience etc)?

(Do they require a modern, fast paced, highly graphical site to target the younger generation or a more user friendly site for the less experienced or older internet users.)

What image do you want to portray (Professional / Casual / cutting edge etc)?

(Some sites use white space and limited text to give a relaxed feel while others use lots of images and text to give the site a busy feel. Define the feel of the site)

If you have branding what colors, fonts, styles do you use?

(See business cards, letterheads etc). More often than not the sole trader will have no graphics, no logo and no identity so in these cases you need to ask the client for colour schemes they think fit with the ideas but also do market research on the competition because the client may not be right)

Core questions:

What do you absolutely definitely want on the site?

(This list could include blog, shopping cart, members log in, private areas, RSS feeds, Gallery newsletter, contact forms, advertising space, different languages, search facility, etc)

What would you like if possible/within budget?

What absolutely must be on the homepage and what is the order of priority?

(This is a core question and you should allow the client time to ponder and discuss this with you. Their answers here should define the position of the building blocks. The answers could be phone number, email, help icon, downloads, cart total, core product links etc.)

What must be visible at all times?

(Every page has a fold. A fold is below the visual part of the page and requires you to scroll down to see it. I have a height I use but you should decide for yourself where it should be. The client must understand this and agree what can go above and below).

How many links will be needed and how many levels of navigation will there be?

(You need to understand the journey paths and decide how far down the link structure will go (level one, level two, level three etc)

If the business has different sections and each wants its own presence on the page which business sections would get the best locations?

Is there any content that may require a database or scripting?
(Contact forms, shopping carts, newsletters etc)

Who are your competitors?
(Supply some URL's of competitors that you think sell your product type well)

Do your competitors use something on their site that you really like?
(Could be navigation structure, form layout etc)

What do you offer that the competition doesn't?
(This often makes the client think about his own business in a new way and I've started a new path for a few businesses with this one!)

List 5 general sites that they like and why do they like them?
(This could be navigation method, colour scheme, fonts etc.)

Do you have any text/copy / graphics / Logos for the site?
Will they be supplying the text in a ready to go copy/paste format or will someone have to input all their text into the site from paper etc. Likewise will we need to outsource all the imagery from other sources or do they have their own graphics that need to be included. Will we need to input all the links?

Will you require space on pages for external/internal advertising (If yes what types)?
Header ads, sidebar ads, ads in the content etc.

When do you want it finished and who is going to be updating the pages.

What is their level of experience?

What are your main products and/or services?
For each explain what you would want you visitors to do, (sign-up, purchase, contact you, etc.). i.e. a call-to-action for each.

What are the main categories of information you want to publish?
(Time-sensitive like news & events? Product or service descriptions? Case studies / Success Stories? Careers information? Special offers?)

How would you like to communicate with you visitors? *(Telephone, Email, Live Chat, Blog's or discussions, Mailing list, Brochure/magazines)*

Shopping Cart questions:

Do you want to offer real time shipping?

Do you want the consumer to sign in or log-in?

Do you need cross selling?

Do you need to offer unlimited products?

Do you need unlimited categories?

How will you charge for shipping?

How will you charge for taxes

Blog's:

Will there be multiple authors?

Should the site clearly be displaying author info?

Are there multiple styles of blog posts, like longer feature posts and shorter quick posts?

What other kind of content will be on the site?

Does the site need to accommodate for advertising?
(What type? Sizes?)

Do you plan to use categories? tags? both?

How do you want to handle archives?

How do you want to handle search?

Are you going to be presenting source code in the posts?

Are there any other blog's that you really like?

Content Management Systems:

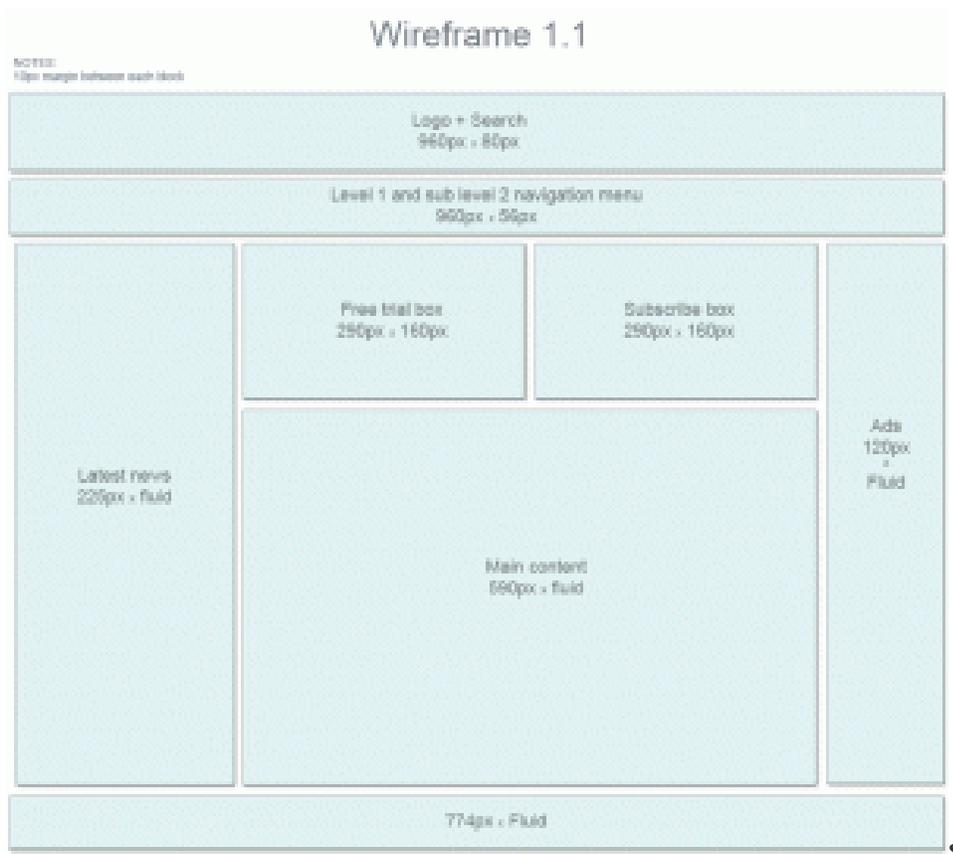
Do you require multiple levels of access?

Does the new content need final approval before being published?

Will they want simple content editors or web developers to change styles?

So I have the web build answers...now what?

I usually start with scribbles on a napkin or pad. Seriously if you start sketching out as the client is answering your questions you quickly get a feel for the blocks and usually when I leave the client I already have sketched out where the blocks need to go. I then sit in the nearest cafe with my laptop or go straight home and start building a basic wire frame based on the sketches but in this one I start playing with spacing, widths, heights margins and padding's based on the priorities the client gave. The tool you can use for this can vary. I use Photoshop but you could use pretty much any paint package, PowerPoint etc. Here is an example of a block wire frame I made for a client recently who runs a subscription based site:



Once the client agrees with the position and prominence of the blocks I can start thinking of the graphics. This is where your preferred way of building a site comes into play but the difference between how you did it before and now is you have the building blocks in front of you and with the answers to your questions beside you it should be a much simpler process than ever before.

The visual wire frame should include the effects on the page. For example if your navigation has a mouse over then have that mouse over on “one” of the links. Likewise for active stats etc. If the effect is transitional then try to give a example web page with it working or give a detailed description.

The visual wire frame may be overboard for some of you but for me it is easier to modify a PDF than a pixel perfect web page. A client can often try and change the layout after looking at it for a while and while I'm in the PSD stage I'm happy to accommodate this. Once the visual wire frame has been agreed then the build begins and any changes after that point will incur costs. The client can't really argue because they have already agreed to the block wire frame and visual wire frame so it is a lot easier to ask for extra costs when you're at the final stage of the contract.