

THE **13** WEBSITE  
**REDESIGN SECRETS**  
YOUR WEB DESIGN  
COMPANY WISHES  
YOU KNEW



## Introduction

There are a bajillion website design companies out there. How are you going to find the right one to do your website redesign?

I'm going to shock you here. The biggest factor in whether your redesign is a success has very little to do with the design company you choose. Ok, sure, you need to choose a company who knows what they're doing. And you probably should skip any promotional ads you receive in your spam filter for \$200 custom designed sites. But that aside, your website design will only be as good as you let it be.

So, I'm going to guide you through a crash course in becoming an empowered, educated client who winds up with a stunning new website that absolutely works for your company.

Ready?

## 1. Decide how much you can invest before you start.

**Your website could potentially be your most valuable marketing machine for your company, so be prepared to invest money in making it work.**

This is a touchy subject, I realize, so I figured we should get it on the table right from the start.

Don't move into this process with a vague notion of "what's expensive" or a "good deal." That's a strategy that will get you to nowhere quickly. Instead, think strategically. If you know that you're going to spend a certain amount of money for advertising in a year, decide what percentage of those resources you are going to allocate to an effective web presence. Be sure to figure in an investment for working with the content on your site continually. Launching a new website isn't the end of your project. It's the beginning.

For many companies, a website doesn't have to be astronomically expensive to be effective. There are, however, some components that you absolutely need to make sure your website has in order to be effective.

1. The ability to add and edit content without relying on someone else.
2. Pages that describe each service and how it benefits your customers.
3. A blog for generating content quickly. For most platforms this should be integrated in already.
4. Landing pages to collect information about leads.
5. Integration with email & social marketing.

6. Designed for optimum use on all devices. Usually means “responsive design”.

[Glossary: Responsive design means that your site “responds” to whatever device the site is viewed on. The way it practically works today is that multi-column sites move to single columns on smaller devices, and navigation is modified to make it simpler for the user.]

## 2. Evaluate your current site.

**You've got some homework to do before you just TNT your old site.**

If you don't have a way to measure what's currently going on, you're not going to know if changes were effective. Benchmark the criteria that matters to you.

So, open up Google Analytics and export the All Pages reports for the last 6 months. Sort by most visits, and you'll see what pages generated the most traffic for you.

Take note of how many visits per week or month, time on page, conversions if you had that set up in Google Analytics. All of these things are going to be important for you to evaluate the website redesign.

If you have an existing site map of your website, make sure that all of your existing pages that have content get mapped to a page on the new site. This is critical for SEO.

### 3. Describe who you're talking to.

**The sad truth is that most companies aren't talking to anyone on their websites.**

They're just droning on about themselves.

So spend a little time defining the "perfect audience" for your company.

Some marketing people call these "buyer personas", or target audience. The term isn't all that critical but the principle is the single difference between a website that works well for your company, and one that just sits there like your Uncle Bill in the La-Z-Boy after Thanksgiving dinner.

You may have more than one ideal client, but chances are you could boil most of the criteria down into 2 or 3 fictitious people that you want to talk to.

Describe in detail what that fictitious person cares about, their family, their role in life, their needs, how they communicate.

You're doing this kind of research so you can talk directly to the right people, and they'll know you're talking to them.

Your website isn't about your company. It's about your customer.

#### 4. Define your unique value to them.

##### **You've probably heard about Unique Value Propositions.**

Every industry loves its catchy phrases. But if we were to ditch jargon, we could simply ask, "What unique value do I bring to my customers?" "Why should they work with me and not someone else?"

Those are big, big questions, that we tend to shudder when we hear. Then, we recover, and move on without ever stopping to nail it down. It's critical. If you don't know specifically why a customer should work with you, they won't know either.

## 5. Mark out a path for your customers to walk down.

### **Begin with the end in mind.**

- Stephen Covey

For each of your buyer personas, imagine that they encounter your site through one of various ways. Then, think through the questions that they're asking themselves:

- What do you want your customer to experience?
- How do you help them feel like they have come to the place that can actually help them?
- What do you want a visitor on your website to finally end up doing?  
What's the goal?

If you're thinking strategically, you'd say, "for them to decide that they are the right customer for us, and actually buy our product." Yep. The goal is to gain new customers.

So, what questions would your would-be customer have JUST BEFORE they pulled the switch?

Then, take a step up from there.

Then another step.

What questions do they have when they first arrive at your site?



Build a thought map from the goal back up to when they arrive at your site.

Once you have a sequence of thoughts, you're ready to create a "site map."

## 6. Muster your resources

I love the word, “muster.” Get all your stuff together because you’re going to work some magic with it. You’ll see why you need it in a moment, but for now, just know that you’re going to gather all of the white papers, fact sheets, brochures, hand-scribbled notes, emails back and forth with valuable customers, etc, into one place.

Choose one or several, depending on how ambitious you are, and tweak them until you have some pieces that appeal to your “buyer personas” needs. Imagine writing them in such a way that you could attach them to an email to a potential customer, and they would totally stand on their own without you needing to explain a ton about what it is.

Bring in your sales team, and write down all of the questions that they handle each time they call. What are the main pain points that your company solves for your buyer persona?

- How are your customers asking their questions?
- What words do they use?
- How will they find you?

Each of your pages on your website should handle one of those phrases. **And only one.** If you have more phrases that you’d like to cover with one product or service, create an overview, and then link it to its own page where you can, again, address one phrase that your customer uses.

By the way, some people call this keyword research or SEO strategy. It's easy to lose sight of talking to a specific person when you do this. It's important that you don't just "look for keywords." They need to be the phrases that your idea clients are using, not the public at large.

## 7. Make sure you write content before you hire a designer.

I'm surprised by how often this simple principle is violated. I've made this mistake before, too. You're just so eager to try a "look" or that cool slider on the homepage, that you completely blow by what you're trying to say.

A picture may be worth a thousand words, but make sure you know what you want to say before you choose one.

As web designers, we're the worst at this, because we're so eager to code up something cool, that we get a little impatient and don't want to wait for the right copy.

When you get those special email offers to build you a website for \$200, you can be sure that they're not going to write the copy and build the site. They'll build out a look, and you can "fill in" with copy later. Even higher-priced websites will often leave the copy as an afterthought. If you're going to work with a designer, and are going to hire a professional copywriter, make sure they design only after the copy is written. Anything else will make you crazy.

Read your copy out loud, and listen to it. [Does it sound like you're actually talking to a real person?](#) If not, it's time to get back to work. Especially be on the look out for jargon or insider lingo. If your ideal customer wouldn't know what it is without an explanation leave it out. Or if you have to use it, put the explanation right there so they're better informed. (You have to think like your customer.)

When writing every sentence on your website, imagine your visitor sitting on the other side of the screen, and make it personal. That means that you won't talk about your features, and your services, blah blah blah, without it tying in to that person sitting there. You'll use "you" way more than you would in a corporate brochure. The web is a casual and intimate medium. Make sure your copy reflects that reality.

Decide what each page is going to be about, and then stay focused on that one topic. Don't ramble all over the place. If you want to introduce new concepts, do it in a way that links off quickly to a page that covers just that concept.

This single focus will help your site get the attention it needs because search engines really like for you to talk about one topic and not range all over. If you've identified the phrase that your client uses to describe that topic, be sure to incorporate their lingo into your writing. Don't write for search engines. Write for humans. They're the ones who become customers.

When you write your headlines, remember that web page headlines have one goal: to get you to read the next line.

Use a style guide and stick to it. That will keep your tone and your voice consistent over your entire website, and your other channels.

## 8. Don't skimp on photography

It's surprising how much time and effort is spent on a website, only to slap up a few stock photos or worse yet, snapshots someone in your company has taken. As I've evaluated hundreds of well-designed, effective websites, without question the largest differentiator between mediocre sites and amazing sites is the quality of the photography. The right photograph can set the right tone, communicate an emotion, and support your copy in unbelievably powerful ways. Conversely, a poorly constructed photograph can completely derail all that you're trying to say and convey with your site. It's that big of a deal.

That doesn't mean that every single photo on your site has to be professionally done, unless you have the means to do it. It just means that the photos that carry the weight of your design should be able to handle it.

Make sure you budget enough money so you can get what you need here.

By the way, when it comes to the graphics on your blog, make sure that they support your mission, too. If you're going to use stock photography, spend some time choosing the right one. If you're going to use some of your own photographs, take the time to create some shots that represent your company well.

## 9. Give your web site designer something to work with.

**“I’ll know it when I see it” is the absolutely worst thing you can say to a designer who asks about any design parameters.**

Instead, the success of your website lies with you combining what you’ve learned about what you have to offer with who is looking for it. And bringing all of those things to bear in the new design.

Spend time browsing sites that are outside your industry and see if there are elements that would help you give customers what they are looking for and move them down your path.

Use a tool like a shared notebook in Evernote to give your designer all kinds of ideas. You can use their Web Clipper to take screenshots and then annotate them on the graphic so your designer will know WHY you like certain things.

If you’ve hired a good designer, they’ll be able to distill the idea out of the screenshot you’ve sent and create something unique and communicates with your buyer personas.

If you’ve done the hard work we’ve already talked about, you can create a “pre-flight” notebook that has your Unique Value Proposition, your buyer personas, your path, your tone, your requirements, and your budget all in one convenient place.

There should be a discovery phase where the designer asks you questions that will guide them further with the design. Be as clear as possible with these

questions. Don't use vague answers or tell them that you're sure they'll figure it out.



## 10. Find the right website design company.

When you're looking for your website design firm, take a look at the websites they've created, and spend some time reading everything they've put out. See if you see things the same way they do. That's important.

When you contact them, give them your pre-flight document. They will instantly love you, and want you to work with them. Believe me, it will happen.

When you get the proposal back from them, don't try to talk them down on the price. This isn't like buying a car. It's more like investing. The market drives the price. If you don't have enough trust to give them the benefit of the doubt on their pricing, you should find a design firm that you can trust.

This is not a bidding war. Find companies whose work you love, and see which one may be able to accomplish your goals within the ample budget you have created.

If your goals are to generate leads with your website, make sure that you design firm understands best practices for design and page structure to make your site work for you.

## 11. Let your designer design.

There are probably few things that are as damaging to the relationship with your web designer as trying to take the design over. If you trust the design firm, and you've given clear direction of your goals, then let them work their magic. Often they will bring things to the table that you would have never thought of and the final design will be better than you could have imagined. Plus, if your designer is only as good as you let him be, you should just have designed the site yourself and saved the money and frustration.

If you have a problem with a design, run back over your notes about your audience, your unique value proposition, and your conversations with the designer and see if the design is on target for those things. If it is, let it go. If it's not, have an open conversation with your designer.

## 12. Communicate clearly

Throughout the website redesign process, you will need to give approvals at various milestones. Many design firms will have you sign off on site maps, copywriting, wireframes, or mood boards, rough design comps, and of course, the wired-up site before it can go live.

Use these communication tips:

- Follow the steps above so that you clearly lay out what you are expecting, and have the designers repeat to you what they understand so you are both on the same page.
- If the design company wants to use a tool like BaseCamp to communicate with you, use their tool, and don't insist on sending emails instead. Their system is designed to make sure that your website comes out like you intended.
- When you're presented with copy or a wireframe or design, make sure you understand specifically what you need to approve. Don't be focused on a large photo that's just a placeholder when all you're supposed to sign off on is the layout itself. If you're unsure, ask questions. This is a key piece of communicating with your designer. Most likely, your designer assumes a certain level of common vocabulary, so if he says something you don't understand, ask him to explain a little further.
- When asked for your opinion, always start with what you do like. This is huge! Your web designer is an artist, and is hyper critical of his work already. By starting with the overall good things you see, you'll help him/her be receptive to your more specific critique. (By the way, you

can use this anytime you're dealing with giving feedback on anything. It's like a "truth" sandwich. Start with good. Then give suggestions for improvement. Then close with an affirmation that they can make it happen. That was free advice.)

- Be very specific with any critique.

### 13. Invest yourself in the success of the site.

Your site should have been built on a platform that you can update.

- Don't be intimidated by the learning curve. Dive right in, and learn how to make the most of it. If you have questions, ask.
- Ask for "next steps" from your design company. Then do your best to follow them.

Even though your design firm will test everything, that's no substitute for you testing things. Especially test the following:

- All forms, that they send a message or notification like they should.
- All landing pages redirect where they're supposed to.
- All social profile links are accurate.
- All links work correctly.

There's actually one more secret you should know about your site...

## 14. A new website isn't the end. It's the beginning.

Now that you have a new website you have a platform to build content, create landing pages, and generate leads. But none of that will happen without ongoing work from you.

To be effective in content marketing, plan on spending 5-10 hours each week creating written blogs, shooting small videos, making presentations, developing downloadable content, and interacting with customers through email marketing and social media.

It may seem like a lot, but the results are well worth it. Create a plan and stick to it, and the results will come in time.



If you'd like to explore inbound marketing for your company, we'd be glad to talk through the process with you. [You can request an assessment of your existing site or your newly redesigned site, and we can help you get the process working for you.](#)

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