



PLANNING AND KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR A NEW WEB SITE:

Your Guide To Understanding What It Takes To Create A Winning Solution

By: Rock Multimedia Solutions – February, 2003

Rock Multimedia Solutions offers you this checklist so there are no surprises in the web site development process. It is important for new customers to understand all the elements that they will be responsible for when a new web site is being created. Please contact us with any questions you may have about items in the checklist.

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Once an organization has thought through all of these elements, it greatly improves their success in launching winning eBusiness solutions. Keep reading to understand more about each of these elements.

■ Internet, Intranet or Extranet – Define Your Audience and Establish Communication Goals

Identifying and understanding your audience is the first step in determining what kind of web site you want to build. The Internet is a great avenue to market your services and products to the general public...even globally. However, if you just want to share information, products, and services to a select group of people, a secure Intranet or Extranet offers more flexibility on how the site can be accessed.

An Intranet is appropriate for internal use at an organization wishing to share general and sensitive information to it's internal staff members at one or more locations.

An Extranet is appropriate when a select group of customers are provided access to proprietary information, products, and services.

Consider the average educational level of your users before making your site too complicated in its functionality.

■ Web Site Layout and Design

Do you have ideas about how you want your web site designed?—color schemes, fonts, and logos? How do you want users to navigate around your web site? Following are some tips to consider as you make these decisions.

1. The best tip for a good layout and design is to keep it simple! Keep navigation options obvious so that users do not get lost in your site and can find what they are looking for each time they visit. Avoid annoying banner ads, or at least use them at a minimum. Draw a visual map of your ideas.
2. It is best to stick with universal fonts that all users have installed on their computers such as arial, vendana, new times roman and the like. The use of sans serif fonts (such as, arial) are good for headings and titles, but the use of serif fonts (such as, new times roman) have much better readability qualities. I have a special affinity to “everything sans serif”, but this is not what the typography experts recommend. Special fonts can be embedded as graphics or embedded fonts, but they will increase the load time of your pages unless kept to a minimum.
3. Choose a color scheme that is easy to look at on the computer monitor. Every color also has a significant psychological value that could impact a users response to your use of color. For example reds and yellows could create excitement and compel someone to look quickly and move on. McDonald's uses the red and yellow colors to draw you in, feed you quickly, and get you out the door. This is not to say that you should not use these colors on your web site, just make good choices about the hue and brightness

values of each color, how the color(s) are used, and their purpose. Avoid dullness, but do not over-do it. Rock Multimedia Solutions can help you make these kinds of decisions if you are seeking advice.

- Use web safe only colors if you want users to see your page in the same way on any type of monitor. Non-web safe colors may look good on one monitor, but washed out on another. Following is a list of web safe colors to choose from:

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- Research web sites on the Internet and note why you like or do not like certain design styles. Look at different navigation methods and consider the style that might work best for your organization. We discourage use of frames to hold your navigation selectors. While it is faster to implement from our perspective, not all browsers and browser versions support frames. There are a number of design style templates that you can choose from by

6. searching the web for ideas. Do you want a Horizontal or Vertical Navigation bar? Would you prefer a more artistic navigation solution with icon selectors? You can even purchase design layouts from many resources such as: <http://tn.coolhomepages.com/chp/templates/0.html>.
7. Make good use of graphical elements to break up long pages of text. Visual objects will help your users maintain interest.
8. Keep site accessibility issues in mind when creating your web site. For example, blind users utilize screen readers to browse your site so be sure that “alt tags” are used on all images to explain what they are, and keep navigation in a simple, logical order that the disabled users will be able to follow.
9. Animated .gifs and Flash Animations are the latest trend with more and more users able to access these “flashy” solutions. They hold a users interest and keep things lively. But many disabled users will not be able to enjoy them, and many browsers still do not support them, or the user needs to download special players to see the animation or movie. They definitely have their place and Rock Multimedia Solutions can develop Flash movies for your web site needs.
10. Keep your web site professional looking. A poorly designed or unprofessional web site reflects on your business. Your web site should be about functionality and information first, and art second. But do not disregard the importance of aesthetics.
11. Even after you launch your web-based solution, continually evaluate its relevance. You will continually need to keep in step with changing user needs, technology, changing market demands, and other trends.

Functionality Requirements and Browser Support

How sophisticated do you want to get with your eBusiness solutions? Following are some examples:

Simple or Economy Solutions – would provide a means to market your services and products, or to disseminate and share information. These sites are more static in nature and may include a “Contact Us” submittable email form.

Intermediate Interactive Solutions – adds site or database search functionality, or other interactive options for visitors to your site. Submittable forms that populate a database would fit into this category as well.

Highly Sophisticated Collaborative Solutions – adds “shopping carts”, user-defined options (like “My Yahoo”), user-defined report queries, or highly secured

solutions that protect your organization and your users (password protected sites).

If you are unsure where you want to start, then always consider the simple solution first to test out the Internet waters. That will allow you to collect feedback from your user base so they can tell you what they are looking for as far as functionality, interactive tools, and search capabilities.

Also, consider the browser(s) that your users will likely utilize. No browser is created equally. Some browsers support the highly sophisticated solutions, and some do not. Here is a brief overview of the browsers being used as of this writing:

<u>Browser and Version</u>	<u>Market Share</u>
<i>Microsoft Internet Explorer v5.x</i>	24.9%
<i>Microsoft Internet Explorer v4.x</i>	44.7%
<i>Microsoft Internet Explorer v3.x</i>	3.6%
<i>Netscape Navigator v4.x</i>	22%
<i>Netscape Navigator v3.x</i>	2.3%
<i>Web TV</i>	1.4%
<i>Other</i>	1.1%

This list clearly shows that you should almost always develop web sites with functionality that is supported by both Microsoft Internet Explorer v4.0 or higher, and Netscape Navigator v4.0 or higher, so that at least 66.7% of all users can utilize the functionality. Unless, of course, you have control of the browsers your users utilize (for example, in an internal company setting for an Intranet solution). Rock Multimedia Solutions will advise you when certain functionality is not supported by the most popular browser versions.

■ Domain Name Research and Registration

The domain name is the www.websiteaddress.com name that users will enter to access your web site (or the <http://websiteaddress.com> or <https://websiteaddress.com> name for Intranets and Extranets). Many domain names have already been registered and may be unavailable for your use. It is important to register and secure the domain name you want as early as possible before someone else beats you to it. Do a quick check at www.powweb.com to see if your domain name is available. However, it is recommended that you register your domain name shortly after looking up its availability as some companies are in the business of snatching your domain name after you look it up. They do this in hopes of persuading you to purchase the domain name from them at much higher costs. So register it if you find it available! The hosting company that Rock Multimedia Solutions uses, www.powweb.com, only charges \$15 per year to register and park your domain name.

You may also hire Rock Multimedia Solutions to research and register your domain name. We can also offer suggestions on alternative domain names

when the one you want is already registered. Be prepared to be flexible on the final domain name that you choose.

Content, Artwork, and Image Preparations

Your organization also needs to begin the preparation of the content to be included in the web site. Text content is best submitted in Word format (Microsoft Office 2000 for Rock Multimedia Solutions). The .gif file format is best for clean logos (at 72 resolution), and .jpg files (also at 72 resolution) are best for images and other artwork to be included. It is easy to keep file size to a minimum when using the .jpg format so that your pages load quickly.

Will users have the ability to download content such as white papers, instructions, news releases, newsletters, or other material from your web site? The Adobe Acrobat .pdf format is recommended to meet this need. It is easy for users to use, and Adobe offers free Adobe Acrobat readers from their web site. If you include .pdf downloads, include a link for the user to download the Adobe Acrobat reader in the off chance that they do not have it already. You are currently reading an Adobe Acrobat .pdf file.

You may also need to prepare databases that may need to be accessed from your web site. Work with us to structure your database so that it works efficiently with your web site. Rock Multimedia Solutions recommends Microsoft Access file formats.

Rock Multimedia Solutions offers a number of services to help you prepare your artwork and images for your web site: scanning services, image optimization (reducing large file sizes), image corrections (for color, dust, scratches, etc.), image slicing (to prevent unlaw downloads of your copyrighted images), graphic artwork creation, Adobe Acrobat .pdf file creation (from your Word documents and other other file formats), and much more. Just tell us what you need.

Having a clear idea about your content will expedite the development of your web site.

Ongoing Content Management Needs

In most cases, your content needs will not end when the initial web site is created. This may not apply to very static web site solutions, but most organizations will want to put processes in place to keep their content “fresh”. When information is outdated, it should be updated. When information (like a seminar date) is irrelevant, it should be removed. As your organization grows, so should your web site.

Rock Multimedia Solutions can offer a number of proven processes to help you keep up with your changing content needs.

■ Copyright Obligations

Rock Multimedia Solutions encourages strong ethical use of material, information, artwork, and images on all web sites. If you do not own it, or you do not have permission from the right full owner, than do not use it on your web site. The last thing you want is a lawsuit after launching a great web site solution. Work with an attorney, or internal legal resources, to validate your plan, when appropriate.

It is also important to protect your own organization from the unlawful use of your material, information, artwork, and images. Include copyright and trademark identifications where applicable, and make it difficult for users to steal your work (with the use of watermarks, sliced images, etc.).

Rock Multimedia Solutions will not accept any legal responsibility for the content provided by your organization in the creation of your web site.

■ Hosting Vendor Selection

Selecting a reliable and affordable hosting vendor is an important step in the web site creation process. The type of solution you are implementing (simple to sophisticated) will help narrow down the list of appropriate hosting vendors that will meet your needs. Not all hosting vendors support shopping carts, database queries, and other more sophisticated solutions. If needed, Rock Multimedia Solutions will work with you to help you select the appropriate vendor.

The Rock Multimedia Solutions web site is hosted by www.powweb.com for a very reasonable cost.

■ Site Testing

Rock Multimedia Solutions can test your site in a number of environments, using various browsers. However, your participation in testing is invaluable. Your organization's involvement is critical to the overall success of your web site. The size of the solution will determine the effort needed for testing. Rock Multimedia Solutions offers you strong project management skills to help define the best test strategy, test environment, automated testing tools, and resources needed to implement your individualized plan.

Your organization will be the best “proof-reader” of content to be sure that everything is in its proper place, referenced correctly, and in some cases, spelled correctly.

■ Launch Plans, Marketing, and Search Engine Optimization

This is the most exciting part of the process! Your web site is about to be launched to your targeted audience and you can start to the watch the hit counter

tick with “hits”! Plan ahead to create appropriate launch announcements and/or advertisements to your users. Rock Multimedia Solutions can help you with this task. We can also help you write a good Search Engine “description” and help you to define good “keywords” that users might search on. This information needs to be embedded into the HTML code on your page(s) in the web site.

With thousands of new web pages going up every day, the task of getting your web site noticed has become increasingly difficult. Add to that, the tactics that some site owners will pursue to get their own site recognized and ranked high in search engine results. Work with us to develop your online marketing strategy!

We offer services to get your web site located on the World Wide Web utilizing some of the most popular search engines like www.google.com, www.yahoo.com, and other popular (sometimes fee-based) search engines. Certain search engines only apply to specific topics or industry-types so we can tell you which search engines will work best for your needs. We will help you get your web site registered with the best search engines so users can find it.

It is also important to integrate this marketing solution (your web site) with all of your other marketing solutions. Do not treat them separately, but as co-existing allies. This will better enhance your chances for success. Consider ways to measure your success. Do not expect instantaneous results, but set realistic goals and measure your progress. Pursue industry-related accolades to further promote your web presence and your business!

Break out the champagne!

Ongoing Site Maintenance

There is more to ongoing site maintenance than just keeping content fresh and up-to-date. Rock Multimedia Solutions can help you manage:

1. Continued Search Engine Optimization (or you risk falling back to low rankings in search results, or worse, falling off search engine lists entirely).
2. Statistical Reporting so you have a daily record of site usage. Custom solutions can even be implemented that tracks traffic to each page, or specific item on your web site.
3. Continued Browser Compatibility Testing and Usage Review so that as browser versions advance, your site remains accessible to the masses.
4. Link Updating to validate that bad links and email links are fixed or removed. Users hate to see the “Page Can Not Be Displayed” message!
5. General Maintenance to update content as requested.
6. Uploading your site and any site changes to your web hosting vendor.
7. Maintenance of email accounts with web hosting vendor, where appropriate.
8. Ongoing Page Loading Optimization to make sure that page loading is as quick as possible when content changes, and/or increases.

9. Creation of backup CD's each time the site changes.

Rock Multimedia Solutions offers a variety on Ongoing Maintenance Contracts to meet your specific needs. Choose from a monthly contract that provides “x” hours of work each month, to hourly rates on an as-needed basis. Monthly contracts will offer the most cost-effective means to maintain your web site. It is usually advisable to budget about half the cost of the initial web site development for yearly ongoing maintenance costs, building in inflation for each additional year.

Backup Considerations

It is important to keep a backup of your site in the event a web hosting vendor suffers an outage, goes out of business, or has some other unfortunate event that could take your web site offline. In instances of highly sophisticated, security dependent web sites, you should contract with a web hosting vendor that offers comprehensive disaster recovery and business continuity plans and procedures.

Rock Multimedia Solutions will provide the web site owner one copy of the web site on CD, and will do its best to retain that master web site for up to one year. Once you take ownership of your web site, Rock Multimedia Solutions has no obligation to retain the web site files, unless a special arrangement has been made in writing. If you contract with Rock Multimedia Solutions to maintain your web site, we will send you a new CD each time your web site changes, unless other arrangements have been agreed upon.

In any event, make sure you have a backup plan! We can recommend Disaster Recovery planning experts for sophisticated solutions that carry more risk.

Insurance Needs Analysis

Consider any additional insurance-related risks that might become pertinent with the launch of a web site. Talk to your insurance agent for advice before you commit to developing a new solution. Rock Multimedia Solution's roots are from eBusiness solutions created for the insurance industry. We have many great brokerage contacts to refer you to if you need assistance.

Web Site Creation Agreements and Ongoing Maintenance Contracts with Rock Multimedia Solutions

Feel free to request copies of our contracts and agreements for your review. In general, Rock Multimedia Solutions requires signed Hold Harmless Agreements saving us from any liability issues that might arise out of your web site, its content, copyright and trademark issues, and the like.

We will also require sign-offs throughout various stages of the web site development process. Site Map hierarchy, page layout/design, pre-testing, post-

testing, final delivery are some examples that might apply to your situation for sign-offs.

Summary

This should illustrate the initial and ongoing commitment that a good web site solution involves, including the commitment your web site developer needs to fulfill. Rock Multimedia Solutions can guide you through all of these processes to help you make the best decisions about the options available. Please contact us at webmaster@rockmultimediasolutions.com to learn more. You can trust our commitment to quality and professionalism to facilitate your awaiting eBusiness and marketing successes.