

Organise, Structure and Style

*This article aims to share **5** simple guiding principles that will help you start to organise your website, improve your content and develop a style that reflects your needs.*

Who should read this?

The guides and advice featured are written from a non-technical perspective and are aimed at those who have little or no experience in the development process of producing a professional website.

This publication is intended to be used as an additional resource for freelance web-designers, small web-design teams and their clients.

Article Sections

Website pages.....	0.1
Website structure.....	0.2
Website navigation.....	0.3
Website content.....	0.4
Website colours.....	0.5

0.1

Website pages

Lets create a list!

One of the first steps in planning your website is to create a list of all the pages that you might need. A small website might only include a few pages: i.e. home, products, contact-us and about-us. However, if you are thinking about creating a larger website you will obviously need to plan for many more pages.

Identifying your pages

To help identify your pages try spending some time thinking about your websites goals, its purpose and its target audience. It might also be a good idea to research other sites similar to yours to see how they've organised their information.

Don't worry too much about the length of your list, just write down all the pages you think you might need; we will be looking at organising and

structuring the pages later on in the next section. E-commerce stores or very large database websites often require a very different approach; in this article we will focus on small to medium sized websites.

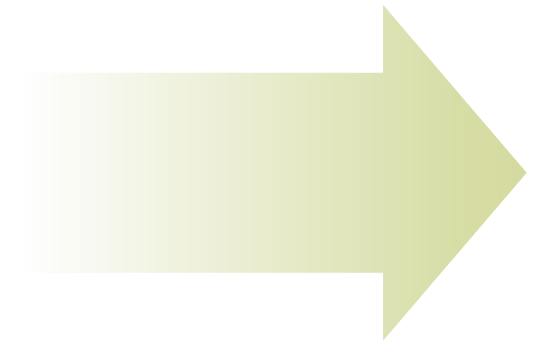
To give you an example of a typical set of site pages we have listed the pages of a fictional software company.

1. Home page
2. Company Services
3. Company information
4. Support pages
5. Discussion Board
6. UK Division
7. Ireland Division
8. Scotland Division
9. Contact
10. Company Location map
11. Writing Software
12. Graphic Software
13. Website Software
14. Software updates
15. Extras
16. Software books
17. Book 1
18. Book 2

19. Testimonials
20. Copyright information
21. Privacy Statement
22. Accessibility Statement
23. Links
24. Events
25. Jobs
26. Faq

Our pages so far

As you can see, we have managed to identify a total of 26 pages for our fictional software company, it's now time to start thinking about arranging these pages into website sections.



0.2

Website Structure

Organising your website's sections

To help your visitors locate what they came to find we now need to arrange your pages logically into various sections and then into sub-sections. This will enable us to present a clearly defined structure that follows a logical order and is easy to use.

- Home
 - Copyright and privacy information
 - Accessibility Statement
 - Jobs
- Software
 - Writing Software
 - Graphic Software
 - Website Software
 - Software updates
- Company
 - Testimonials

- Company Services
- Events
- Contact
 - UK Division
 - Ireland Division
 - Scotland Division
 - Company Location map
- Links
 - Software Books
 - Software book 1
 - Software book 2
- Support
 - Discussion Board
 - Faq

As you can see the website structure is starting to take some shape, it is no longer just a long list of potential pages.

Some pages have been combined and others organised into a logical order of primary sections and sub-sections. We can now use the website structure as the building blocks for our next task, preparing a graphical website map.

Graphical site map or site diagram

Whatever the size of your website its always a

good idea to develop a graphical website map (see fig 0.2). A website map is a set of simple diagrams that describes the information architecture and the interaction of pages on your site. A website map is a valuable tool for clients and web designers alike as it helps define the sites structure in a visual context.

Apply a user-led approach

Its a good idea to initially draw up your website map with pencil and paper. When creating the map always apply a user-led approach; try to anticipate what the user wants and then layout the page structure in an easy to follow way. Use arrows or lines to show how the pages will be hyper-linked together. It's also a good idea at this stage to give each page a title; the title must reflect the content of the particular page. This is important as titles are often read by assistive technologies like screen reading software and search engines (like Google) use them to index your site. The website map helped to arrange, link and associate the individual pages that make up your website. We have now done enough groundwork to move on to the next phase, creating an easy to use navigation system.

0.3

Website Navigation

Consistent navigation

Website navigation often consists of a set of graphical buttons or interactive text links. Its important to locate the primary navigation and any other important information *above the fold* making sure it's clearly displayed. *Above the fold* is the section of a web page that is visible without scrolling. See fig 0.1.

As a rule of thumb, the primary links should not exceed seven. Sub navigation links are often seen just below the primary navigation or placed in the sidebar. It's also essential that the navigation system is consistent and arranged in a similar layout throughout your site.

A consistent navigation system enables your visitors to find your products or services efficiently, and works best when it's clearly defined, grabs attention and attracts the eye.

When it comes to naming your individual sections try to trim them down to one or two words. For example, imagine a set of primary navigation links like this...

1. Our company introduction page
2. Our company information structure
3. Our full selection of software products

Perhaps, the titles are a bit long; it might be better if they were written in a more concise way, for example:

1. Home
2. Company
3. Products

Trimming down your section names like this can help to reduce user confusion and makes better use of vital screen 'real estate'.



Fig: 0.1. Place important information 'above the fold'

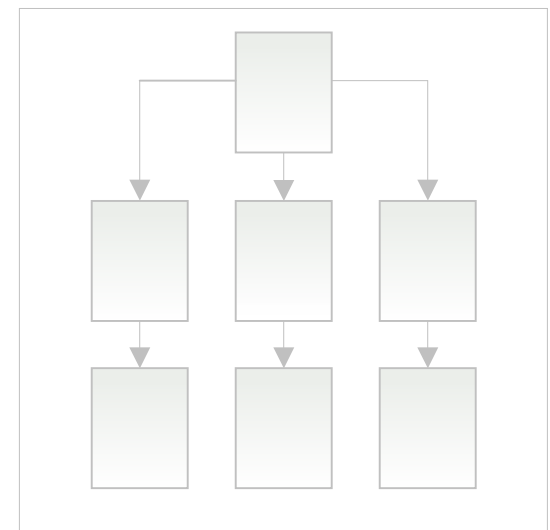


Fig: 0.2. Example of a very simple website map.

0.4

Website Content

Preparing your web copy

Reading from a computer screen is different from reading from a book or a newspaper; most of your visitors will 'scan a web page' looking for headings, keywords, or phrases. With this in mind the textual content will need be to the point, easy to read and concise. If you have a lot of content, it will need to be organised and hyper-linked into manageable chunks.

" The key to good 'chunking' is to divide your information into comprehensive segments. That way readers will have direct and complete access to the topics they are interested in without having to wade through irrelevant material or follow a series of links to get the whole picture" www.webstyleguide.com

Content quantity

The amount of information you have may

determine the layout style of your site, for example if your site is primarily an image-based portfolio with very little text you may need a site with a fixed width. Alternatively if you have reams and reams of text with many images, a fluid or flexible solution might be a better idea.

The argument over using fixed or fluid/flexible layouts has been debated many times by the web design community and there are pros and cons to either approach. At the end of the day it comes back to what's best for your target audience.

Write quality content

To write quality content you need to have a good awareness of your target audience. So assuming you know this, let's push on with a few tips.

- When writing the content for your website, try to develop a style that reflects the spectrum of your audience.
- Use simple sentence structures: long-winded writing and complex words are even harder to understand online.
- Each paragraph should include one key idea; use a second paragraph for a second idea.

- Use headings wisely, users rarely read web pages word by word; instead, they scan the page and look for keywords and headings.
- Use bulleted or numerical lists, more on this later.
- Bear in mind that the user may have entered your site from any page, so make every page independent and clarify its specific theme, don't assume the user has viewed the previous page/s.
- Put the most important information near the top of your pages, some users don't like to scroll down too much.
- Use present or present perfect tense. Write in the here and now, the web is often viewed as a live medium.
- Search engines look for good, relevant content, the text on your home page is probably the most important, make sure you explain your services clearly and spread your keywords evenly throughout your page.

- Words or phrases in bold or italics can help readers find what they want, however don't go over the top, too much bold or italic text can look messy!
- From time to time write fresh content; create a news-page and keep the most important pages up to date.
- If you really have to use last years article that was written for print, rewrite it for the web.

More on using bullet points

Bulleted and numbered lists slow down the scanning eye and can draw attention to important points, lists also help the reader make sense of the information on the page.

The following example is taken from Designing Web Usability by Jakob Nielsen.

Consider the following paragraph

Nebraska is filled with internationally recognized attractions that draw large crowds of people every year, without fail. In 1996, some of the most popular places were Fort Robinson State Park (355,000 visitors), Scotts Bluff National Monument (132,166), Arbor Lodge

State Historical Park & Museum (100,000), Carhenge (86,598), Stuhr Museum of the Prairie Pioneer (60,002), and Buffalo Bill Ranch State Historical Park (28,446).

Not that easy to read, now take a look at the same content using a bulleted list.

In 1996, six of the most-visited places in Nebraska were:

- Fort Robinson State Park
- Scotts Bluff National Monument
- Arbor Lodge State Historical Park & Museum
- Carhenge
- Stuhr Museum of the Prairie Pioneer
- Buffalo Bill Ranch State Historical Park

Check your spelling

Always double check all your copy for any spelling mistakes or grammatical errors. Remember your website is often a 'first point of contact' for many people. Basic spelling errors suggest a lack of professionalism and could reflect badly on your organisation as a whole.



0.5

Colour, Graphics and Photography

Using Colour

Choosing the right colours for your website is probably one of the most important design decisions you will make; colour often plays a vital role in giving your website its identity. You may already have a set of colours in mind, perhaps you are going to use the company colour scheme or you might just want to use your own preferred scheme. Either way there are a few guidelines worth taking into account.

- Always use harmonious colour selections.
- Try to keep the primary pallet down to three or four colours.
- Consider the fact that some users may be colour-blind, think about colour combinations wisely.

- Remember colour is often associated with emotion and feelings.
- Make sure that the colours you chose reflect your websites purpose.
- Remember that computer screens can make colours seem brighter than they are in print.
- Use a tool like Colormatch: www.colormatch.dk (requires Internet Explorer) to come up with a nice harmonious scheme.
- Try and remember to chose colours for your audience, its their website after all, don't just chose a colour scheme because you think it's pretty.
- Finally, your colour scheme can mean the difference between a great site and an unusable site, please choose it carefully!

Photography and other images

The use of positive and creative imagery is an essential component in the design of any visually engaging communication tool.

When used appropriately a relevant photograph or image can grab attention, establish a sense of

trust, and communicate much more than a paragraph of text.

- Creative imagery plays a vital role in communicating your skills and services
- A carefully placed photograph can enable a sense of trust or relaxation.
- Photographs or images can support a visitor to make online decisions.
- Photography creates an opportunity for customers to use their imagination.
- Photographs are a great way of creating a visual metaphor.
- Remember copyright; don't just grab photos from other people's websites.



Fig: 0.3. Always use harmonious colour selections.