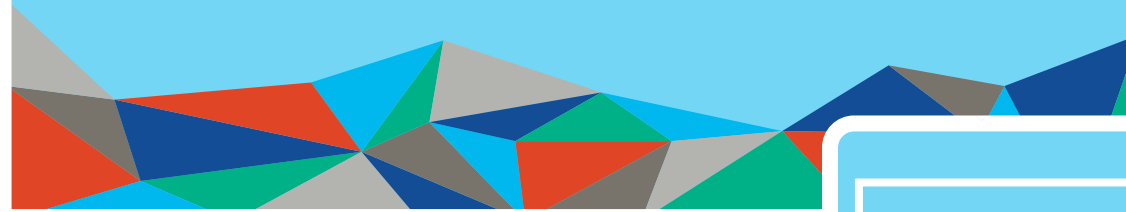


Avoid Common Website Redesign Pitfalls



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Introduction

Just the thought of a website redesign project can cause a marketing executive to shudder. While the idea of having a new online look is exciting, the execution is challenging, and marked by potential pitfalls: spending too much, taking too long, making a bad choice in digital providers, as well as other industry-specific obstacles.

Anyone who's been in business during the Information Age has probably had the misfortune of experiencing at least one bad website redesign project. It can leave a scar. However, that shouldn't stop companies from keeping their website updated and serving as a key business growth tool.

Most website projects fail due to poor planning or unrealistic expectations. We've found that many sales and marketing executives underestimate the potential of their website.

Ultimately, that's why we designed this guide: to help executives realize the potential of their website, prove that it's possible to avoid common mistakes and proactively manage expectations. From understanding your place in the market to creating cohesion for all of your business units, we hope to provide some useful insight that will make your redesign undertaking seem far less daunting.

Where to Start

The first step for any business hoping to undergo a website redesign is to establish business objectives. For example, consider the following questions:

- What kind of website do you need?
- Are you counting on getting sales leads from the website?
- Do you need to integrate the website with third-party software?
- Is there a business need driving the date for completion?
- Can you plan and build the website on your own, or do you need a partner?

Thinking about these things upfront, and making key decisions based on your company's specific needs, gives your website redesign project a better chance of running smoothly. Once your goals are established, you can take the following steps to prepare for the project.

Who's in Charge?

Designate the person responsible for taking ownership of the project. While there will be many hands in the collective redesign pot, picking that person—and defining the internal support team—goes a long way toward sustained success from the start of the project to the end. Keep in mind that projects succeed more easily when the person in charge has both the responsibility and the authority to make decisions.

Let Your Brand Standards Point the Way

Once the decision-maker has been established, it's always good to brush off your company's brand standards manual. This will serve as a solid compass for the look and feel of your site, as well as the tone of the content that will be needed to support it. While this might lead to formally defining or simply tweaking the brand standards, that's perfectly fine—you'd rather do that now than right after a redesign, right?



Gather Your Collateral

For additional brand support, you should also raid every office file cabinet for past collateral, photos, and creative briefs. Reviewing the evolution of your brand, as well as past campaigns, can shed insight on the direction you want to take today. Your brand is more than a logo; in fact, your brand should help provide the architecture and messaging of your site.

Determine the Kind of Site You Want to Have

We mentioned answering this question above, but the topic bears repeating. Deciding exactly what kind of site you want to have is your first major decision. Do you want one that supports sales or just create brand awareness? Is the website expected to generate sales qualified leads? Always remember that your website is a tool, one that should help you achieve your objectives.

Don't Sacrifice Function for Aesthetics

To be clear, a site should be visually appealing, with clean navigation and the user experience in mind. However, many business owners are pitched gorgeous sites that ultimately don't support their revenue goals. When it comes to your website, pretty is good. However, pretty and effective is better.



What to Expect from Your Site

After thinking about where to start, more questions will arise. That, in fact, is a good thing. This means you'll start turning your attention to what you should expect from a redesigned site.

Your company's website should be viewed as the center of your digital universe, the nexus where marketing, sales, and technology meet. Think about it: what element of your marketing, from business cards to trade shows to advertising, doesn't funnel a prospect back to your website? That's why you need to be so strategic.

Balance Today's Needs with Tomorrow's

While the website needs to support existing marketing investments, it also should create new opportunities to improve business effectiveness through digital marketing.

A well-designed, marketed, and maintained website can:

- Attract, qualify and nurture new sales leads.
- Reduce recruiting costs by making jobs more visible via search.
- Protect and grow market share by owning search results.
- Aid business development by uncovering new market opportunities.
- Provide digital marketing intelligence for sales research, improving the effectiveness of sales conversations.
- Align the online and offline sales pitches and offers to support sales and increase sales effectiveness.
- Reduce training time of new staff and create clarity for potential customers by clearly explaining the company's unique value proposition, processes, and services while setting proper expectations for prospects.
- Create consistency for customers by unifying the language between all customer-facing staff.
- Grow sales by increasing visibility via search, brand perception, and brand recognition.

These are just a few examples of how to form a strategy around current needs, as well as future ones. Dedicating time to consider your starting point, and to set expectations for your redesign, will go a long way toward determining the success of the project. While it's difficult to avoid some of the pitfalls we're about to outline, time spent planning at least gives you a fighting chance.

The Common Redesign Pitfalls

For 15 years, we've been building websites and analyzing redesign projects. We've identified seven key mistakes that frequently show up in the early stages of website redesign, and almost always lead to poor performance, lost opportunities, and unmet expectations.

Pitfall #1: Letting Ego-Based Decision-Making Lead the Way

Ego-based decision-making isn't just for people with big heads. "Ego" in this context literally means the "self."

What it sounds like: When you hear the words "I like these colors," "Our company believes," and "I think that visitors will," then you may be dealing with ego-based decision-making.

Why it's a potential pitfall: A website that just looks "the way we want it" may provide an accurate representation of your company, but it won't attract your audience effectively. Your customers don't just want to hear about you—they want to know what you can do for them. You're designing your website for customers. What you do - and what they do - likely differs.

What to do about it: Always place yourself in the shoes of your customer. When you think about your customer first, then the unique value your company brings to that customer becomes clearly evident. Use the customer data you've uncovered in planning to help design your site's content, structure, and appearance. And stop saying "we want," and start saying "our customer wants."

Pitfall #2: Allowing Expectations to Remain Unspoken

Unspoken expectations can come from anyone inside the company who has a voice in the project.

What it sounds like: When you hear, “Just make it work,” “It needs more bells and whistles,” or other vague instructions from project stakeholders without clearly stated requirements, you’re headed for serious problems with unspoken expectations.

Why it’s a potential pitfall: Without clear expectations, the project can’t gain the clarity necessary to move forward effectively. Early in the project, it may feel like “too many cooks in the kitchen” and near the end this feeling will manifest itself as general dissatisfaction. Often it leads to conflicts between the designers and project stakeholders, resulting in delays and expensive changes in scope.

What to do about it: Engage all key stakeholders early in the process to gain every ounce of input possible. Carefully solicit and manage expectations. Take the time to find out in detail what each stakeholder truly expects, needs and desires from the project, and then educate them regarding realistic opportunities. This will help keep them engaged throughout the process. It feels like extra effort, but the process will be smoother, and the end result better.

Pitfall #3: Simply Handing It Off to “The Computer People”

In many companies, the website is handled by the IT department. This seems like the logical solution—after all, a website requires strong technical expertise to create and manage.

What it sounds like: When you hear, “I don’t know much about technology,” or “Shouldn’t the IT department handle this?” you know you’re headed for trouble.

Why it’s a potential pitfall: The website is a marketing and sales tool. Handing the website off to technical staff who already have a full workload is similar to leadership by abdication. They’re not marketers. Their job is to keep the business operational. You can guess which priority will always win. This mistake will often manifest as delayed timelines, a hastily completed project and failure of the site to provide significant business value.

What to do about it: Encourage stakeholders to view the website as a business tool rather than a technical asset. Really, a variety of teams should be providing input and ideas: sales, customer service, marketing, human resources, and—of course—your IT team. While the site has a definitive technical component, as the central hub of online marketing efforts its true value lies in its power to support marketing and sales.

Pitfall #4: Failing to Receive Expert Guidance

Related to Mistake #3, this pitfall arises from the incorrect belief that a website is a simple project and that all web agencies are created equal.

What it sounds like: When you hear, “We can handle this internally,” or “Our printer also does websites,” it’s time to evaluate the project’s leadership.

Why it’s a potential pitfall: Having a background in marketing or even website design is not the same thing as owning the expertise to truly create an online sales and marketing platform. From marketing funnels to lead generation and user experience, transforming a website into a business growth tool takes a high level of expertise, and you need a digital marketing agency that aligns with your vision.

What to do about it: Look for demonstrated experience in understanding and measuring the business value of online assets. You want a guide who can point you to case studies where they have significantly improved results via website redesign. Ask to see the methods they use to determine return on investment (ROI).

Pitfall #5: Refusing to Budget Appropriately

While outstanding website redesign doesn't have to be outrageously expensive, choosing the cheapest web design services will almost always backfire, undermining your brand and hurting your sales. There are often other important budget line items to consider as well including project management, SEO copywriting, photography, video and other content-related expenses.

What it sounds like: When you hear, "We don't really have a budget—we'll just figure this out as we go," or "XYZ company only spent \$X on their site and it looks great!" you already have a problem, and it's only going to get worse.

Why it's a potential pitfall: These projects rarely get past the dreaming stage. Those that get off the ground are headed for a host of problems: unexpected expenses, projects held hostage by disgruntled team members, and resource gaps. At best, you may end up with a slick-looking site that provides no significant business value. At worst, the project can become dead weight, drawing on interminably, draining resources, costing more money than ever expected, and never coming to completion.

What to do about it: Ask website redesign providers detailed questions about what is included, what other expenses need to be considered, and how ROI will be measured. Read their case studies

and look for a demonstration of business value in prior projects. Expect them to understand how their work contributes to business performance. Internally, derive a realistic budget based on the overall value your website can bring to your entire business for the full lifetime of the site.



Pitfall #6: Forgetting to Vary Your Site's Content

In our experience, many companies look at content only as static copy. If that's the only content game plan for your site, then prepare to alienate many of the visitors who land there.

What it sounds like: When you hear, "Oh, we already have a lot of stuff written for our website," "Video shoots are too expensive," or "No one's going to read this anyway," then it's time to educate the stakeholders.

Why it's a potential pitfall: Creating effective content that supports the marketing function and learning styles of readers is much harder than it sounds. That's why it's important to let content specialists, from copywriters to videographers, use their expertise to ensure messaging is on target and engaging. The good news? The marketing personas you've created during the planning phase will lead the way here. While you have a variety of audiences, you also have a wide range of "absorbers." Some may be readers, but others may prefer lists, diagrams, infographics, or videos.

What to do about it: Budget accordingly for content as well as design, and ask your online marketing experts to include content in the package. You can also leverage subject matter experts within your own company for future efforts; a blog, for example, is an excellent platform to create a culture that leads to your

company establishing itself as a business authority. But in laying the initial groundwork, ensure a high level of visitor engagement by leveraging your digital marketing agency, and mixing up the ways you deliver messaging.



Pitfall #7: Neglecting the Mobile World

Today's consumer isn't sitting behind a desk when they're on the web. They're using their phones and tablets at a rate that continues to rise. Failing to include responsive design to ensure mobile compatibility means your shiny new site may not resonate with your customers.

What it sounds like: When you hear, "No one's going to visit our site on a smartphone," or "We'll worry about mobile later," this is a signal that key decision-makers might not understand current web usage trends.

Why it's a potential pitfall: Statistics support the reality that more and more users have shifted away from desktops and laptops when they're on the Internet. The rise of phones and tablets—and now the phablet—proves that surfing tendencies have changed dramatically. If you don't ensure that your site's user experience translates to mobile, then you might be missing out on half of your intended audience.

What to do about it: As mentioned previously, make sure the agency you retain has a UX designer on their team. These specialists ensure a positive user experience across all platforms. But even before this, you and your team must acknowledge mobile as an integral strategy from the start of the project. At best, tacking

it on at the end will be expensive. At worst, it will be impossible.
Our Six Steps for Success

Now that you know a few of the potential pitfalls, and you've chosen a digital marketing agency, what comes next? Every agency has a different m.o., so all we can do is give you a glimpse of what our process looks like.

Our six-step process is something we've honed over the last 15 years. As we mentioned earlier, when it comes to digital marketing, there are no cookie-cutter strategies. However, we've found our process serves as a good roadmap for success across a wide range of industries.

Our six-step process is composed of the following phases:

1. Discovery and Planning

This step involves developing a deep understanding of your company's mission, objectives, products/services, markets, and audience. The only way this can happen is through interviews of key stakeholders and customers. A thorough discovery process will produce marketing personas and strategy, which lay the foundation for everything else.

2. Architecture and Content Strategy

In this phase, we plan content around target audiences (i.e., the marketing personas), as well as develop the information architecture (site structure and navigation). From there, we uncover valuable search phrases for search engine optimization (SEO), create key messages, and build calls-to-action. SEO is an integral part of our design process, which is why our websites generally see significant search rankings lift upon launch.

3. Design

In this phase, the site starts to take shape. Using the strategy, audience research, and content, we create a design with the user experience in mind that hits four key goals: it supports the corporate branding, fulfills the business objectives, addresses the needs of the various audience members and provides a scalable foundation that supports future growth.

4. Development

This step is where a lot of behind-the scenes action takes place. Bi-weekly releases provides an agile development process that supports the inevitable changes that occur during a website design project. By using an agile development process, release times are shortened through continuous testing and real-time feedback.

5. Testing and Deployment

After a thorough internal Quality Assurance (QA) process, the website is released to the client for final testing, internal launch, and feedback. Finally, the moment of truth arrives: the website is launched.

6. Marketing and Management

Thought the launch was the end? It's not. Now our focus shifts to the marketing and management phase. We work with our clients to continually improve online marketing for the brand. This includes increasing online visibility, engaging visitors, capturing sales leads, keeping content up-to-date and relevant, analyzing visitor traffic and behavior, all the while making recommendations to meet objectives, and to respond to market shifts and opportunities.

There's no way these six paragraphs could go into every detail about a website redesign process, but hopefully this gives you a clearer understanding of what to expect. It's worked well for us, as well as for our clients.



Want to Learn More About Us?

While this document offers strategic insights and up-to-date web trends, we also acknowledge that learning more sometimes leaves readers feeling even more overwhelmed. However, have no fear. If you're ready to take the next step, we're here to help.

[Knowmad](#) is a [Digital Marketing agency](#) located in Charlotte, NC. We work with clients across the U.S., helping them to build their own lead generation engines using Inbound Marketing. Our passion is creating clarity and measurable results. We do this by guiding our clients on how to use the web to improve sales and marketing performance—which, of course, includes redesigning websites. As a result, our clients have experienced a 200-500% increase in online lead generation. Our clients can be found in a wide range of industries and organizations, including manufacturing, B2B services and technology.

If you're interested in receiving a free [website assessment](#), we're only an email or a phone call away. We're more than willing to take a look at your current site, and chart a path for your website redesign project. This will give us a feel about what your goals are, and what you need your new website to accomplish.

We look forward to speaking with you about how to boost your online marketing!



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