An Introduction to Growth Driven Design

Learn what it takes to launch a website in a fraction of the time of a traditional website design.

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Foreword by Trish Lessard

It's been a few years since I have been as excited as I am today to share with you a new and (proven) approach to website design.

For the past 18 years, I've felt the website redesign process was flawed. So many companies have outdated websites because a complete redesign is incredibly stressful and time-consuming.

In early 2014, Media Junction embarked on a new approach to website design. A client, Avella, wanted to get their website up quickly and make enhancements based on real data about how customers actually use their site. So that's exactly what we did.

We launched Avella's website in only 60 days - a fraction of the time of a traditional redesign. Over the past year, we've worked with their team to continually improve their website—and their results have been incredible.

Growth Driven Design is revolutionary. It's the process we now recommend to our clients—and how we chose to update our own website.

This ebook is a must read if you're considering a website redesign. Learn what's wrong with the traditional web design process and decide if Growth Driven Design is right for your company.

Table of Contents

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Introduction

You are wasting time and resources on your website and don't even know it.

For six years I ate, slept, and breathed web design. Working both internally and at agencies, I launched hundreds of websites and just over a year ago I realized everything I thought I knew about the web design process was completely wrong.

What we have come to accept as the standard way we approach building and maintaining a website is riddled with systemic risk and is costing your business time, money and opportunity.

But there is a better way, a new way to approach your website that holds tremendous potential for you and your business. It's time to take a step back and challenge the assumptions of the traditional web design process.

My hope in writing this book is to open your eyes to a smarter approach to website design so you can avoid website disasters, produce better results, impress your boss and grow your business.

-Luke Summerfield

Traditional Web Design is Broken

Your website is your biggest marketing asset and is the centerpiece of all your marketing activities. The first place people go is the website when looking for more information on your products or services. All of our marketing efforts and the first place prospects come looking for information is the website.

Your best salesperson is your website. Did you know a prospect has already moved through 70% of the sales process before even reaching out to your sales team? How do you think they find the information before talking to someone? – Your website.

Unfortunately, the way we approach building and improving our websites is fundamentally broken.

The Traditional Website Design Process

I love the look people give me when I ask them about their last website redesign project. Most tilt their head back, roll their eyes and cringe in disgust, remembering what a headache it was.
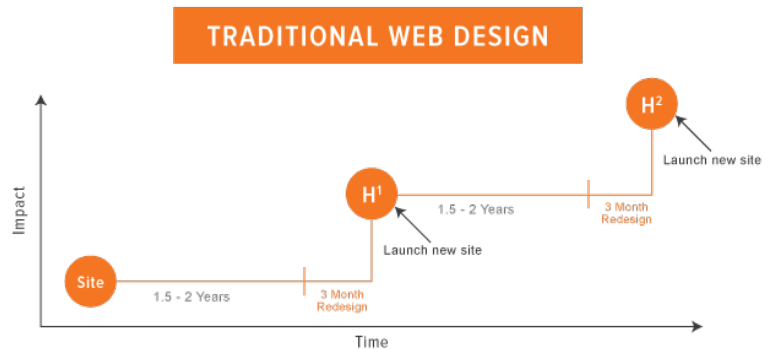
Think back to your last website redesign project you did with your company and ask yourself:

◇ How would you describe the overall experience?

◇ What went right and wrong in the process?

◇ How much time/energy/resources did it take to finally get live?

◇ Did it get launched on time or on budget?

◇ After the launch, how much continuous improvement has happened to it?

◇ How excited are you to do another website redesign?

Traditional Web Design is Broken (cont.)

Chances are you didn't enjoy your last website redesign project.

The approach causes that pounding headache of website redesign.

Traditional Web Design

Large Up-Front Cost: The average small to medium-sized business (SMB) website costs anywhere between $15,000 - $80,000 up-front. The website requires the full payment before going live.

Large Time & Resource Commitment: The average SMB website takes three months to complete and requires a great deal of resources and energy from your team.

Not Set in Stone: Large projects can fluctuate in cost and time, which makes accurate quotes difficult.

Project delays and increased budgets happen sometimes.

No Prototype: The Traditional method launches a website that should succeed in theory. However, this method lacks a "trial and error" run with viewers.

Trial and error helps determine what works for viewers and what does not, which is beneficial in the design process.

After launch, a website has no major updates for 1.5 to 2 years.

Our #1 marketing asset and best salesperson, our website, now sits unchanged for years, which is not conducive to maximize website performance.

Some small updates or improvements may happen, along with adding blogs or landing pages to the site, but the vast majority of the site remains untouched.

The Shift Marketers Need to Make

How can we approach the website redesign process from a different angle?

We need to find a process that produces a quick and agile website, and produces viewer feedback prior to completion.

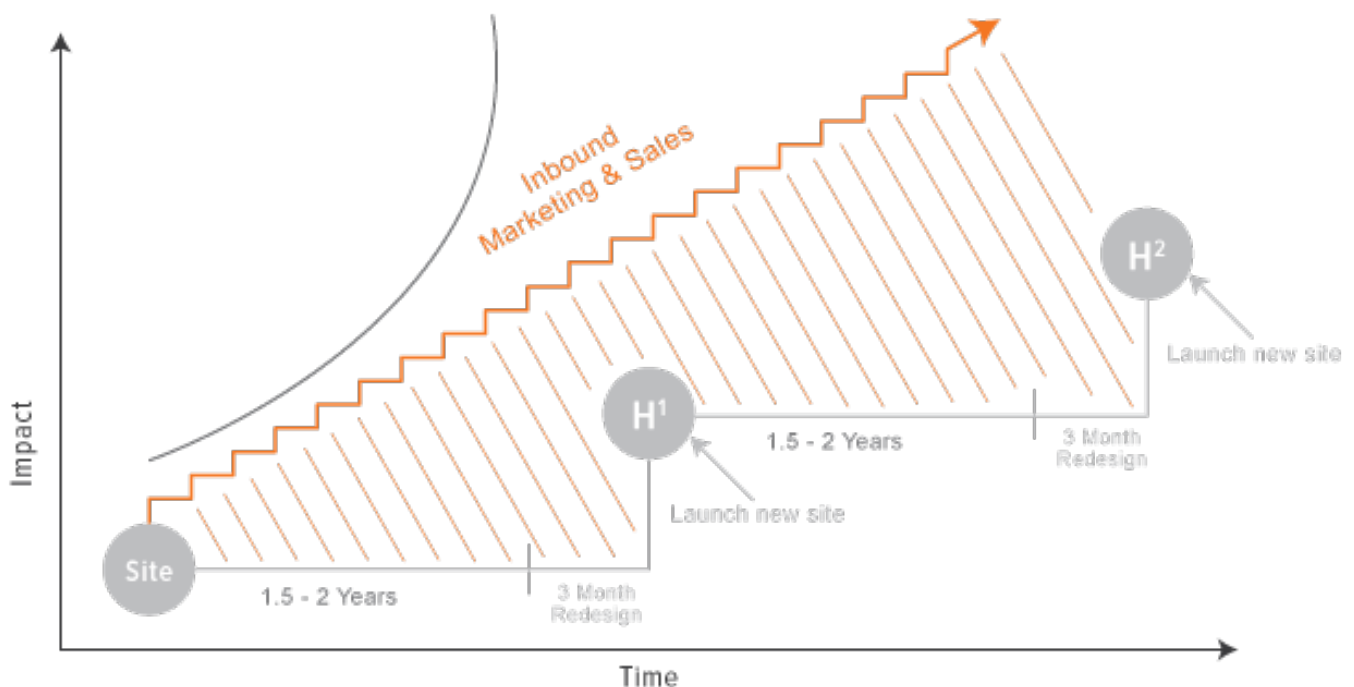What is that process? – **Growth-Driven Design.**

A Smarter Way to Think About Web Design

Growth-Driven Design changes our approach and way of thinking about building and growing the website.

The Three Pillars of Growth-Driven Design

01

Minimize risks associated with traditional web design.

We work to avoid the risks of traditional web design by taking a systematic approach to shorten the time to launch, focusing on real impact and continuous learning and improvement.

02

Continuously learn and improve.

We are constantly researching, testing and learning about our visitors to inform on-going website improvements. Through continuous improvements we can reach peak performance.

03

As you learn, inform marketing and sales (and vice versa).

Growth-Driven Design is tightly integrated with marketing & sales. What we learn about visitors helps inform and improve marketing & sales strategies and tactics (and vice versa).

The Growth-Driven Design Process

The Growth-Driven Design process is broken up into two major phases:

PHASE 1: STRATEGY / WISHLIST / LAUNCH PAD WEBSITE

Strategy

Much like the traditional website design process, the first stage of Growth-Driven Design is the strategy stage.

In this stage we'll develop a rock solid foundation that we can build our Growth-Driven Design process upon using the following steps:

Goals: What are the performance goals that we are trying to achieve with our website? How have we historically performed, where would we like to improve and how will this impact the overall marketing department's goal?

For help with setting and tracking goals, download HubSpot's free S.M.A.R.T. (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound) marketing goals Excel template.

Personas: Next you will develop detailed persona profiles for the different types of groups visiting the site.

A persona is a fictional representation of your ideal customer. You can create different groups of personas based on common characteristics your audience shares. This could be a point of pain, industry, job title, etc.

As you'll learn later in the book, Growth-Driven Design centers around the user, so it is critically important to fully research and develop your persona profiles in the beginning, as they will set the stage for all future activities.

To learn how to create personas for your business, download HubSpot's free buyer persona PowerPoint template.

The Growth-Driven Design Process (cont.)

Quantitative Research - Website & Analytics Audit: Time to start digging into the data. Analyze the current website's performance and perform a quantitative audit of the good and the bad.

As you do this, identify where the website can improve.

Through interpreting our quantitative data, we can create a hypothesis around what we can improve, how we can improve it, and relatively how much impact our improvement can have. We can then test our hypothesis with an experiment, and use our quantitative data to measure the results.

NISSA THUMANN - MEDIA JUNCTION - DEVELOPER

Qualitative Research - User Research: After proactively reaching out to your existing users to learn more about them, use the data to better understanding of who they are and find ways to improve.

As you're collecting new user research, validate the assumptions you put in your original persona profiles. More often than not you can include additional information.

Through qualitative research, we're able to observe the user's goals, motivations, and pain points in action. This helps us to develop an understanding for the human behaviors that are tied to the quantitative data points that we've collected.

As a result, we can begin to empathize and design for the human on the other side of the monitor, thus improving our user experience and moving the needle on key performance indicators like conversion and retention.

RYAN VONBERGEN- MEDIA JUNCTION - DESIGNER

The Growth-Driven Design Process (cont.)

Fundamental Assumptions: Using what you've learned in all of the previous steps, you can now start forming some fundamental assumptions about your users.

Some examples of fundamental assumptions include:

◇ Value propositions for each product, service and offer

◇ The various locations and devices users will be accessing your website from

◇ What information your users are looking for

These fundamental assumptions help you explain the behavior and motivations of your users. They influence both the global and page strategy, and also future Growth-Driven Design cycles.

Global & Page Strategy: The last step in the strategy phase develops both a global strategy for the website as a whole and a specific page-by-page strategy for each major page on the site.

Both the global and individual page strategies should incorporate all of the previous steps. Also, they should lay out a detailed strategy of exactly how to best engage and influence the user to best attain your goals.

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The Growth-Driven Design Process (cont.)

Your Wishlist

The next stage in the Growth-Driven Design process is to create a wishlist. Taking what you've learned in your strategy planning, gather your team together and brainstorm every impactful, creative and innovative idea that you'd like to include on the site.

Go into your brainstorming session with a "clean slate" – don't get hung up on the existing website. What items do you need on your list to achieve your goals? Answer this disregarding the issues of money, time, and development skill.

Include brainstorming ideas such as:

◇ Key impactful website sections and pages

◇ Marketing assets, tools and resources

◇ Specific features, modules and functionality

◇ Design elements

◇ Changes in experience based on devices, country, etc.

After a few hours of brainstorming, you and the team should have a list of 50-150+ ideas for the new website. Not all of these items will be implemented right away, but start to think of as many ideas as possible.

Your wishlist determines both the initial action items to implement on the new site, and the agile and flexible list that continuously changes. Adding to and subtracting from the agile and flexible list re-prioritizes action items over time.

The Growth-Driven Design Process (cont.)

Launch Pad Website

In the traditional web design process we launch websites at the finish. In Growth-Driven Design we launch websites right away.

In this stage, we build and launch what we call a "Launch Pad website". All of your other Growth-Driven Design activities and improvements start from this Launch Pad website.

Launch the imperfect Launch Pad website quickly. We want to avoid getting stuck on analysis, features or content while building our launch pad website. No one launches a perfect website on the first go. However, your launch improves your current website and gives a starting point on which to continuously improve.

The size and complexity of the Launch Pad website varies depending on what you have on your wishlist and what type of website you have. Shorten your list to 20% of the original. This short list makes an impact and launches quickly so you can continue to learn about your users and improve the site.

The Growth-Driven Design Process (cont.)

Run an 80/20 Analysis on Your Wishlist

In the wishlist phase we compiled a long list of all the action items we'd ideally want on the site. Start sorting and prioritizing these wishlist items to determine which action items happen first. Implement those on the launch pad website.

Review the list with your entire team and identify the 20 percent of items that will produce 80 percent of the impact and value for your website's users. Once you have identified those core 20 percent of items, pull them to the side and do some additional filtering by asking yourself, "Is this action item...?"

A "must have" or actually a "nice to have"? – If you answer "nice to have" then it will return back to the main list.

Then with the remaining items ask:

Is this absolutely necessary for the initial Launch Pad site, or could we build it into the site in month two or month three?

Narrow your focus. The "Must Have" action items provide the most impact. Narrow down to these core action items to ensure a quick launch.

The Growth-Driven Design Process (cont.)

Hypothesis Statements for Each Core Action Item

Once we have narrowed down our list of action items for the Launch Pad website down to the most impactful 20%, then create a "hypothesis statement" for each one of the action items.

The hypothesis statement allows us to gain clarity on how each action item relates back to the goals we're trying to achieve, the persona we're focusing on, and the expected impact.

Here's an example hypothesis statement:

ACTION ITEM 1
Hypothesis Statement

For [MARKETING MARY] visiting the [PRICING PAGE], we believe changing [ENTERPRISE PRICING] into a [REQUEST A QUOTE] will [BOOST MQL CONVERSION BY 10%]

We believe this to be true because [RESEARCH OR PREVIOUSLY VALIDATED ASSUMPTION]

Expected Impact + Effort Required + Metrics Measured + Definition of Complete

At the bottom of each statement, there are four important items:

Expected Impact - A single number based on the value the visitor receives from the action item and the impact that will have in moving toward your goals.

Effort Required - A single number that represents the combination of the number of hours, resources and difficulty to implement that particular action item.

Metrics Measured - Specific metrics you need to measure to test this specific action item and evaluate if your hypothesis was correct. The more specific the metrics are that you list, the better.

Definition of Complete - All the steps you need to complete in order to consider this action item complete. Defining this up front helps us avoid any grey areas that may arise down the road when reviewing results or efficiency.

The Growth-Driven Design Process (cont.)

Web Process Steps

Once you have identified the most critical action items to include on your Launch Pad site, you can run those items through the standard website implementation process, including:

◇ Messaging & Content

◇ User Experience (UX) & Site Architecture

◇ Inbound Marketing Strategy Alignment

◇ Wireframes

◇ Designs

◇ Development

◇ Quality Assurance and Testing

Set Up Data Collection

The last step of the Launch Pad website sets up qualitative and quantitative data collection around:

◇ Your goals defined in the strategy phase

◇ Each of your fundamental assumptions

...AND

◇ Each hypothesis statement of your action items implemented in the Launch Pad website.

Also, set up data collection. It allows you to start learning about your visitors once your Launch Pad site is live.

Just launched a new website?

Have you recently launched a website, but want to implement the Growth-Driven Design continuous improvement model? No problem!

You can use your existing website as your launch pad website and move right to phase 2, the on-going cycle of Growth-Driven Design.

The Growth-Driven Design Process (cont.)

PHASE 2: THE GROWTH-DRIVEN DESIGN CYCLE

Continuous Improvement

Your Launch Pad website is live. Time to start your on-going cycles to continuously experiment, learn, and improve on your website.
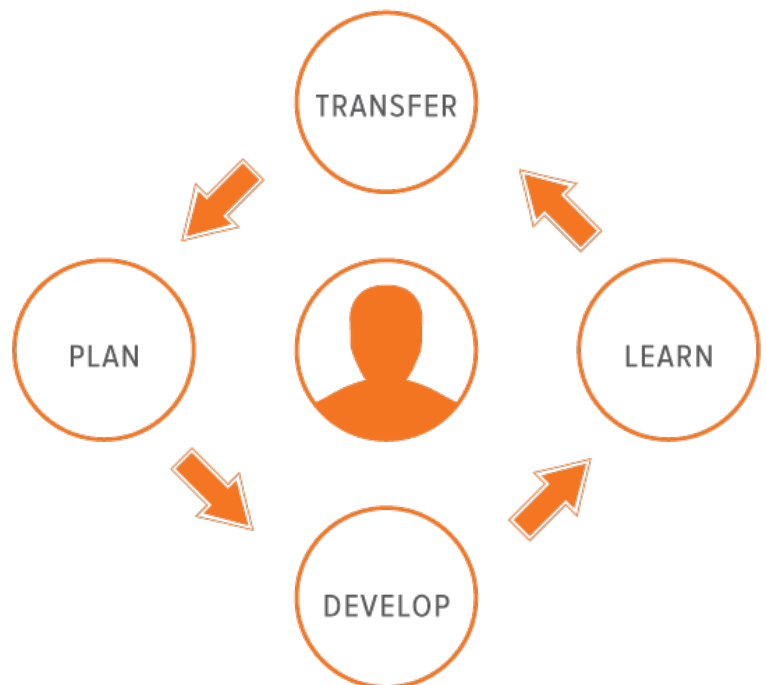
You still have a long wishlist of impactful items that you'd like to implement on the site. This agile list should be updated on a regular basis.

This Revolves Around the Persona

This entire cycle starts with and revolves around the personas who are coming to your website.

At each stage of the cycle, continuously ask yourself how this relates and provides value to the personas visiting your website.

If at any point it becomes unclear how an action item provides value to, or relates to the persona, take a step back and re-evaluate what you're working on.

TRANSFER

PLAN

LEARN

DEVELOP

The Growth-Driven Design Process (cont.)

Cycle Step 1 : Plan

First, the Growth-Driven Design cycle needs planning. Identify the most impactful items at the current moment. Plan to implement the top ones into the current cycle.

A number of steps go into the planning phase:

Performance vs. Goals: Review the current performance of the website and contrast that to your goals. This informs you of important opportunities.

Additional Data or Research: After the last cycle, review your performance vs. goals. Often additional data and research may need to happen in order to help clarify what action items you should add to your wishlist.

Learning from Marketing & Sales: Connect with the marketing and sales teams. Determine the key items learned about the user since your last cycle.

This information can hold insight that can transfer to your action items implemented in your Growth-Driven Design program.

Here's an Example ...

The marketing team may have written a blog on a particular topic that exploded in popularity and resulted in a great number of organic and social visitors.

We've now learned that this topic is important to your personas. How can you take that knowledge and add new items to your wishlist to influence your Growth-Driven Design program?

Brainstorm and Prioritize Wishlist: Based on all of the new data, research and learnings gathered at this point, brainstorm again to determine any new action items to add to the wishlist.

The Growth-Driven Design Process (cont.)

Generally speaking, your action items fit within these buckets:

BOOST CONVERSION	IMPROVE UX	PERSONALIZE TO THE USER	BUILD MARKETING ASSETS
◇ Conversion points ◇ User path ◇ Testing value props ◇ Split Testing	◇ Navigation ◇ Ex: Blog Layout ◇ UI improvements ◇ Mobile experience	◇ Navigation ◇ Ex: Blog Layout ◇ UI improvements ◇ Mobile experience	◇ Tools ◇ Marketing resources ◇ Directories / listings ◇ SEO-focused asset

Boost Conversions: The first bucket of wishlist activities directly relate to conversion rate optimization.

Improve User Experience: Improvements to the website give the user a better experience and make it easier for them to navigate. They find what they are looking for and solve their problem(s).

Personalize to the User: Adapting the site, calls-to-action, content offers, etc. to the specific visitor based on the data we know about them. This includes tailoring based on interests, persona, device, geolocation, referral source or previous actions on your site.

Build Marketing Assets: Marketing assets hold great value for your marketing program, such as email lists, social accounts, your blog, etc.

Build new marketing assets into the website such as tools, in-depth resource sections, online training, directories, etc. -- any item that provides great value to both the end user and your company.

A great example of a marketing asset is HubSpot's Marketing Grader. Users get a detailed report of their digital marketing efforts and HubSpot gains links, data and leads.

General Website Updates: General website updates come up from time to time and can be added to your wishlist as well.

The Growth-Driven Design Process (cont.)

Prioritize Your Wishlist

Once all the new items added to the wishlist, then prioritize all the action items. Base them on their (High / Medium / Low) impact on the goals of the website and value to the user.

Plan sprint cycle: With an updated and prioritized wishlist, pick the most impactful action items you want to implement in this cycle.

The number of items you pick depends on how long the cycle lasts. Best to pick less items and really focusing on doing your best work with them. If you happen to complete them early, you can always go back to your wishlist and pick more.

Cycle Step 2 : Develop

Now to the develop phase of the cycle. Start implementing impactful action items on the site.

Your team gets together to start completing each action item that you selected in the planning phase.

Experiment with each action item you implemented. See the impact it has on the performance of the website. To measure your experiments you must setup validation tracking around the metrics outlined on the action item.

Once launched, consider developing a marketing campaign (social, PPC, blogging, etc.) specifically designed to drive traffic to that section of the site. Collect the data.

During the develop phase of the cycle, build and schedule the marketing campaign while working with your marketing team.

The Growth-Driven Design Process (cont.)

Cycle Step 3 : Learn

After your experiments collected enough data, you can then move to the learn phase. In the learning phase, you review the information you collected about your website visitors.

Based on the information you collected, validate or disprove your hypothesis on your action item card. Did your change impact as you expected, why or why not? Based on the results, what did you learn about your visitor? What did you learn about them that you didn't know before?

Publish the correct hypothesis and the information learned about users in a place everyone in the organization can access.

"Every website or application has a unique subset of users that share common traits. It is a primary goal of Growth-Driven experiments to answer questions about our unique subset of users.

Let's imagine that we have a food blog and want to know how to best engage our readers. Take a look at the following learnings we've had through running quantitative experiments:

- *We learn that our users want comfort food in the winter, but want to lose weight through the rest of the year.*
- *We learn that our users are more likely to read an entire piece of content if our first paragraph contains less than 120 characters and is preceded by a full width image.*
- *We learn that our users are most engaged with our content at 9 am on weekdays.*

These learnings all compound on one another and help us to hone in on who our users are and exactly what works best to engage them. With these three key learnings, we will know what to write about seasonally, how to format our content, and when to send out our newsletter."

MATTHEW RHEAULT - SIDEKICK, GROWTH TEAM - LEAD DEVELOPER

The Growth-Driven Design Process (cont.)

Cycle Step 4 : Transfer

The last step in the cycle is to now transfer any impactful information you've learned in your cycle to other parts of your business.

Review previously completed action items to see if you can find any patterns about your users.

Here's an Example ...

Let's say that in your experiment you were testing two different landing page variations. One variation used social proof as the independent variable and the second variation used authority.

After running the experiment, you reviewed the data to find out that for your users coming to your website, social proof was a much more influential factor leading to conversions.

Now that you've learned that social proof is a better trigger for your audience, you can inform your other teams to start incorporating social proof into other parts of their marketing and sales activities such as email or sales scripts.
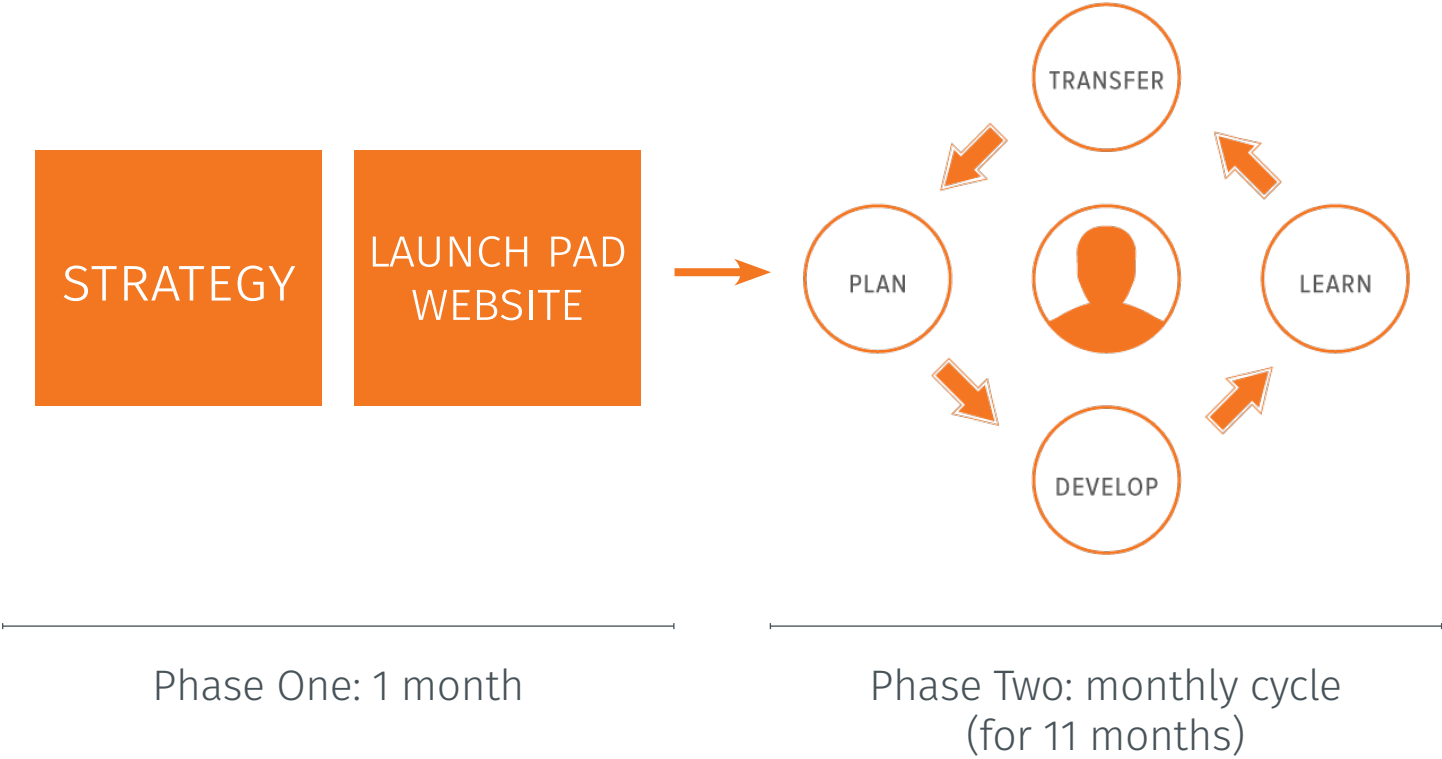
Now host a meeting to educate the team members about your recommendations. Brainstorm ways to integrate and transfer these ideas into tactical action items within their department.

The Growth-Driven Design Process (cont.)

Then, Repeat

The cycle is now complete. Go back to the beginning and start planning your next cycle.

This cycle repeats itself over and over again each time with a better end result and more learning about your visitors. The more cycles you can complete, the more impact your website has.

Phase One: 1 month

Phase Two: monthly cycle
(for 11 months)

Final Thoughts & Next Steps

The companies who are adopting the Growth-Driven Design methodology are finding huge success in the flexibility and results they are getting.

Re-evaluate both the way you approach your existing website and how you approach future redesigns.

Grow as a marketer and start implementing Growth-Driven Design.

Ready to Learn More?

When you sign up for the free "Deep Dive Training Course" at GrowthDrivenDesign.com you will learn and gain access to:

◇ Detailed step-by-step implementation of the GDD process

◇ GDD Templates and documents

◇ Tools to use

◇ Best practices and ideas

If you're an agency who's interested in offering Growth-Driven Design as a website retainer service, register for our free "Agency GDD Blueprint" training to learn how to market, sell and service Growth-Driven Design retainers.

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