REDESIGN BLUEPRINT

10 Steps Towards A Better Website

ArcStone

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Introduction

Whether your company wants to move onto a new Content Management System (CMS), or if your company's website looks like it was built in 1999 (eek), every now and then it's time to make a change.

But, without taking some key steps, redesigns can suck up thousands of dollars without producing any measurable results. So, what can you do to ensure that your redesign is successful?

Start by following the best practices included in this checklist, which addresses a critical area frequently overlooked during redesigns: how your site will support (and build on) your overall marketing efforts. Your website isn't a silo; it is closely connected with your social media efforts, online reputation, email marketing campaigns, lead generation, brand awareness, and sales strategies.

Whether you're working with an agency (such as ArcStone hint, hint!) or redesigning in-house, this checklist of best practices will save you from some major headaches, and help turn your website into a marketing machine poised for long-term success.

Chapter 1

Benchmark Your Current Metrics

How will you know what to improve — or even if you have improved after a redesign — without first taking stock of your site's past performance?

BEFORE YOU DO ANYTHING ELSE, TAKE THE TIME TO LOOK AT SOME OF YOUR SITE'S KEY PERFORMANCE METRICS, SUCH AS:

- Number of users / unique users to your site

- Bounce rate *(the percentage of users who exit your site without viewing any other pages)*

- Time users spend on your site

- Current visibility / reach

- Domain authority *(measure of the power of a domain name and a search engine ranking factor)*

- Number of new leads / form submissions generated on your site

- Total amount of sales generated

This will give you an idea of what's working for you and what's not, and it will give you a point of comparison as you move forward with your redesign.

The importance of this kind of data can't be overstated. If you don't currently have access to this information, add Google Analytics to your site and get tracking!

Chapter 2

Determine Your Goals

"It's been a while since we've done one" is not a good reason to embark on a major redesign. Neither is: "I want our business to look bigger."

It's not just about how your site looks, but how it furthers your overall business goals and marketing strategies. Without clear and measurable objectives, there's a good chance you'll end up with an aesthetically beautiful site that does nothing to improve your organization's bottom line.

Even "we want our site to look fresh and modern" isn't a good enough reason on its own. But, if you see corresponding room for improvement in your site's analytics (like a high bounce rate and low rate of form conversions), then you're probably due for an update.

Be sure to clearly document your goals. Don't forget to be realistic about where your site is now. If you are only getting a few visits a day, you cannot expect conversions to increase without traffic increasing as well.

EXAMPLE GOALS:

- Publish 3 blog posts per week with relevant topics, news and updates

- Increase weekly site visitors by ___%

- Post on social media daily

- Increase in organic conversions by ___%

SHORT-TERM GOALS:

_____

_____

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LONG-TERM GOALS:

_____

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Chapter 3

Inventory Assets

No matter how outdated, it is likely that your current site contains marketing assets that have served you well in the past and are still relevant to your organization today.

It can be a costly mistake to replace all of your old content with new in the course of a redesign.

For example, if you replace a page containing a high number of inbound links with a page containing far fewer, you could lose a lot of SEO credit and end up with a sparkling new website with lower keyword rankings than your old — a step in the wrong direction and a poor use of your resources.

To prevent this from happening, take an inventory of your current assets. You can then make sure these important pieces get integrated into your new site.

SUCH ASSETS MIGHT INCLUDE:

- Most shared or viewed content

- Most trafficked pages

- Best performing keywords you rank for and associated pages

- Number of inbound links to individual pages

This is an area in which an agency like ArcStone can help; by approaching your website redesign from a marketing perspective, we can make sure you fully leverage your existing assets. After all, there is no sense spending time and money duplicating good work.

My Metrics	Benchmark (current)	3 Months	6 Months	9 Months	Target (1 Year)

Chapter 4

Analyze your Competition

While we don't recommend obsessing over your competitors, it does help to know how you stack up in relation to your competitors.

Knowing what your competitors do well and where they fall short can give you valuable insight into ways you can set yourself apart.

Start by running your own website through Marketing Grader: marketing.grader.com. Marketing Grader evaluates all aspects of your online marketing efforts, including your website, social media activity, mobile responsiveness, blogging activity, email marketing, lead nurturing, and analytics. It gives you a report card and offers specific recommendations for improvement.

Next, run your competitors through Marketing Grader to identify their strengths and weaknesses compared to your own, and then take a little time to peruse your competitors' websites yourself. What do you think they are doing better than you? Why do you think some customers choose them over you? What do you think you can do to give yourself an edge? Keep in mind that you're not looking for areas to copy, but rather areas in which you can differentiate yourself.

Once you've completed a thorough analysis, put together an action list of those weaker areas and what you can do to move ahead of your competitors.

ACTION LIST:

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Chapter 5

Identify Your Unique Value Position

Unless you're a brand as ubiquitous as The United Way or Coca-Cola, you must immediately let site visitors know who you are and what you do.

Don't make your audience search for what it is you offer; the answer should be apparent within just a few seconds of entering your site. Your unique value proposition (UVP) is a succinct audience-focused statement (not to be confused with your mission statement, which is future-focused) that describes the benefits of what you are offering, and how you solve the needs / problems of your customers.

Many organizations fall into the trap of telling everything to everyone — as all programs and services are important. Distill what you do into a short, yet specific statement. Since this statement is geared towards your customers, don't use industry jargon or other forms of gobbledygook (yes, that's the technical term). Sound human! Consider the following example of how we could describe Kids in Need Foundation in a gobbledygook way:

> *Kids in Need Foundation supports a national network of affiliate partner corporations and philanthropic organizations throughout the country that benefit needy children by providing free school supplies to teachers and students from low-income schools and funding for certified preK-12 teachers to conduct innovative classroom projects.*

Huh?! Now let's translate that into the way people actually speak:

> *The Kids In Need Foundation's mission is to ensure that every child is prepared to learn and succeed by providing free school supplies nationally to students most in need. School Supplies. Changing Lives.*

Ahh yes, much better! Your UVP is an essential part of your redesign; it can dramatically affect your bounce and conversion rates, as it gives visitors a reason to stay on your site and take a closer look at what you have to offer.

UVP

WHAT YOUR BEST PROSPECTS REALLY WANT

WHAT YOU DO REALLY WELL

UVP

DON'T GO THERE

WHO CARES?

WHAT YOUR COMPETITORS DO REALLY WELL

Chapter 6

Design Your Site Around Personas

Your website is not about you; it's about your users. But who are they and what do they want?

This is where audience personas can help. An audience persona describes what prospective users are thinking and doing during the interaction process. They are fictional representations of your ideal audience, based on real data about your audience's online behaviors, combined with an educated speculation about their personal histories, motivations, and concerns.

For instance, if you are a marketing manager for a software company who is looking to bring in new business, you might target three buyer personas: IT manager's searching for a solution like yours, CTO's trying to solve a problem, or COO's attempting to improve a process.

CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS WHEN BUILDING YOUR BUYER PERSONAS:

WHO ARE THEY?
Start developing personas by identifying the most common types of people among your current customer base. You may have several different types; give each one a detailed description, including a name, job title or role, industry or company type, and demographic info.

WHAT DO THEY WANT?
What are the biggest problems they are trying to solve? What issues and causes are important to them and why? What do they need most? What information are they typically searching for? What trends are influencing them?

HOW WOULD YOU CHARACTERIZE THEIR ONLINE BEHAVIOR?
What are their digital habits? Are they active on Twitter, Facebook, or other social networks? What kind of search terms do they use? What kind of information do they tend to consume online? Who do they trust to provide information or feedback?

Your website provides great ways to match your messaging to the needs of your audiences. Build your pages into categories to fit these personas, or offer content in a way that allows your users to easily find what's most relevant to them.

Personas will inform more than just your redesign, but also provide helpful insight for your content strategy and marketing campaigns.

MARKETING PERSONA WORKSHEET

PERSONAL

Name: _____

Demographic: _____

Background: _____

Age Range: _____

Job Title: _____

Company: _____

Hobbies & Interests: _____

Affiliations: _____

Buzzwords: _____

DIGITAL & ENGAGEMENT HABITS

Social Media Use: (Circle below)

WORK HABITS

Describe a Typical Day: _____

_____

_____

Describe Professional Roles and Responsibilities: _____

_____

_____

Work-Related Organizations / Associations: _____

Goals: _____

Challenges: _____

Typical Objectives: _____

Chapter 7

Optimize Your Site For Search

If no one can find your site, how can you increase leads, downloads, sales, or even brand awareness?

Though Search Engine Optimization (SEO) isn't the be-all and end-all people once assumed, it does stand to reason that if people can't find you online, your site won't be worth a whole lot.

Fortunately, there are a few simple steps you can take to optimize your site so that it can become the revenue-generating, lead-converting machine you want it to be.

DOCUMENT YOUR MOST SEARCH VALUED PAGES

As mentioned in step three, knowing what pages have the strongest SEO juice (the most traffic, inbound links, and keywords rankings) is key.

CREATE A 301 REDIRECT STRATEGY

This may be THE most important step in terms of retaining traffic and rankings when switching over to your new site. Without proper 301 redirects, your prospects may land on an error page instead of your site. Create a spreadsheet to map out your 301 redirects to ensure you don't miss any pages — especially the ones you already marked as the most search-valued.

DO YOUR KEYWORD RESEARCH

For every page, pick one or two keywords that the page will focus on. Once you determine the keyword(s), use on-page SEO tactics, such as internal link building and header tag optimization (H1, H2, H3, etc.)
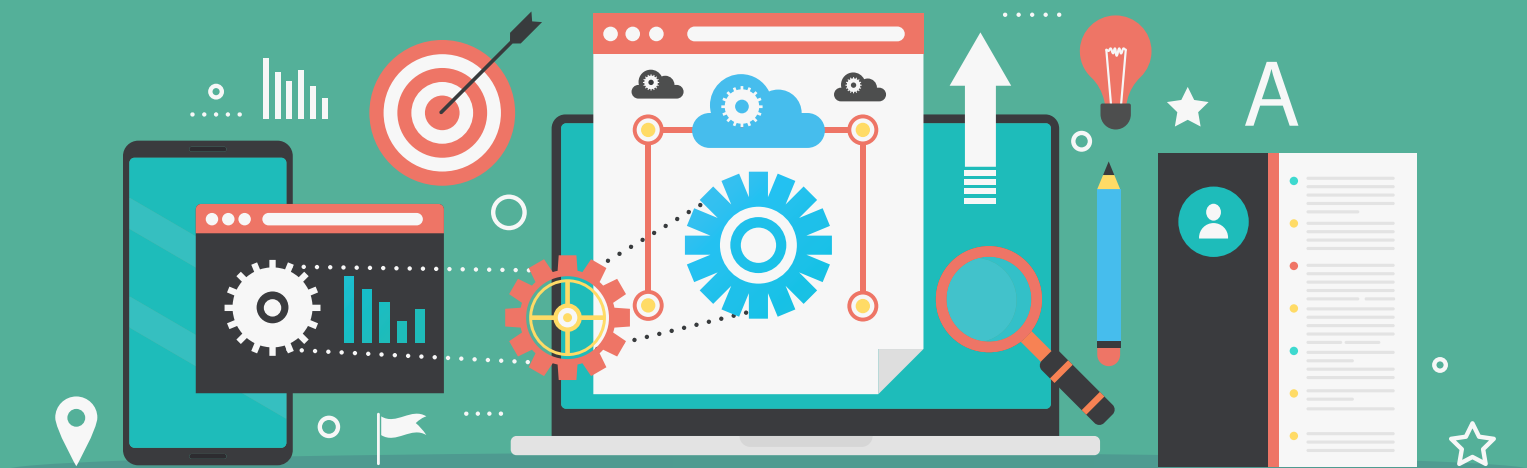
Chapter 8

Identify Calls-to-Actions (CTAs)

Your website shouldn't just be a static brochure describing your programs or service but should prompt your visitors to do something that really engages them with your brand.

THOSE PROMPTS ARE KNOWN AS "CALLS-TO-ACTIONS" OR CTAS.

CTAs are the elements on your website that drive visitors to download an infopacket, contact your sales team, follow on social media, or subscribe to your e-newsletter — just to name a few of the potential opportunities for conversion.

When you're planning for the redesign, find the CTAs that make the most sense for your organization and design your site so that it funnels visitors to those CTAs / engagement opportunities. You can't expect new users to contact you the first time they hear of you, so consider what "micro-conversions" can push them down the funnel.

Chapter 9

Ongoing Content Strategy

# MORE CONTENT = MORE VISITORS = MORE AWARENESS + LEADS.

A 100-page website will beat a 10-page website 99% of the time, and a 500 page site will beat both — especially when it includes a constant flow of fresh content. So crafting a realistic strategy to continue adding more and more content to your website is essential to making your site work for you.

START A BLOG
This is one of the best ways to add great content to your site on an ongoing basis.
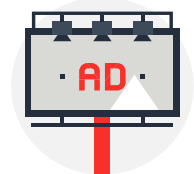
INCLUDE SOME PR
Post press releases and updates, but don't rely on this alone.

OUTSOURCE IF AND/OR WHEN NECESSARY
Lack the time to create effective, new content? ArcStone can help! We have a team of web marketing experts to help generate compelling content for your site — including video, copy-writing, and infographics. Need ideas? We can help with that, too!

CONTENT IDEAS:

_____

_____

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Chapter 10

Don't Forget The Extras!

Getting the core pages up and running is just the beginning. By focusing on a few "extras" you can really take your website to the next level.
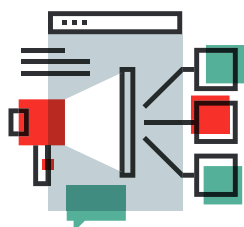
LANDING PAGES & CALLS-TO-ACTIONS
Landing pages and calls-to-actions are critical lead generation components. Create compelling landing pages to generate leads and conversions.

ADD RSS SUBSCRIPTION
RSS allows some content from your website to be automatically pushed out to other websites and people, dramatically increasing the reach of your content.

SHAREABILITY
Add social media sharing buttons/links to all your pages. You can use tools like ShareThis or AddThis.

ANALYTICS
It's absolutely critical that you are measuring the performance of your website from the start. Without data you're flying blind.

PLUG-INS
Plug-ins can add a great amount of usability and features to your site. Contact us for our curated list of vetted plugins.

Conclusion

A successful website redesign starts well before pen is put to paper (so to speak). It's easy to get caught up in how you want the website to look and allow a narrow focus on design aesthetics to overshadow how well the site is actually serving your company or organizations' needs.

Remember, a website is not a silo. Its integration with other functions, such as social media, email marketing and lead generation, is critical. This is your chance to turn your website into an effective marketing hub.

Feeling a little overwhelmed? Trying to decide if it's time to update your site? Deep in the middle of a redesign? ArcStone can help no matter where you are in the process.

Give us a call at 612-455-7200 or send us an email at info@arcstone.com.

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