THE REDESIGN BLUEPRINT: 10 STEPS TOWARD A BETTER WEBSITE • • •



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Whether your company is undergoing a general rebranding, you want to move onto a new Content Management System (CMS), your current site is generating lackluster results, can't be viewed on mobile, or looks like it was built in 1999 (eek), every now and then your website needs a refresh.

Eventually, there comes a time when you've gathered all the low-hanging fruit possible: you've swapped out your logo, changed the color palette, spruced up the images, and added some missing keywords. That's when it's time to make a bigger change.

Radical redesigns provide a great opportunity to take stock of what's working for you and what's not – where you are now and where you'd like to be. Most importantly, they have the potential to generate new business. But without taking some key steps, they can also 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 address a critical area frequently overlooked during redesigns: how your site will support (and build upon) 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.

1. BENCHMARK YOUR CURRENT METRICS

How will you know how or what to improve – or even IF you have improved after a redesign – without taking stock of your site's past performance? You won't! So before you do anything else, take the time to look at some of your site's key performance metrics, such as:

- ••••• Number of visits/visitors/unique visitors to your site
- Bounce rate (the percentage of visitors who exit your site without viewing any other pages)
- ••••• Time visitors 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, so if you don't currently have access to this information, add a tool like Google Analytics to your site and get tracking!

2. DETERMINE YOUR GOALS

I"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. And without clear, measurable objectives there's a good chance you'll end up with an aesthetically beautiful site that does nothing to improve your business' 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 the site analytics (like a high bounce rate and low rate of conversion on site forms), then you're probably due for a major redesign.

We just finished up a redesign of our own website here at ArcStone. Based on feedback from customers, in addition to an internal audit, we felt that our site did not accurately reflect our values and personality as a company. And this, we felt, was hindering our ability to attract clients.

We took a close look at our site performance metrics over the past year (thank you, Google Analytics!) and felt that our conversion rates were not as high as they could be.



So we were convinced: it was time to radically redesign our site. We set some specific, measurable goals: increase the average amount of time visitors spend on our site as well as the number of pages viewed per visit, and improve conversion rates for contact forms and ebook downloads.

We will keep a close eye on these metrics so that we can gauge the relative success or failure of our efforts and then continue to make tweaks in pursuit of our original objectives.

The takeaway: be abundantly clear about why you're redesigning your site in the first place and then tie those objectives to measurable results.



3. INVENTORY YOUR 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 business today. This can make it 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.

4. ANALYZE THE COMPETITION

While we don't recommend obsessing over your competitors, it does help to know how you stack up. Knowing what your competitors do well and where they fall short can give you valuable insight into the ways in which you can set yourself apart.



Start by running your own website through Marketing Grader:

http://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 on those efforts, including specific recommendations for improvement.

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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.

5. IDENTIFY YOUR UNIQUE VALUE PROPOSITION

Unless you're a brand or company as ubiquitous as Coca Cola or Nike (and let's be honest, who is?), you must immediately let site visitors know who you are and what you do. Don't make them search for what it is you can offer them; the answer should be apparent within just a few seconds of entering your site. If it's not, they are likely to take their business to one of your competitors.

Your unique value proposition (UVP) is a succinct **customer-focused** statement (not to be confused with your mission statement, which is business-focused) that describes the benefits of what you are offering, how you solve the needs / problems of your customers, and how you do it better than your competitors.



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 ArcStone in a gobbledygook way:

ArcStone is a web development agency that specializes in building WordPress websites, intensive web applications, and implementing internet marketing strategies. We achieve this by leveraging years of technical experience and emerging technologies to create effective online platforms for your business.

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

Partnering with local and national clients, ArcStone aims to build evolving platforms that not only help to reach your goals, but are also easy to maintain. Because – happy people make happy websites and that leads to happy customers.

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.



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 buyer personas can help. A buyer persona describes what prospective customers are thinking and doing during the buying process. They are semi-fictional representations of your ideal customers, based on real data about your existing customer demographics and their online behavior, along with educated speculation about their personal histories, motivations, and concerns.

For instance, if you are a marketing manager at a hotel who is looking to bring in new business, you might target three buyer personas: a corporate travel manager, an event planner, and a vacationing family.



Consider the following questions when building your buyer personas:



••••• WHO ARE THEY?

Start developing personas by identifying the most common types of buyers among your current customer base. You may have several different types of buyers; 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 do they need most? What information are they typically searching for? What trends are influencing their buying decisions?

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? Which of your products do they spend the most time researching? How do they use those products?

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

7. OPTIMIZE YOUR SITE FOR SEARCH

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

Fortunately, there are a few relatively 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 error pages 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.)

Want to learn more? The world of SEO can be a bit overwhelming, and sifting through all of the advice out there can feel like a full-time job. We can help! Our SEO experts can take a look at your website and help point you in the right direction.

8. IDENTIFY CALLS-TO-ACTION

Your website shouldn't just be a static brochure describing your product or service but should prompt your visitors to do something that really engages them with your brand. Those prompts are known as "calls-to-action" or CTAs.

CTAs are the elements on your website that drive visitors to download a whitepaper, contact your sales department, purchase a product, start a free trial, 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 business and design your site so that it funnels visitors to those CTAs / engagement opportunities.



9. CREATE AN ONGOING (AND REALISTIC) CONTENT STRATEGY

MORE CONTENT \longrightarrow MORE VISITORS \longrightarrow MORE REVENUE (OR DONATIONS OR AWARENESS)

A 100-page website will beat a 10-page website 99% of the time, and a 500page 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. In fact, companies that blog have 55% more website visitors and 88% more leads than those that do not.

••••• INCLUDE SOME PR

Post press releases and updates, but don't rely on this alone.

····· OUTSOUCE 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, copyrighting, and infographics. Need ideas? We can help with that too!



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.

BLOG

As we mentioned, a blog is a great way to create content on an ongoing basis, and to converse with your customers and prospects.

..... LANDING PAGES & CALLS-TO-ACTION

Landing pages and calls-to-action 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.



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 site to look and allow a narrow focus on design aesthetics to overshadow how well the site is actually serving your business' 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.

ArcStone Technologies, Inc.

ArcStone is a full-service interactive agency. Marketing, design and technology professionals sharing a common vision of service, craftsmanship, evolution and happiness since 1997.



2836 Lyndale Ave. South, Suite 132 Minneapolis, MN 55408

612-455-7200 | info@arcstone.com