

Website Development Process

With Dialogs providing the framework, our producers and developers construct web applications following a time-proven methodology. We divide the project into five segments of activity: Discovery, Architecture, Creative, Implementation, and Life of the Site. This process carefully organizes content and creative direction to reduce missteps that cost time and money. Each segment has a deliverable that is approved before the next segment begins, which allows for greater focus on each individual aspect of the site. Here is a brief description of the five segments:

Discovery

This segment begins with one-on-one content interviews with key contributors from the client. The one-on-one interviews collect information about wants and objectives. Differences in opinion within the client's company are most efficiently resolved at this stage, before planning the architecture of the site and before beginning the creative design. The Discovery segment also identifies how the site will be implemented and what features will be included in the site (e.g., Flash elements, randomized content, custom landing pages, e-newsletters, etc.). Discovery yields a content report that includes definition of goals, scope, content, and functionality. Once this has been identified, the information structure and functionality must be defined.

Architecture

Based on the results of Discovery, the producer creates the architecture map – an organized outline of content placement and interconnectivity. It defines how a viewer gets from one piece of content to another, what information is contained on each page, and what is included in the site navigation system. Supplementing the architecture map is the functionality report, which describes every functionally unique piece of content in the site and identifies how each is delivered (e.g., Flash, a Dialogs List, text only, text with graphics, etc.). The Architecture segment also defines the fields in the database and where each field of data is displayed. The approved architecture map and functionality report give the designers all they need to create concepts and layouts that fit the needs of the site.

Creative

Building on the previously defined structure, the Creative segment develops the look for the site. The creative process includes research, concept development, design exploration, photography research, color research, layout, and creative presentations. Each design direction shows a home page, example(s) of a sub-page(s), and a description of how the navigation works. Once a concept is approved, the designer creates a layout for each unique page or area of the site. The Creative segment is complete when all layouts are approved.

Implementation

The fourth segment includes translation of creative work into database and Dialogs configuration, custom coding (e.g., web 2.0 features, automated nav, form validation, import/export of XML/CSV data, Flash integration, search functionality, external integrations, etc.), template skinning, and image optimization. Content entry begins as soon as the content entry forms are set up. Client participation is commonly limited to content creation and content entry. After all content is entered, all functionality is working, and the client has given their approval, the site undergoes browser testing (on all required operating systems) and server testing. Site users receive documentation and training as needed. The Implementation segment is complete when the website goes live.

Life of the Site

The final segment in the development of a successful website is ongoing – it is the maintenance and evolution of the site after the audience begins using it. After the site is live, ideas surface that have real value. Content needs to change to keep the audience interested and to improve search engine optimization. If the site owner adjusts the direction of their company, the website direction needs to be adjusted as well. Staff changes may require updates to bios or contact information. There are countless factors that require revisions to a live website, and these revisions must be given priority and resources if the website is to be a continued success.