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Web Site Check List for Realtors
Collecting your materials and getting ready to create your site.
By Keli Etscorn, keli@etscorn.com, ©2012 Keli Etscorn

Creating an Internet presence to promote your business and services is more of a requirement than an option these days. Once you've decided to establish a Web site on the Internet, you will want a Web page that reflects you and your business to your satisfaction. Here are a few tasks – fun tasks! - to help you plan your Web site.

One of the key parts of a Web site is establishing the "look and feel" – the design. If you're moving an established business online, you may already have a "look and feel" to your business via brochures, logos and other marketing materials. Or you may be creating your look and feel from scratch.

Some questions to ask yourself:

a. What colors and fonts are your customers used to seeing?
b. If you're starting new, what colors and fonts would you like them to see?
c. What do you want to say to them? Is your overall image serious, light-hearted, professional, whimsical, etc.?

Don't expect the best ideas to come from your first thoughts; good Web design takes time. The more "substance" you can communicate to your Web designer, the better chance you have for your vision and the final design to resemble each other!

I suggest that you start keeping track of your thoughts. Use whatever means you normally use for idea generation - a written journal or notebook, a standard manila file folder and loose-leaf paper. You can even create a special folder on your computer and use a word processing program such as Microsoft Word for your pages.

You will want to track six overall subjects and create a page or so for each subject. Label your folder/file/notebook "My Web Site" and then label each subject as follows:

Purpose and Goals
Target Audience
What I Like
What I don't Like
Web Site Pages
Other Thoughts

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Here are some ideas about how to approach each subject.

1) Purpose and Goals

- What is the goal of your site?
- What are you hoping to achieve with your Web site?
- What do you want visitors to DO at your Web site?
- Establish a "call to action" otherwise known as a "conversion point". This could be any of the following: the filling out of a form, having someone call your company, signing up for your newsletter, downloading an e-book or buying a product NOW. You may have other great ideas for your conversion points, **what you want your clients to DO** at your Web site.
- Do you want to attract a larger audience? Provide an existing customer base with more information? Teach your audience?
- Will your site be used to generate leads to be followed up by your sales team?

2) Target Audience

My copywriting friends always say this: "If you call out to everyone, you call out to no one." Figure out who your target audience is and design your site to be exactly what they need.

- What is their age? What is their income? Gender?
- What sort of Web interface will appeal to them?
- How can your product or service solve their problems? (And of course you'll need to consider what their problems are first!)

3) What I Like

Browse some other real estate Web sites. Go to Google.com and type in any **city** plus the words "**real estate**" - you should find plenty!

- Take note of the Web sites that appeal to you.
- What do you like about them? The Layout? Colors? Navigation? Fonts?

  Layout - think about how you want your Web site to look. Take notes of Web sites that you find appealing.

  Colors - Choose your colors wisely. If you have existing marketing materials, you will want to send them to your Web designer for scanning and color sampling. It's important to maintain your existing branding and corporate look as you move online.

    - Elegant business-like colors include dark, rich colors such as navy blue, burgundy, scarlet, deep purple.

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- Fresh, healthy colors include bright orange, pale yellows, blues and greens.
- Loud, high-impact colors include vibrant colors such as bright shade of yellow, bright red, purple and black.

If you are not sure about color use this page to get some ideas: http://www.kelie.com/color.htm

We recommend choosing one color as the primary color of the site and one or two complimentary colors. If you don't chose to have a white background, make sure your text color does not conflict with the background you select.

Navigation - Keep it simple and you won't lose your Web site visitors. Do you like your navigation across the top? Left side? Right side? Nice buttons or text links?

Fonts - Use an easy-to-read font for the majority of your text. Fancy fonts and special fonts can be used for headings, subheadings, special announcements, and news.

Be considerate of your visitors – don't use a font that's hard to read – or they may just "click" and be gone! Identify several sites that use a font you like.

4) What I Don't Like

Knowing what you don't like is just as important as what you like. Write down things that bug you and share them with your designer so he or she can steer clear of them!

Be specific. What don't you like about a Web site? Visually loud? Difficult to read and understand? Is the navigation unclear?

5) Web Site Pages

Here's what I usually recommend to start, the basic pages. If you've got ideas for additional pages, great! And, of course, more pages can always be added later.

- **Homepage** - This is the first page of your Web site. This page is the "first impression" someone has of you and your business. (And you know what they say about not getting a **second** chance for a **first** impression?)
  The homepage must clearly state what your site is about. It can include a mission statement and link to your other pages for more information.

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- **About Us** - This page is about you! Include your resume, your pictures, your biography, and your services.
- **Buyers / Sellers Page** – Information about buying and/or selling a home. Ideally you'd have a page for each.
- **Listings** - There are several ways you can post your listings on your site:
    1. One is through your local MLS. There is a program called IDX that your Webmaster can easily integrate into your Web site.
    2. Second, you can use our Property Listing Software. This lets you be in charge of adding your listings 24 hour a day. This system makes it easy to add information such as description, cost, and type of house, area, pictures and more.
    3. The third option is to send your listing information to your Webmaster and let them add it to your site.
- **Contact Us** - Usually all your contact information goes here, along with a form for your visitors to fill out. When your visitors fill out the form, it's instantly E-mailed to you.
- **Relocation Information** – Feature information about the local area to show potential new residents all about your city!
- **Local Information** – People moving to your area are going to want to know all kinds of information about their new home; schools, crime stats, important numbers. Create a resource area to include all this type of information.
- **And more -** The sky's the limit when it comes to thinking of all the great content you can present to your visitors. You're not restricted to just these pages!

6) Other Thoughts and Ideas

Write down any other thoughts and ideas that you have for your Web site, no matter how small or simple!

Once you've filled up your journal with your thoughts and ideas, it's time to hand those ideas – and the copy (text) for your pages - over to your designer.

Your designer will be most impressed with the information and clear insight you're able to provide. You'll also save a lot of time by clearing up questions regarding your design before they ever crop up.

Just like creating a plan for your business strategy or marketing efforts is important to success, creating a plan for the creation and design of your Web site is highly recommended for a successful Web site launch. Put your best foot forward on the Information Superhighway!

Last update 1/15/1012