

Designing for SelectEdit

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In January we announced [SelectEdit](#). SelectEdit provides the same web development process and [NewfangledCMS](#) content management capabilities as Newfangled but in a simplified, low-cost way for small companies, sole proprietors and non-profits. SelectEdit's purpose is to help fulfill Newfangled's conviction that all clients (regardless of budget) should be able to control their website's content. SelectEdit allows us to bring this capability to clients that have less than \$4,000 to spend. In order to make this price available, there are certain parameters to maintain. One of these parameters is the site's visual design. This month's newsletter provides a guide for providing website designs that fit within the SelectEdit framework.

Four key differences...

SelectEdit is a simplified, streamlined approach offering all the same web development process and content management functionality that Newfangled delivers to its clients. SelectEdit retains the important interaction between a client and professional web developers as a website's structure, content, and design is worked out. It keeps costs low by minimizing the actual development time needed to build the site. Our [January newsletter](#) went into more detail about this overall approach. In order to understand how SelectEdit works you need to understand how Newfangled works. SelectEdit does what Newfangled does but with four key differences. One of these differences is its approach to visual design. This month's newsletter provides a guide for designing within the SelectEdit website structure.

Simplified Website Design Approach

Overview of the four key differences between Newfangled and SelectEdit

1. Site-wide administrator access. A custom Newfangled site has the capability of providing limited administrative access to certain areas of the site. For example, you might assign one administrator access only to the press release section, while other administrators might be able to edit the whole site. [SelectEdit](#), on the other hand, does not break up administrative access. While you can have as many site administrators as you wish, each of them will have full administrative access to the entire site.

2. Limited [NewfangledCMS applications](#). Custom Newfangled sites have at their disposal all of our advanced NewfangledCMS applications. SelectEdit's list of available components is much shorter (currently calendar of events and simple password protection). Additionally, while custom NewfangledCMS applications can themselves be customized to fit a wide variety of applications, SelectEdit components have fewer customizable properties. For example, our calendar of events component is available for both custom [NewfangledCMS](#) sites and SelectEdit, but while a custom site implementation of this component like on www.pbn.com/calendar can be filtered by various event categories. A SelectEdit implementation of the calendar component would not be filterable.

How a custom NewfangledCMS editing screen differs from a SelectEdit editing screen.

SelectEdit uses the same editing screens for every page on the site. Among the fields on this screen are the page's title, the content abstract, and the main content field for the body of the page. Additionally these screens contain two image uploads and two document uploads with corresponding caption fields. Every page of

a SelectEdit site uses these same fields, albeit each page uses them in a different way. A main section overview page would use the title field for the page's title, and the content field for the main body of the page. An FAQ page would use the title as the question and the content field as the answer.

Compare how you might edit a press release page using a custom NewfangledCMS site verses how you might do it with SelectEdit. A custom NewfangledCMS site would have custom field definitions created and labeled according to their use on the press release page. It would have a field for the date, by-line, press contact name, email, phone number, etc.). Based on these fields the customized press release template would display each part of the page with the appropriate formatting embedded. The press contact's email address, for example, would automatically display itself as a clickable email link. A SelectEdit press release page, on the other hand, would add the contact information manually within the main content field and use built in formatting tools to apply details such making a name bold or adding an email link.

3. Site editing screens use a common page definition. This is the key conceptual difference between SelectEdit and custom Newfangled sites. Custom NewfangledCMS sites include custom editing screens for every kind of page. Every field on these content editing screens match the exact content for the page. This makes custom NewfangledCMS sites extraordinarily intuitive to maintain. SelectEdit however uses a common content definition for every page of every site. While this takes a little bit more training than a custom NewfangledCMS site does, it is still very easy. So far we have found that while it usually takes less than an hour to train a client how to use a custom NewfangledCMS site, it takes about an hour and a half to train them on a SelectEdit site. The significance of this limitation increases or decreases based on how detailed or complex a website's content needs to be. Because SelectEdit is intended as a starting site for small companies, this limitation is rarely problematic.

4. Design limitations. While there are design limitations to SelectEdit, it does not require clients to pick from pre-designed sets of templates. Each SelectEdit site is custom designed for each client. However, SelectEdit sites do share an underlying site structure. Although SelectEdit only supports certain structural elements, the SelectEdit structure is based on best practices that Newfangled has developed over the years. It is also based on the most compliant web coding standards so that SelectEdit sites are compatible with a broad range of browsers and platforms. By pre-building and pre-testing SelectEdit page structure we are able to minimize development and design implementation time, thereby keeping costs to a minimum. Nevertheless, within the adopted SelectEdit site structure, each element's design parameters are actually quite broad. Each design element can be custom designed.

Simplified Website Content Management on a Budget

SelectEdit site structure

The rest of this newsletter will detail the structural elements of a [SelectEdit](#) site and describe how they can be visually designed and customized. We do have plans to develop additional site structures in the future.

General description of the structural elements of a SelectEdit site

SelectEdit currently supports top and left side navigation, and flexible and fixed width site structures. The main navigation supports either a text based or graphics-based main navigation bar with or without dynamic cascading menus for sub-sections and third level pages.

Top navigation: We standardized on top navigation due to our use of dynamic cascading menus. We have found cascading menus to be a very user friendly and flexible navigation device. While it is certainly possible to build dynamic cascading menus into a side navigation structure there is a definite usability problem with side navigation cascading menus (see "[Web Design Tips for the Print Designer, part 2](#)" for details). Therefore we adopted drop down menus for the top navigation only on SelectEdit sites.

Customizable CSS Websites with Content Management

Parts is Parts

A [SelectEdit](#) site can be broken down into various page elements. The design parameters for each of these elements can be fully customized. If you happen to be familiar with [cascading style sheets](#) (we do not assume that you are) then you are familiar with the basis for SelectEdit design. Generally speaking, if you can design it with CSS, you can design it for SelectEdit. However, if you are not familiar with CSS, this means that for every element we describe below you can define its design parameters in terms of background color and background image, type style, margins, borders, width, height, and layout placement.

Header: The very first element in the upper left corner of a SelectEdit site is its logo. The height of the logo graphic determines the height of the header area of the page (note: we generally place the logo in the upper left corner, however we do have a workaround that allows us to align the logo to the right of the header area). The rest of the header area above the navigation bar can contain background images, colors, and other "global navigation" or "site utilities" (home, search, contact, etc.).

Navigation bar: The main navigation bar can be adjusted in terms of height, width, spacing of navigation elements, and background color. The main sections can be displayed as HTML text (which makes a SelectEdit site extremely flexible since additional main sections can be added or edited without having to create corresponding graphics). SelectEdit does support main section graphic buttons, or graphic text including rollover states and "current section" states. The dynamic cascading menus can be turned on or off, and can be designed in terms of background color, rollover colors, height, width, divider colors, and size. While the main navigation bar can utilize custom graphics, the cascading menus cannot. This is generally good practice for any site using dynamic cascading menus due to performance and download considerations.

Sub-page navigation: SelectEdit sites can opt for breadcrumb navigation, side navigation, or they can opt for no sub-page navigation.

Bread crumb navigation: Bread crumb navigation is common for sites that include multiple sub-categories in their structure. Search engines and directories commonly use bread crumb navigation as they display the various categories that have led to a particular page. Bread crumb navigation, when used, is displayed beneath the top navigation bar and above the body of the page. A product directory, for example, might display as "Food Preparation Products > Commercial > Cooking > Stoves," where each word is a link representing the categories you followed to arrive at the page you are currently on. Unless a site has more than three levels, bread crumb navigation is not usually the best choice.

Side Navigation: Side navigation is the standard sub-navigation system for a SelectEdit site. It uses the left hand column in the body of all sub-pages. It lists the main category on the top and then all of the sub-pages within the category. It can also list all third level pages when viewing a particular sub-section of the site. The side navigation is always in the leftmost column of the page and it can be designed with a unique background color, background graphic, typographic styles, width, and position.

No side navigation: In some cases, where content does not go very deep or it only goes deep in one section, you might opt not to have any side navigation. Instead, you would rely on the main navigation bar with its cascading menus to provide all site navigation. If most of your site's sections do not have sub-pages in them, you might want to opt for no side navigation.

Main body content area: The main body of each page is fairly straightforward. You can specify the typographic style for the title, body copy, lists, links, etc. As with all [NewfangledCMS](#) sites you can upload images and other documents and display them in the body of the page. SelectEdit's built-in formatter tools are used for low level content formatting such as bold, italic, and adding inline images. Specific styles can be set up for use in the formatter to create special typographic styles for subtitles, or other low level typographic elements. Page titles also need to be specified as text, SelectEdit does not support graphic page titles "â€" which are not good SEO practices anyway.

Image one and image two: SelectEdit (and most custom NewfangledCMS sites) have a couple pre-positioned image slots for each page. While images can be placed anywhere in the body of a page using the formatter, the image one and image two slots display uploaded images in the upper right column of the page. This "right column" can also be designed in terms of width, background color, background image, and typographic style. Using image one and image two also has the added benefit of allowing for captions to be added to the uploaded images. The caption style can be specified as well.

Widget:

All SelectEdit pages have a "Widget" element. The widget is simply a handy page element used to highlight various types of content throughout the site. It can be used to call attention to a particular feature or benefit, to refer to related links, or feature current news items. The widget box can be formatted in terms of size, color, background image, typography, and it can have a title bar which can also be similarly designed. While widgets are generally positioned in the upper right of the page, they can also be set to display at the bottom of the main content area or beneath the sub-navigation system in the left-hand column (tip: you can use a widget to flesh out a left hand side navigation area for sections that have no sub pages to avoid the "wasted space" problem noted above in the "no side navigation" option).

Footer: Finally, the footer of the page can also be designed to include a text based version of the main navigation bar, general contact information, or other legal disclaimers. This area can also be designed in terms of background colors, background image, typography, etc.

In addition to the overview of the design elements described in this newsletter, we've also put together a [couple sample Photoshop files](#) that contain all of the various elements we've described. It is assembled in layers and can be used as a starting point for designing a SelectEdit site. If you have a client that might benefit from SelectEdit and you follow the structure of this Photoshop file, we can provide an additional discount to the already low cost of a SelectEdit website. Give us a call for details!