

Announcing Newfangled's Project Anatomy

by Mark O'Brien, March 2008

PROTOTYPING

STRATEGIC REVIEW

- Mark, PM, IA, Planner
- Review site objectives, plan strategy and prototype schedule

CYCLE OF BUILDS & REVIEWS

- IA builds based on strategy meeting, internal review, tweaks and then initial presentation to the

DESIGN

INITIAL REVIEW

- PM, Designer initial interview
- Review submitted client profile doc

HOME PAGE DESIGNS

- Internal review with PM, UX, Programmer and Planner
- 3 designs posted
- Revisions

PROGRAMMING

WHITESCREEN

QA

DESIGN APPLICATION

QA

CODE REVIEW

FINAL TWEAKS

As I will discuss in an upcoming blog post, 2007 was a year of many big leaps in Newfangled's growth as a web development company. One of those growth points was our putting to paper a process guide to our web projects. We have called this the Project Anatomy, and it has already proven to be quite valuable.

The purpose of the anatomy was to ensure consistency as we grew the company from 6 to 17 people. As an example, there were some projects in the old days (circa 2003) that I personally closed the business on, managed the project, built the prototype, programmed the site and put it live on the server (NEVER did I design anything - we weren't stretched *that* thin). Those were, honestly, really fun days. The nice part about it was that I learned a lot with each project, so I just automatically got better and things improved. Fast forward to today, where we have 17 people, any 7 of which will have involvement on a given project through its initial development prior to going live for the first time. That represents a lot of moving parts, and a lot of dangerous chances to make mistakes and not collectively learn from them.

GO LIVE

SITE APPROVAL

- Final internal review with Planner and PM

SCHEDULING

- Review with Accounting
- DNS review
- Coordinate with System Admin & Programmer
- Run site testing script

GO LIVE

- Live site QA review
- Programmer & PM review of entire site (use hosts file if not yet propagated)
- Schedule bi-annual hosting review with Dan

FINAL CLIENT INTERVIEW

- Mark
- Ask for testimonial, reference

CASE STUDY

- Planner creates case study (if warranted), adds go live notice to NWF home page and creates gallery entry

Go live date:

Fortunately, this problem also has opportunity buried within it. Our opportunity, of course, is to increase our learning seven fold. We could either wallow in inconsistency, repeating the same mistakes over and over again because we aren't talking about it, or we could assemble an ever-improving document that could guide all of the major components of our web development projects. Given our experience with this so far, and the many changes it has already gone through, I think we've landed on the correct side of this problem. The Project Anatomy will most likely be different again next week, but it currently does a pretty thorough job of representing the major and minor stages of a web project for a 25-45k site. Since most of this is not proprietary to Newfangled, I welcome anyone to use it and make changes as they see fit. Here are a few examples of the small details that we have captured as a result of our collective learning. You might want to follow on with our [Project Anatomy](#) document.

Prototyping: DNS and process review with the client

Clients are always in a rush to go live at the end of the project and they usually don't know how to get the necessary access to point their domain name at our server. Clearly, neither of these things are major discoveries. Our slight shift in process, to instigate the DNS conversation at the end of the prototyping process (which is the first major stage of the project) was a big deal though, at least for us. It is just one small detail that is going to make our next project go a little smoother.

Integration: 301 redirect review

Integration, the fifth stage in the project anatomy, is the stage in which the client adds their content to the programmed site while we apply the approved design. Most sites we build existed previously, and sometimes the legacy site had really great search engine placement. Since our system is most likely going to have different URLs than the old system the clients are going to need to know what 301 redirects are (here is a [great thread](#) on them, if you aren't quite positive) and how they should be setting them up, using NewfangledCMS's new 301 redirect management tool. This little reminder will ensure that we at the very least have the 301 conversation with our clients and that they will be properly educated in order to make the right decision. This is a great alternative to all of us having a big *gulp* moment 3 months after the new site has gone live and the client just realized their old ranking really mattered.

Design: Home Page Designs: Internal review with PM, UX, Programmer and Planner

Eric always wants to see what we are up to with our designs. In the heat of the moment, we often forget to include him in the design review process - no more! Well, kind of. Now we are ensured that a planner will always be included in design reviews. According to the role definitions in the Project Anatomy, that means the Eric or Chris will take part and that our client will benefit from not just the designer's attention, but the reflection and critical thought of 5 Newfangleders at this stage alone.

For us, the Project Anatomy is riddled with project management wisdom that we've accrued over the years and continue to build on. Like so many other things we've figured out over the years, it has become an essential part of our makeup.

TERMS

IA: Responsible for crafting a site structure and flow that meets usability standards and site objectives.

UX: Responsible for ensuring that the designs are intuitive, highly usable and in line with the prototype.

QA: Responsible for making sure the site works as it exists, with no regard for IA or UX.

ROLES

IA, UX, QA: Michael Stalker

PM: Katie Jamison, Jason Adams, Mitch

Planner: Eric Holter, Chris Butler