

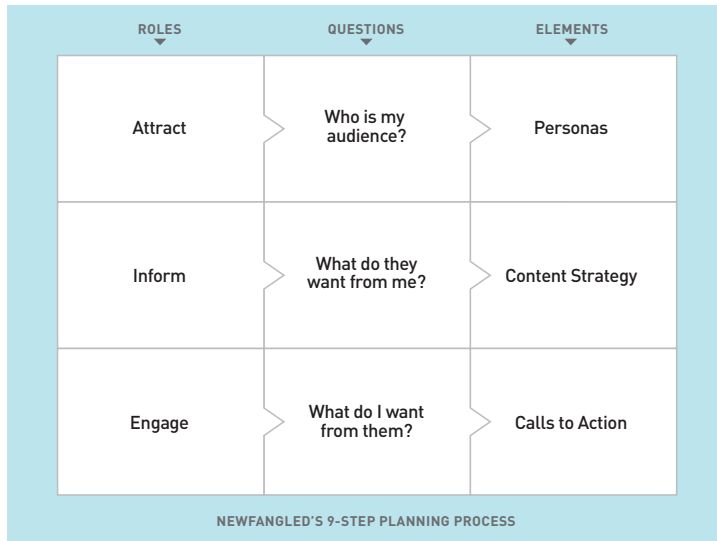
/the_9_step_ process_for _planning_a_ marketing_ website/

**YOUR WEBSITE IS A WORK OF COMMERCE,
NOT A WORK OF ART.**

Why do you have a website?

This may sound like a foolish question, but it should be the first one you ask when starting every new web project, especially when building your own site. Judging from the many agency sites I see, most principals do not ask themselves this question, or, if they do, they do not seem to take the time to really think about the answer.

Many agencies believe that their site's central function is to show their visitors how creative they are. I disagree. Certainly, a portion of the site should serve this purpose, but this is not the primary purpose of the site. The site's key role is to generate business for the firm, and demonstrating creativity is only part of what converts a visitor into a



prospect. Designing a website with the primary goal of demonstrating creativity is akin to an architect designing a demo house with the sole intent of showing how many different styles she can design. The result would be an interesting house but not one anyone would ever choose to live in or buy.

The same is true of your website. The site, first and foremost, needs to be a highly usable site. You will not lose a site visitor because the home page is not splashy enough, but you will lose plenty if the site is so “creative” that the visitor cannot figure out how to get to your portfolio section within the first five seconds of landing on the site, for example.

The site is the vehicle that attracts the right prospects to your company. It should intuitively guide them to the pages that interest them the most and entice them to engage with you on a more meaningful level at some point during that first visit. Your site is a tour visitors can take of your firm, but it is a self-guided tour, and visitors will probably not follow the path that you expect.

One indicator that your website is performing well is if visitors can easily learn about the various aspects of your firm as they move through your site based on their interests. The more accurately the site describes your firm’s expertise across different media (imagery, text, video, etc.), and the more intuitive the navigation is between those descriptions, the more successful the site will be. Your portfolio will certainly be part of the tour visitors take, but it is not the only thing they want to know about.

When first approaching your website redesign, it is important to consider your basic strategic plan for the site before jumping into the “real” work of building the site. To help you add some structure to the strategic planning stage of your site, I created a 9 Step Process. This process is designed to help you take a more objective look at why you have a website in the first place. Taking a week or two at the beginning of the web development project to work on your site’s strategy will undoubtedly have a significant and positive effect on the results the site ends up delivering for you. This practice could also extend your site’s shelf-life by a number of years.

Websites take a lot of time, money, and energy to create, and you risk wasting all three of these commodities unless you have a specific plan for the goals of your site. Just winging it and hoping for the best might create a site that represents your firm well enough for the next six to eighteen months, but that approach is unlikely to create a site that has a significant impact on your business over the long term. My goal for you is to create a site that will be an effective revenue-generation tool for your business for three to five years, after which point web design and technology will have probably changed enough to warrant a rebuild.

THE ORIGINS OF THE 9 STEP PROCESS

You will notice that the book's structure is based on the 9 Step Process. This process came about as the result of over a decade of working with agencies from around the U.S. and Canada on marketing sites of all shapes and sizes. Through the three main roles (Attract, Inform, and Engage), we will move horizontally across the process chart pictured on page 14. Following this process allows you to walk through your site planning process in a logical sequence that matches how your prospects will navigate through your website.

Over the years, I have been in contact with thousands of agencies. There was one agency from the Midwest I had been eager to work with for quite a few years. They knew of us, but we had not had any opportunities to work together. One day I received a kind and

anonymous tip that this firm was starting to think about rebuilding their own site. I wasted no time in emailing their interactive director, whom I had met a few years prior after my first public speaking opportunity at a small conference in Chicago. As it turned out, not only were they interested in rebuilding their own site, but they were also about to launch a new business for which they needed a site, and they were preparing to pitch a site rebuild to one of their biggest clients.

I found myself sitting in a beautiful historic hotel room in Kansas a few weeks later, excited but fretting about the next day's agenda. The morning would begin with breakfast with two key people from the agency's interactive department, followed by a tour of their office. After that, we would head to the client's office so that I could present to them for an hour and a half, then we'd head back to the agency's office so I could give two presentations, one on marketing firm website best practices and one on planning marketing websites. Looking back, that day still stands out as one of the most intense and enjoyable I've ever had.

The firm's leadership would all be in attendance for the planning presentation, and I only had their attention for thirty minutes. At that point in my career, I had been speaking on web strategy topics for a number of years, but this presentation was going to be a more pointed talk to a more specific group of people in less time than I was used to. I also knew that it was the most important meeting

of the day. If that presentation went well, we had a good chance of them choosing to work with us.

So, that night in the hotel room I created the 9 Step Process.

It came together quickly, probably due in equal parts to the experiences we have had and the necessity of the situation. The next day, my presentation was successful. The Process was the glue that brought all the otherwise disparate components together. I explained the concepts in much less time than usual, and by the end of the session, it was clear that they had a firm grasp of the material. The fact that we were eventually hired for both jobs was icing on the cake.

Since that day, I have had the opportunity to use this process to explain how marketing websites can work to many dozens of agencies, some who are not sure what a CMS is (CMS stands for Content Management System), and others who regularly do complex web work for huge brands that we all know. In every case, the logic holds and the content is revelatory. I hope the same is true of your experience with this book. </>