Building a Website in the University Style

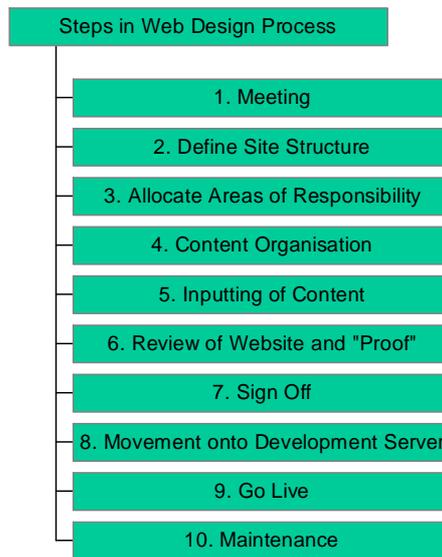| Steps in Web Design Process |
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1. Meeting

The Department meets with a member of the Communications & Development Office (C&DO) to discuss the needs for the Department site, and the timescales that they hope to achieve. The Department will also nominate who will be the main liaison with C&DO in the build of the site. (This person may also go on to become the Web Editor for the site using Macromedia Contribute)

2. Define Site Structure

In conjunction with C&DO, the Department decides the structure of the site. This will define 'what goes where' ie what will appear in the "sectional" left hand navigation of each page, (a constant throughout the site) and what will appear on the "sub-sectional" right hand navigation of each page.

The Department will be asked to create an example site structure as a diagram available at www.webtools.stir.ac.uk in Powerpoint format to download and to use as a template.

Once the site structure has been agreed, C&DO will then begin work on creating an 'empty' site framework into which the content and images will be placed.

Remember!: It is helpful for departments to design their websites around the user's needs, not based on the Department's existing website. This is an opportunity to really think about whether the information provided on the website underpins the strategic aims of the University.

3. Allocate Areas of Responsibility

The Department will choose someone to be the **Content Liaison** to work with C&DO in the build process of the website. They compile the site content and are responsible for collating this information into Word Documents ready to be inputted into the pages.

The **Web Editor** is the person responsible for the updating of the website on a day to day basis and may also be involved with C&DO in the initial inputting of content at the build stage. This will be decided between C&DO and the Department.

Please Note: Often the Content Liaison and the Web Editor are one and the same person.

The Web Editor will then attend the University's Contribute training course run by Information Services. Thereafter, C&DO will provide them with access to 'Webtools', an online resource which contains tutorial movies to guide administrators on using the University 'webstyle'. C&DO will then provide the Web Editor with a practice area in which to practice their Contribute skills and use of the University 'style'. The Web Editor will have little need for web design skills, as the text is put into the University's approved web style.

The final role will not have to be decided until nearer "go live". The **Site Administrator** will grant access to more than one Contribute user if the department deems this necessary. Again, training will be provided by Information Services.

4. Content Organisation

The site administrator, in liaison with any other content contributors, will start to collect together all content and organise it into Word documents reflecting the site structure (eg one Word document to each web page). These documents should be thoroughly spell-checked and proofread, and signed off by any Department heads involved in the site build. Alternatively, if the Department wishes to use existing content from their present site, this should also be revised, spell-checked, proofread and signed off by Department heads. It is helpful if Departments bear in mind a writing style appropriate for use on the web. For example, pages that are not too long, that have snappy, punchy text and make use of devices such as bulleted text to deliver content to the user.

5. Inputting of Content

Once all Word documents have been checked and signed off, and the Web Editor has become comfortable with using Contribute in the practice area, text can start to be inputted on the site proper.

Please Note: Content will either be inputted by C&DO or by the Web Editor. It will be decided between the Department and C&DO which is the most appropriate.

If the option to give the Web Editor the task to put in the "initial" content is chosen, C&DO will email a 'connection key' which will give editing access to the new site

framework. The administrator can then start placing content into the pages. The site under construction will be placed on a "test site" and members of the department able to view it as necessary...

6. Review of Website and 'Proof'

Once the Web Editor has completed inputting all content into the new site framework, C&DO will spend a few days reviewing the site (this will depend on the site's size). They will check whether the structure still meets the needs of the Department, that it is easily navigable, and that it reflects both the University style, usability and accessibility guidelines.

An appropriate individual should be nominated to "proof" the website both for currency, relevance and accuracy of information and spelling and grammatical errors. They will then return proofs to the Web Editor so that he or she can take in any changes that are recommended.

7. Sign Off

When both the Department and C&DO are happy with the changes that have been taken in, then the newly constructed site can be 'signed off' by all parties involved. No changes can readily be made from this stage until the site actually goes live.

8. Movement Onto Development Server

Communications and Development then undertake the technical process of moving the site onto the Development Server for final testing.

9. Go Live

On a date decided by the Department in liaison with C&DO, the site is sent live, which means it is freely accessible to anyone browsing from the University of Stirling website. The administrator is then sent a connection key to this new, final site, giving them the same access rights as they had while the site was in its draft form.

10. Maintenance

It is the Web Editor's responsibility to keep the site up to date and maintain its relevance to the intended audience. Department heads should also review the site on a regular basis and give feedback. It is crucial to ensure that information held on the site remains relevant, correct, and up to date, or it can reflect badly on the Department. *C&DO will prompt the department every three months to review the website to ensure content is kept up to date.*

Useful Questions to Ask

Whether you are building a website from scratch, or simply updating your existing site into the new style, this is an opportunity to look at the site with fresh eyes:

- Does your site promote your Department, or let it down? What judgements would you make about your Department if, like many overseas students, the website was all you had to go on?
- How much time do you have to build your site? Set an attainable schedule for its launch, and within that, build time for discussion, revision and sign off.
- Once its created, how much time will you have available for maintaining the site – will someone be able to look at it and update it every day, or will this happen as little as once a year? This will affect how ambitious you can be with your site. If you want new items and events listings on your site, then you must be prepared to update it daily, or at least weekly. If you site has very little time-sensitive information, then fewer updates will be needed.
- Would a prospective student/someone outside of the University be able to navigate the site easily?
- Is the information on the site easy to understand, or does it assume previous knowledge of your Department's subject or field of expertise?
- Who is your target audience? Is it postgraduates, undergraduates, international students, or must it appeal to everyone?
- How will your target audience affect your content and vocabulary?
- What are your competitors doing? Explore other websites and take note of sites that work well and those that don't.
- How do the photos and visuals look? Are they tired and in need of update?

Content is Everything

Before you begin, it is crucially important to have ALL of your content written, agreed upon and organised into a site structure. It is much easier to add or reorganise pages when they are still in Word documents than when they are part of the integrated structure of a website. Because you are moving into the University style, much of the design is already in place, so focus on the content.

- Agree who will be responsible for writing or compiling all the site content.
- Get all of the content written and spell-checked, always bearing in mind who your target audience is.
- Work out which are the most important areas, and which are less so; this will later shape how left and right hand navigation is organised.
- From the above, form a loose idea of how you want this content to be structured on your site: draw diagrams if it helps, to decide what should be on your home page, your left navigation, and right navigation. Go to webtools for guidance on this at: www.webtools.stir.ac.uk
- Decide on the wording for your home page, remembering this is the first thing anyone will see when they come to your site.
- Refer to the University Web Style Guidelines and Recommended Terminology (both contained within www.webtools.stir.ac.uk) when writing content. This will help you present a standard use of terminology both within your own Department and right across the University.

Things to Avoid

- Avoid presenting information which will go embarrassingly out of date very quickly.
- Don't assume too much knowledge – avoid learned acronyms and abbreviations. Write them in full for the first time on the top-level pages of the website, and then you can summarise later. If they must be used, you could provide a 'Key to Terms' page.
- Don't present long expanses of information on just one page. Instead, break it up into short, digestible chunks of information, one or two to a page.
- Don't attempt to present every single piece of departmental information on the site. This will create a site that has many layers of pages that are rarely used, and worse, rarely updated.
- Avoid very specific links to external sites that are likely to change, eg: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/4100589.stm. This is likely to be changed by that site host, which means the link on your page will break as a result. Instead, use generic urls and guide the user verbally eg. 'See Telecoms news on www.bbc.co.uk/business'.