

### 2. Ideas That Count

It's impossible to build a decent website until you understand the information you are going to present. It all boils down to this: *Don't say anything until you know what you're going to say.*

Everybody has ideas, but you'll waste time thrashing around in ignorance unless you know which ideas are most important. Take care at this stage and you'll save many hours of work on down the road. Use the audience results from Step 1 as a guide and run through the following tasks to help decide the content of your site:

#### ***Understand the task:***

At this point in the process you must keep clear the difference between what a page says (content) and how it appears (look-and-feel). Right now, your task is to decide **what** your site is going to say. Content, as they say, is King. Don't

get distracted! Use the following guidelines:

### **Content, not “Look:”**

Many website builders begin with the way things are going to look. They then try to shoehorn the content into the design. This is absolutely and positively the wrong way to go.

*You have to decide **what** the pages are going to say **before** you decide how they look.*

But don't divorce the content people from the folks that decide the look-and-feel. Be sure to get both groups together early on, *but do not allow the look-and-feelers to take over at this point.* You may have to duct-tape their mouths, but right now, it's content that's of paramount importance.

If, at this point, anybody says, “That won't fit into the design,” you should:

- 1 - Smack them hard on the top of their head.
- 2 - Send them out for coffee and donuts.

We'll get to the way the pages look later on. Promise. Short-circuiting the process is a form of

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hurrying and you don't hurry websites. *Remember: Hurry = Crap*

### **Welcome all ideas:**

Be open-minded as you collect ideas for the site. Gather them all no matter how silly they might sound. Imagine how many opportunities are lost because a decision maker wouldn't consider a seemingly [stupid](#) concept.

**Underling:** “Hey, I know! How about an online sales site named after a giant river in South America?”

**Boss:** “That's the dumbest idea I've heard—you're fired!”

One of the best things about going through the process as outlined is that the stupidest ideas are included early in the process where they can be examined for good or evil without damage to the site as a whole.

## **Involve everyone:**

Lucky enough to have a technical staff? Good for you! Don't like 'em much? Too bad. Get them involved early in the process, like right now. One thing tech folks don't like is being left out of the planning process. A good techie can use knowledge of the company infrastructure to provide feedback as non-techs try to decide what the website is going to do. Bad techies need to be watched at all times, so bring them along anyway.

Seriously, a mix of tech and non-tech folks is best in a project like this. Don't have a technical staff? All is not lost. Cruise the Internet and do a little reading on what technology is needed for the tasks you'll be dreaming up. While you're out there, look for good and bad examples of what a website can be. For Pete's sake, learn from the mistakes of others. It's a sign of maturity.

## ***Gather Ideas:***

All great websites start with ideas, so gather-

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ing them is a critical step. Remember, dumb ideas can equal a great website. Avoid judging any idea because that's not your task at this point in time. Besides, even the best ideas can sound goofy at first. Gathered ideas are like gathered apples; They don't have to be perfect to make a great pie.

### **Dumb ideas make great websites:**

Sounds silly, but it's true. Think of the best websites you've visited and try to imagine what some boss thought when the idea was first mentioned. From online auctions and sales to references for all sorts of stuff, from T.V. shows to wart removal, all sites start with someone's goofy idea.

The trick is to decide which ideas are good. And you can't tell a good idea from bad until you have them in one location where they can be evaluated and compared. Gather all of your folks together, content, look-and-feelers, techs, and non-techs, (even if all those people are you) and get

started.

### **Write the ideas down – temporarily:**

A good technique is to use those stickee-note pads. Write one idea per note and put them on a board, or wall. If you have more than one person, give everyone a pad. Or, let one person record and stick ideas as people call them out.

*Do not use a computer at this point!* It slows the process. Don't circulate the ideas via email. Everything needs to be written, by hand, on something that gives the impression of impermanence. The moment it's typed, or printed, it becomes difficult to change.

### **Do NOT group the ideas - Yet:**

Don't confuse collecting ideas with categorizing them because you will stifle creativity if you try to group them at this point. Everyone feels the urge to gather their ideas into little piles. Don't do it—yet!

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Ideas will appear in clusters around a topic that's being discussed, but don't feel as if you need to exhaust all of the ideas around one topic before moving on to the next. Allow ideas to arrive in the order they want. Grouping ideas will come later.

### **Everyone should be heard:**

One of the remarkable things about collecting ideas is that the good ones often come from unexpected sources. While it's possible to develop a site based on little internal feedback, experience shows that the most useful and interesting sites are built with a combination of ideas from many different people.

This is exactly why you need content, look-and-feelers, non-tech and tech folks. The tech says "People always call me because..." The marketing person says, "I'm always sending this information..." The customer support rep says, "The 20 most common questions our customers ask are...."

## Short and Painless Book

These are the things you should be listening for. It's a win when you include them on a site because you are providing an extra service to your audience.

It's okay to keep in mind that instituting some ideas are more time- and money-intensive than others. But don't dismiss ideas on the basis of cost. We're collecting, not judging. Put it on a sticky-note. You can make it a dream for the future, or you might find a simpler way to present similar information.

### ***Grouping Ideas:***

Now things start to firm up. Up 'til now, all you've done is discuss or define. It's time to start making your website more of a reality. Grouping your ideas once they're gathered establishes the [relationship](#) of the information you present on your website.

This step is particularly important because, to some extent, it gives you the beginnings of your