

WEB SITE DESIGN:

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM CAVALEAR WEB DESIGN

If you're reading this article, you are probably considering building a new web site or rebuilding an existing site. If you already know you need a site, then this article can help you navigate the process of Brainstorming, Quoting, Designing, Building, Launching and Advertising your new Web site or redesigned site.

One of the goals of a good Web Development company is to reduce overall development time and cost for the client while still providing a superior product. At [Cavalear Web Design](#), we implement a set of documents that helps us achieve just that - welcome to my world of site maps and wire frames.

Where do we begin when building a Web site? First, our team personally meets with the client to develop scope. This can range from one to a few meetings depending on the complexity and size of the site. A typical meeting involves munching on catered delicacies while defining goals and objectives of the site, client expectations and target audiences. We evaluate what will make the site exceptional from the competition, and gather a working list of the materials we'll need to build it.

Then comes the site map. A site map reflects the structure and organization of the site content. It groups the information into logical sections. To create these sections, we put ourselves in the mind of the user: Why is she at this site? What does she need to accomplish? How can she accomplish this? What logical path will she take through the site? An intuitive navigation system is the goal of a site map.

Once a site map is developed, clients become eager to see actual site design. However, integrating design too early in the process can conceal problems that might otherwise be detected, thereby lengthening the design cycle.

Coming to the rescue are wire frames. A wire frame can take the form of paper prototypes or HTML pages; however, it is important to note that wire frames are not design. They convey the information that should be on a given page, and a hierarchy of the level of importance of that information. Simple boxes and "greeked" text are used to demonstrate where images or important copy is later to be placed.

As a design tool, wire frames accelerate the Web site design process. Designers have a preliminary sketch of what to design to, rather than guessing how much content or the type of content that will appear. They are able to concentrate on visual design features that can enhance the overall usability of the site. Changes to the design are minimal, and soon a finished site evolves.

Internally, site maps and wire frames become checklists that we can use while gathering content. We can identify exactly what content will go where (and usually who owns it). Additionally, programmers can see what databases are needed and how things will connect together, as well as predict any technical requirements.

Without these two fundamental documents, clients are left guessing and in the dark, and may request major changes to a site late in the development cycle, causing delays and significant rework. Site maps and wire frames give clients a clear picture of the site and allow them to interact with a model of the Web site. They can see where links will take them, and begin to "feel" what it will be like to use the site. It is important to remember that a site map is not every single link on every single page, and that a wire frame is not design. They are merely tools to help designers and content managers work their magic. This tried and true process saves our clients time and money, and avoids costly HTML and programming revisions.

STEP 1: BRAINSTORMING

Before you contact any Web Designers, you first need to put together your own thoughts on what you want your site to do and how you want it to look. This doesn't need to be a formal process; that's why I call it Brainstorming. Instead, I recommend making a list of features (e.g. catalog, shopping cart, updateable content, portfolio of work, articles, contact us form, tell-a-friend form, etc.) and a list of content (e.g. news, Blogs, product/service descriptions, about us, legal disclaimers, etc.). Then brainstorm a few words that characterize the site you want built (e.g. professional, catchy, trendy, fun, colorful, elegant, etc.).

You should also make a list of domain names in this step, if you don't already have one. If your Web site is for an existing business, the domain name should be as close to your business name as possible. If you're creating a new Web-based business, the domain name should be easy to remember and easy to type. The domain name search features on www.NetSol.com will help to find your Domain name. There's only one limitation on choosing your name: someone else can't own it. This is a big limitation and can result in a lot of effort and frustration.

Once you have your lists of features, content and adjectives, you're ready to consult a professional. It's important to do your dreaming first before speaking with a Web Designer. By having your own thoughts written down, you will have a handy reference that you can use to jog your memory during the design phase. This can save you time and money, while ensuring that your dreams end up on your Web site.

STEP 2: QUOTING

You may be thinking, "I have FrontPage. I can do this myself." Or, "My nephew built our family site. I'll get him to build mine." I strongly urge against succumbing to these thoughts of finding the cheapest alternative for building your Web site. Unless your nephew is gifted (or a professional Web Designer), you risk having a site that looks unprofessional and amateur. This is certainly not the image you want conveyed to your potential customers or users. In fact, many believe that having a poor Web site is worse than not having a Web site at all. Sending no message has no chance of tarnishing your image; however, sending the wrong message can have a horrible effect on your business.

Luckily for you, the process of choosing vendors and getting quotes has been eliminated with the availability of Cavalear Web Design. In the past, if you wanted to build a Web site, you would have to undertake a long, arduous process of research and selection. For Web Design, you have literally thousands of potential vendors to choose from. Some are good; some are bad. Some are expensive; some are cheap. The challenge of sifting through the pages and pages of search results, reviewing vendor Web sites and portfolios, and finally choosing one, only to learn upon contact that they are no longer in business or don't take projects of your size, is simply too much for many people to handle.

Using a company like Cavalear Web Design, you can complete a brief [Request for Quote](#) form and sit back and relax while our qualified professionals contact you. It's nice to have options, but thousands of options can be paralyzing. The prices you receive for the quotes you have requested from other vendors may vary considerably. Remember the old adage, "You get what you pay for." Keep this in mind when reviewing the quotes. The cheapest quote may not be the best choice. While reviewing the quotes and selecting your vendor, here are some important questions to ask yourself:

- Do I like the sample sites in this vendor's portfolio?
- Can this vendor demonstrate the features that I'm asking for?
- Can this vendor provide references?
- Was the vendor's response(s) timely and accurate?
- Do I like interacting with them?
- Are they familiar with my industry?

Even with only a handful of qualified vendors, the selection process can still be challenging.

You may also consider requesting quotes from Web Hosting companies during this step. If the Web Design firm you choose doesn't offer hosting, you will need to find your own. Once again, you can use Cavalear Web Design to help with this process by completing a Web Hosting Request for Quote form.

STEP 3: DESIGNING

OK now you're ready to work with them to create the design of you new site. The first step is to clearly define what features and functions your site will contain, including the pages and navigation. It's important to clearly define this upfront so the developers spend less time, and therefore less of your money, making changes down the road.

The second step in this process is to develop the graphics for your site, which also entails choosing a color palate. Cavalear Web Design can help you pick colors and images that are compatible with popular browsers. The important thing to remember here is that this is your site. You have the first and last say on how it looks. You may need to compromise a bit to work within browser limitations, but the end product should be something that reflects you and the purpose of your Web site.

STEP 4: BUILDING

Now that the design concept is complete, you're ready to start building! This can be the most anxious part of the project. You've written the check for the down payment, spent hours on design and now you've sent a developer or developers off into the abyss to create your masterpiece. The wait can be excruciating. Many firms now have much of their software in reusable formats, allowing them to easily and quickly snap together the features your site requires. This greatly reduces the development cycle and brings your site to the Web much faster. Once the site is built, you're ready to launch.

STEP 5: LAUNCHING

Launching a Web site is much more than just copying the files to the Internet. While that is the first step, the remaining ones will take much longer and require due diligence on your part. You should begin by ensuring that all the pages and functionality that you paid for has been built. If the developers missed anything, now is the time to get it fixed. All sites are updateable or content managed via a browser. If this is the case with your site, you may need to add content.

For e-Commerce sites, you will need to have a Merchant Account and a Payment Processor Account. Cavalear Web Design can help you with both of these. Once your online payments are working, you should run several test transactions and at least one live transaction before allowing customers to use the site. A live transaction will require you to use a valid credit card. You can then follow the money, so to speak, all the way to your bank account. This is the most important step when launching an e-Commerce site. If the money doesn't flow, the site doesn't go...

After all the content has been added and the Web site has been tested to ensure proper functionality, you're ready to go live. If you're building a new Web site, your domain is probably already functioning. In other words, when you type your domain name in a browser, your Web site is displayed. However, if you're re-building a site that is live, you will need to re-point the DNS's (Domain Name Servers) before users will see your new site. Once again, Cavalear Web Design can help you with this.

STEP 6: ADVERTISING

You wouldn't launch a new business in the real world without advertising; the same is true for the virtual world. While organic positioning in search engines is a great way to get free advertising and visitors to your Web site, this takes time. Organic positioning refers to your placement in search results on sites such as Google, Yahoo! and MSN. Good organic positioning occurs when your Web site appears on the first page of search results. This can take months or even years to accomplish. Until time passes and your placement improves, you'll need to pay for advertising if you want visitors to find your Web site.

The two most common forms of Internet advertising are Pay-Per-Click and Banner Ads.

Pay-Per-Click advertising allows you to purchase ad space for your Web site that is placed throughout the Internet. Think of these ads as moving billboards that are displayed when the relevance is most appropriate. For instance, if a user is searching Google for "fine jewelry", you can pay to have ads for your fine jewelry store appear on the page of search results. This is an extremely effective and moderately inexpensive way of getting traffic to a new Web site.

Banner Ads on popular sites can also be an effective way of driving traffic to your site. Cavalear Web Design can most likely create banner ads for you, which you can then pay to have placed on sites that are relevant to your site. For instance, you may contact About.com to place ads for your printing Web site in sections pertaining to business services or even printing services. This method can be costly, however, since sites with a lot of daily visitors charge a premium for ad space.

It's also important to mention traditional advertising here. While Internet advertising probably offers the most bang for your buck, traditional print and broadcast advertising can also be very effective. By providing your Web site domain on printed media and in radio or television ads, you can drive a large volume of traffic to your Web site. You may not have the budget for television, billboards or even postcards now, but you should at least keep these forms of advertising in mind. Using both online and offline advertising can be the ticket to a successful Web site.

Now that you know what to expect and how to build your Web site, it's time to get started! You should first spend some time brainstorming and making notes. Then once you've finished writing down your ideas, we will be ready to take over from there.

STEP 7: SITE MAPS AND WIREFRAMES

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Related Links

- [Web Design Portfolio](#)