

Website Project Pitfalls & How to Avoid Them

Here's a roundup of the most common mistakes we see among organizations that are redesigning their website or creating a new one.

Failure to identify goals and results

Knowing what you want your Website to accomplish before you start your project is critical. The site should support your organizational goals, and you should have some measurable communications objectives in mind. Don't confuse function (what it does) with results (what you want visitors to do or learn).

Saving content for last

Websites are more complicated than print materials in that the content, design, structure, and navigation are connected at multiple points and across multiple layers. The best course is to plan your content (what pieces you will have, how they are related, and so on), then develop all four aspects of your site concurrently, since each affects the others. If you save the content for last, you'll end up writing for the design and structure rather than to serve your outreach goals.

Site architecture that won't accommodate growth

Your site should be able to grow with your organization and accommodate changing communications needs for at least a couple of years without a major overhaul. Make sure your basic navigation scheme and top-level architecture will last a while.

Too many bells and whistles

Don't be seduced by technology's hipness factor. (Our favorite example is useless animation.) Most organizations don't need sites with complex databases or fancy content management systems. The same holds true for design. Keep it simple.

Expecting one person to do it all

Design, software development, and creating content and writing are different areas of expertise. No one person can (or should) do all of them. And remember, your website is a marketing communications tool: make sure your marketing (or perhaps development) staff controls it—not the IT person.

Sites that are difficult to maintain

Don't take on more than you can handle. For example, if you need to be able to update pages inhouse, make sure your designers and developers can create a site that allows you to add content and change copy without technical expertise. Also, don't commit to a publishing schedule that will be impossible to sustain with quality results, or to a news-driven home page if you don't have regular news or the capacity to keep up with it.

Thinkshift is a San Francisco-based company that creates communications programs for clean-tech and sustainability-focused businesses and nonprofits. Find out more at www.thinkshift.com.