

## Planning your Website

### Developing a Strategy and Structure

Once you've gained an understanding of HTML or you know how Dreamweaver works, it is tempting to jump straight in and start building your website. But, like any construction, you need to have a solid plan or blue print in order to start building or creating. You wouldn't expect builders to construct a skyscraper without first having a major plan of how the building is going to be constructed, what materials they are going to need and how many people they will need to work on the project.

What sort of things do you think you would need to know before you start production? The first steps will be determining the:

- who
  - what
  - how
  - why
- of your web project.

Who are you creating the website for?

What kind of information will users be coming to your site for?

How are you going to create it (technical & production aspects)?

Why are you creating it (the purpose)?

Without a specific plan or strategy to accomplish the given objectives you waste valuable resources and time on a product that misses the target. The first part of the plan is to define the objectives. A successful website can only be achieved if solid objectives have been defined. Objectives or goals reinforce the purpose of your project, providing clear paths in a specific direction. Without this focus, your message becomes diluted and weak. (Sather et al:1997)

### Defining objectives

#### **What is the purpose of your project?**

Objectives differ depending on the website, the organization and the audience. If you are working for a client they may have differing objectives for the site than their audience. Ultimately, because you are building a customer-centered website you are keeping the needs of the audience in mind. Some examples of objectives of websites could be:

- to establish the company as an expert in its field
- to provide comprehensive product and service information
- to provide resources/information to the general public
- to provide satirical commentaries on social & political events
- to sell a product (online shopping)

**Determining target audience and their needs**

You cannot design an effective product or communicate a message successfully without knowing your audience. This task involves asking the questions - Who will be using my website? Who do I want visiting my site and what reasons might they have for visiting my site? You need to create a user profile in order to help determine who your potential audience might be. The user profile is created with his/her specific needs or interests in mind. Keep in mind that you may have multiple audiences - each of these needs a profile.

To create a user profile, try to determine the following characteristics about your target audience or audiences:

- age
- gender
- education level
- geographic areas
- household income
- hobbies and interests
- computer experience
- computer equipment
- computer habits

**What will visitors be coming for?**

After determining your audience(s), you must determine their needs or wants. You must understand the user's needs in order to organise and package your information in such a way that they can use and appreciate it. Your audience must regard the content as relevant and important information.

Ask yourself these questions to help in determining your users' needs:

- What information do they desire?
- How are they going to use the information?
- How often might they access this information?
- Where will they be accessing the information from?
- How might these needs change over time?
- What level of web knowledge do they possess?
- What other websites do they access? Why?
- How do they use the web in general?
- In what ways do they use your client's products and services?
- Why do they use the product or service?
- Where do they purchase the product?

*(Sather et al:1997)*

Some of the reasons people might come to your website are for information, news, interaction, entertainment, free downloads.

Do your homework! If you have drafted a strong plan – you have clear objectives and a well-defined audience profile you will find that this will be the touchstone for the entire web production process. Remember, the most effective web designer is an informed web designer.

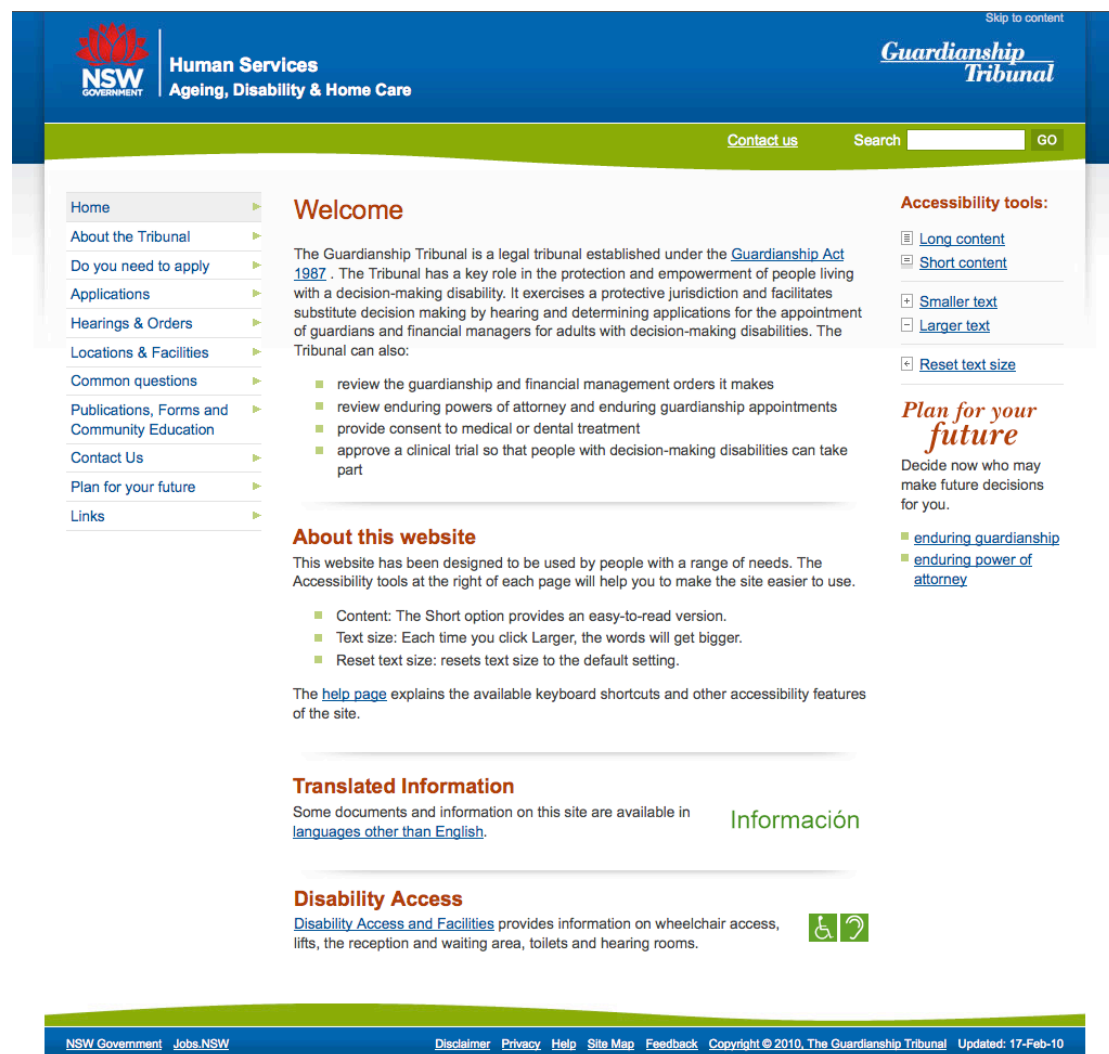
## Case Study

### The Guardianship Tribunal

A NSW Government agency funded through the Dept of Aging, Disability and Home Care.

The Guardianship Tribunal's primary role:

To hear and determine cases relating to the appointment of guardians and financial managers, where necessary, for people 16 years and over with a disability, who do not have the capacity to make their own decisions.



User Interface, 2008



User Interface, 2012

## The Need

The Guardianship Tribunal needed to redesign their existing website to make appropriate information available to people with disabilities, their carers, and service delivery professionals. This was also in light of the outcome of the SOCOG case.

The main problems they identified were:

- the site did not meet the W3C accessibility guidelines
- a considerable amount of the Tribunal's information was not available on the existing website
- the site did not meet community expectations for service delivery
- the current processes for service delivery were costly and resource intensive
- the Tribunal's application forms were not available from the website.

**The Audience**

The audience was determined and broken up into smaller, more specific groups, each with a detailed profile:

- People with disabilities: dementia, intellectual disability, psychiatric disability, brain injury
- The elderly
- People from ethnic backgrounds
- Carers (50 - 65 age group)
- Professional service staff
- Key stakeholders (other govt organisations)

In later stages of the project each audience category is used as a reference point for decisions regarding visual design, interaction design, user specifications and editorial voice.

**The Objectives**

The overall strategic issue that the Tribunal's team identified was that of improving accessibility in various context and forms - website design, online applications and information sharing for the majority of clients, carers and service professionals.

However, these objectives were defined:

- to provide information in a more accessible format to the Tribunal's clients and their carers
- to provide a much wider range of information on the website than is currently available
- to provide online applications in place of the current paper-only system
- to considerably reduce pressure on both the telephone enquiry and public education services
- to greatly improve efficiency for the transfer of information between the Tribunal and partner agencies

**The Team**

The team working on the website project consisted of:

- Project Manager
- Designer
- Writers and Information designers
- XHTML coder
- Database administrators
- Usability expert

Reporting to a steering committee

The importance of defining your objectives/goals is paramount when working in such a team. Each member went off to work on their various areas, coming from different

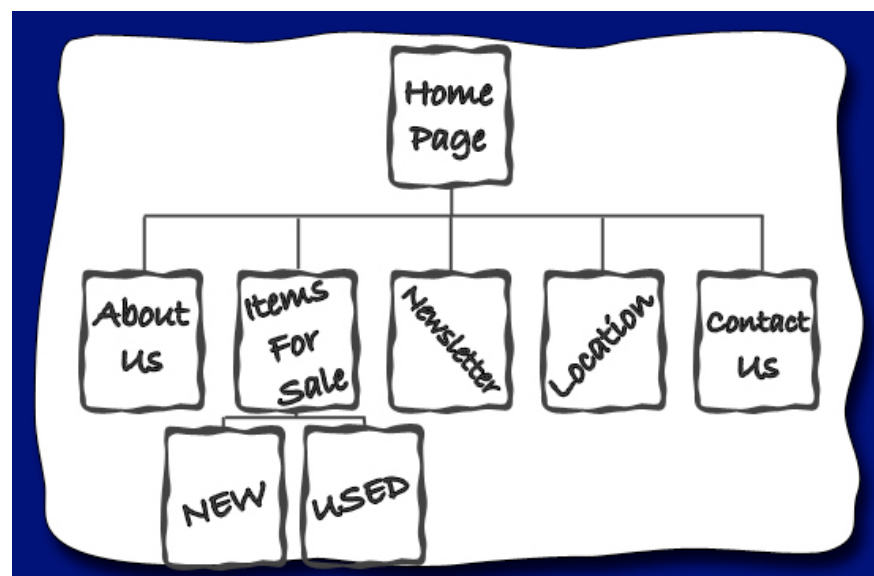
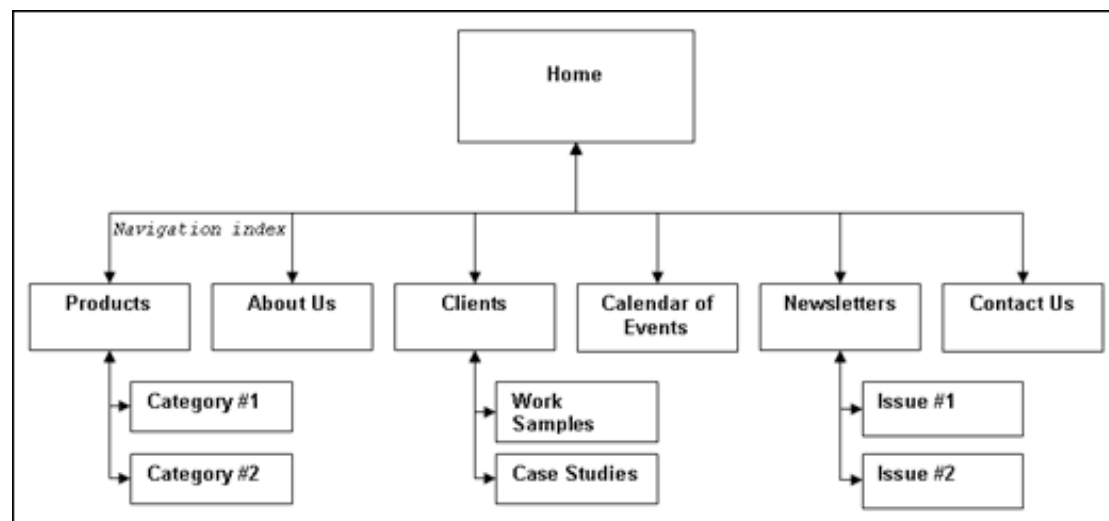
disciplines but working towards the same goals. These goals also ensured that at the various meetings everyone was staying on track.

### Planning website Architecture

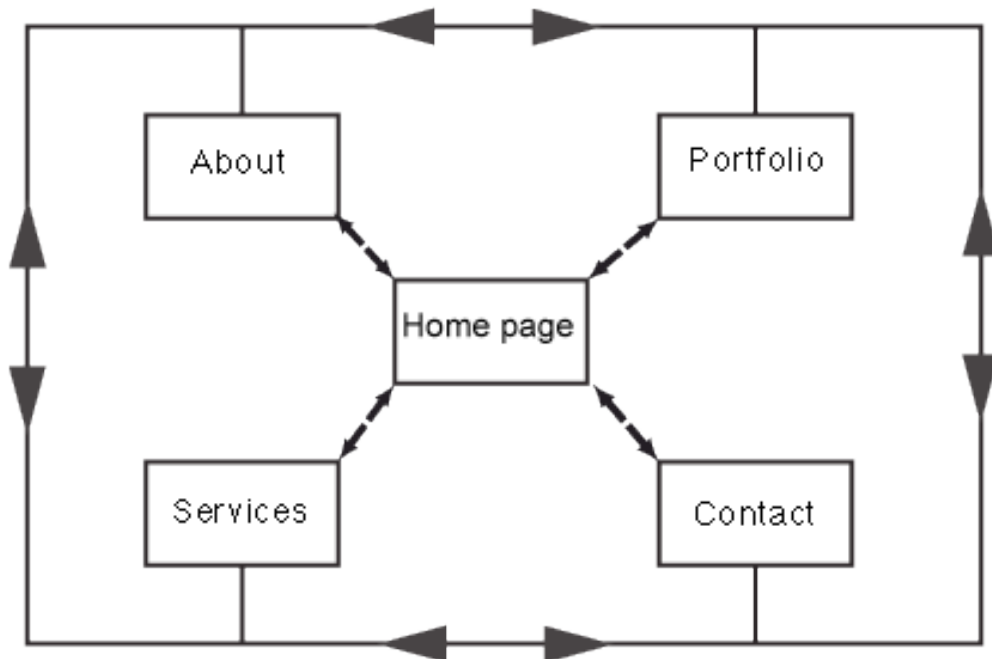
The next step in the planning process is to create a flowchart that shows the structure and logic of the content and navigation of your website. This is a mapping out of the site structure to help create effective information design, to organise and group your content areas and to see how the navigation flow will work.

The flowchart identifies all the sections and pages of your site and shows how they relate to each other. It also helps in the navigation design. The flowchart is an important part of Information design - the process of structuring the site's content (text, photographs etc) and making decisions about how it is presented to the end user.

From building a user profile and identifying your audience's needs and expectations, you will have a good idea of the information you need to include in your site. This should also help in making decisions about how to organize this information and grouping it into distinct identifiable and intuitive content areas. The reading for this week shows a number of different information structures that you could use, based on the information flow.



The Pyramid or Hierarchical structure (above) is the most commonly used information design with broader content at the top levels and more specific content as you move further down into the site.



The Web structure is also a simple way to show a non-linear information flow for small websites. Users can easily move from one page to another because the major navigation is the same on each page.

Either of these models would be appropriate for your flowchart.

## References

Sather, A, Ibanez, A, DeChant, B & Pascal (1997), *Creating Killer Interactive Websites*, Hayden Books

Sklar, J (2006) *Principles of web design*, Thomas Course Technology, Boston Mas