

Plan. Design. Build. Access.

by Andrew Webb, Director of Internet Solutions

Setting the right direction is important. Sail off-course by one degree, and you'll eventually miss your destination by many miles.

Overlook a critical element during software development, and the cost of correcting the oversight increases day by day until you're forced to bite the bullet and backtrack.

Your Web investments are no different. Yes, we all have to invest online, because the world is moving there and we must be there to greet it and compete for its attention. Many people expect things to happen online faster than in the rest of their business: they want to build fast, and see quick results. That's natural, because when an idea or a product does combine perfectly with Web technology, success – whether that's measured as visits or adoption or just plain 'buzz' – can come with dizzying speed.

So we build, expecting someone to turn up. But all too often they don't. Hopes fade, frustration grows, and we hesitate to invest further in an unproductive site. In the meantime, benefits aren't showing up, competitors are doing better than we are, and opportunity is lost.

In such a case, what's to be done? Very simply, pull out the checklist.

We like checklists at Quicksilver

Some months ago, we passed around a New Yorker article about an emergency room physician who saved hundreds of lives simply by implementing a five-step checklist aimed at stopping opportunistic infections. The checklist didn't really cost anything to develop, beyond smart thinking. Implementation – rigorous adoption by everyone in the emergency room – was the real secret. They had to buy in, and they had to be consistent.

I'd like to suggest that your website isn't really different.

For example: Are you visible (or visible enough)? Well, if you're not, there are actions you can take. These actions aren't a big mystery, but especially for small and medium-sized sites with limited budget, this is a corner that all too often gets cut.

Have you designed with your target audience in mind? That's a pretty savvy crowd out there, and they want what they want when they go online. Instant gratification is on the menu; loyalty is harder and harder to win, and very easy to lose. Are you keeping yourself in the game by following some simple guidelines related to content, design, navigation and functionality?

A website assessment, using a checklist, is the first step towards improving your online metrics. It focuses your thinking on what you are doing well, and what you're overlooking that could deliver additional benefits. It provides a set of requirements that can be assessed in the light of business objectives and available budget. And it puts your website into the right context – because your site is often part of a larger set of activities to communicate, build relationships, sell products and services, or support a community. It never hurts to look at your marketing and communications holistically, and ensure you are communicating consistently across all channels.

Plan. Design. Build. Access. (continued)

Once you have a comprehensive checklist, an initial assessment can be completed quickly and easily.

The results may prompt deeper research, but there again is that point I started with – about setting a direction. Once you know which way to point, you know the effort to dig deeper is worth it. It feels good. You just know that you're going to finally unearth the value of this site and connect better with your target audiences!

And you will – as long as you embrace a process and not simply an event. Maybe you already rebuild your site every five years; but consider assessing its health – and it's direction – more often than that.

Quicksilver has developed a comprehensive checklist that we can apply to your website and related online investments. The output from the checklist is a written report. For qualified organizations the assessment is free. You can request an assessment [here](#).



Andrew Webb is Director of Internet Solutions and has been involved with Internet projects since 1995, including experience with strategy and site structure, user experience and creative direction. As director of Quicksilver's Internet solutions group, he manages delivery of integrated services ranging from site concept to construction, hosting and application development.

Quicksilver has been designing interactive websites since 2000 for clients ranging from prestige cruise lines to medical diagnostic companies to associations with business and medical foci. [Click on this link](#) to learn how our end-to-end Internet solutions integrate your strategy with our design and technology capabilities to make your Web presence a highly productive and valuable tool for communications and marketing or [contact our sales team](#) for more information.