

Website Architecture

Creating an effective marketing website requires a carefully-crafted structure. The overall design of the project should take into consideration your web marketing objectives, best practices from the usability sciences, your particular sales processes, content integration, programming concerns and any planned expansion of your website. Known as “website architecture”, it’s more than just a foundation – it’s the blueprint for achieving maximum website performance.

It begins with a web strategy.

Websites are multi-faceted. They educate. They inform. They persuade. They also incorporate business objectives, strategy, content, design, technology, branding, and performance measurement. As you consider each “purpose” your website should accomplish, there should also be a corresponding set of goals and strategies.

Whether you are modifying an existing website or designing a new one, a comprehensive web strategy is key to developing a website that will achieve all of its goals. Without a defined strategy, your website may continue to grow in size *but at the same time, become increasingly ineffective*. Typical signs of weak architecture include:

- Poor search engine rankings
- Low online conversion rates
- High website exit rates
- Low usability scores
- Decreases in web traffic
- Orphaned pages
- Duplicate content
- Broken links

Website architecture – defined.

Think of a house or a building. It can be viewed as a mere structure but actually, it is much more complex. The architect of the facility takes into account the various needs of the end-users, specific goals regarding functionality, systems integration, aesthetics and budget. Similarly, website architecture is a comprehensive approach to website development that takes into consideration the requirements of the site visitor as well as the goals of the organization providing the site.

Blueprint of a great website.

When a home or a building is designed (or even modified), *it’s the architect who ensures that all of the requirements for that building are incorporated within its design*. The primary challenge is to make sure all of the components of that space interrelate effectively, efficiently and impressively.

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The architect must account for the systems to be included (electricity, water, lighting, ventilation, heating, etc.), pathways into and throughout the building (doors, hallways, elevators, etc.), functional areas (cooking, dining, storage, entertaining, etc.) and its aesthetics (finishing materials, colors, interior design, etc.). All of these must be masterfully coordinated to not interfere with one another while providing the inhabitant with convenience, functionality, and satisfaction.

Your website is no different. Whether it's a small website or a large one, there are basic components that all websites must accommodate. Using the illustration above,

"Systems" are analogous to the items typically included in the primary and secondary navigation. These are the major content areas and are integrated within the site.

"Pathways" are the click-paths you have designed to move your visitors from a wide range of starting points (e.g. landing page) to specific actions (e.g. form completion).

"Functional Areas" of your website might include a resources section, online store, chat area, etc. These will involve programming and specific strategies to move traffic toward these destinations.

"Aesthetics" encompasses the many design elements contained in your website. Like a marketing brochure, every website communicates a certain image but its design also has an impact on website usability and interaction.

Updating an existing website.

If you have identified problems with an existing website, an evaluation of the site can help to pinpoint architectural issues that should be addressed. The good news is that unlike the remodeling of a building, many web-fixes are fairly easy to implement once identified. A variety of tools are used to analyze websites and include evaluations of web statistics, search engine rankings, usability scores and content mapping.

Building a new website.

Developing a solid architecture for your website requires input from all of the site's stakeholders but if properly developed, the new site architecture can achieve optimum results with regards to ease-of-use, search engine rankings and online conversions.