

# FINIEN

## YOUR BRAND **LAUNCH**

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### **09** **UI/UX Design**

*By FINIEN Consultancy*

## **START WITH A SOLID STRATEGY**

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No brand launch is complete without a solid digital strategy. Your online presence will serve as your primary brand communication tool. Bear in mind that your digital strategy will likely evolve many times over the years as technology and user behaviors change. It is important to stay up-to-date on current technologies, trends, and best practices to ensure that your online presence will continuously supplement your brand in a successful way.

There are multiple phases involved in developing and implementing your digital strategy, and each one is as important as the next. If you haven't already done so, it's imperative that you gather a team of professionals for this important brand launch task.

**A great website consists of much more than a beautiful interface. Beneath the facade lies a logical structure that has been carefully crafted to allow users to navigate the site and easily find the information they need.**

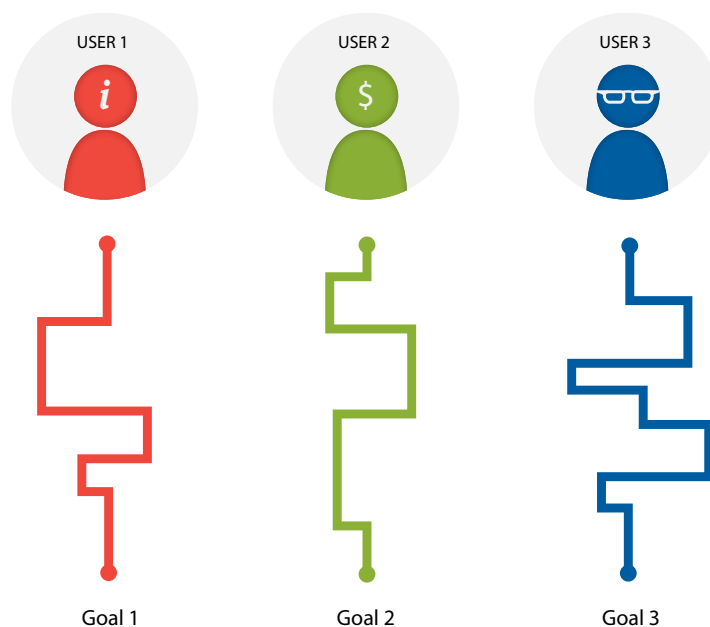
## PHASE 1: DISCOVERY & PLANNING

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This initial stage will set the tone for the project. It will help you gain a deeper understanding of your target audience's online behavior and preferences, decide on the appropriate interface, and lay out the full scope of work for the project. Skimping on or skipping this phase could lead to costly time delays in the future.

### Understand your Target Audience

In order to really understand your target audience, it can be helpful to define specific personas to help you obtain a clearer picture of your market. A minimum of three profiles will aid you in capturing a wide variety of users who may visit your website. Once you know who your users are, it's time to figure out how they behave online. Ask yourself what types of tasks users will need to accomplish on the site. Will they need to log in, find a product or specific information? Identify and prioritize these tasks and ensure that they receive special attention during the Information Architecture phase of the project. For instance, the illustration below shows three types of users with different goals in mind. The first is seeking specific information, the second wants to make a purchase, and the third wants to engage in content. How does your website need to be structured to help your users swiftly accomplish their goals on your site?



## Responsive Design

The days of building two different websites, one formatted for desktop users and another for mobile device users, are quickly fading away and being replaced by responsive Web design:

“Responsive Web design is a Web design approach aimed at crafting sites to provide an optimal viewing experience—easy reading and navigation with a minimum of resizing, panning, and scrolling—across a wide range of devices (from desktop computer monitors to mobile phones)” (Wikipedia).

Mashable, a leading technology and social media news blog, called 2013 “The Year of Responsive Web Design” for good reason (source: <http://tinyurl.com/brandlaunch3>). As sales of tablets and smartphones increase, more of today’s population is browsing the Web on mobile devices than ever before. Therefore, your digital strategy needs to address how to reach this growing segment of your audience, and responsive Web design is quickly becoming the mainstream means of accomplishing this. The benefits of responsive Web design are twofold: (1) there is a singular CMS backend, so updating and maintaining the site is much simpler than building two separate sites to accommodate desktop users and mobile users, and (2) building one website equates to less design and development cost than building two completely separate sites. If you feel that a responsive approach to Web design is best suited for your brand, be sure to discuss this with your design and development partners at the outset of the project.

## Devise a Content Strategy

You’re in the process of launching a website, but have you stopped to consider how you will engage your website visitors and encourage return visits? A dynamic website is one that continuously evolves, offering new, valuable, and interesting content that has been carefully selected or created to appeal to your specific target audience. “The Web is content. Content is the Web. It deserves our time and attention” (2008), states Kristina Halvorson, co-author of *Content Strategy for the Web*. A discipline not to be ignored or procrastinated upon, content strategy is too often pawned off on somebody else to handle “later on.” Tackle the task of devising your strategy and assigning content creation to a designated person or team at the start of your Web project.

The first thing to determine as part of your content strategy is the category your site falls within. At FINIEN, we’ve outlined three major content strategy umbrellas:

**1) Product-centric:** When the goal of your website is to move product, devise a strategy in which every piece of content that gets added to your site supports that goal. Take Amazon.com as an example; you would be hard-pressed to find a single piece of content, from ads to customer reviews, that doesn't somehow relate to leading you into the purchasing funnel.

**2) Editorial:** The term "editorial" may bring to mind numerous articles listed categorically on a blog-like website whose primary goal is to earn money through advertisements. However, it can also relate to the multitude of brands whose sole purpose is to sell a service. For example, a hair salon might try to gain an edge on its competition by including video how-to's of the latest hairstyle trends or articles about choosing the right cut for your face shape. This type of content can encourage return visitors to your website as well as help promote your salon's expertise to potential customers. However, it is important to ensure that the quality of editorial content is professional, speaks the brand's language, and will be regularly updated. If the content is low quality or if new content rarely gets added to the site, this strategy will backfire and make your brand appear less credible.

**3) Social-centric:** Websites catering to social interactions in the digital realm will fall under this umbrella. It's a fast-growing category, including sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and even Match.com. Take another social-centric site such as Quora.com, for example. Upon signing up for this site, the user is asked to select a minimum of five interests. These interests are then compiled into a feed of question-and-answer topics posted by other users. This website is designed with social interaction in mind.

Content strategy particulars will vary on a per-project basis, but here are some of the essential items that should be considered as a part of any good content strategy:

**Copywriting objectives:** Will your site target a B2B audience, a B2C audience, or a combination of both? This objective will have a significant impact on the language you use—whether you speak in industry jargon or need to use more simplified language to educate your audience about your product or services. Additionally, consider SEO as a part of your copywriting strategy. A good copywriting consultant will be well-versed in how to use key terms within your copy to enhance your SEO rankings.

**Tone of voice:** To ensure that the content created for your site consistently conveys your brand's unique tonality, write up a few sample headlines and paragraph styles that exemplify that tonality. This is particularly important if you have multiple content writers for your website. It is imperative that each person involved in content creation is well-versed in your brand's unique tone of voice.

**Photography/Imagery:** Often when we think of content, we think only of the words written on a page. In devising a complete content strategy, it is important to also set the standard for consistent brand-centric imagery, which can carry as much (or even more) impact as written content.

**Multimedia:** Consider whether video is appropriate to help sell your particular product or services. If so, decide how it will be used on the site and prepare a plan to ensure that the look and feel of video content is harmonious with the style of the website.

## Conduct a Content Audit

As a new brand, most of your content will likely need to be created from scratch. However, you may already have some existing imagery and copy assets that you would like to see included on the website. It's at this stage that you should provide these items to the team working on the Information Architecture for your site so they can be sure to include areas to house this content. Even if you're not sure if all of the content belongs on the site, provide whatever you have to your design team and let them make the initial decisions as to what may be deemed relevant for the site. You will always have the final say in the end.

## Prepare a Requirements Document

The Requirements Document, usually prepared by your creative or development team, outlines all of the features and functionality that will be considered "in scope" for the duration of the project and serves to ensure that both you and your Web design and development partners are on the same page throughout the project. Information included in this document will vary on a project-by-project basis but may include the following:

### Design Requirements

- Fonts: Google Web Fonts or Adobe Typekit incorporation
- Items that must appear on the site, such as logos, social media icons, search bar, and so forth

- Whether to base the site on responsive Web design
- Target pixel dimensions for the desktop version of the website design
- Specific color palette
- Presence of advertising banners
- Overarching messaging or mood to be conveyed through design
- Number of design directions to be presented (detailing whether the directions will be conservative, progressive, “designer’s choice,” etc.)

### **Theme**

- Browser testing (define required browser types and versions necessary)
- CSS and HTML versions used

### **Mobile Optimization**

- Target pixel sizes
- Testing on mobile devices (if responsive)

### **System Architecture**

- Type of CMS (Drupal, WordPress, Joomla, etc.)
- Staging website
- Google Analytics

### **Visual Editor**

- Video and Image support
- WYSIWYG Editor

### **Content Types**

- Forms
- Slideshows
- Promotions

### **RSS Feeds**

### **Workflow**

- Draft, Needs Review, Published, Unpublished
- Preview mode
- Moderators

## PHASE 2: INFORMATION ARCHITECTURE

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A great website consists of much more than a beautiful interface. Beneath the facade lies a logical structure that has been carefully crafted to allow users to navigate the site and easily find the information they need. In their book *Information Architecture for the World Wide Web*, authors Peter Morville and Louis Rosenfeld draw the analogy between websites and brick-and-mortar buildings noting, “Like buildings, websites have architectures that cause us to react” (2007, p. 3). They go on to further explain:

Each building serves its purpose uniquely. Architecture, design, construction, furnishings, inhabitants, and location all play major roles in shaping the overall experience. All elements must work together. In successful buildings, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

In the above sentence, replace the word “building” with website and you will get a hint of what Information Architecture is all about. Even though your creative and development partners will be the ones executing the Information Architecture phase of your project, we will provide you with a broad overview so that you can review your team’s work with an educated eye.

### Sitemap

At the start of the Information Architecture phase, your team will set about the task of creating a sitemap. Similar in appearance to an organizational flowchart, a sitemap serves as a tool to help organize content on your website in a way that will make it easy for your users to navigate and find information. Creating a sitemap is an exercise in skilled common sense to create a structure that groups large amounts of content in a logical manner. Here are some items to look for when reviewing a sitemap:

- Ensure that levels of hierarchy have been kept to a minimum. Typically, a site should require no more than three levels.
- Ask yourself whether the content is grouped in a logical manner. Don’t force grouping of content just to avoid another navigation item because your users may have trouble finding what they are looking for.

- Keep top-level navigation items to a minimum (again, without forcing grouping of content).
- Review the naming conventions used for navigation items—they should be straightforward and easy for almost anyone to understand. This will enable users to readily find the information they are seeking. Furthermore, these naming conventions should resonate with your brand’s voice (“About Us” vs. “The Company,” etc.).

In addition to being an invaluable tool in the organization of your website, a sitemap serves as the roadmap that will guide your development team to knowing which pages they need to build, and your creative team to knowing what pages need to be designed. Additionally, on larger website projects, it can act as a guide for future phases of your website by calling out new pages that can be incorporated over time as your capabilities and services grow.

## Wireframes

Now that we have an understanding of the site structure, we need to know which items will live on each page. That is the purpose of a wireframe. Recalling our original analogy of a brick-and-mortar building, just as you need a blueprint to build a house, you need wireframes to build a website. For example, in a kitchen you know you will need to allot space for countertops, a sink, a stove, and a refrigerator. The same concept applies to each page of a website. This is also the phase where you begin to get a good feel for the usability of the site. It is important to note that you may receive two different types of wireframes:

**Flat file:** This often comes in the format of a PDF presentation that you can click through. While flat files can visually represent interactive items such as rollovers and dropdown menus, there will be no real interactivity with the elements on the page.

**HTML prototype:** As the name implies, an interactive wireframe allows you to click through the site, just as you would on the finished product. While the site won’t be designed during this phase, the prototype will give you a great idea as to how it will function. It further allows for easy prototype testing, especially if your website presents a new online tool or interactive offering. It is easier to make adjustments during this stage than after the design or coding process.

Here are a few tips to consider when reviewing wireframes:

- Refer back to your user tasks in Understand Your Target audience on page 3. Ensure that the items necessary to accomplish these tasks have been included in the wireframes in a way that is easy to locate and simple to execute.
- Review the wireframes against your content strategy and ask yourself if there is space allocated to any items that don't support your strategy. If so, have that content removed and consider whether there is something more important that can fill the void. If not, it is better to reorganize the content that is already on the page than to add something extraneous. Ask yourself if all of the content on each page is necessary. Above all, websites are about ease of use and information finding. All too often websites are filled with excessive information.
- Be sure to spend quality time with the wireframes. Walk through each page and make sure that content is laid out in a way that feels intuitive. If you have any concerns about the content or find that important items have been left out, now is the time to address these issues. Again, once your team moves into the design phase, making significant revisions to the organization of content becomes much more cumbersome and could lead to schedule delays and additional costs.

## Usability Evaluation

For many, usability testing—an optional phase in your website development—is a technique that helps to determine how actual users will interact with your website. Typically, the testing is conducted once the wireframes have been approved and before the start of the design phase. Your creative or development team will create a list of scenarios in which they will ask a random set of users to accomplish specific tasks on the website. This is possible only with interactive wire frames, which will serve to simulate the interactive experience of a real website. After the testing, the team will compile the results and make a list of recommendations for changes to the wireframes. The advantage of usability testing is obvious: It allows you to gain insight into how an actual user will experience and navigate your website. The disadvantages of usability testing include adding significant time delays to your project and possible confusion for people who are not familiar with viewing a website in the wireframe stage of development. Without the visual cues that the design phase adds to your website, participants may be overly confused about certain elements, thereby misconstruing the accuracy of your results. As there are definite pros (but also cons) to usability testing, it needs to be assessed on a project-by-project basis.

## PHASE 3: DESIGN

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In an ideal situation, the same company who helped build your brand to this point would be tasked with the design of your website. They already have a thorough understanding of your brand and will be best equipped to extend that vision to the Web.

Depending on the creative team, you will be presented with anywhere from a single to multiple design directions for your review in the first presentation round. The first round will generally consist of the landing page design along with one or two subpages. This will give you a good idea of the look and feel of the site and how it may be carried through to the rest of the interior pages. Since you've already been through the sitemap and wireframe process and have likely spent a good amount of time refining the details of each page of your site, you will not be surprised by what appears on the landing page and subpages.

When reviewing the design comps from your creative partners, evaluate them based on the following criteria:

**Interface Simplicity:** Are the elements of the page clearly defined? Can you quickly identify the important parts of the page such as your company's logo and the main navigation? Does the design make the best use of pixel space without seeming cluttered or overwhelming? Is the white space used in a way that helps your eye travel around the page? If there is minimal white space, review the content and determine whether certain items can be removed, minimized, or rearranged in a way that allows for a more organized page design.

**Hierarchy of messaging:** When you view the design, the eye should follow a logical path. If you feel that your eye bounces around the page and doesn't quite know where to look first, the hierarchy of the page elements is not clearly defined.

**Clear call to action:** When viewing the page, do you know where to click next? Your website should have a clear call to action, whether that entails persuading your audience to sign up for your mailing list, call a specific phone number, or buy or learn more about a product. The site shouldn't leave your viewer stranded on the first page, having to guess where to go next. If that's the case, you will have already lost them the minute they land on your

homepage. A call to action can take many forms: a large and conspicuously placed button, a form placed “above the fold,” a banner with clear messaging that indicates how a user can buy or learn more.

**Cohesiveness with the brand:** Evaluate the overall look and feel of the design, focusing on elements such as color, typography, and imagery. Accent colors should provide contrast to your identity colors, allowing for both readability of text and visual interest. Fonts chosen for the site should complement but not copy fonts used in your identity. Review any imagery used on the site and ensure consistency with the tonality and messaging of your brand.

**Intriguing design:** The Web design should get you excited about the overall brand promise. It should draw you in just as you might be drawn in to a brick-and-mortar store or any other immersive brand experience. It should be familiar enough that you feel at home and comfortable, yet it should be different and exciting enough for you to want to explore the website further.

Once you’ve selected the final design direction, your design team will move on to applying the same design language to key interior pages, ensuring that all important pages receive a fresh and cohesive design while creating enough templates to house all content. In this phase you will also be presented with mobile and tablet views of at least the landing and an inside page to understand and approve the nuances that exist in the different views.

## Style Guide

Following your approval, your creative team will provide a website style guide: a tool that explains in detail the elements used throughout the site so that in the future, when additional elements or pages need to be added, the design will remain consistent. It also serves as a guide to your Web development partners as they build out the website. A style guide will typically include some or all of the following sections, along with other items as deemed necessary by your creative team:

### Color Palette

### Typography

- List of fonts used
- Hierarchy of headers

- Ordered Lists
- Unordered Lists

#### **Guidelines for Imagery**

- Sizes
- Imagery style recommendations
- Imagery in the context of a paragraph

#### **Styles for buttons**

#### **Styles for rollover elements and links**

#### **Styles for form elements and tables**

### **Design Application to Social Media Channels**

The importance of applying the branding of your website to your social media channels should not be overlooked. Many social media sites allow for various brand customization options. It's advisable to request a line item for this in your contract with your creative team to ensure that the application of your brand across all channels will be consistent with the design language of your new website.

## PHASE 4: DEVELOPMENT

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Once your creative team has completed the Web design comps, it's time to implement the design into a live website format. Ideally, by the time the design of your website is completed, you will have already chosen and contracted with a development partner. Your choice of partner to develop your website will depend on three things: (1) the size of your project, (2) the complexity of the design, and (3) your budget.

### Selecting a Developer

Freelancers can be a great option for smaller websites with minimal complexity and tighter budgets. For all other Web development projects, it is highly recommended to contract with a development firm. A firm will have the resources and capabilities to develop your site to its fullest potential. When selecting a development company, check for the following:

- Experience developing websites with functionality similar to your new site. For example, if you are developing an e-commerce site, ensure that they have other e-commerce projects in their portfolio. Similarly, if your website has been designed as a responsive site, ask your prospective development partner to show you examples of other responsive sites they've built.
- A project manager who will act as your primary point of contact. Website development is a complex task requiring someone to manage a timely schedule and budget. If a development firm is vague about who your point of contact will be or if a developer is to act as the project manager, consider it a red flag.
- Experience with Search Engine Optimization (SEO). "Build it and they will come" doesn't apply when your new website has poor SEO rankings. When interviewing potential development firms, ask them about their knowledge and capabilities in this area.
- Expertise with platforms that match your needs. Examples include Magento, Drupal, Joomla, WordPress, and so forth. Specific development platforms are better suited for certain projects. Make sure you are educated about the specific nature of your website so you can match it to a development firm's know-how and preferred coding technique.
- Content Management System (CMS). Make sure your new site will have a CMS in place

that will allow you to make edits and updates to your site in the future.

- Post-launch support. There is nothing worse than launching your new website only to find yourself alone with broken links and cross-browser issues. Ensure that a plan is in place that allows you a fixed amount of time to contact your development partners with questions or corrections. A 30-day support period is usually sufficient.

## Development Process

Each firm or freelance individual will have their own process. Here we've outlined a typical development process to give you an idea of what to expect from start to finish:

### **Develop or Refine Technical Architecture**

#### **Set Up Hosting**

- Specify hosting requirements
- Solicit cost proposals
- Select and contract with a provider
- Set up hosting
- Validate environment
- Set up staging/production

#### **Development**

- Install and configure CMS
- Embed A/B testing and heat map code
- Build visual theme
- Perform testing and refinements
- Implement mobile website
- Implement content on site
- Implement analytics

#### **Quality Assurance**

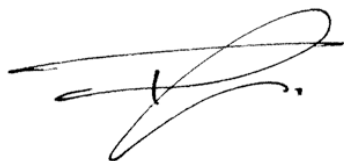
- Conduct testing for specific use cases
- Beta launch
- Review and feedback
- CMS training and documentation

#### **Soft Launch**

#### **Launch and Post Launch Support**

Keep this document on-hand when you plan your (next) brand launch and share it with your project team and agency partner(s) when you are choosing a new domain name.

Please share your opinion or own findings with me via [fgeyrhalter@finien.com](mailto:fgeyrhalter@finien.com) or engage with us to take you there safe and sound ourselves. I look forward to hearing from you!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Fabian Geyrhalter', with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Fabian Geyrhalter  
Principal, FINIEN

#### REFERENCES

Halvorson, K. (2008, Dec. 16). The discipline of content strategy. Retrieved from <http://alistapart.com/article/thedisciplineofcontentstrategy>