Writing the Website Development Brief

The development brief provides the developers with sufficient information on which to base a proposal to undertake the development of the website. It would be ideal if it were to contain enough detail for external web developers to provide a firm quotation. Quite often it will merely enable them to provide an approximate quotation which would be confirmed in the first stage of the project once they were appointed.

Below is the outline of a typical Development Brief that you can complete with your own information.

Section 1 - About [your organisation's name]

- Organisation's mission statement

- Services/products offered

- History of the organisation

Section 2 - E-business Vision and Objectives

- What is its vision?

- What are its objectives?

- What are the intended deliverables of the e-business plan?

Section 3 - Target Audiences

Be as specific as possible about who the target audiences are. Provide as accurate a breakdown of the demographics as possible, eg gender, age groups, location (state, national, international, rural, city), interests. Provide some assessment as to their likely experience using the Internet.

Section 4 - Project Management

Explain the management structure - who are the decision-makers, their respective roles, internal decision-making procedures. Detail your expectations re project meetings:

- how frequently the project team is to meet with the developers

- the agenda for those meetings

- what is expected of the developers by way of reports

- how proceedings are to be recorded

- how disputes are to be resolved.

Section 5 - Background to the Project

Provide any relevant history to the project and/or the organisation that would assist developers to understand people and content sensitivities, schedule, design, aims of the organisation etc.

Section 6 - Content

Indicate:

- content scope – how many words, images, maps, minutes of video, audio etc

- content type - eg text, photos, audio, and their current format - eg digitised, hard copy

- provide an information design map showing all headings and sub-headings to be used in the site and how they relate to each other.

Section 7 - Functionality

Identify the functional elements that are to be included in the site. Describe in as much detail as possible how you envisage each function will work from the user's perspective.

Include what results or information you want and what tracking you want to be able to do when users access that functional element. For example, for each online form stipulate how many fields of information, what information is sought, to whom in the organisation the information supplied is to be sent and in what format - as an email or a comma delimited file that can be imported into a spreadsheet, or is it to go automatically to a database or other program?

Section 8 - Graphic and Information Design

- Describe the corporate identity – does it need to complement the organisation's existing branding (logo, font, colours) or is it purposely different?

- Detail your design criteria and provide URLs of sites you like the look of.

- Describe how the information/content is to be organised (ie the information design) and provide guidelines.

- Specify accessibility requirements.

Section 9 - General Technical Issues

- Speed – the optimum speed and any special factors that may impact on it.

- Hosting and Web Server arrangements – are you doing it or an ISP?

- Usage monitoring and reporting requirements.

- State the need for the solution to comply with industry standards.

- Miscellaneous - explain any restrictions you think will limit the target audience's capacity to access the Internet - eg rural clients with limited access speed and capacity.

Section 10 - Databases (if applicable)

Are users of the site to "talk" to your organisation's database(s)? If so, outline:

- whether there is a need for instant links to keep the database up-to-date instantaneously or if periodic (eg daily/weekly) updating is sufficient

- what restrictions are required for access to your database(s) and what level of security is required

- how often you expect users to access the database(s) and how many at any one time (estimate) – eg if the site is to accompany an exhibition, when do you anticipate greatest access to the site?

Section 11 - E-Commerce (if applicable)

Do you want users to be able to purchase products and/or services via this site? If so, be specific about:

- the products and services which are to be offered online

- the payment processes which are appropriate - eg instantaneous via a secure online payment solution or users to provide credit card details with their order, leaving the organisation to process the order and payment manually

- the fulfilment details – how you are going to ensure supply and how the product or service is to be delivered

- how and where the terms and conditions of purchase (returns, refunds policy, disclaimers etc) are to be displayed to users.

Section 12 - Maintenance and Training

Your requirements for what needs to be maintained and how each of the following aspects of site maintenance should be addressed:

- the solution – browser-based or simply a third-party tool - eg Dreamweaver or Microsoft's FrontPage

- content

- graphic and navigational design

- functions and features

- documentation

- training.

Section 13 - Testing and Revision

- What is to be tested and under what conditions?

- Your respective roles and responsibilities

- Over what period will testing take place? – at the beginning, during and/or just before launch?

- Who pays for changes that are required as a result of feedback from the testing?

Section 14 - Project Schedule and Deliverables

- Specify the deliverables and milestones

- Specify your timeframe and any stages you specifically require in the development process.