

THE OFFICIAL GUIDE TO BUILDING A MORE PROFITABLE WEBSITE

The Real Estate Website Success Guide



A Step-By-Step Approach
for Building Lead Generating
Real Estate Websites

FREE WEB DEVELOPER CHECKLIST INCLUDED

57 Proven Elements Every Successful Website Must Have

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Introduction

Developing a Plan

As a successful real estate agent, you have probably come to the realization that you neither possess the time, energy or inclination to be an expert in website design and development. The endless decisions concerning choosing the right company, the right design and the right features can make you want to just throw up your hands and surrender. Too often, real estate professionals will set themselves up for failure by simply giving up and saying “just build me a website.” In like manner, buyers who request a home be built and not have a blueprint are sure to be told – let’s talk to an architect. Those without a plan – plan to fail! That’s where this eBook comes in. Because we know your time is better spent focusing on your core strengths of helping clients buy and sell real estate, this guide was developed to outline the specific features and specifications of what is needed to create a successful, lead generating website. It takes the guess work away. This guide is your blueprint for success.

Websites Built From a Time-tested Marketing Perspective

So what are the specific features that make a website successful? The short answer: The ones that generate leads! After all, the ultimate goal of a real estate website is to fill your inbox with qualified leads. Our recommendations are the result of years of testing, user feedback and trial and error. We have incorporated a combination of fundamental marketing principals taught by industry leaders and statistical data gathered from hundreds of websites. In other words, you are able to learn from other’s mistakes without having to worry about repeating them. Fortunately for you, we have already done the hard part so you don’t have to. What is left is the opportunity to create a consumer friendly website that makes people want to interact – a website that will attract, excite and influence the Internet Empowered Consumer (IEC). For more information on the IEC, visit www.REwebguides.com/iec.

The Approach

This eBook clearly outlines each aspect of a successful website. But our goal is to do more than simply say “You need X.” Our goal is to tell you **why** you need X. After all, once you understand the “why” you can then put these principles into practice in other areas of your marketing. But keep in mind that the reasoning behind some of these features can be pretty technical in nature. If you happen to get stuck on an unfamiliar word or term, refer to our quick reference Glossary at the back of this eBook. If you are not a self proclaimed “computer geek,” then don’t feel bad simply skimming over the sections that are more technical. Feel free to soak up as little or as much as your comfort level will allow. You don’t have to have a thorough comprehension of every single aspect - unless of course you want to leave real estate and become a Web Developer.

You Don't Have to Understand It, But Your Web Developer Should!

While you don't have to know how to implement each of these aspects, your Web Developer should! That's where the second part of this eBook comes in. The "Web Developer Checklist" is an outline format of website specifications. Once placed in the hands of your Webmaster or Web Developer, it will serve as a detailed step-by-step instruction manual for creating a successful website. Nothing is left to chance or question. You may use the accompanying "Web Developer Checklist" to solicit quotes to build your next website. Just make sure to stress the importance that your new website must meet all of the specific criteria.

Focus on Functionality – Not the Number of Pages

Some Web Developers will get caught up in pricing based off of the number of pages. While the ultimate goal is to have a comprehensive website for your site visitors, launching a website with 50 pages or more is not required. After all, your website should incorporate a solid content management system to allow you to easily create an unlimited number of pages of content. **A successful website is not about how many pages it has, it is about available functionality and how a web visitor will interact with it.** With this in mind, let's get started.

I. Look and Feel

A. Target Market

The Fears, Wants and Desires of your web visitor vary depending upon what market they fall into. Your **Target Market** should be able to identify with the “style” of your website. A website design for a first-time homebuyer should vary greatly from a design geared towards the luxury market.

B. Branding

The look and feel of your website should be in line with your other marketing materials. It is also important that the overall branding is congruent with the intended Target Market. With this in mind, you should supply your Web Designer with sample marketing materials such as your business card, property fliers, sample print ads, etc. **Stealth sites** should also maintain the same consistent style as your **brand** through use of similar geometry, color and tone. If your new website will set the tone for your other marketing materials, remember to follow up with your Graphic Designer once the website is complete.



Sample website targeted to families in a specific geographic market.



Example of consistent branding across multiple mediums.

C. Home Page

When a web visitor first arrives to your website, they quickly assess whether or not the website is going to supply them with the information they are looking for. With so many websites to choose from, they have no reason to give yours more than a fleeting glance. After all, they probably arrived at your website using a keyword search that yielded millions of results. Because of this, web visitors are relying more and more on visual appeal to determine if a website is going to serve their needs.

Your home page should immediately engage the web visitor and encourage them to begin clicking as soon as possible. This is typically achieved by using **Guided Navigation**. Guided Navigation pulls the web visitor down a predefined path or **funnel process**. Use **Featured Graphics**, **Compelling Offers** or text placement to to accomplish this.

Ultimately, the purpose of a website it to generate leads. For this reason, it is vital that you lead the web visitor down the funnel process. It is important that your home page incorporate **Compelling Offers**. The best placement for these offers is **above the fold** as it gives the web visitor an opportunity to engage without having to scroll. The ideal funnel process is Home Page - **Compelling Offer** - Lead.

D. Background

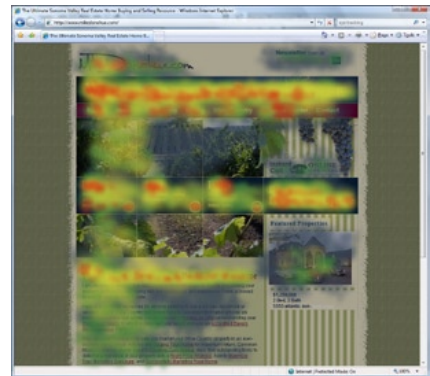
Use a dark color font on a light background for easy readability. However, there are times when **reversed text** may be used for visual impact. Examples include **Featured Graphics** and **Compelling Offers**. Using reversed text too often will lose its impact and tire the web visitor's eyes.

E. Website Header

Typically, your logo should appear in the top left corner of the website header and link back to the home page. If utilizing a **Unique Positioning Statement (UPS)**, it should also be incorporated in the header of the site.

F. Above the Fold

The Fold refers to the point at which the web visitor must begin scrolling to view more information. When a web visitor arrives at your website, the visible area without scrolling is called the **Viewport**. It is vital that the most important information on your home page is located in the Viewport and does not require the web visitor to scroll.



The above graphic shows a sample eye tracking heat map that measures where visitors focus their eyes. As you can see, **Compelling Offers** and **Headlines** drew the most attention.

A Quick Note About First Impressions

“Visual appeal can be assessed within 50 milliseconds, suggesting that Web Designers have about 50 milliseconds to make a good impression,” reported in the *Journal Behavior & Information Technology*.

Web visitors can only read one word in that tiny amount of time yet they can also process an entire webpage! Researchers believe this is due to the fact that web visitors use their emotional system, which works independently of their cognitive system, to make these ultra-fast determinations. This sort of judgment is most affected by color and interactivity, with the way that information is structured coming second.

It goes beyond the 50 milliseconds...

The first impression is vital to the web visitor’s entire experience due to “The Halo Effect.” The Halo Effect states that a person’s initial emotional reaction will affect all subsequent judgments. The initial impression your web visitor gathers in the first moments will affect the way they perceive your entire website. This means, for example, that if their first impression is positive, they will view your listings and read your copy all in a more favorable light.

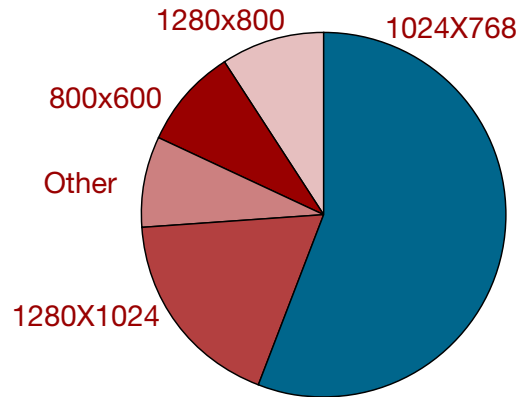
II. Size and Alignment

A. Alignment

In most cases, websites should be aligned in the center of the screen.

B. Resolution

Websites must be formatted to fit a variety of screen sizes and **resolutions**. It is important to find the balance between accommodating to the widest range of resolutions while also giving the best user experience to the largest segment of web visitors. With the growing popularity of widescreen laptops and larger monitors, websites should now be designed to accommodate high resolution monitors. The resolution of 1024x768 is replacing the previous standard of 800x600. Statistics show that less than 15% of web visitors still use a resolution of 800X600. With this in mind, have your Web Designer design your new website to be 950 pixels wide (this is the standard viewable area for 1024x768 users).



Although your new website will be designed for users with a 1024x768 resolution, your website will still be viewable by 800x600 users. The only caveat is that users with a lower resolution will have to use the horizontal scroll to view the full width of the website.

III. Functionality

A. Performance and Usability

The method used to code your website greatly affects how easy your website is to maintain, how well it performs and how easily search engines can **crawl** your website.

Your Web Developer should correctly code your website using Web Standards as described by the **W3C** (<http://www.w3.org>). Global aspects of your website should be separated using **include files** and all styling should be separated into a **style sheet**. This allows for maximum scalability and mobility in design and content changes.

B. HTML Coding

As stated above, your website should be coded to meet W3C standards and contain separate **markup** and style. It is important that the website also be fully tested and compatible in all browsers including, Internet Explorer 6, Internet Explorer 7, Firefox and Safari.


C. Navigation

Navigation is the road map for how web visitors interact with your website. In a well-designed (and well-written) website, the web visitor should never have to use the main menu. They should arrive at the home page and be immediately pulled in by **Guided Navigation** which engages them in finding the information that originally brought them to the website. Informative and relevant copy accompanied by additional Guided Navigation will encourage the web visitor to click from page to page, eventually drawing them down the **funnel process**.

Main navigation is typically used by the return web visitor who wants to jump directly to a specific page or a particular piece of information that interested them in a prior visit. It should always be clear as to what page the web visitor is currently viewing so the information will be easy to find on a return visit. All content on the website should be accessible with the minimum amount of clicks, in most cases no more than 3 clicks deep.

From a technical aspect, the navigation should be **cross browser compatible** and any drop down menus should be **CSS** based and not **JavaScript** based. This will ensure that the website is easily viewed by both web visitors and search engines. It is also important that the menu is sectioned off in an include file for easy updates. Text based footer links should also appear on the bottom of the web site. Again, these footer links should be declared in separate include file so that any updates to the navigation will change globally.

D. Links

All links should be easily identifiable as links. It is important not to confuse the web visitor by giving them multiple link styles or by using the same style for both linkable and non-linkable text. Any link that takes the web visitor to a different website should open in a new window. In general, you should avoid linking to other websites as the web visitor may become engaged with the new website rather than yours. It is preferable to bring the desired content onto your website instead. Always inform the web visitor when a link will open in a new window. This can be achieved by using **Alt text** or by placing a graphic beside the link such as this one. 

E. Fonts

Fonts should be displayed in a logical hierarchy. The main Headline (**H1 tag**) should have the largest font size. Subheads (H2 tags) should have a slightly smaller font size. Headlines should maintain their style throughout the entire site.

Body content should use **Web Safe** fonts that are easily readable. You may also consider slightly enlarging the **line spacing** to enhance readability.

From a technical aspect, it is important that all styling be declared in the **style sheet** and NOT **hard coded** into each page. This will allow your website to have well written code which is more favorable for **Search Engine Optimization (SEO)** and enables your Web Developer to quickly make global adjustments in font sizing and styling.

A popular feature is to incorporate **variable CSS** which will allow a web visitor to choose their preferred font size with a single click (see graphic for example). A **cookie** will be placed in the web visitor's computer to remember their preferred font size setting. Note: While this is a nice added feature, it does typically add implementation time and cost.



F. Flash

All too often, Flash has been incorrectly used simply to make a website appear more dynamic. The reality is that these intentions often end up doing more harm than good. Flash elements can quickly become an annoying distraction and divert the visitor from the reason for visiting your website in the first place. In Addition, information contained in a **Flash** file cannot be “seen” by search engines. Because of this, Flash does not aid in **SEO**.

There are valid reasons to incorporate Flash into your website. One good use for Flash is to deliver sought after Audio and Video content to the web visitor. An example of an incorrect use of this technology is a Flash intro to a website. If a website is effective, its visitors will be back multiple times, so a Flash movie that repeats every time a page is loaded (sometimes even during the same visit) quickly loses its appeal. At best, this repetitious element becomes a time waster, and at worst it becomes an irritant that drives potential leads away. In those few cases when Flash is the best technology to relate information, the web visitor should have the ability to control the presentation.

For ease of updating, Flash should be driven via **XML files**. It is also important to note that Flash may not always be the best tool for the job. Technologies such as **AJAX** can often accomplish the same result in a more streamlined way. In fact, surveys show that AJAX is set to surpass Flash in '07.

G. Audio and Video

With high-speed Internet access becoming more commonplace, a greater number of Real Estate Agents are seeking to incorporate multimedia into their website. This can be a valuable tool if done correctly. It is important that the web visitor is in control of their experience. Never automatically start any multimedia.

It is also important to have maximum compatibility so that all web visitors will be able to view/hear your multimedia. Since 98% of all Internet users have the Flash plugin, it is only logical that Flash is the best medium for playback. The Flash should be **XML** driven for ease of updating. For 99% of website owners, it is not necessary that you purchase a **streaming server** or anything additional to display your videos. If your video is **encoded** correctly, the video file will automatically stream.



H. Popup Windows

A website should not incorporate automated popups as they are widely regarded as an annoyance and are often blocked, which creates the risk of lost content. Popups should be used very sparingly and should always require being initiated by a click from the web visitor. In addition, the web visitor should be alerted that the information is going to open in a new popup window. If information must be presented in a popup window, the Web Developer should use a **floating div** to display the information.

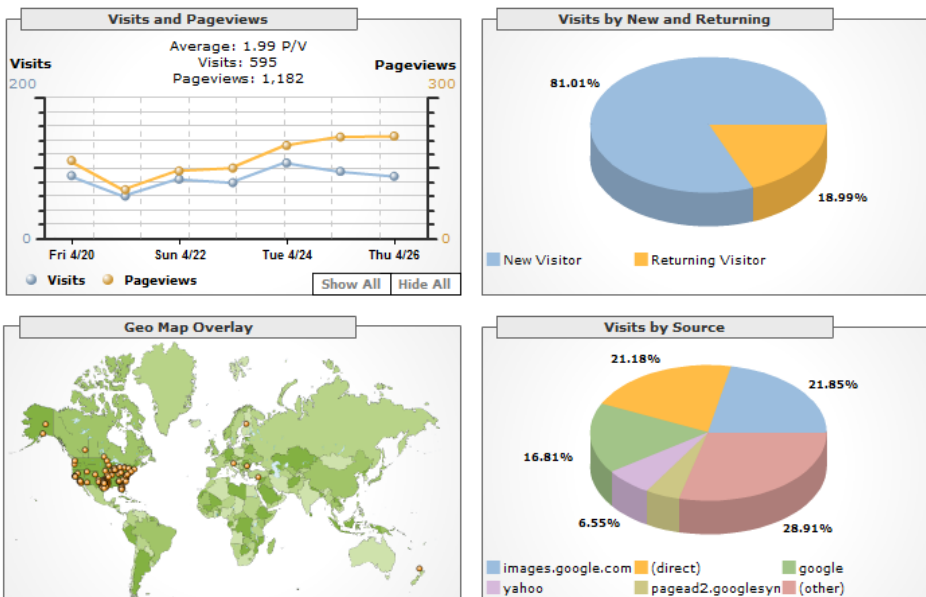
I. Frames

In most cases, **Frames** should not be used in your website. Keep in mind that many websites explicitly state that you are not allowed to frame in their information (Realtor.com for example). Frames are difficult to use from a navigational standpoint and can have a negative effect on **Search Engine Optimization**. There are, however, a few special circumstances where it is acceptable to use frames. These cases include incorporating 3rd party services such as an MLS search. In this case, inline frames are typically the best choice.

J. Visitor Tracking

The use of **Web Analytics** and **Tracking** are the only way to ensure your website's success. Analytics allow you to view the habits of your web visitor. You can then adjust your website based on this data and monitor the analytics to track the changes. Analytics should be studied and then put into action. Studying Analytics without taking action is simply a waste of time and money.

Ensure that your Web Developer has a solution for incorporating Analytics into your new website. While there are many website statistics packages available for purchase, one of the most robust Web Analytic Packages is Google Analytics. Your Web Developer can easily incorporate Google Analytics into your website by adding just a few lines of code.



IV. Mandatory Site Elements

A. Error Page

Typos and outdated **bookmarks** can cause your web visitor to reach a page that does not exist. Instead of the web visitor seeing a standard page that says “Page Not Found,” they should be presented with a page that has consistent branding with the rest of the website. This page should instruct the web visitor on how to best find the resource they were looking for (either by site search, viewing a sitemap, using navigation, etc.). You should also include copy that instructs the web visitor to contact you (with a link to your contact page) if they still have trouble finding the original resource. This page is known as a **Custom Error Page** or a **404 page**.

Due to unforeseen **bugs**, your website may encounter an error from time to time. If this happens, the website should trigger an automatic email message to be sent to the Web Administrator. This will allow the Web Administrator to quickly be notified of the problem so they can correct it in a timely manner. Note: It is also important that the web visitor not see the actual error but rather a Custom Error Page that reads “This site has encountered an error. We apologize for the inconvenience. The Web Administrator has already been notified of this problem and is working to resolve the issue.”

B. Privacy Policy

Your website should contain a Privacy Policy page that explains how you will use personal information collected from the website. A link to this page should appear in the footer of your website as well as on every page where a form is present.



Tip: You can download a free Privacy Policy template by going to www.rewebguides.com/resources.

C. Terms of Use

Your website should contain a Terms of Use page that details what the web visitor agrees to by using your website. It is not necessary to include a link to this page from your main navigation. However, the Terms of Use link should be included in your footer.



Tip: You can download a free Terms of Use template by going to www.rewebguides.com/resources.

D. Site Map

A sitemap is a great resource for both web visitors and **Search Engine Spiders**. It acts as a quick and easy guide for a web visitor to locate a specific resource on your website. The sitemap also allows Search Engine Spiders to quickly find all areas of your website. Site Maps should be automatically built to ensure they always remain current. (In other words, you should not need to manually add a link to the sitemap page every time you add a new page to your website.)

In addition to the sitemap that appears on your website, your Web Developer may also create an **XML Sitemap**. This is a special file that can be submitted directly to Google, Yahoo, MSN and other Search Engines that contains specific instructions on how Search Engines should **crawl** your website.

E. Footer Copy

The footer of your website serves as an easy reference for finding specific information. Footer copy is valuable for both your web visitor and Search Engine Spiders. The footer copy should include: your full contact information; any mandatory disclosures; the website's main menu links; a Terms of Use link; a Privacy Policy link; a Sitemap link; and copyright / trademark notices. The Copyright Year should be automatically pulled in via **JavaScript, PHP**, etc. to avoid having to manually edit the year to keep it current. It is also highly recommended that you include the following text in your website footer: "Information Deemed Reliable but Not Guaranteed."

V. Property Search / IDX

A. Overview

Searching and displaying homes are two very important aspects of your website. Your Web Developer should be familiar with a variety of MLS Boards and IDX systems since each MLS board has its own unique rules and regulations. You should also ensure that you or your Web Developer understand any restrictions or requirements that are associated with your broker.

B. Displaying Your Listings

There are generally two ways to populate listings into your website.

1. Automatically From the MLS Board

If you or your Web Developer has access to your local MLS Board's **raw data**, it is possible to automatically populate your website with your listings directly from the MLS. This method of displaying your listings has the obvious benefit of not having to manually populate full listing details, but can sometimes be costly to implement and can be limited by the data supplied by the MLS board.

Note: When choosing this route, it is important that your Web Developer provide you with the ability to add additional information to your listings such as Property Flyers, Additional Descriptions and other Documents.

2. Manually Populated

If your MLS board does not supply raw data feeds, you or your **Virtual Assistant (VA)** will need to manually enter the listing information into your website. Your website should include a Control Panel that allows you to easily update and maintain this listing information. It is important to understand what capabilities your website will have in regard to this functionality (number of photos, amount of text, type of information, etc...) and what limits are in place.



C. IDX Property Search

Studies show that the number one reason people visit a real estate website is to search for homes. This makes your property search the most critical aspect of your website. There are typically three ways to incorporate MLS search capabilities. Again, it is vital that your Web Developer is familiar with IDX and MLS integration since this will be one of the most visited areas of your website.

1. Framed IDX Solution

There are many companies that offer framed-in MLS search solutions. Typically, they provide you with a link that your Web Developer integrates into your website. Your Web Developer and IDX provider will need to work closely with one another to make sure there are no incompatibilities between the IDX solution and the website.

Your IDX provider should give you a breakdown of pricing and features included.

Popular features that aid in converting visitors to leads include:

- Ability for the web visitor to save their favorite properties
- Ability for the web visitor to receive automatic email updates
- Ability to search for homes using Interactive Mapping

Another aspect to consider is how seamlessly the IDX search feature will incorporate into the design of your website. Your Web Developer should work with the IDX Provider to ensure the IDX search feature will maintain the overall branding of your website.

2. Your Brokers' IDX Solution

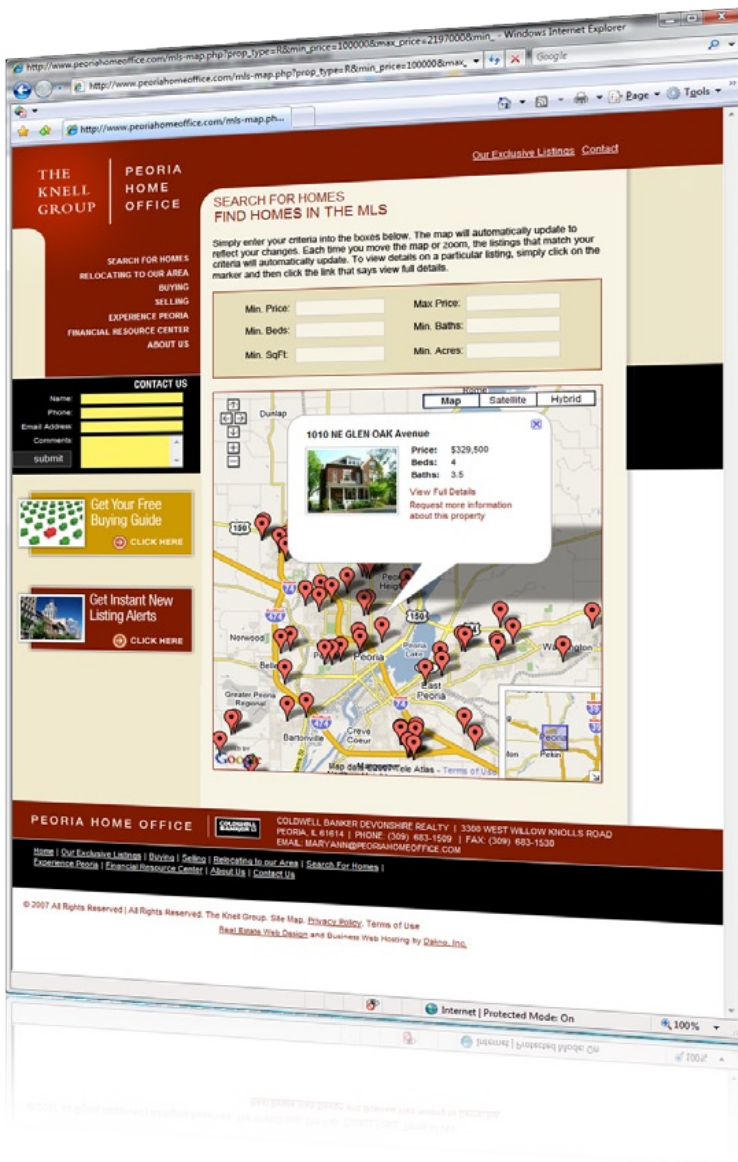
It is necessary to know the rules and regulations of your MLS Board and/or Broker prior to beginning your website development. If your Web Developer is experienced in IDX Integration, they will be able to assist you with this information. Some MLS Boards only allow agents to frame in or link to their Broker's IDX search solution. This typically limits the amount of features and the level of customization of your website's home search. If you are limited by this, contact your Broker so you will have a clear level of understanding of how leads are handled when web visitors request property information.

3. Custom IDX Solution

A Custom IDX solution provides you with the best way to seamlessly integrate an IDX search into your website. This is accomplished by first signing up with your MLS Board to receive a **Raw Data Feed**. Your Web Developer will then work to integrate this data into a custom MLS search on your website. Again, each MLS board has their own rules regarding this process so make sure you or your Web Developer understand these regulations before beginning development. If you plan on incorporating a Custom IDX solution into your website, only choose a Web Developer that can show you many examples of websites that they have built with this functionality.

Custom IDX Solutions involve more than just the ability to search homes in the MLS. They should also integrate the ability for a web visitor to save their favorite properties into a property organizer, receive automatic email updates of new listings that match the web visitor's search criteria and save frequent searches. The Custom IDX solution should also feature an accompanying Control Panel that gives you the ability to view lead information including their contact information, search criteria and saved properties.

While Custom IDX solutions offer the most flexibility, they typically require large amounts of programming time and can be costly to implement. The advantages of a custom IDX solution are that the MLS search can be built directly into your website and can also be tailored with your look and feel and desired functionality.



VI. Web Forms

A. Design

It is important that the overall look and feel of the forms on your website are attractive, inviting and intuitively easy to use. Your Web Developer can accomplish this by designing the forms using **CSS**. This provides the ability to globally change the look and feel of how the form fields and labels look and operate.

Web visitors are hesitant to share their personal information unless there is a perceived benefit. It is important to include text above each form that specifically explains what value the web visitor will receive by completing the form.

Longer forms should incorporate “sections” to help separate the input data in a logical way from a web visitor’s perspective. All forms which request the web visitor’s contact information should include a Privacy Assurance statement. This statement includes a link to the Privacy Policy page and promises that all data will be kept strictly confidential.

B. Operation

If the web visitor does not complete all of the required fields, the form should specifically state which fields the web visitor did not complete (indicated by a red border). This will easily allow the web visitor to know what specific information is missing all at once and without numerous annoying popup alerts.

It is vital that you have the maximum amount of control over what happens when a form is submitted. This is necessary because the length of time it takes you to respond to the web visitor, as well as what you say, can make or break the sale. With this in mind, all forms must have an accompanying backdoor system that allows you to specifically set the form functions such as: who receives the lead information; the contents of the automatically generated email to the web visitors; and the text the web visitors will see on the Confirmation Page once they submit the form.

The benefits of being able to control and edit your form functions via a backdoor include:

- You can continually refine your form copy and email response based off of lead response and client feedback
- You can easily specify who receives the lead information on a form-by-form basis. For example, you can set all Buyer forms to be sent to your Buyer’s Agent and the Mortgage Prequalification forms to be sent directly to your Mortgage partner.

Upon form submission, the following will typically occur, but may vary from form to form:

- The web visitor will see a Confirmation Page that includes the completed form which they are encouraged to print out for their files.
- The web visitor will receive an email confirmation containing a customized message based on the form they completed, as well as a copy of the completed form.
- The specified member(s) of your team will receive a notification email containing the lead information.
- A database will be populated with the lead information.
- When applicable, the website will dynamically add the web visitor to an appropriate drip e-mail campaign. Note: If this occurs, the Confirmation Page must indicate that this will happen and explain how the web visitor can opt-out if desired.

C. Form Security

In recent years, Spammers have found a way to exploit website forms by using them to send unauthorized email. This practice is known as Header Injection and your Web Developer should code your forms in a way that guards against this practice. In addition, Spammers are continually developing new ways to find vulnerabilities in website forms.

Be sure that your Web Developer provides you with a specific plan to maintain patches and security fixes. Ask the following questions:

- Will I be charged for patches and updates to my website forms?
- Will my Web Developer notify me of any new security vulnerabilities or patches?

There are many ways to guard against security vulnerabilities to your website forms. A common method is to use a **CAPTCHA**. CAPTCHAs provide a way to determine if a human or a computer (Spammer) is attempting to fill out a website form. A common type of CAPTCHA requires the web visitor to type the letters of a distorted image.



Since only humans will be able to read the text and correctly enter the information, the CAPTCHAS prevent Spammers from submitting the form. However, while CAPTCHAS do a great job of filtering out malicious scripts, they can also greatly reduce your conversion rate on forms. Often, web visitors become frustrated when they cannot easily recognize the letters in the CAPTCHA. Limit the use of CAPTCHAS and instead have your Web Developer use filters to block any malicious code.

Some Web Developers will use prewritten scripts that allow them to build forms with less programming. Great caution should be taken if this is the case. Forms using prewritten scripts are most likely to be exploited by Spammers.

D. Additional Notes on Forms

Ideally, forms should be **database driven** and not **hard coded**. This will allow your forms to be easily manipulated based off of **Web Analytics**. Having all forms on your website database driven will make it easy for you (or your Web Developer) to swap the order of fields, choose what fields are mandatory, and add / remove fields. This also allows you to control what happens once the form is submitted. For example, you should be able to choose what information (including both fields and text) is sent to the web visitor for each form.

E. Form Integration with Lead Management and Contact Management

Information submitted via website forms should seamlessly integrate into your lead management work flow. For example, lead information should automatically populate into your Top Producer database or be easily exported to Microsoft Outlook. In the same manner, forms should have the ability to automatically trigger email drip campaigns (if desired). This automation will help to streamline your lead management process and greatly reduce the amount of time it takes to process each lead.

VII. Content Management

A. Overview

There are many things to consider in regards to maintaining your website. If your website includes an easy to use Control Panel to make updates, then chances are you will be more inclined to keep your website up to date. Having Control Panel access to your website also gives you the ability to change or add content at a moment's notice.

B. Updates and Additions

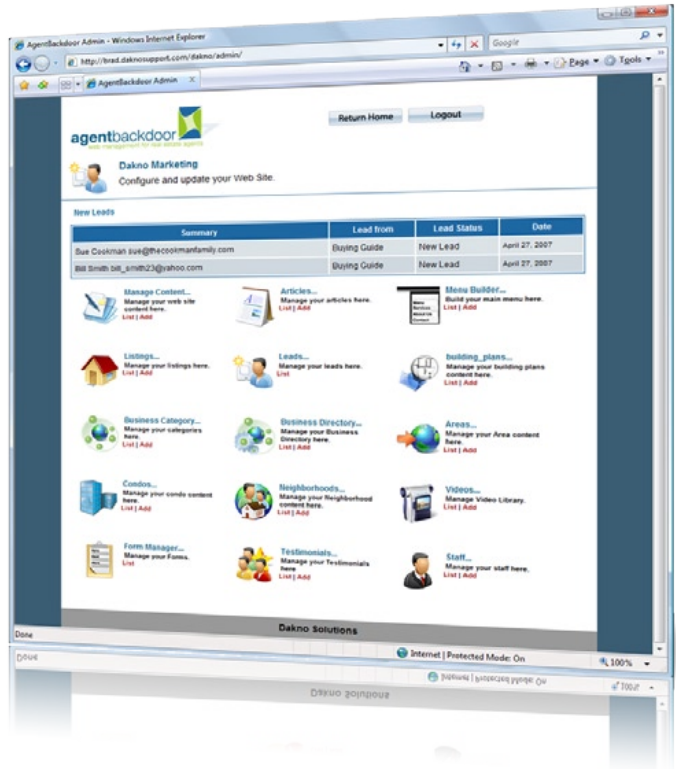
Your backend Control Panel should allow you to make updates to existing content within your website. Search Engines favor websites that are continually growing and expanding. Because of this, it is also important that you have the ability to grow your site by adding new pages and content using your Control Panel.

C. Third Party Updates

More than likely, your website will incorporate some type of outside technology such as Google Maps, IDX, etc. Your Web Developer should supply you with a plan and price quote to keep these technologies up to date.

D. Lead Management

Since the main goal of your website is to generate leads, it is vital to have a process for how website leads will be managed. Failure to have a predefined workflow will result in many leads falling through the cracks. Consider integrating a lead manager into the Control Panel of your website.



Your Integrated Lead Management system should give you the ability to:

- Assign leads to specific individuals
- Limit access for those individuals so they can only view leads assigned to them
- Give individuals the ability to document and update the status of their leads
- Easily export leads into your contact management software such as Top Producer or Microsoft Outlook

This type of lead management system will also provide a level of accountability as you can track lead status, response time and amount of follow-up.

VIII. Hosting

A. Overview

Web Hosting is a vital aspect of the website process because the hosting company is responsible for keeping your website online and accessible. In addition, they also provide the hardware that runs all of the systems of your website. With this in mind, it is important to choose a hosting company that is compatible with your automation systems. You could incur additional costs if the Web Developer is required to spend extra time ensuring the automation and functionality of your website is compatible with your chosen hosting company. If you elect to host with the Web Developer, ensure that they have the infrastructure to meet your needs.

B. Choosing a Web Hosting Provider

1. Reliability

Choosing a provider that is reliable should be your top concern. Do they have a reputation for providing reliable service? Do they offer an **uptime guarantee**?

2. Uptime

This is the amount of time that the provider is operating their servers without any disruptions in service. In other words, the amount of time that your website is running properly.

3. Support

The web hosting company should be easily accessible in case you require support. What happens if you encounter a problem? What forms of support do they offer? Do they offer toll-free phone support or email only support? How difficult is it to reach someone in the event of a problem?

4. Money Back Guarantee

How confident are they in their service? Do they offer a Money Back Guarantee?

5. Pricing

Are there hidden set-up fees? Are they a cut rate provider?

C. Additional Web Hosting Features

A Web Hosting Provider provides more than just storage space for your website. Below are a few additional features that you should inquire about...

1. Email Accounts

How many true email accounts are offered with your package? Do you have the ability to setup **email forwards**, **aliases** and **out of office replies**?

2. Web Based Email Access

Web-Based Email Access provides the ability to access your email via any computer connected to the Internet through a web browser. Does the web hosting company provide this option?

3. Spam/Virus Filtering

This gives you the ability to automatically filter or flag viruses and spam.

4. Website Statistics / Analytics

This gives you the ability to monitor the amount of traffic your website receives.

5. Databases

As your website grows, you will want to implement more database integration. Ensure the hosting provider has the ability to continue to service your company as you grow.

6. Extra/Hidden Charges

See if the hosting provider charges extra fees for the above services.

How To Use The Web Developer Checklist

Clear and Easy Website Specifications

Now that you are armed with the knowledge, it's time to take the next step in developing your new website. The next few pages are a "no frills" recap of what has just been outlined. We would encourage you to use this as your specification document for your Web Developer. This will ensure that your new website incorporates all of the ingredients needed to make it successful. Be sure to let your Web Developer know the importance of having the website work exactly as outlined in the Web Developer Checklist. You may also want to send this to a few Web Developers to solicit website pricing. Request examples of websites that have been produced with the specific functionality outlined in this guide.

Your Website "Spec Sheet"

It's possible that the most expensive functionality in a website is the one that fails to be accounted for by your Web Developer. Helping you clearly define the scope of your website is paramount to controlling your costs. Otherwise, you could end up with a website that doesn't meet your expectations and costs more than you bargained for. Having an idea in mind of a specific type of functionality only to find you were delivered something completely different can be frustrating and delay the launch of your website.

Avoid the Pitfalls

Providing the Web Developer Checklist to your Webmaster or Web Developer eliminates two potential pitfalls common in building a website; "undefined functionality" and "undelivered functionality." Undefined functionality occurs when the client requests functionality, or programming, and the developer fails to properly integrate this request according to the clients intentions. It is important to clearly define your expectations concerning how you want your website to function. The second potential pitfall is undelivered functionality. In this case, a type of functionality is completely omitted because it may have been requested in conversation, yet never formally outlined in the contract.

Free Web Developer Checklist

We have created a separate PDF file to share with your Web Developer that can be downloaded by going to www.rewebguides.com/developer. If you have a question or get stuck along the way, feel free to contact us at help@rewebguides.com.

After It's Complete

Once you have created your new lead generating site, the next step is to drive as many people to it as possible. After all, the best store front in the world does no good unless you get customers to your door. That's where our next eBook comes in. The Website Accelerator features dozens of proven and easy to implement ways of sending tons of new visitors to your website. And here's the best part, 87 of those ways will not cost you a dime! To learn more, visit www.REwebguides.com.

Web Developer Checklist

I. Look and Feel

A. Target Market

The target market should be able to identify with the “style” of the website design.

B. Branding

The look and feel of the website should be in line with all other marketing materials (print, corporate identity, etc.).

C. Home Page

The home page should immediately engage the website visitor and encourage them to begin clicking as soon as possible. Use Compelling Offers and Feature Graphics to achieve this.

D. Background

Website copy should be easily readable using a dark color font on a light background. Reversed text can be used for Feature Graphics.

E. Website Header

The logo should appear in the top left corner of the website header and link back to the home page. The Unique Positioning Statement should also be incorporated in the header of the site.

F. Above The Fold

Display your most important features in the top 500 pixels of the site (above the fold).

II. Size and Alignment

A. Alignment

The website should be centered in the screen.

B. Resolution

The website design should be 950px wide (fixed width).

III. Functionality

A. Performance and Usability

- Website code should be validated to W3C validation standards.
- Global aspects of the website should be separated using include files.
- All styling should be separated into a stylesheet.
- Never mix content and presentation.

B. HTML Coding

- Website code should be validated to W3C standards.
- Website should be fully tested and cross-browser compatible in Internet Explorer 6, Internet Explorer 7, Firefox and Mozilla.

C. Navigation

- Navigation should be cross browser compatible.
- Drop down menus should be CSS based and not JavaScript based.
- Menus and text-based footer links should be sectioned off by using include files.

D. Links

- Links should be consistently styled and easily identifiable.
- All off site links should open in a new window.
- Use alt text to alert the web visitor of any link that opens in a new window.

E. Fonts

- Use Web Safe fonts that are easily readable.
- Headlines should incorporate appropriate heading tags (H1, H2, H3) and styling should remain consistent throughout the website.
- Separate all presentation and content by using stylesheets.

F. Flash

Do not use Flash simply to make a website appear more dynamic. Note that AJAX may serve the same purpose as Flash and offer a more streamlined user experience.

G. Audio and Video

Use Flash to deliver any Audio and Video aspects of the website.

H. Popup Windows

- Do not use automated popups.
- Use floating divs instead of new window popups.
- Always alert the visitor that information will open in a new window.

I. Frames

Frames should not be used in the website except for incorporating third party services such as a MLS search.

J. Visitor Tracking

Incorporate a Web Analytics package such as Google Analytics into the website

IV. Mandatory Site Elements

A. Error Page

- The website should include formatted custom 404 pages that are congruent with the site design.
- All parse errors, database errors, etc. should trigger an automatic email to the Web Administrator so they can quickly respond to any problems with the website.
- Actual server error information should be hidden from the website and instead display a Custom Error Page that contains (or something similar to) “This site has encountered an error. We apologize for the inconvenience. The Web Administrator has already been notified of this problem and is working to resolve the issue.”

B. Privacy Policy

A link to the Privacy Policy page should appear in the footer of the website as well as every page where a form is present.

C. Terms Of Use

A link to the Terms of Use page should appear in the footer of the website.

D. Site Map

- Site Maps should be dynamically built and should automatically update when new pages are created.
- The website should contain an XML sitemap (according to the standards outlined in www.sitemaps.org) that can be submitted directly to Google, Yahoo, MSN and other search engines.

E. Footer Copy

- The footer copy should include full contact information, any mandatory disclosures, the websites main menu links, Terms of Use link, Privacy Policy link, Sitemap link, and copyright / trademark notices.
- The Copyright Year should be dynamically pulled in via JavaScript, PHP, etc. to avoid having to manually edit the year to keep it current.

V. Property Search/IDX

A. Overview

The website should include the ability to search homes and display featured listings.

B. Displaying Listings

Depending on specific IDX board information, there are two ways to display listings.

1. Automatically from the MLS board

- A raw data feed should be secured from the MLS board. The data will then be parsed into a database and filtered by the Agent ID Code thus displaying all listings that match the Agent ID Code.
- The backend Control Panel should provide the ability to add additional listing information including Property Flyers, Additional Descriptions and other documents.

2. Manually Populated

The backend control panel should offer the ability to:

- Add, edit and remove featured properties
- Upload an unlimited number of photos for each property
- Add and edit the property description using a WYSIWYG interface
- Ability to create custom fields
- Ability to set an expiration date for each listing
- Ability to set the status for each listing i.e. active, inactive, sold

C. IDX Property Search

There are three ways to incorporate MLS search capabilities into the website.

1. Framed IDX Solution

- Work closely with the IDX provider to ensure there are no incompatibilities between the IDX solution and the website.
- The framed-in IDX solution should be customized to maintain the brand of the website.

2. Broker's IDX Solution

Work closely with the Broker's company to ensure the MLS search is within the specifications of the brokerage.

3. Custom IDX Solution

The custom IDX solution should be seamlessly integrated into the website and physically reside on the domain. The website Control Panel should include a section for custom IDX that provides the ability to view lead information including their contact information, search criteria and saved properties.

Front-end Features should include:

- Ability for web visitor to save their favorite properties into a property organizer
- Ability for web visitor to receive automatic email updates of new listings that match their search criteria
- Ability to save frequent searches
- Ability to search using interactive maps

VI. Web Forms

A. Design

- All forms should be designed using CSS.
- Longer forms should be broken up into Sections.
- In the copy above the form, include a Privacy Assurance Statement and link to the Privacy Policy page.

B. Operation

- All form validation should be done server side and not client side. For example, use PHP or ASP and not Java Script alerts. If the web visitor does not complete all the required fields, the form should specifically state which fields the web visitor did not complete (indicated by a red border).
- All forms must have an accompanying backdoor system that allows the site owner to specifically set the form functions such as, who receives the lead information, the contents of the email to the web visitor and the text the web visitor will see on the confirmation page once the web visitor submits the form.

Upon form submission, the following should occur (typical, but may vary from form to form):

- The web visitor will see a Confirmation Page which includes the completed form that they are encouraged to print out for their files.
- The web visitor will receive an e-mail confirmation with essentially the same information as above reminding them that they filled out the form and a customized message based on the form they completed.
- The specified member(s) of the Site Owner's team will receive a notification email containing the form information.
- A database will be populated with the lead information.
- When applicable, the website will dynamically add the web visitor to an appropriate drip email campaign. NOTE: If this occurs, the confirmation page must indicate that this will happen and explain how the web visitor can opt-out if desired.

C. Security

- All forms should be coded to guard against header injection.
- Forms should ensure that the refer matches the actual domain.
- All inputs from the form should be filtered against new line returns, script tags and special characters.
- If using pre-written scripts, such as FormMail.php and Matt's Form Mail, provide a plan and specific pricing for maintaining these scripts with the latest security patches and updates.
- Avoid using CAPTCHAS as they decrease conversions.

D. Additional Notes on Forms

- Forms should be database driven and not hard coded.

E. Form Integration with Lead Management and Content Management

- Information submitted via website forms should automatically populate into Top Producer.
- Information submitted via website forms should be easily exported to Microsoft Outlook using VCF format.
- Form submissions should have the ability to automatically trigger an email drip campaign specific to that form.

VII. Content Management

A. Overview

The website should be fully controlled by an accompanying backend Control Panel.

B. Updates and Additions

The Control Panel should provide the ability to add new pages and content to the website and to edit existing content.

C. Third Party Updates

State your specific plan and pricing for maintaining third party applications such as Google Maps, IDX, etc.

D. Lead Management

The Control Panel should include a Lead Management system that gives the ability to:

- Assign leads to specific individuals
- Limit access for those individuals so they can only view leads assigned to them
- Give individuals the ability to document and update the status of their leads
- Easily export leads into a contact management software such as Top Producer or Microsoft Outlook

VIII. Hosting

A. Web Hosting Service

- What is your uptime guarantee?
- What form of support do you offer (phone or email)?
- How difficult is it to reach someone in the event of a problem?
- What is your Money Back Guarantee?
- List all set-up and monthly fees

B. Web Hosting Features

- How many email accounts are included in your service?
- How many Email forwards and Aliases are included?
- Do you offer out of office replies?
- What are your methods for spam and virus filtering?
- What Web Statistics and Analytics packages are included in your hosting service?
- What database infrastructure do you have in place to accommodate site growth?

Glossary

This section serves as a quick reference guide for the more technical terms used in this eBook. If you find a highlighted term that you are unfamiliar with, simply refer to this section of the eBook.

Above the Fold

The portion of a website that is visible in the browser window without scrolling.

AJAX

AJAX or Asynchronous **JavaScript** is a scripting technique for silently loading new data from the server without having to refresh the web page. This allows web visitors to more seamlessly interact with the website without having to “submit” the page to retrieve the updated information. A practical example would be using AJAX for Interactive mapping. With AJAX, you can drag a map and retrieve new information without having to refresh the page. Without AJAX, you would have to “submit” and retrieve the new map information once the page reloads.

Alt Text

The text that appears when you mouse over an image or picture on a website. Alt text is especially useful for the Blind and Vision Impaired as their browsers will “speak” the Alt text to describe the photo. Since Search Engines cannot “see” graphics, they also rely on this information when visiting websites. However, Search Engines are relying on Alt text less and less due to the fact that it is so easily abused by stuffing keywords in an effort to exploit Search Engines.

Bookmark

A method of saving links to individual web pages or web locations on your computer. This allows the web visitor to easily reference the link and return to it at a later date. Bookmark is the term used in the Firefox browser while Internet Explorer uses the term “favorites.” Both accomplish the same task.

Brand

Your identity as perceived through the eyes of the public. It is made up of your name, logo and other visual elements such as colors and symbols. It also encompasses the overall view of a person or business.

Bugs

A bug (as it relates to websites) is a flaw or mistake in the coding or programming that prevents the website from operating correctly.

CAPTCHA

A CAPTCHA is a type of test used to determine whether or not the web visitor is human. Many CAPTCHA's appear in the form of distorted text.

Compelling Offers

A compelling offer is a special package, piece of information, document or item that will likely be viewed as extremely valuable by your web visitors. So much so that it compels them to fill out a contact form requesting the information.

Cookie

A cookie is a small text file that is sent from a web server and is stored on the web visitor's local computer. The file can contain information such as a username, preferences, shopping cart information, etc. The Web Server can then retrieve this information when a web visitor returns to the website. This allows the Web Server to "remember" preferences and other user information.

Crawl

Crawl is the act of a **Search Engine Spider** navigating through the code on your website. Search Engines then store this information to be later retrieved when a user conducts a search for the related content.

Cross Browser Compatible

The ability for a website to correctly display and operate in a variety of web browsers including Internet Explorer 6, Internet Explorer 7, Firefox and Safari.

CSS

Short for Cascading Style Sheets, CSS is a standard for specifying the appearance of text and other elements on a website. CSS allows the Web Developer to set global styles that are used over and over throughout the website. For example, a CSS file may state that all headlines be red. If you want to change the headlines to blue, you would only have to change the single reference in the CSS Style Sheet and your entire website will instantly update with blue headlines.

Custom Error Page or a 404 Page

A custom error allows your Web server to replace the default error messages with a specific page that you create. This specific page can then be customized to be consistent with your website and contain helpful information that directs the web visitor to find the specific information that they requested.

Database Driven

The information is stored in a database as opposed to statically in the code. This is achieved by using the database to populate the information every time the page is loaded. This allows websites to be updated at a moment's notice as changing the information in the database will immediately be reflected on the website.

Email Aliases

Email aliases are additional email accounts that point back to one true account. For example, if your email address is Philip@domain.com, then you may want to create aliases such as phillip@domain.com and phil@domain.com. It is not needed to check each individual account as all email addresses will be routed to Philip@domain.com. This is helpful to use for spam protection. You can setup an email alias such as amazon@domain.com, this allows you to give out these specific email addresses. If you begin to receive spam via that address, you can simply delete the email alias and create a new one.

Email Forwards

Email Forwards are similar to Email Aliases in that they are not true email accounts. Email forwards allow you to forward email to an email address on another domain. For example, you could have email sent to bob@domain.com forward to a gmail or yahoo account.

Email Out of Office Replies

If you will not have access to your email for an extended period of time, it is useful to inform anyone who sends you an email that you are not available and to redirect their questions in your absence. This can be done via an Out of Office Reply. When someone sends you an email, the server will automatically reply informing them of your absence.

Encoded (Encoding)

The compression of a digital video file into a streaming format that allows the file to be played as it downloads. With earlier digital files, the entire file had to be downloaded before playback could begin.

Feature Graphics

Feature graphics are buttons or graphics that stand out from other elements on the website. They are often used to encourage web visitors to navigate to **Compelling Offers** or used as **Guided Navigation**.

Flash

A popular software developed by Macromedia, Flash is used to develop animation, navigation interfaces, graphic illustrations and interactivity. Flash on the Web is displayed by a browser plug-in and is **cross browser compatible**.

Floating Div

A floating div resembles a “pop up window” in that it allows you to display a window that sits above other content in the website. The advantage of a floating div, as opposed to traditional pop-up windows, is that they are not blocked by pop-up blocking software. To see an example of a floating div, visit www.rewebguides.com/div.

Frames

An HTML technique used to combine two or more separate HTML documents within a single web browser screen. This allows a single webpage to have separate scrolling regions each with a scroll bar as if it were a window within the window. But, keep in mind that frames can cause both navigational and search engine ranking problems.

Funnel Process

Also known as a Conversion Funnel, the Funnel is a defined path or a set of steps that turn a web visitor into a lead. For example, a web visitor may arrive on your website, click a **Feature Graphic**, complete a form and then click the “submit” button. In this case the funnel would be Home Page – Feature Graphic - Form – Lead. It is helpful to understand the different funnels on your website so you can successfully lead the web visitor down that predefined path.

Guided Navigation

Guided Navigation helps the web visitor easily find the most compelling aspects of the website without having to search for the specific page via the standard menu. For example, your home page may contain a banner or graphic that leads web visitors to an MLS search. **Featured graphics** can be used as a form of Guided Navigation that attracts web visitors down a predefined **Funnel Process**.

H1 Tag (Heading Tags)

Properly using heading tags can have a positive impact on both search engines and visitors. Visitors will benefit from having easily scannable text with both headlines and subheadlines. In addition, including keywords in the Heading Tags can improve search engine ranking. With the proper use of **CSS**, you can then set global style attributes for all headlines throughout your website.

Hard Coded

Hard-code refers to the practice of embedding information or content directly into the source code. This practice is discouraged as it provides no easy way to modify content in the website. For example, if the menu of a 50 page website is "hard coded," then even a task as simple as changing one link would require the developer to have to edit all 50 pages. A more streamlined and scalable approach would be to use external sources such as an **include file** or **database** to control these aspects of the website.

Include Files

A file that contains specific information that is referenced many times within a website. For example, instead of **hard coding** a menu into every page of a website, each page would simply reference the include file. This way, updating the menu would only require you to update one file to reflect the changes throughout the entire website.

JavaScript

JavaScript is a scripting language developed by Netscape that is mostly used in web pages to add features that make the website more interactive. When JavaScript is included in an HTML file, it relies upon the browser to interpret the JavaScript. It is important to keep in mind that most search engines cannot "see" information built via JavaScript.

Line Spacing

Also called "leading," this refers to the vertical distance between two lines of type.

Markup

The "code" used to build the structure of the website that browsers then interpret to create the webpage.

PHP

An open source, server side programming language that allows Web Developers to create websites with database interactivity and dynamic content.

Raw Data

Typically delivered in a text based file, Raw data is information which has not yet been processed. A Web Developer would then take this data and import the information into a database where it can then be retrieved and displayed on a website.

Resolution

The screen resolution of a computer monitor is the number of pixels that are displayed horizontally and lines displayed vertically (pixels x lines). Because there are so many different resolutions available, it is important that a website provide the maximum amount of support for the largest possible audience.

Reversed Text

Reversed text refers to any light color text on a dark background. While reversed text can help create visual impact, it should not be used excessively due to the fact that it will tire the web visitor's eyes.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

Search Engine Optimization is divided into two practices.

1. On Page Optimization is the process of altering a website for specific keyword phrases to encourage a better position when those phrases are entered into a Search Engine. This can be done by editing content, title tags and HTML code.
2. Off Site Optimization is the process of building the websites' overall exposure and credibility as it relates to other websites. This can be accomplished by encouraging others to link to your website and by participating in social networks.

Search Engine Spiders

Spiders are Software Programs or Robots that **crawl** webpages in an automated manner. Search engine spiders retrieve the content of the visited pages which are then processed by the search engine that will index and rank the downloaded pages.

Stealth Sites

Stealth Sites are "unbranded" websites that focus on the service and not the agent. The concept is that visitors are more likely to register to receive free services (such as MLS updates or a CMA) because they can do this without obligation or threat of being hassled by an agent.

Streaming Server

A streaming server is a dedicated server specifically designed to deliver streaming video content. Typically, this is only needed for companies that deliver large amounts of video content to thousands of daily visitors.

Style Sheet

*See the definition for **CSS**.*

Target Market

A defined segment of the market to which you advertise your services. A target market will possess common characteristics often defined by one or more of the following characteristics...

1. Psychographic - Shares a similar emotional profile (i.e. wants, fears, etc.) relative to your services.
2. Demographic - Shares a similar socio/economic/educational profile.
3. Geographic - Lives or desires to live in a particular community / neighborhood.
4. Behavioral - The desire for the services you offer can be easily predicted.

Tracking (Web Tracking)

Web Tracking enables you to learn information about your web visitors by following their click habits. This can include how the web visitor arrived at your website, specific pages they visited and where they left. This information can then be used to ensure your advertising efforts are giving you the largest possible return on investment.

Unique Positioning Statement (UPS)

A Unique Positioning Statement (UPS) is a single sentence that when heard, read or seen by your target market, causes them to immediately and viscerally:

1. Recognize your value (Value)
2. Perceive that you are the best (Differentiation)
3. Want to take action (Desire to Act)

Uptime Guarantee

A guaranteed amount of time within a specific period that your website will be active and available for web visitors.

Variable CSS

The ability for a web visitor to dynamically load different stylesheets. This is commonly used to give the web visitor the ability to change the font size for easier readability.

Viewport

The browser viewport is the window in the browser through which the website is viewable. The exact dimensions of a browser viewport will vary depending on the number of tool bars, layout and screen resolution.

Virtual Assistant (VA)

A Virtual Assistant is self-employed contractor who works for various clients over the internet. All the work is performed remotely without ever having to set foot inside the client's office.

W3C

World Wide Web Consortium is the governing body for web standards. The organization's purpose is to develop specifications, guidelines and open standards to enable on-line commerce and communications on the Internet.

Web Analytics

The process of collecting and analyzing a website's performance based on data collected when web visitors navigate a website. (See **Tracking** for more information.)

Web Hosting

Web Hosting refers to the service of providing space on Internet servers for the storage of websites which can be accessed by users on the internet.

Web Safe (Web Safe Fonts)

Web safe fonts (also known as Browser Safe fonts) are a list of fonts that will correctly display on all browsers and computers.

XML Files

XML is a format developed by the **W3C** initiative to structure, store and send information in a logical structure that both humans and computers can understand. It is important to note that XML is not a replacement for HTML. XML is used to describe and transfer data while HTML is used to format and display the same data. Because XML is a cross-platform, independent tool for exchanging data, it's a logical choice when passing information to **Flash** files.

XML Sitemap

An XML Sitemap is a protocol developed by Google that has recently been adopted by other search engines. XML Sitemaps allow search engines to more accurately and efficiently find website content and pages. For more information on the XML sitemap protocol, visit www.sitemaps.org.

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Brad's most noteworthy recent work includes conceptualizing, developing and implementing Agent-Backdoor, a comprehensive back-end system that sets the new standard for administrating leads, managing website content and maintaining property listings. His work has been featured on Realtor.com, national television and various other media outlets throughout the United States and Canada.

Together with his wife and business partner, Stephanie Carroll, he also owns and operates other corporate brands including AgentBackdoor, FlexTarget and QuickProducer.

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