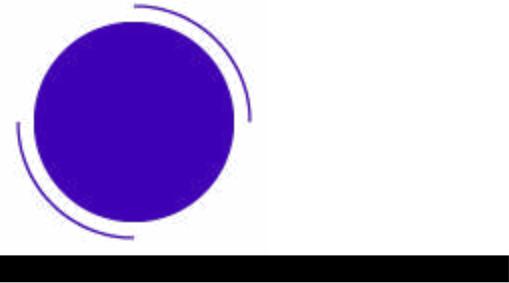




MARKETING RESOURCES

Growth-Driven Design



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Web development provides unique challenges (read: headaches) to today's modern marketing companies. Building a high-quality website can be laborious, time-intensive, and expensive, and it's one of the worst culprits when it comes to scope creep.

Growth-driven design (GDD) is the next big thing. It's a foreign concept to many people, and it might be a tough pill to swallow for a lot of clients, but we're confident that it's the new wave of web development. Let's dive in.

Chapter One: The State of Web Development Today

In short, web development as it's currently conducted is too front-loaded. Developers have endless conversations with clients, talking about what they want their website to do, now and in the future. They try to anticipate needs, demands, and trends that they can't possibly see. Essentially, developers are trying to build everything the client will ever need, all at once.

The problem is that those needs are not based on user data. How could they be? There are no users yet. If no one's using the site, there aren't any analytics you can run. You have no idea who's using the site, what they're doing with it, and what needs work. Any development you do before the users arrive is a shot in the dark.

Worse still, clients don't know everything they need. We've all been there – the client has a goal and an idea for how to make it happen, but you're the expert and you know better. Predicting the needs of a site's users is unreliable enough – asking the client to tell you what a site needs to do is even worse.

Web development like this takes too long to be efficient. These big, front-heavy sites with 30 or more pages usually take up to six months to build. A lot can change in six months. Product lines update, market research changes, and the needs and preferences of a company can shift dramatically. You're all but guaranteed that the original scope of the website will change before you're finished, which is a recipe for scope creep and blown budgets.

Finally, change is simply too difficult. Since sites are built slowly over time,

their background systems become more and more complicated. Making alterations, whether they're basic aesthetic changes to the front page or fundamental changes in the site's features, is complicated, expensive, and time consuming. As a result, most site owners avoid them, only updating the site every few years, at which point this whole convoluted process starts again.

Chapter Two: Web Development in an Ideal World

Here's an idea that a lot of people aren't going to like: web development should start as a minimum viable product. That means four to six pages instead of 30, no fancy web apps, and a lot less time and money spent. You should launch a new site with the bare minimum.

Less is More

Think of your site like a launchpad — a jumping-off point from which more features can be added as needed. Your site will contain your core messaging, your core features, your core products, and nothing else. It's worth mentioning that the "core" features of a given brand or company are not going to be the same as another's — you'll have to figure out what your "bare minimum" looks like. But the point is to be quick, nimble, and minimal.

This is an unpalatable idea to a lot of web development clients. A client who shells out \$10,000 to \$50,000 for a professional website expects to see where their money is going. That means bulkier sites, more features, more pages, and other tangible things.

GDD is reframing that expectation. First, clients should realize that they're paying for expertise, not flash — the launchpad site that you create will showcase the very best of structuring, design, and functionality. You can bring the best marketing strategies to bear, basing the launchpad on how users interact, what they're looking for, how they use the web in general, and the best way to craft messaging to reach them.

The budget of the site won't be spent up front on hundreds of hours of work

that might prove to be unnecessary. Instead, it'll be spent on adjusting, studying, and updating the site to match the changing needs of your client and their company. What GDD proposes is to think of a website more of a service that you pay for over time than a product that you only buy once.

Growing From the Launchpad

Once the launchpad is created, you can start gathering data. You'll be able to see how customers are using the site, where they're coming from, and which features are most important to them.

You might realize that there's a feature you had previously relegated to a small module that needs a lot more attention. You can include services, features, and messaging that you now know are necessary, based on the data you've gathered from your site's users.

It's worth remembering that what the client says they want isn't necessarily what they need. You're the expert in how websites work, not them — you'll be far more helpful to your clients if you find out the core aspects of their business and use that information to make decisions.

Ask your clients who they are at their center. Ask them what they can't leave behind. Find out who their customers are and what they need. Don't ask them what features the site needs, ask them what they want it to accomplish.

Chapter Three: How Growth-Driven Design Works

Growth driven design will fall into three phases: strategy, launch, and improvement. Here's how that looks.

Phase One: Strategy

It'll always be cheaper and easier to plan a website before you build it than to jump in with some half-baked ideas and try to muddle through. Planning is crucial if you're going to launch a trim, efficient, effective site as quickly as

possible.

You'll need a focused growth strategy. The whole point of a launchpad site is to be the first stepping stone toward a better, more optimized site, so sit down with the client and talk about the direction you want the site to go. Set clear objectives — pick KPIs that you can set a number to, so you can clearly tell whether you're meeting goals or not.

Focus on the customer first. Remember the goal of the website is not to show off how much you spent on a website, it's to provide customers with a centralized hub of timely, relevant, useful information. Pay attention to what customers' needs and pain points are so you can address them specifically.

Finally, think about your customer's journey. What drove them to your industry? What kind of questions do they ask before making a purchase? What are the things that will clinch a sale, and what might drive them away? Your site should be shaped in a way that helps guide customers along their journey toward making a purchase.

Phase Two: The Launchpad

Phase two is actually launching a site. Remember, this isn't supposed to be a final product. In fact, there won't really be a final product, since you'll constantly be adjusting the site (more on that later). Instead, you're launching a sleek, minimal site that will meet your basic needs better than what you already have while informing future changes.

A traditional website build takes about six months. It also requires a huge amount of money to be spent up front. As we mentioned, a lot can change in six months, which means you'll almost certainly be changing what you build along the way. And finally, you're building a site based on assumptions about what the customer will want, not based on actual data.

With a GDD launchpad build, you should have a site up and running in two to three months. Your budget will be light in front, just enough to launch the site with the few pages it needs to get started. Instead, you'll save most of your

money for optimization later on.

Since you're not building nearly as much, there's very little room for scope creep, so you're much more likely to launch on time and under budget. Once you have a site up and running, you can start to make decisions about the future of the site based on real data.

Phase Three: Continuous Improvement

Don't think of a website as a single "launch it and leave it" product — think of it like a subscription. Rather than spending tens of thousands up front for a "finished" product that might be obsolete in a few months, you're spending a small amount up front and putting the rest toward development.

Here's the best part: If you build a 30-page site right off the bat, there's a good chance that some of those pages won't be necessary, in which case you've wasted a good chunk of your budget. If you start small and build as the data demands it, you might still end up with 30 pages on your site. But with GDD, you can be confident that the site actually needs all of those pages because the site usage data told you so.

Pick a single metric that you want to improve on your site — bounce rate, number of visitors, pages viewed per session, conversion, or whatever is a high priority for you and your company right now. Strategize about what needs to change on your site in order to make that metric improve. Then, build it all at once.

Since you're making relatively minor adjustments, it should be quick and easy to update the site, at which point you can immediately start collecting data to see if your update is working. If it doesn't work, back to the drawing board. If it does, share your findings across other departments to make sure that everyone is up to date on the new changes you've made.

The Future of Website Development

Web development has been a source of headaches in the marketing world —

websites are time-consuming, expensive, and always end up changing along the way to a degree that's frustrating and wasteful. But it doesn't have to be like that.

Growth-driven design offers a chance at a new kind of web development — one where websites are built quickly and efficiently, budgets are easy to meet, and changes are based on real data about how users interact with the site. GDD is the web development technique of the future — are you on board?