

So you want a new website? Here's how to get started.

8 easy steps to create website content

1. Answer the who, what, why...

Literally write down answers for these questions. If you are working with AgriLife Communications, we'll want to know your answers.

- Who are your main audiences for this website?
- Which one is the most important audience?
- Why do you think they would be visiting this website?
- What will this site be called? And what should the web address be?

2. Determine what you have and what you need.

If this is a brand new site... Do you have marketing materials such as brochures or flyers? Do you have a strategic plan? Do you have some sort of external review or charter document for the organization?

Gather as much information as you can about the group that needs the new site.

3. Make an outline of topics you need for this website.

This can be "formal" like an outline, organized in excel, or even a hand drawing (or in Microsoft Word) with boxes to represent each section. Give each section a heading to help you organize the theme, and then list a subhead for each item that you need for the major sections. (See examples given: ContentOutlineExample.xlsx and SiteOutlineExample.pdf)

Make sure the outline you create matches the needs of your most important audience. For example, if you are an academic department with a high priority to recruit new students, your website should have information about the degree program, rankings and campus life information. Not HR forms and tenure and promotion procedures. Sure, your site may still need those things, but they shouldn't dominate the site with the most content or be prominent on the homepage. Your most important and visible content will be related to prospective students.

If you already have an existing website... does a page already exist for each section on your outline? If so, for each piece of content, you need to determine if the content is good or if it needs to be updated.

Mark your outline with a column next to each item so you know 1) which pages are OK and 2) which pages need to be revised or 3) which pages are brand new and need to be written.

4. Choose an “expert” for each section. This isn’t necessarily the person who writes the content or even the department head, but this is the person that you would call first if you had a question about something on this topic/page.
5. Determine a plan for how to develop content for each section. Options to consider:
 - Will you write it and then have the expert review?
 - Will you interview the expert and then write it yourself?
 - Will the expert write the content and submit to you for revisions?

Choose the option (or a customized plan) that will work best based on each person’s workload and schedule (i.e. How much time can this person commit to this project based on their current job requirements?). Also consider the overall project deadline. You may end up with some experts writing their own content and you writing for others in order to meet the project deadline.

6. Now that you know which sections you need for your site, you can determine what information you need in each section. You can develop a template for each section so the author knows what information you expect. The author can then write 1-2 paragraphs per question on the template.

For example: If you are working on a section about 3 different academic degrees. Each degree is slightly different, but prospective students want to know the same information when deciding on a degree. You might develop a template with the following categories:

- Prerequisites
- Summary of course curriculum – what students can expect to learn
- How many hours/years are involved?
- Career options
- What makes this degree unique from competitor universities or similar degrees
- Application process
- Who to contact if you have questions about the degree/advisor

Your section author would write an answer for each item and send it back to you.

7. Create a due date for the first draft of each page and assign to the person who will be responsible for each page.

8. Revise! Have one person who is a good editor review all the content and make sure everything sounds like one person wrote it. If your writers are filling out a template, like the example of academic degree in step 6, your editor can choose to revise their answers as complete sentences or some other format that matches the rest of your content.

This will help with flow for the reader. Don't rely on an automatic spellchecker, check for the following:

- Review for spelling, stylistic and factual errors.
- Is everything is accurate and current information?
- Are all application dates current or future?
- Is the correct contact person listed for each section?