

Unit 2: Planning and Organising Your Website

Goals of this Unit

- Identify the audience for your website
- Plan site content for your audience
- Create a site plan
- Create a site structure
- Understand the importance of good site management
- Understand site management features in Dreamweaver

Unit Two begins the process of using Dreamweaver by first discussing the essential elements required for site planning. Readers are led through a discussion of the importance of advanced planning before the first Web page is built and this leads into site definition, site management and the use of Dreamweaver's Site window to define sites. The Unit features a practical example using a live website to show good site structure and concludes with the reader creating their first website.

In Unit 1, you learned how the Internet works and received an introduction to some of the basic terms that you'll be seeing throughout this course. You may recall that the point was made that designing good Web pages is a craft—it takes patience, planning and lots of practise to make everything work the way you want and for your pages to be appealing to your audience.

Like any craft, prior planning will be a big part of your success as a Web designer. If you think about any craft at all—from home building to basket weaving—the person performing the task must have a clear plan of what they intend to accomplish before they set out. The same is true in Web design and without a clear idea of what you hope to accomplish you'll quickly find yourself floundering with a mishmash of folders, files and Web pages that you can no longer manage. Websites are very much like the plans that a homebuilder needs to be thoroughly familiar with before the first shovel of dirt is ever turned over. If you don't plan for who you want to reach, what kind of experience they'll find at your site and how your site will be put together, more than likely you'll have a site that is not as successful as you want (at best) or an unmanageable mess (at worst).

Luckily, Dreamweaver makes the chore of managing your sites much easier and provides powerful tools for making the inevitable additions and revisions easier as your site grows and changes. Without a solid foundation and good planning, though, even the best software won't be able to overcome poor decisions made at the outset of your project. Your first chore, then, is to come up with a rock-solid plan for your site.

Planning Your Site from the Ground Up

As tempting as it is to open up a new software program and start playing around, the best tool for getting a new website off the ground is not Dreamweaver, but a piece of paper and something to write with. You need to give some serious thought to exactly what it is you want to create before you ever make your first HTML document. Taking notes and making early sketches of what you want to accomplish is an important element in your early site design.

Identify the Target Audience

As noted above, every good craftsman develops a plan before they start building something. If they're developing a new product, they research the market and decide which design will appeal to the people they are trying to reach. After all, *selling* the product depends on having a set of people who are interested in *buying* it. Likewise, you need to look at your target audience before you start laying down the first line of HTML if you want to develop a website that will attract visitors.

Understanding your target audience has far-reaching implications. Imagine if there were only one style of Web pages allowed on the Internet and the style happened to be based on a page developed for people who enjoy collecting teddy bears. Now, collecting teddy bears is a perfectly fine way to spend your time; however, if your passion happens to be hardcore skateboarding, you'll

probably be turned off by a website that features a style that holds no appeal for you. Your first goal in designing your site revolves around answering these two questions:

1. Who exactly do you want to attract to your site?
2. What do you want them to find when they get there?

The answers to those two questions determine not only the style of your pages but also its organisation. Deciding up front who you want to reach allows you to focus your efforts on designing pages for them and keeps you from wandering off on tangents that have nothing to do with your primary goal. Designing pages that have appropriate content for your audience gives them an experience that appeals to them and keeps them coming back.

The goal of the site addresses the second part of this equation—what will the viewer find at your site. It's not enough to understand who you're writing for, you also have to know what you want your audience to do when they find your site. Let's use the website for teddy bear collectors as an example. If you were designing a site for collectors to share photographs and chat with other people, the site would have a much different structure than one devoted to actually selling teddy bears or selling supplies to teddy bear manufacturers. Even with the same general target audience, the purpose (or goal) of the site leads to a much different site design.

Let's look at a few practical examples of how website planning can effect the way you structure your site.

In the first example, recorded in the table on the next page, you see the planning that has gone into a website that will be designed for teachers who want to use the Internet as an instructional tool. (You can find a blank copy of this document in the exercise files for Unit 2.)

Planning for a Teacher's Website

Task	Conclusion
Define Your Audience	
1. Describe your target audience.	Teachers who want to use the Internet for classroom instruction and enhancement.
2. How proficient are they at using the Web?	Varies. Some are novices, some are experts.
3. What kind of computer and browser will they use?	Varies. Schools tend to lag behind in getting new equipment so plan for older computers and older browsers. Many teachers will also access the Web from home using a variety of browsers.
4. Will the audience's age, gender, education or location affect the site design? If so, describe how.	Teachers are educated by definition and range in age from 25 to 65. Site should feature a professional style. The site will be written in English.
Define Your Goals	
1. How will your audience find your site?	From search engines, links on other education websites.
2. What services will you offer at your site?	Information: Links to lesson plan collections. Reviews of education-related websites. New services on the Web for teachers. Tutorials on using the Internet in the classroom. Great ideas submitted by readers. Sales: Books on education and the Internet Classroom materials and supplies
3. What will make your site different from others that serve the same audience?	Simpler style. Easy to navigate. (Many teacher websites have become so comprehensive that they're hard to navigate.) Practical examples from real classroom experiences.

That all seems pretty simple, right? First, you decide for whom you would like to develop your site and then begin planning how you will reach them. You can probably see some of the implications for this site based on the initial planning and you'll learn more as you move along.

Hint: One good way to get a feel for your potential audience is to create fictional viewers, in different categories that might visit your site. This can help you get a firmer grasp on the kinds of things those visitors might expect to find.

The next example site is going to be designed for a local shop that sells computer and console games. The couple who own All Cool Games want to expand their offering to the public and not only provide information about their shop but also be able to sell games, posters and all things associated with the world of computer games on their website. For this site, the planning guide looks much different than in the first example.

Planning Guide for All Cool Games

Task	Conclusion
Define Your Audience	
1. Describe your target audience.	Computer game enthusiasts.
2. How proficient are they at using the Web?	Probably quite proficient. Most gamers are young males who also are likely to have lots of experience on the Web.
3. What kind of computer and browser will they use?	We can safely assume that most of our audience will have newer computers, have all the current plug-ins installed or be willing to upgrade to see all our content.
4. Will the audience's age, gender, education or location affect the site design? If so, describe how.	Gamers tend to be young males between the ages of 13 and 25 and may be located worldwide. Our site will need to have the latest technology available to satisfy our audience.
Define Your Goals	
1. How will your audience find your site?	From search engines, through referrals from fellow gamers and through advertising in computer game magazines.
2. What services will you offer at your site?	<p>Information: Magazine style feature articles Product reviews Buyer's guides Tips and tricks Cheat codes</p> <p>Sales: Games Joysticks and computer accessories Clothing Videos</p> <p>Interaction: Chat room Message boards An 'Ask the Expert' section</p>
3. What will make your site different from others that serve the same audience?	Lots of game reviews and game hints Graphics that would appeal to a gamer Discounts

A different audience with a different set of goals for the site produces some very different results from our first example, doesn't it? Let's look at one more.

The last example will be for the website that you'll be developing during this course. The good people at Caribe Travel Services (a purely fictional company) want to expand beyond the typical storefront operation and provide travel services to people throughout the UK. To do so, they'll need to reach a much wider audience and be able to provide them with updated information on travel deals as they become available—a task perfectly suited to a well-designed website.

Planning Guide for Caribe Travel Services

Task	Conclusion
Define Your Audience	
1. Describe your target audience.	People interested in travel to the Caribbean and Florida.
2. How adept are they at using the Web?	Varies. Some are novices, some experts.
3. What kind of computer and browser will they use?	Varies.
4. Will the audience's age, gender, education or location affect the site design? If so, describe how.	Expect that most will be adults with sufficient income to book Caribbean vacations. No impact in terms of education or gender.
Define Your Goals	
1. How will your audience find your site?	From search engines, links to other travel websites, reciprocal links with partners in airline, cruise and resorts business.
2. What services will you offer at your site?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information on our primary products 2. Cruise packages 3. Air travel packages 4. Resorts 5. All inclusive packages 6. Weekly specials 7. Photo galleries of resorts 8. Maps 9. Testimonials 10. Newsletter 11. Contact forms: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Basic info ii. Vacation query form iii. Newsletter sign-up
3. What will make your site different from others that serve the same audience?	Our site will offer weekly newsletters that will be sent to interested customers. We hope to have a comprehensive site that focuses only on Caribbean travel, allowing us to be the experts in that area.

Hint: Researching what's available on the Internet can give you some great ideas for planning your site. Look at other sites that appeal to the same target audience. Can you tell right away who the site is designed for? Is there an easy to follow structure? Can you navigate easily? Do they include topics like those you intend? Did they leave something out? Did they include things that aren't necessary?

Three different audiences lead to three very different websites. You can see that knowing your target audience (and knowing what we want them to do once they reach out and find you on the Web) can have a profound impact on how your site is constructed.

Planning Site Content

Now you have a basic goal in mind and have thought about your target audience, it's time to do a little more planning and focus on the content of your pages, as well as on how the website will be put together. You can be more accurate in designing your pages if you can answer the questions below:

Who is your audience?

What would cause them to want to find and visit your website?

What kinds of content will you provide that will bring them back or bring in new viewers?

What are the age, gender and location of your audience?

Are you designing for a general audience or do you have a tightly focused group in terms of age and gender?

If your audience is generally the same, how can you target content that they will find appealing?

How experienced are they at using the Internet?

Should your content be simple and straightforward or can you experiment with newer technologies?

Should your site navigation be kept simple or are your viewers experienced enough to search for information within your site?

What kind of computer do they likely have?

Will they have the latest browsers and all the plug-ins they need to view our content?

Will they use other means of accessing your site? (Web-TV, AOL browser, text-only browsers?)

Will they be viewing from only one platform (Windows, Macintosh, and Linux) or will there be variation?

Hint: The viewers who come to your website should be thought of as your clients, even if they aren't paying the bills. The success or failure of most websites can be directly traced to the number of visitors you can attract on an on-going basis. This is essential to keep in mind since you will be designing for them and not for yourself as you start putting your site together.

Creating a Site Map

Not only is good site structure important because it will make your job as a developer easier, it's absolutely essential to the proper operation of your site and pages. Remember that, in Unit 1, it was noted that the HTML code for a graphic includes not only the file name but also the file location? You have to know where your files are at all times, so that you can properly link to them and so they'll load correctly when viewed live on the Web. As noted before, Dreamweaver has some great tools to make this easier but the program can't protect you from yourself if you don't plan correctly. And since even a simple page can be composed of dozens of separate files, planning for the folders that you'll need on your computer to save the files is extremely important.

Let's go back to the Caribe Travel Services website. Here are the services that were initially filled in on the site-planning sheet:

- Information on our primary products:
- Cruise packages
- Air travel packages
- Resorts
- All inclusive packages
- Weekly specials
- Photo galleries of resorts
- Maps
- Testimonials
- Newsletter
- Contact forms

If you were to map this out graphically (and were to create a separate folder for each functional area of your website), it would appear as in Figure 2-1.

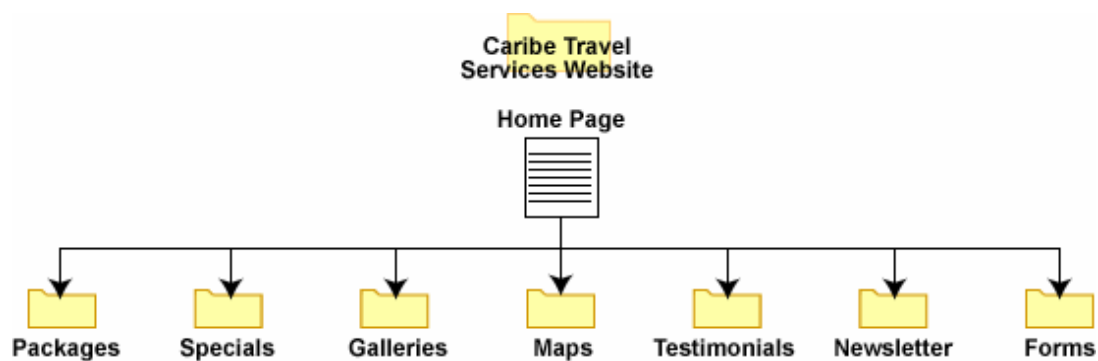


Figure 2-1: Organising websites based on the function of the site allows you to consider where your files will be stored and how they will be named.

Understanding Paths and Site Structure

With the initial plan for this website in mind, it's now time to talk about the files themselves and to keep those organised you need to understand how to work with paths.

The term *path* refers to the precise location of files on a computer—whether that is your computer at home, work or school or files located on a Web server somewhere. The term is a very important one because knowing the path to a file is a crucial element of site layout. Remember what was said about HTML—your code has to describe both the what of the file (its name) and its where (location and path to get to it). This is another good reason to develop a solid plan for your site before you write any code.

Paths can be a bit tricky since they have to describe how the computer locates a file relative to the page that it is on. Consider this: you're standing outside your home and someone stops to ask directions to the train station. No problem, you send them off with detailed instructions on how to get to the station starting from your home. Now, if you happen to be in town when the same question is asked the directions will be quite different. Even though the destination is the same, the directions on how to get there—the path—are different because they have a different starting point.

Paths to files stored on a computer work in the same manner. A link from one page to another page within the same folder is quite easy since only the file name needs to be provided. But chances are you will have many different folders within your website and the paths between files will be much more complicated. Luckily, Dreamweaver will sort out all the paths to your files for you, but having a clean and well-organised site structure is essential to ensuring that the program can effectively do its job. Not to mention the inevitable moment when you can no longer find a file you need because it is not stored in a logical location.

Another important element to discuss at this point is how computers respond to your folder and file names. If you've been using computers for some time, you'll probably remember the days when file names were very restrictive. If, for instance you wrote a story about a cat, you might have given the file a name like **catstory.txt**—and then hope you could remember how to find the file later. With more modern computer operating systems, we've now become used to longer names with few restrictions. Today you could name your story 'The calico cat in the tree.txt' for instance and your computer would have no problem finding and reading the file.

Web servers are not so forgiving. At this point, you're still a long way from posting a website to a server. However, there are some guidelines about the way that servers and Web technologies handle file names and it's important to be aware of the rules for naming files and folders before you create your first file.

Folder Names:

- Folder names should be kept as short as possible.
- Folder names are restricted to letters or numbers and should use no spaces.
- Folder names cannot contain special characters except the underscore symbol (for example, NEW_DOCUMENTS).
- Folder names should not begin with a number.

File Names:

- The file name for the first page in any website is (almost) always **index.htm** or **index.html**.
- File names can be as long as necessary but may not contain spaces.
- In place of spaces, use the underscore symbol.
- No special characters should be used except the underscore symbol.

Hint: While you can use both upper- and lower-case letters in your file and folder names, it's best to always stick with lower-case letters only. This is another way to avoid unforeseen problems later on as some Web servers will consider files called **Index.htm** and **index.htm** as two entirely different files.

So, having said all that, let's go ahead and clean up the site map for Caribe Travel Services and put the files and folders into their proper format as seen in Figure 2-2.

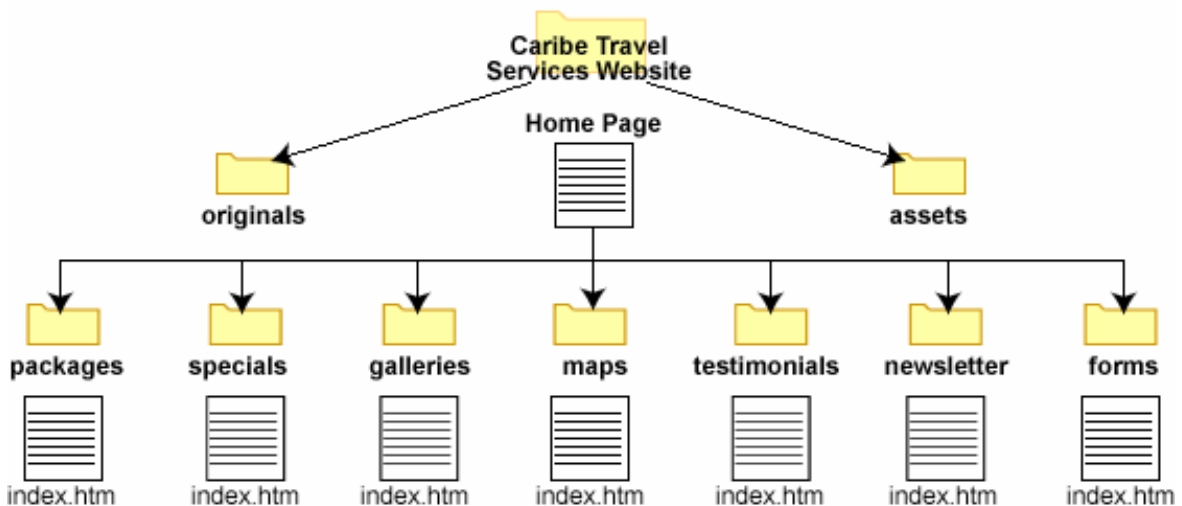


Figure 2-2: A website begins to take shape as you consider how you will name your folders and files.

In addition to changing the folder names, you'll note that some additional folders have been added—assets and originals. These folders will serve to provide storage for two different types of image files. The originals folder is used to store original files that have been composed in other applications such as Fireworks, Photoshop or Flash, while the assets folder provides a location for images and other files that are used in the site to be stored.

You'll also note that every folder in the site structure has a file called 'index.htm' located inside it. In essence, each of those pages is the homepage for that particular folder and is the first file that the browser will attempt to open when the viewer enters the Web address. While the name *index* is the most common name for these special files, you may find that your Web hosting company uses another common file name such as *default* or *home*.

Designating a home page for each folder also makes it possible for you to provide a shortcut to the page itself. If, for instance, you wanted to send someone to the Caribe Travel Services page that contains the specials for the week, you could direct them to **www.caribetravelservices.com/specials** and the browser would automatically open the index page in that folder. If there were no index then you would need to specify the full file and path to the page, such as **www.caribetravelservices.com/specials/firstpage.htm**.

Of course, this style/format is not the only way that a site could have been organised. Remember that each site's structure and organisation are dependent first and foremost on the target audience and the goals of the site. Project 2-1 will give you an opportunity to think about some different sites and let you map them out on your own.