

## From Vision to Strategy

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So far, you have created a vision statement that will guide your efforts to create a successful Web site. The next step is to determine how you will achieve that vision. For this, you need a strategy.

### OBJECTIVE

1.1.6: Site strategy and tactics

### NOTE:

Notice that the vision statement gives focus to all the efforts that follow it because all efforts (strategy) need to support the vision. This focus can help streamline all tasks that follow.

### NOTE:

You can analyse a competitor's strategy for attracting and retaining customers and tactics for supporting site strategy in Book 5's **Optional Lab 4-1: Analysing the competition's strategy and tactics.**

### Defining the Web site strategy

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Your strategy must be focused on persuading users to spend time on your Web site and return to it in the future. In fact, the goal of electronic commerce — indeed, of any business — is to attract and keep customers. To accomplish this goal, you can use the unique features of the Internet to your advantage.

As stated earlier in this course, the Internet can address individual needs. It is more similar to the local grocery shop than to television or publishing. You enter a grocery shop when you please. Inside, you decide whether to just browse or to buy and you choose how you move around the store.

Thus, the Web strategy is not to build the best looking or most useful Web site. The basic strategy of a business Web site is to attract and retain customers. The details of implementing a Web strategy make the task complex.

### Defining the Web site tactics

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A tactic is a method used to implement your strategy. For example, if you want to gather personal information from your users, you need a tactic. A widely used tactic is to offer something in exchange for that information. A business might offer a screensaver, software, discounts or a free product in return for the requested information.

Another common tactic rewards the 'first-time buyer.' If you place an order now, you will receive an additional discount or bonus.

The net effect is that you now have the customer's information. The next time he or she visits your site, you can use this data to complete the customer's purchase or transaction much more quickly. You can also market to users based on their preferences from previous purchases.

In the following lab, you will develop tactics to support a Web site vision and strategy. Suppose you are launching your own online business. Your vision for your site is strong but you need ways to attract customers to it so you can share and implement your vision. If you can develop solid strategies that help accomplish your vision and devise tactics for carrying out your strategies, you will be able to create a Web site that appeals to users, builds a customer base and helps your business to flourish.



### Lab 4-2: Developing tactics to support a Web site strategy

In this lab, you will develop some guiding principles to support your Web site's vision statement and associated strategy. Write your answers in the spaces provided.

1. Consider the vision statement you created in the previous lab. Develop two strategies to support your vision.  
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2. Consider the strategies you specified in Step 1. Develop two tactics for each strategy to support your vision.  
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3. **Browser:** Visit the Web sites of some of your favourite online businesses. Can you identify some of the strategies these sites are using to support their visions? What tactics do you see employed to promote these strategies? Which tactics do you think are most effective? Which tactics are least effective? Why?  
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## Web Site Specifications

**OBJECTIVE**  
1.1.10: Site design and architecture specifications

After you have determined the audience for the site and you have created a strategy for your Web business and tactics to achieve that strategy, it is time to create specifications. Specifications define the features, content, functionality and structure (or architecture) that the site requires in order to meet the customer's needs and achieve the site's goals.

Specifications can be divided into four types:

- Functionality specifications
- Content specifications
- Architecture specifications
- Design specifications

### Functionality specifications

Functionality specifications indicate the functions or activities that the site should be able to perform. For example, the functionality specifications for an e-commerce site will usually include search features, a shopping cart, credit card processing and so forth.

### **Content specifications**

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Content specifications indicate the general types and topics of content that the site will include, such as text describing the company, product descriptions and images, shipping information and frequently asked questions.

### **Architecture specifications**

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Architecture specifications indicate the way that the site will be structured and ways that users will navigate it. For example, an online shoe outlet might organise the shoes into a group for men and a group for women, with additional subgroups of dress shoes, casual shoes and athletic shoes. The shoes might also be separately grouped by price range, brand, colour and so forth. The site architecture specifications help you to determine ways to organise and relate these types of information for navigation and searching.

### **Design specifications**

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Design specifications are used to plan the general look and feel of the site, including the fonts, colours and images that will be used. For example, many companies have standards for the sizes in which their logos can appear for designated uses, as well as the colours and fonts that should be used for specified purposes and areas on the site. These design requirements are discovered and recorded during the requirements gathering phase of the project. When the design specifications are created, the Web designer determines how to satisfy these requirements. Generally, site design templates (which will be discussed shortly) are most useful for this purpose.

### **Creating site specifications**

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Web site specifications do not need to be complicated. Often, they can be created on a whiteboard or developed through a series of e-mail messages. The important point is that the final document — whatever its form — should answer this question: what are we going to create?

The customer and any other stakeholders should review and approve all specifications before the project moves forward to the design phase.

In the following lab, you will determine the functions that your Web site will offer. Suppose you have created a vision for your own Web-based business and you have identified the strategies and tactics that will help you realise your vision. The next step is to create the functionality, architecture, content and design specifications for the site. Begin by considering the functions that your Web site must offer in order to accomplish your goals. Functions include site capabilities such as animation; interactivity; catalogues; downloadable files; streaming audio or video; site and database searching; user-input forms; e-commerce capabilities; and so on. The best plans will not be successful if they are implemented poorly or incompletely.



### Lab 4-3: Developing the specifications for a Web site

Now that you have a vision, a strategy and tactics, you can continue the planning process by defining your Web site's specifications. Write your answers in the spaces provided.

1. What products will your Web site offer?  
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2. What services will your Web site offer?  
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3. What information will your Web site offer?  
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4. Consider some of the functions that your Web site must offer, based on your answers in Steps 1, 2 and 3. What functions are crucial for the success of your site? What functions might be helpful but are not required? What functions are unnecessary? Use this information to create functionality specifications for your site.  
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5. **Browser:** Visit the Web sites of some of your favourite online businesses. What functions do these sites commonly offer? Do any of the sites offer an unusual function? Do the unusual functions seem useful, intriguing or unnecessary? What functions do you see on other sites that might be useful on your site?  
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6. Consider the functionality specifications you determined in Step 4. What types of content will your site need to provide the desired functionality? What content might be helpful but is not required? What content is unnecessary? Use this information to create content specifications for your site.  
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7. Consider the functionality and content specifications you determined in Steps 4 and 6. How will you structure and organise the content on your site to provide the desired functionality? How will users navigate this information to maximise the desired functionality? Use this information to create architecture specifications for your site.  
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8. Consider the functionality, content and architecture specifications you determined in Steps 4, 6 and 7. With these requirements in mind, consider the general look and feel you want the site to have. Think about logos, images, colours, fonts and so forth, which you will use consistently

throughout the site. What choices do you prefer? What choices seem necessary to enable your other specifications? What choices might inhibit your other specifications? Use this information to create design specifications for your site.

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9. **Browser:** Visit the Web sites of some of your favourite online businesses. What types of content do these sites typically offer to provide their functionality? What types of architecture do these sites employ to organise their content? What design features are common or unusual? How does design complement or distract from the functionality, content and architecture of these sites?
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## Site design templates

### OBJECTIVE

1.2.8: Web page and site templates

You will implement the design specifications that you create for your site during the design phase of the Web project. Generally, this phase begins with the designer creating a design ‘mock-up,’ or sample, which is often a simple example image of the site’s proposed appearance. Typically, you will revise the mock-up until the customer is satisfied that it fulfils his or her requirements (as stated in the specifications) and all stakeholders agree on the look and feel for the site.

You will generally create your design mock-up at the same time as the functionality of the site is programmed or acquired and the site’s content is being finalised.

After your design mock-up has been approved, you can begin creating Web pages based on the mock-up design. Design professionals prefer to use templates when creating their Web pages. Using a Web page template will help you apply your design consistently and quickly to each page in your site, ensuring that the site has a unified look and feel that does not vary from page to page.

A Web page template is an X/HTML page structure (and sometimes an associated style sheet) that acts as the foundation for each page you create. Your page template must always fulfil design specifications, so it is critical to ensure that all stakeholders reviewed and approved the template design (i.e. mock-up).

Most major Web-development applications, such as Expression Web and Dreamweaver, allow you to create your own Web page design templates. You can also find examples of ready-made page templates at the following sites, some of which you can use free of charge:

- JimWorld’s Free Website Templates (<http://freesitetemplates.com>)
- TemplateMonster.com ([www.templatemonster.com](http://www.templatemonster.com))
- Hoover Web Templates ([www.hooverwebdesign.com/templates](http://www.hooverwebdesign.com/templates))

Ready-made templates can provide you with some good ideas for your site’s look and feel. However, these pre-designed templates are unlikely to fulfil all your design specifications, so be sure to modify any ready-made templates you use according to your site’s needs.

Later in this course, you will create and apply design templates to your Web pages so you can see how they ensure consistency and speed development.

## Designing for PDA-based v. traditional browsers

### OBJECTIVE

1.2.9: Designing for PDA-based v. traditional browsers

When you are designing the layout of your site, it is important to consider the growing number of people who surf the Web on mobile devices, also known as PDAs (personal digital assistants). It is often well worth the time to create separate pages or at least separate style sheets for PDA-based browsers, as the individuals who use them often have disposable income they can spend on your site.

Keep in mind that PDA browsers are not as powerful as traditional browsers and do not handle client-side scripting (e.g. Jscript) very well. Stick to basic XHTML and style sheets and avoid interactive elements.

Also keep in mind that size matters. PDA screens are small. Avoid using static page widths and keep in mind that users are paying for the time they are using their devices, so use few words and small images so that your pages load quickly.

Remember to validate your code. The W3C provides a validation site that will check your code for mobile friendliness: <http://validator.w3.org/mobile/>.

As with pages that you create for traditional browsers, test, test and test. For mobile pages, you may want to test your site on a BlackBerry, an iPhone and an Android (Google) phone, for example.

## The Metaphor

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**OBJECTIVE**  
1.1.9: Site metaphor

A metaphor suggests a likeness or pre-existing identification with other things or experiences. The most common representations used by Web sites are brochures, prospectuses and catalogues — all metaphors of the print medium. Some sites use the familiar metaphor of television. As often pointed out, the Internet offers different opportunities for user interaction. The Web site visitor is more like a visitor to a shop or art gallery who is interested in the total experience of the visit and not just in buying a product or studying a work of art. Even when it is appropriate to use print medium as the metaphor, it should be done intentionally, using the best principles from that medium.

Consider the concept of metaphor you may recall from language classes. A metaphor suggests an analogy between two ideas or objects without using the words 'like' or 'as.' In site design, a site can be presented as a particular object or experience to emphasise or stylise the site's purpose.

### Metaphor guidelines

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Metaphors can be valuable to Web site design. Consider the following guidelines when developing a metaphor for your site:

**NOTE:**  
Can you think of any sites you have visited that effectively used metaphor in the design? Try to think of metaphors you have not seen used that might be effective on the Web.

- Consider whether a metaphor is needed to express the desired idea.
- Select a metaphor that is familiar to the chosen audience.
- Use the familiar to explain the unfamiliar.
- Keep metaphors light and effective.
- Be sure that the comparison shares characteristics with your theme.
- Use the metaphor consistently in the design.
- Do not overuse the metaphor.
- Do not use a metaphor that may have any negative connotations.
- Choose a metaphor that is easy to remember.
- Do not mix metaphors.

## Metaphor examples

One metaphor that has become very widespread in Web design is the tabbed folder metaphor. Resembling a stack of tabbed folders in which a tab can be clicked to ‘open’ each folder, the tabbed folder format has long been a standard in software design — most notably in the design of software preference dialog boxes. Tabs are used for navigation on many of the biggest sites, including Amazon.com, Expedia and PayPal.

Study the following screenshots of sites using example metaphors and see whether you can identify with them. Note that many of the illustrations show older versions of these sites. Today, ease of use and functionality have taken on primary importance in Web design and site design metaphors have become less common and more subtle than some of the samples shown here. However, these samples provide clear examples of the use of metaphor in Web design.

**NOTE:**

If time permits, visit these sites and compare the current sites to the illustrations shown here. Which version of each site do you like better? Do you think these sites use metaphor effectively?

Figure 4-1 shows a previous version of the Handyman Connection home page at [www.handymanconnection.com](http://www.handymanconnection.com).



Figure 4-1: Handyman Connection home page

Figure 4-2 shows a previous version of the Eco Mulch gardening supplies home page at [www.ecomulch.com](http://www.ecomulch.com).



Figure 4-2: Eco Mulch home page

Figure 4-3 shows a previous version of the Hershey's Happiness home page at [www.hersheyshappiness.com](http://www.hersheyshappiness.com).

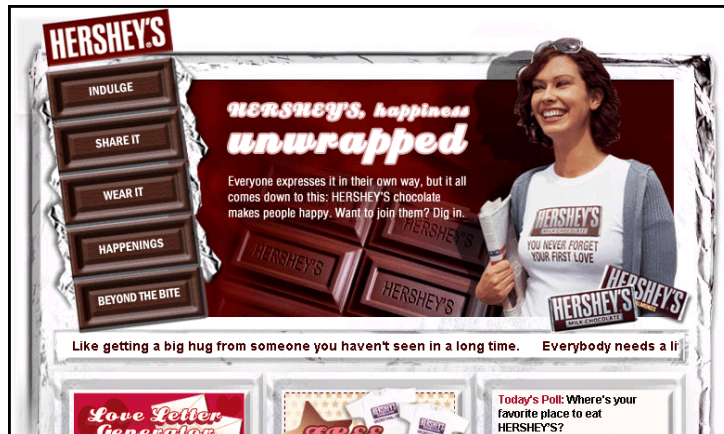


Figure 4-3: Hershey's Happiness home page

Figure 4-4 shows a previous version of the Hux Records home page at [www.huxrecords.com](http://www.huxrecords.com).



Figure 4-4: Hux Records home page

Figure 4-5 shows the Donkey Konga microsite posted by Nintendo Europe (<http://194.192.82.242/donkeykonga/flash/player.asp?language=uk>) for the launch of the Donkey Konga game.



Figure 4-5: Donkey Konga microsite home page

Figure 4-6 shows a previous version of the World Cup page of the Nokia Snowboarding World Cup site at [www.nokia.com/snowboard/](http://www.nokia.com/snowboard/).

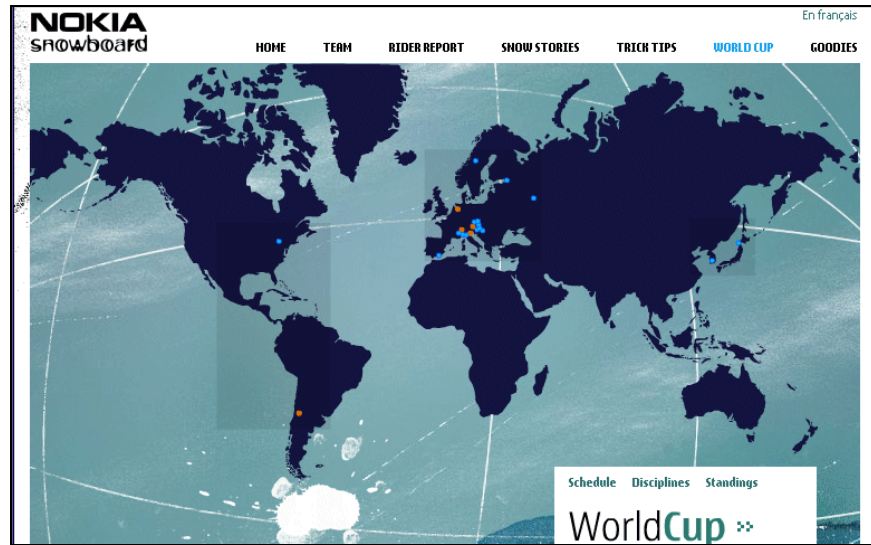


Figure 4-6: Nokia Snowboard World Cup home page

How do these and other Web sites you have browsed use metaphors to their advantage?

### Benefits and drawbacks of using site metaphors

It is not always necessary to choose a site metaphor. In fact, strictly adhering to a metaphor might hinder creativity, resulting in a boring site.

However, creating a site metaphor can be beneficial because it helps you focus on a strong, controlling visual theme for the site. Beginning designers find site metaphors especially helpful because the metaphor helps create a consistent look for the site.

Using a site metaphor can, in many cases, help a designer think through potential problems and then solve or avoid them. Having a strong visual theme for a site can actually help you anticipate various issues, including accessibility. As Robert Frost once said, 'Poetry without rhyme is like tennis without a net.' The same could be said for some Web sites and the importance of creating a strong site metaphor.

### Mystery Meat Navigation

The term 'mystery meat navigation' was coined by Vincent Flanders to describe a Web page or graphical user interface (GUI) in which it is difficult for the user to determine the destination of hyperlinks or, in more extreme cases, to locate the hyperlinks on the page. As a result, the user has great difficulty determining the site's navigation structure. A site that suffers from mystery meat navigation is less accessible and less useful than sites that feature clear and simple navigation. Mystery meat navigation can also cause accessibility issues because screen readers may not be able to interpret the navigation.

You could argue that Figures 4-1 and 4-3 could lead to mystery meat navigation, if done improperly.

The way to correct the problem is to clearly show users the hyperlinks of a site. You can do this by using standard hyperlinks or by making sure that any animated images and Flash files you use readily show hyperlinks when a mouse passes over the link. Even then, it is always best to make navigation quite plain. Having an alternative form of navigation (such as text-based navigation links) is another way to avoid some of the confusion caused by mystery meat navigation.

Flanders' original example of mystery meat navigation is in a Flash video at the following URL:

<http://www.webpagesthatsuck.tv/saturn/saturn.html>

You can read Flanders' essay about problem navigation at the following URL:

<http://www.webpagesthatsuck.com/mysterymeatnavigation.html>

## The Mindmapping Process

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### OBJECTIVE

1.1.7: Mindmapping site structure

Mindmapping is a process that allows you to structure ideas on paper in the order your brain follows, rather than the linear process normally used when documenting ideas.

### NOTE:

Have you ever heard of or used the mindmapping process before? What type of project did you use it in?

Imagine creating an entire Web site or report page-by-page and writing down all your ideas. If you were to write these thoughts on a piece of paper, describing each page and its content, you would have a list. This list might be incomplete, however, because forcing the linear process stifles your thinking and limits your ideas. In the end, could you correlate all these thoughts easily and would they flow together?

### NOTE:

Compare mindmapping to a brainstorming session. Have you used the mindmapping technique during a group brainstorming session? Do you think it could be useful in this setting?

Now consider mindmapping. Instead of beginning in the upper-left corner of the paper and proceeding down line-by-line, place your subject in the middle of the page and circle it. From there, draw branches, which are ideas about your topic. If any topics are related in a more definitive way, create another branch off the current idea branch. Within minutes, you will see your mindmap develop into a dynamic sketch. You might find that a standard sheet of paper is not enough to contain all your thoughts. Use more paper, create more branches and keep the ideas flowing.

Mindmapping is a process of moving ideas from thought to document. Do not judge whether ideas are good or bad; just write them down and move on to the next thought. After you complete your mindmapping process, you can go back and refine or eliminate ideas.

Some techniques for mindmapping include using a large chalkboard or whiteboard. You can also use different colours to designate specific categories or items or use thick markers and thin markers — whatever you can find to help stimulate the process.

Remember that mindmapping is a very different paradigm for transferring your ideas to paper and you might be unaccustomed to it. However, in a short time, mindmapping will feel as natural as reading or writing.

### Mindmapping a Web site

Figure 4-7 illustrates the way you can use mindmapping to develop a Web site. This example is simplistic. Your mindmap might have dozens more branches, which will help you develop a better Web site.

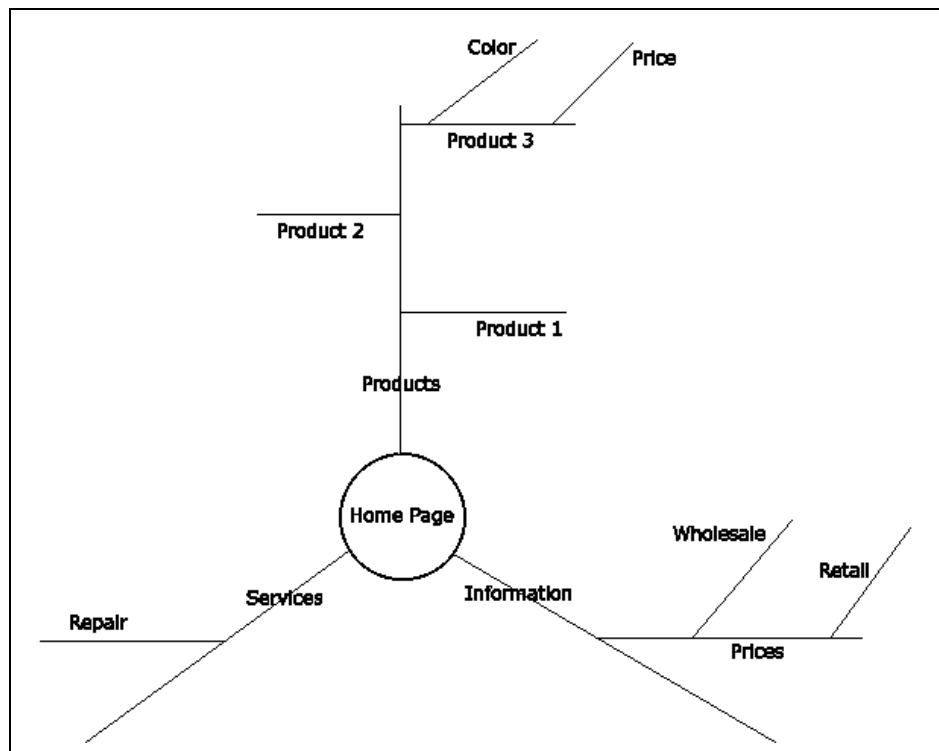


Figure 4-7: Web site mindmap

In the following lab, you will try mindmapping a Web site of your own. Suppose you are leading a Web site development project and you are ready to get your team started on the development tasks. After you have determined the customer's needs, you could gather your development team together for a mindmapping session. Using a large whiteboard, you can record all the ideas from all team members in a brainstorming session; later, you can refine the details to help determine the specific pages and functions your site will need to provide. This process allows everyone to think creatively and focus on any part of the site at any time.