

The Process Behind Every Web Design Project



Customers

Every project involves a cast of characters that conspire to produce something that impresses the audience -- the customers.

They will not always tell you what they want, and often they don't even know. They may hold back on what they consider "good" until after you have produced it. Understanding their needs is both an art and a science.

To deal with this picky audience, there must be one person who attempts to appease and understand them, to figure out what they want, to guess at what will make them happy. This person might think they're in a sales role, but really what they're doing is managing communication between the audience and the other actors.



**Project
Manager
(PM)**

The Other Actors



**Baseline
Installer**

Techie Once the order is placed, a technical person will create an account on the server, and install the base load of Joomla along with whatever other extensions are necessary. (calendar, image gallery, Taskhopper...) They will configure user accounts for both Joomla, email and FTP accounts as needed. As soon as all of this is done, the site is ready for Layout.



**Template
Tweaker**

Layout With the empty Baseline installed, the next step is to select a template that matches the theme requested by the Project Manager. This person looks at total content and matches a template to fit. The new template is configured with temporary or "place holder" images. When finished, the PM will show it to the customers to make sure they approve the positioning of content elements.



**Copy
Writer**

Copy/Content Writer/Editor/Mover

In the case when a site is being converted, old content (copy and images) must be moved from the old to the new. This process does not always need to wait until layout has been approved as some of the content is not positionally sensitive. (e.g., About Us, Find Us, Staff... all those can be inserted as soon as Baseline is ready.)



**Graphics
Design**

Headers, Logos and Branding

With the layout approved, the Graphics person now can start their process of finding images and combining them to fit into the positions defined by the layout. The actual process of selecting the images might be done by this person or in conjunction with the PM. e.g., *"Please use image #812 from iStockPhoto in the header."* It's the responsibility of the graphics person to make graphics fit into the template, often times based on highly subjective input such as *"Colors should reflect yellows, maroons, oranges. Sunny feel with warmth."*

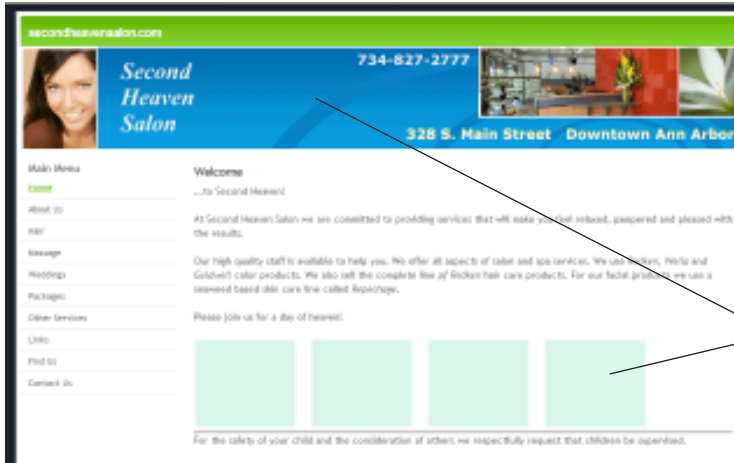
**Baseline
Installer**



When Baseline is finished, it may look something like this. It will contain all of the necessary “add-on” products but all Joomla! demo content will have been removed. The modules/components may or may not be activated as that’s what Layout does.

Baseline effort is almost always a fixed amount of labor. There is very little subjectivity. Either it’s installed or it isn’t.

After install, it goes to Layout



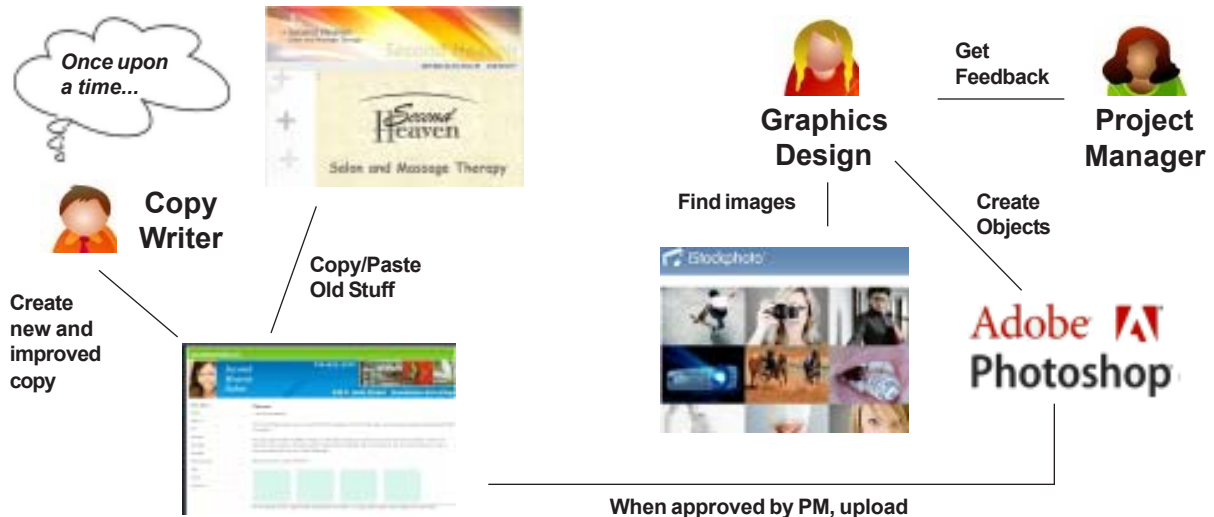
**Template
Tweaker**

(Layout)

The Tweaker, based on direct input from the PM, will find a template that matches the theme and proposed content. The Tweaker will create “holder” images as part of the prototype process that will eventually be replaced by Graphics

In many cases, multiple templates will be suggested to confirm the “layout” portion. Once the layout has been approved by the customer, then the template is “tweaked” for colors, font and content positioning.

Copy & Graphics Can Happen Concurrently



Customers

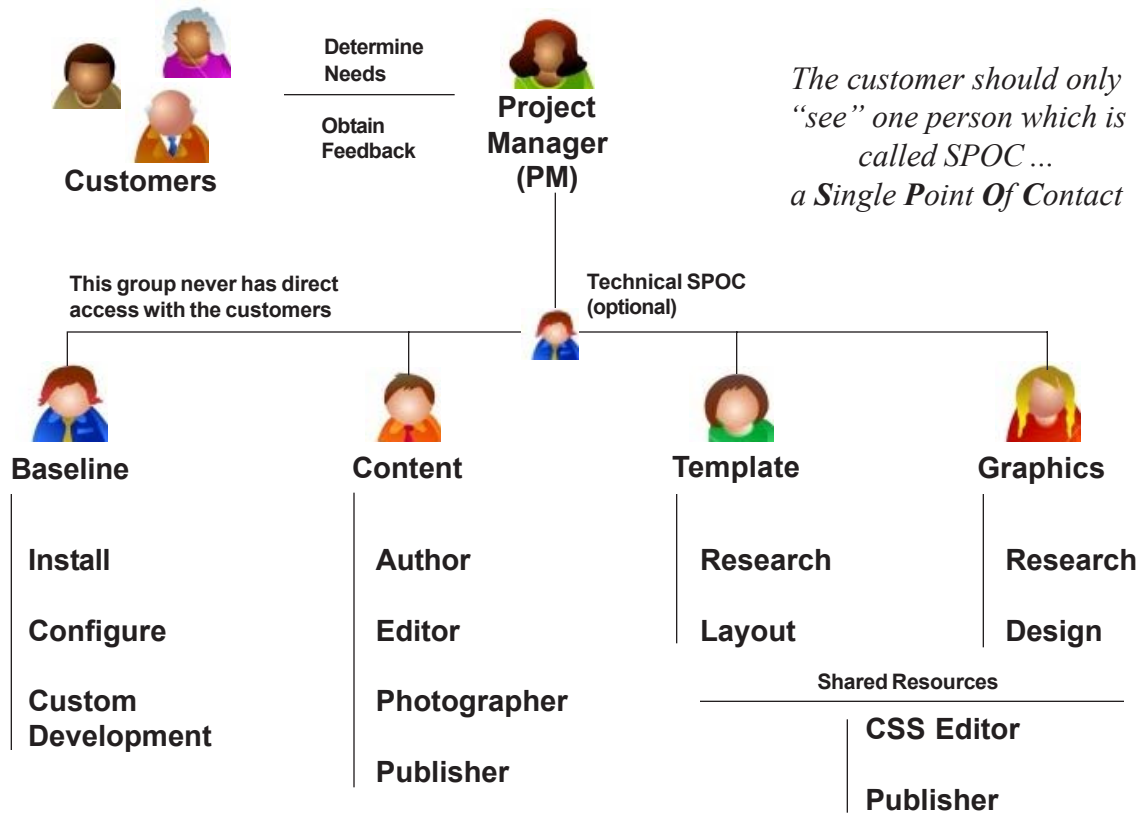
PM is responsible for getting these words

8005 Main Street
Dexter, MI 48130
734.253.2305



Organizational Flow & Resources

8005 Main Street
Dexter, MI 48130
734.253.2305



Resource Descriptions

The above it not intended to imply all projects require a team of different people, but rather to show the different skill levels that are needed to complete any project.

Baseline (techie)

Installation and configuration is something usually handled by one person. If the project requires specialized functions, the Custom Development portion requires a separate specification is usually a good idea to ensure details are properly conveyed.

Template Layout (part tech/part art)

Template tweakers need to work closely with the PM to ensure "look and feel" matches what the customer wants. Research is nothing more than "seeking" a starting point for the template. Layout takes the selected template(s) and arranges modules to fit the available content, hoping for a PM buy-off.

Content (copy writer)

Authors write things. Sometimes Authors are good editors, sometimes not. Photographers are needed to do what they do. Publishers take what authors write, what editors edit and what photographers shoot and copy/paste it into the correct positions.

Graphics (digital artist)

Research is often required to select base images from online sources or to work with the Photographer to obtain what's needed. Design takes these images, blends and sizes them into what fits what Layout has defined.

Remember, all of this can be done by one person, four or ten ... all depends on the size of the project and the timeline in which everything needs to be completed.

WARNING: This is potentially confusing but also a very dangerous to not understand

Single Vision Yields Best Designs

The QUALITY presentation of a website is an artistic endeavor. As an artistic endeavor, it is the creation of only one mind. Otherwise, the result is a battle rather than a team effort. As the single point of contact is critical in customer service, it's identical in graphical vision for the website.



So, one of these two, the Template Tweaker (TT) or the Graphic Person (GP) must assume the principal role, and the other one a secondary one. There is no way something good will come if both believe they are the visionary.

The one with the principal role will design the whole presentation: color, position, images. (The images may be changed at a later time, but will have to remain in the same tone, express the same idea and exist in the same positions)

As is the axiom in life, the secondary will be guided by the primary. So for each project you must decide which one applies:

Option A: Graphics Person (GP) is master, Template Tweaker (TT) is the slave...

GP creates a mockup of what the website will look like. TT listens/waits, and just changes the index/css files according to the mockup. You do this when the GP has a better connection to the PM and/or is more skilled than the TT. In this case, it's critical the GP has a strong understanding of template design.

Option B: Tweaker is master, Graphics is slave...

TT finds the template and tweaks it according to artistic vision. This includes grabbing "borrowed" images, since the template colors chosen must agree with the images. The TT creates very specific requests for graphics, and the only job of the GP is to deliver exactly what these requests are asking for. In this case, the GP has no creative license, but instead is just trying to play the tune that's already in progress.

Why Is This Necessary?

As a TT, it's difficult to tweak a template based on only some sketchy ideas, and hope that the GP will understand what's needed, without creating some well defined graphical prototype.

As a GP, it's hard to see a half-baked template, even with the layout positions specified, and to understand what was in the mind of the TT. Even worse, often TTs don't care and assume the GP will "make things right."

The conclusion is that one of them MUST have a connection to the audience, the customer. The difference is the tools and methods they will use to achieve their objective.

- 1) the GP will use graphic skills and will make a mockup of the proposed layout
- 2) the TT will avoid wasting time this way, and will go straight to the template. When that is done, and if done with quality, the GP (hopefully) will know the intent and should be able to follow the lead.

Usually the master will spend more time on the presentation because they are the one closer to the audience, or they just have more passion for design. In this case, they create the script.. the other will just read their lines and deliver with whatever passion they can muster.

Bottom Line: The PM should appoint the TT or the GP to lead the design else you run the risk of conflict, chaos or even worse, stumbling behind-schedule mediocrity.