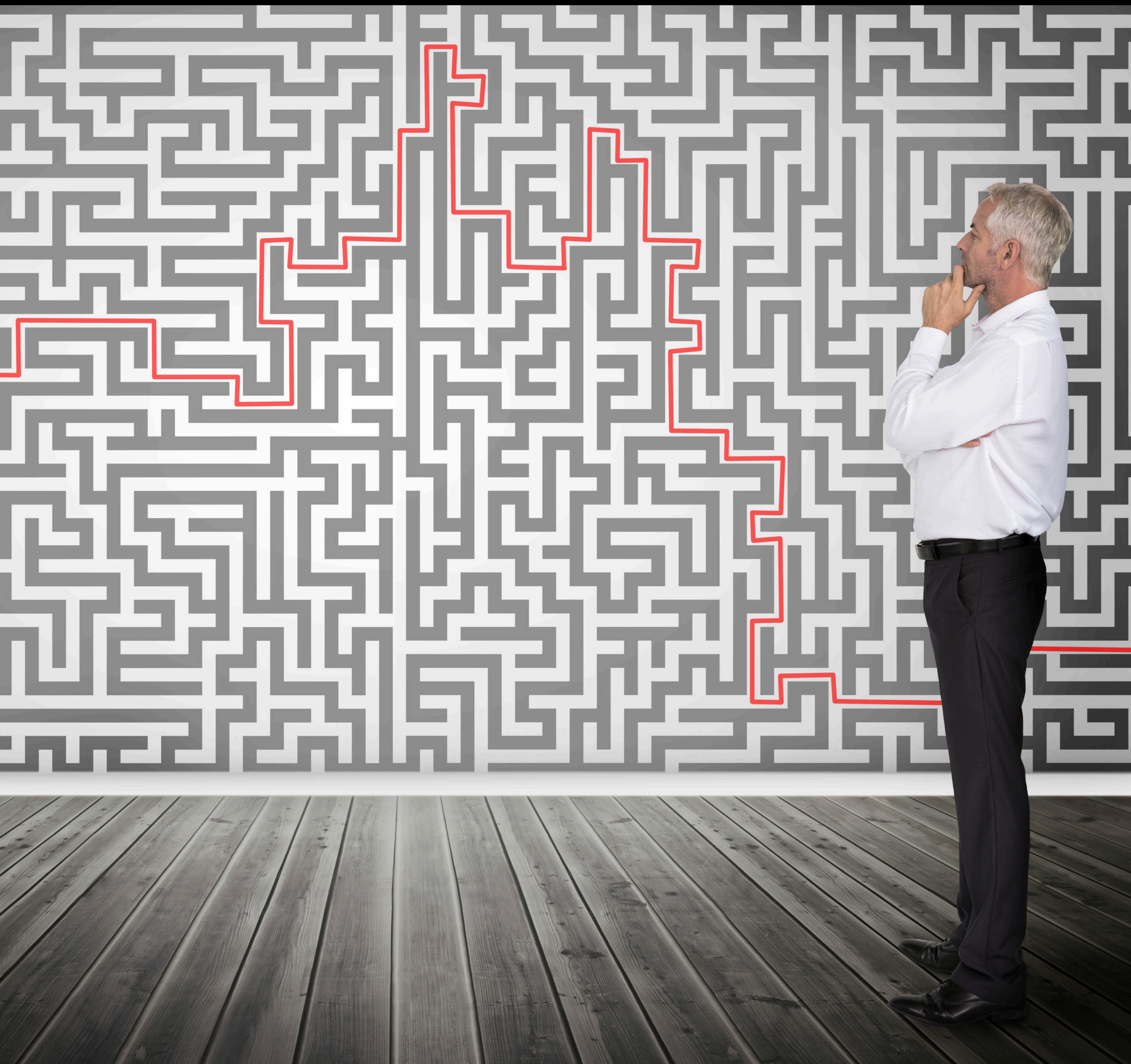# Value Driven Website Design

Manage Risk - Stay Flexible - Be Effective

WEB**DESIGN**PHOENIX

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Introduction

The traditional website development model is totally broken. Beside the fact that most traditionally designed websites do not produce optimal results, the whole endeavor is fraught with completely unnecessary risk to your business and your finances.

This book is for anyone who isn't happy with the results they are seeing from their current website, or anyone who's been through a "website redesign nightmare". It's time to take a step back and challenge the fact that building and maintaining a website must be riddled with uncertainty, risk, vague fee structures, and headaches.

There is a much better way. We'll break down exactly what's wrong with a traditional approach to web design and tee up a better process for you: **Value Driven Design**.

Value Driven Design, also known as Growth Driven Design is an evolved approach to website building. The turning point comes when businesses start thinking about their online presence as a PROCESS rather than a PROJECT.

Instead of an enormous buildout requiring huge financial and resource outlay, Value Driven Design is quick to market, agile, data-driven, always relevant, and right on budget.

We're going to explain how Value Driven Design works, why Traditional Design doesn't, and all the things you should be doing to protect your business when it comes time to design or redesign your website.

I.
Why is Traditional Website Design Broken?

Your website is your #1 sales tool. It is the centerpiece of all of your marketing activities and it's almost always the first place that people are going to look to when investigating your business.

Think of your website as your best sales person. It's always on, and always working for you. Current research says that a prospect has progressed 70% through the decision-making process before ever reaching out to your sales team for the first time.

Your website is where they are finding information and forming opinions of whether or not to do business with you. A crappy company website may not be your fault. It is likely much to do with the development process.

Review of the Traditional Website Design Processes

It's always interesting to hear about the past experiences that people have had with website redesign projects. Managers and business owners are usually pretty disgusted.

Most see a looming website redesign as a huge headache waiting to happen. For many, they've been assigned the task by their boss. Others have been procrastinating and their current website is just too brutal to tolerate any longer.

Web design is not a core competency in most companies. Redesign projects often pull staff and resources away from regular responsibilities.

If a website hasn't delivered much real value in the past, there's not much reason to believe that a fresh website will be any different. Frustrating.

Think back to the last time you took on a website build or redesign project and ask yourself:

• How would you describe the experience?

• What are some things that went right and wrong

• How much time and effort did it take to finally go live?

• Was the project on time? On budget?

• How much has the site improved since launch?

• How exciting is the prospect of another redesign?

Based on conversations we have every day, it's pretty likely that you didn't enjoy the website redesign process. You may have accepted the fact that building your website is filled with risk, bother and brain damage. You are probably right.

Traditional website design processes are set up to shift the majority of the risk away from the developer and toward the customer.

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The Risks of Traditional Website Design

Risk: Big Up-Front Cost

The average medium-sized business website runs between $15,000 and $75,000. This is a meaningful line item for most companies. It's not only hard to budget for this expense all at once, but many contracts call for this money to be committed before you ever know what kind of impact the work will have on your business.

Risk: Vague Deliverables

Treating your website redesign as a one-off project means that the development firm needs to price out everything they're going to be doing for you. With all the nuances of your company, industry, market positioning, existing processes, preferences, and many other moving parts, it's almost impossible for your developer to predict all that is needed. They are very likely to leave out, misrepresent, or over-estimate many requirements.

Risk: Time & Resource Opportunity Cost

The burden is not just financial. The average website takes 3 – 6 months to complete using traditional methods and requires an awful lot of energy and resources from your team. You're taking energies away from regular work responsibilities and committing them to the redesign – with no business results to show until well after launch.

Risk: Late, Over Budget and Inflexible

As diligent as you are in planning out the project, there will always be tons of unknowns and unforeseen variables in a large project. It's extremely hard to accurately quote the cost and time frame to completion. By the way, lose the thought of "completion". It doesn't exist.

It's commonplace for projects run late and over budget. Development companies also "pad" their pricing estimates depending on the level of uncertainty.

Delays to completion means delayed returns on investment, reflecting poorly in the eyes of your boss or stakeholders.

Risk: Subjective Design Decisions & No Results Guarantee

At the end of the day, the whole reason to redesign your website is to improve measurable business results. Whatever metrics are important to your group, the new site should move the needle. Otherwise, why bother?

After all the time, energy and money you've invested in the redesign, how do you (or your design agency) know that the website will perform optimally? The answer is you don't. It's impossible.

Decisions based on some research or on what's worked in the past is educated guessing at best. Tactics are deployed based on subjective beliefs in what may be considered a high-performing website. Decisions are never validated to see if they were ever effective. Just because everyone has a "Contact Us" form doesn't necessarily mean you need one.

After launch, a typical website goes without major updates for 1 to 2.5 years.

We get it…you're sick and tired of dealing with that website and you're really glad it's off your table. Problem is, the site may not be on anyone's table for a while.

Whatever the excuse might be, "no more budget", "no time", or "focusing on other things", businesses let their #1 marketing asset sit relatively unchanged for years. This is clearly not a way to maximize website performance, yet it's the norm.

Sure, you might be adding a page here or there, posting to the blog when you feel inspired, or swapping out a banner image or two. The vast majority of the site remains neglected and unchecked.

The Marketing Shift You Need to Make

Let's look at the website redesign process from a different angle. We should find an improved process that avoids all the risks outlined above – risks that you'd never allow to occur in other areas of your business.
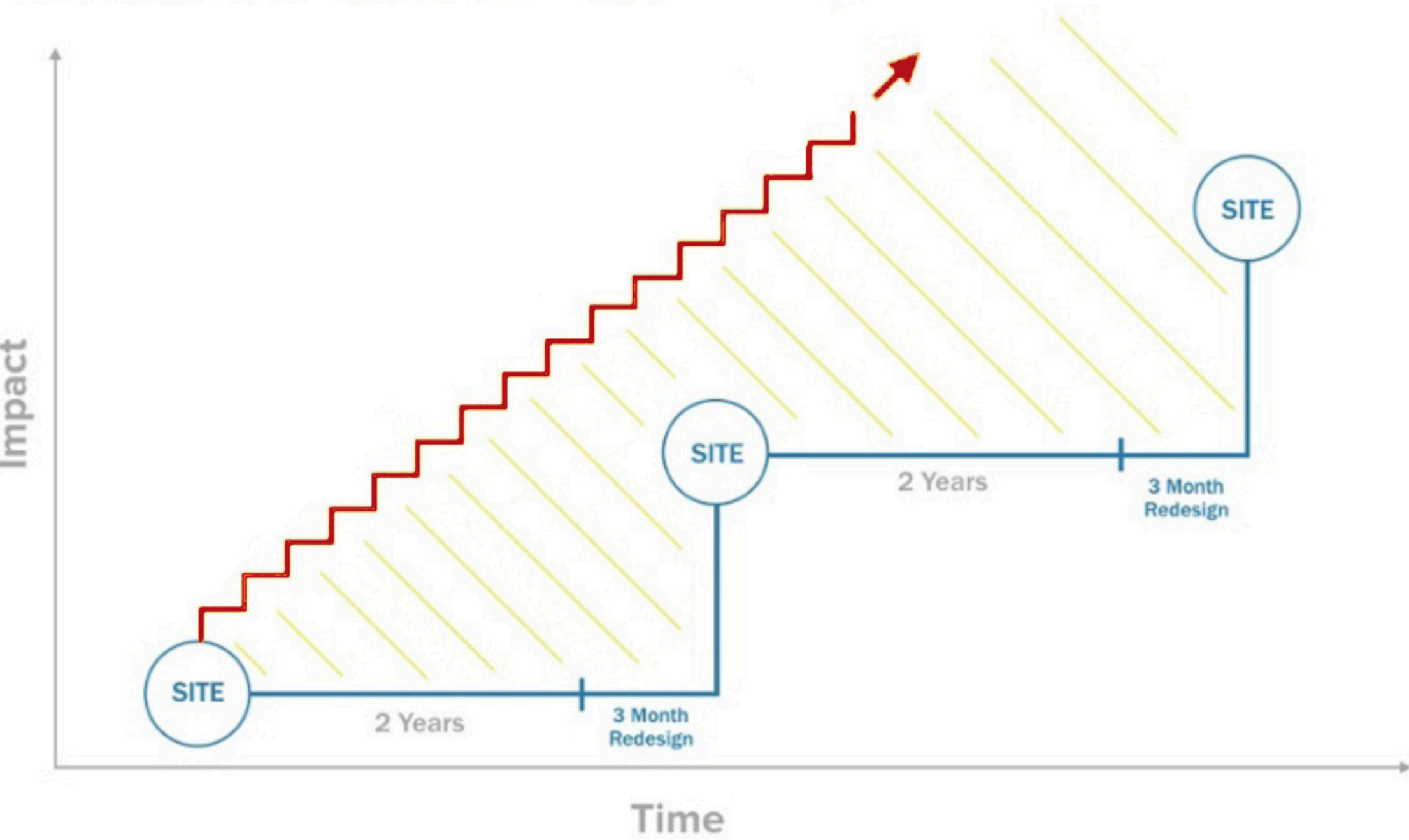
Let's produce a site that gets you up and running really quickly, one that we know is performing optimally and remains agile enough to continually deliver return on investment. In theory, you should never have to go through a "website redesign" again.

We have a process that guarantees all these things. We call this process **Value Driven Design**

The bottom line with traditional web design is that you really don't know what you're going to get, what you're going to pay, and how effective the solution might be.

That's not a strategy.

## Traditional Web Design   vs.   Value Driven Design

Impact

SITE

2 Years   3 Month Redesign

SITE

2 Years   3 Month Redesign

SITE

Time

Traditional Web Design
- Up front costs & risk
- Longer time to delivery
- Decisions based on assumptions
- Long static periods

Value Driven Design
- Launch quick & improve
- Costs spread over time
- Data based decisions
- Continuous improvement

II.
Value Driven Design:
A Smarter Approach

Value Driven Design is a brand new way of building and growing your website. As the name implies, the focus is on delivering value continually while minimizing risk to your business.

	Risks		Results	
Traditional Web Design	Up Front Costs	Resources & Time	Based on Assumptions	Long Static Periods
	(uncertain results, over budget, delays, shifted resources, stagnant)			
Value Driven Design	Spread Over Time	Quick Launch & Improve	Data Based Decisions	Continued Value Delivery
	(agile, quick to market, on budget, perpetual improvement, data driven)			

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Launch Phase
(1 month)

Continuous
Improvement Phase
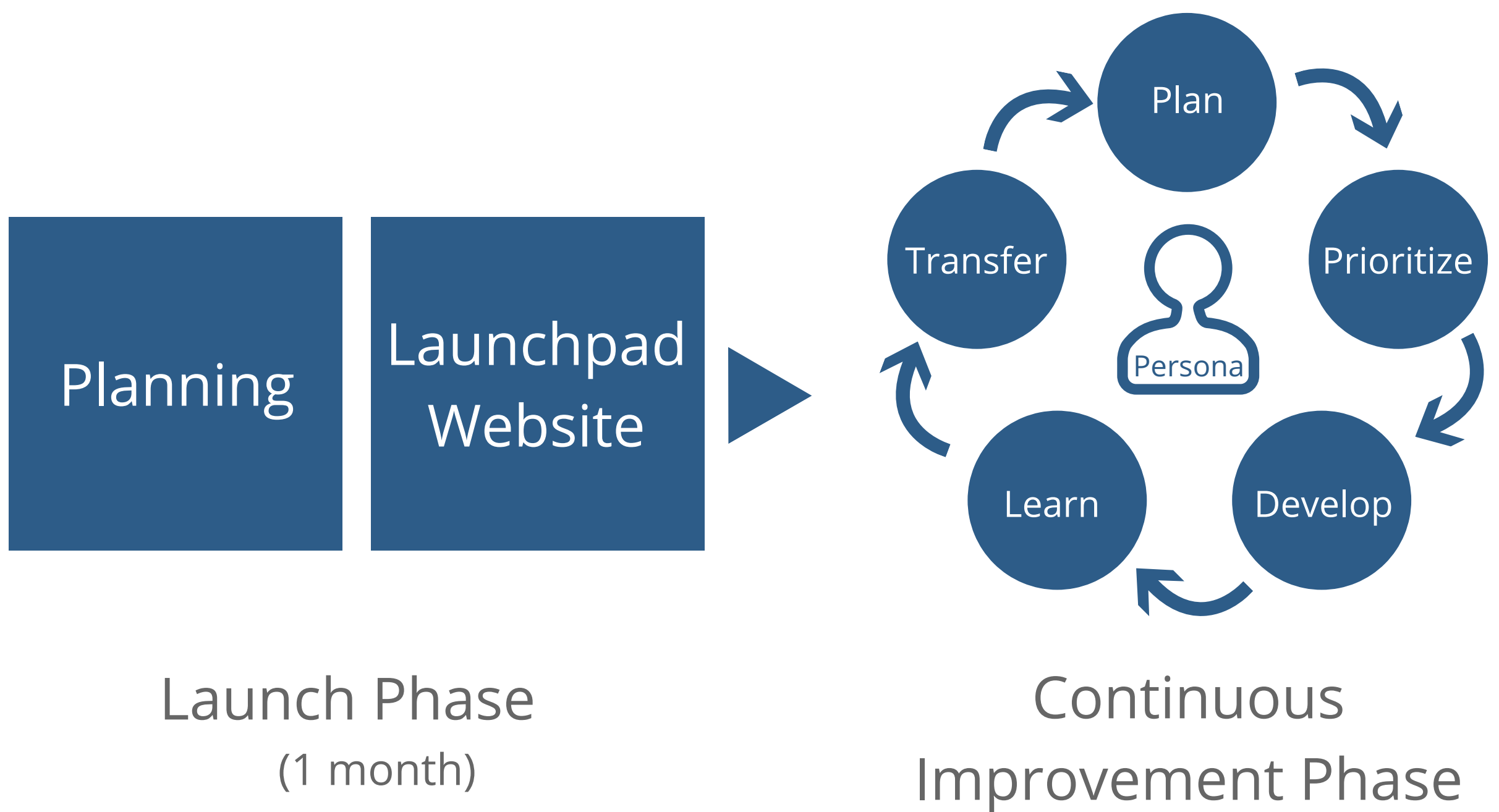
Value Driven Design takes place in two distinct phases.

In the first month or two of work, the goal is to develop a launchpad website with a laser sharp focus on top level, immediate priorities only.

The launchpad website is just the beginning. Once the site goes live, the second phase of continuous improvement begins - repeating cycles of planning, building and learning.

The newly constructed website serves as the core for developing new pages, functionalities and assets of greatest value incrementally. The new site is also a testing ground to gather valuable user data for future decisions.

The Three Principles of
Value Driven Design

1. Minimize Traditional Risks of Web Design

A systematic approach to greatly reduce initial cash and resource outlay, shorten time to launch, and always focusing on areas of highest impact.

2. Continuous Learning and Improvement

Continual research and evaluation of website performance, visitor experience, and stated performance metrics to inform website improvement decisions.

3. Information Sharing

Share what we learn about website visitor behaviors with marketing and sales teams (and vice versa) to help improve marketing tactics organization wide.

III.
The Launch Phase

The goal of the Launch Phase is to get your new website up and running within 30 - 45 days.

To do this, you have to narrow the focus to the most critical elements. You can add functionality later based on actual user data. Here are the basic steps of the Launch Phase:

1. Strategy and Goals

2. Prospect Personas

3. Quantitative Research

4. Qualitative Research

5. Fundamental Assumptions

6. Global and Single Page Strategy

7. Your Wishlist

8. Launch Pad Website
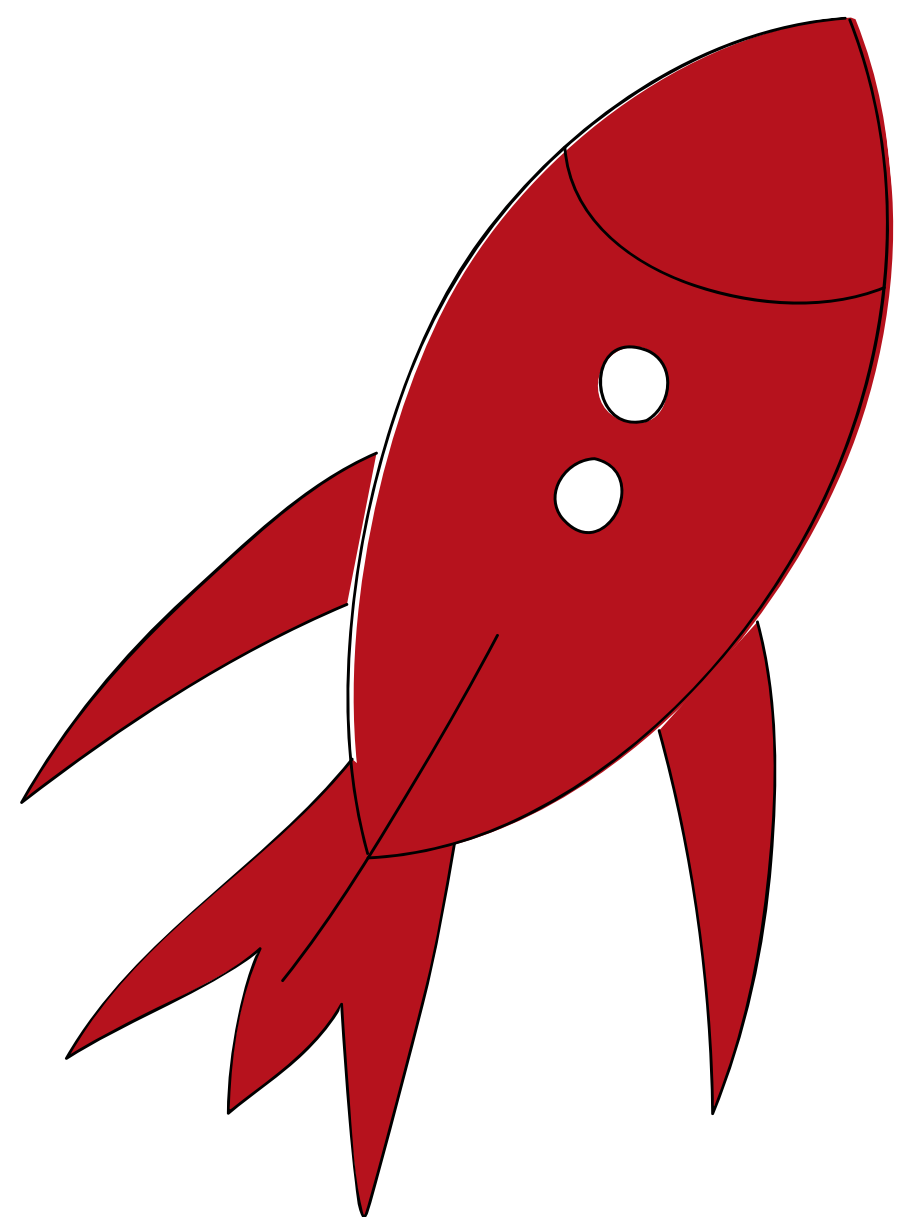
Strategy & Goals

Much like any other major business undertaking, the first stage of Value Driven Design is the strategy or planning phase. Here's where you develop a solid foundation that you can build on.

What performance outcomes are you trying to achieve?

How have you historically performed?

Where should you make improvements?

How will this impact the company's overall goals?

Goals need to be S.M.A.R.T. – Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-bound.

Prospect Personas

A persona is a fictional representation of each kind of ideal customer you'd like to attract. Information about your personas should be grounded in real data however.

Who are your best customers today?

What are you looking for in new customers?

What are you looking to avoid?

How will you differentiate from your competition in the space?

Personas can be separated into groups of characteristics that they share…points of pain, interests, industry, age, sex, job title, etc. Use personas to help guide content creation and also in marketing segmentation and messaging personalization.

Value Driven Design revolves around the user, so it's critically important that you fully research and develop persona profiles accurately from the beginning.

Quantitative Research

Dig into current website data to figure out how well things are performing and what areas could use some improvement. It's always going to be important to learn what is doing well, and what is not performing on your website.

A good website audit will reveal areas of opportunity in future web work.

Qualitative Research

After coming up with some qualitative areas of opportunity, the next step is to reach out to existing users to learn more about them, who they are, what interests them, and to find other ways to improve their experience on the website.

Surveys are a great way to gather this kind of information from existing customers and also new website visitors.

Fundamental Assumptions

Using everything we've come up with so far,now begin developing some fundamental assumptions about your users.

Some examples of fundamental assumptions include:

• Value propositions for each product, service and offer

• Information your users are most interested in

• Types of devices or locations your users are using

to access the website

These assumptions will help to explain user pains and motivations, influencing both global and single page strategic decisions and future Value Driven Design cycles.

Global and Single Page Strategy

Lay out your strategies based on all the work done so far. What are your goals and how are you going to get there most efficiently?

Global Strategy is the overall website game plan.

Single Page Strategy deals with each major page on the website.

Both strategies should account for all of the previous steps and lay out a detailed plan on how to best engage prospects and achieve your business goals.

Your Wishlist

The next stage of the Value Driven Design Launch Phase is to develop your wishlist. This is exactly how it sounds: brainstorm and list every possible creative, innovative or impactful idea that you might like to include on your website.

Gather your team together to come up with some ideas…some may be wild or outlandish, others immediately relevant – nothing is off limits. Take into account everything you learned in the Strategy Stage and let yourself dream of big things.

The key to developing a great wishlist is to enter your brainstorming session with a clear mind. Don't worry about your existing website. As if you were starting over completely, think about all the items that you'd like to have in a perfect world without regard for time, money or technological limitations.

Ideas to consider for your wishlist include:

• Website sections and pages

• Marketing assets

• Resources & tools

• Functionality and specific website features

• Elements of design & aesthetics

• Accommodations based on devices, locations, etc.

After a couple hours, you should have a great list of 75 – 200+ ideas for your new website. Not all of these ideas need to happen immediately, but it's important to get as many possible ideas on the table from the start.

This wishlist will evolve over time. It will be used to establish action items that will be most impactful for initial development vs other items that may be added later. You will continuously add to this list, re-evaluate and re-prioritize over time.

Prioritize Using the 80/20 Rule

In the Wishlist stage, you compiled a huge list of items that you want to include on your website. The 80/20 rule helps you prioritize the tasks which should be implemented first.

Your team needs to review the wishlist and parse out 20 percent of the items that will produce 80 percent of the business impact. Pull these high priority items aside and further separate them according to two key questions:

1. Is the item a "need to have" or a "want to have"?

Any items that are "wants" or nice to have will return back to the main wishlist. The "need to have" items move on to the next round of consideration.

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With remaining items, ask:

2. Is the item absolutely necessary for the initial launch, or is it something we can add to the site in a couple months?

The goal is to narrow the focus down to the "need now" items for the sake of launching the website quickly. This final list should be only a small percentage of your complete wishlist.

Define Each Action Item

Once you've narrowed the list of action items down to the elite few, detail each action item more precisely.

Expected Impact - How much value will your website visitors get from the item and what impact will it have in moving you toward reaching your goals?

Effort Required - What kind of resources are required to bring the item to life? Consider hours of work, expense, resources and difficulty to implement the particular item.

Metrics to Measure - What specific metrics should be accounted for to test this item and evaluate if you are moving toward your goals. The more specific these metrics can be, the better.

Definition of Complete – When is this item considered finished? This is important to define at the outset in order to evaluate effectiveness later on.

Complete Your Launch Pad Website

In Traditional Web Design, the website launch is the end of the line. With Value Driven Design, the website launch is just the beginning. This is where the rubber meets the road and we begin the real learning process and gathering user data.

As the name indicates, the Launch Pad Website is the starting point on which all other Value Driven Design components and activities will stem from. It should be better than your current website, but it won't be perfect or complete by any means.

The Launch Pad Website should go live quickly. To get there, we want to avoid getting stuck over analyzing details like features or specific content in building the site. The new site may not be perfect, but no website ever is. Nothing is ever carved in stone…and it's a starting point for us to continuously improve on.

Launch Pad sites vary in size and complexity depending on the nature of your business, how much valuable content you already have, and how big your wishlist has become.

The game plan for a great Launch Pad Website revolves around what we call the 80/20 Rule: Work on the essential 20 percent of tasks delivering 80 percent of the impact.

Complete
Wishlist

20%
Activities

Need to Have

Launchpad
Website

Need Now

IV.
Continuous Improvement Phase

Once you've launched your new website, it's time to start the processes of continuous expansion and improvement.

Every company will differ in terms of how aggressive these improvement cycles will be, but there must be a plan for refinements over time, even if only

After going live, you should still have a long wishlist of impactful elements that you'd like to add to the site. This list should be flexible and updated on a regular basis as your company evolves.
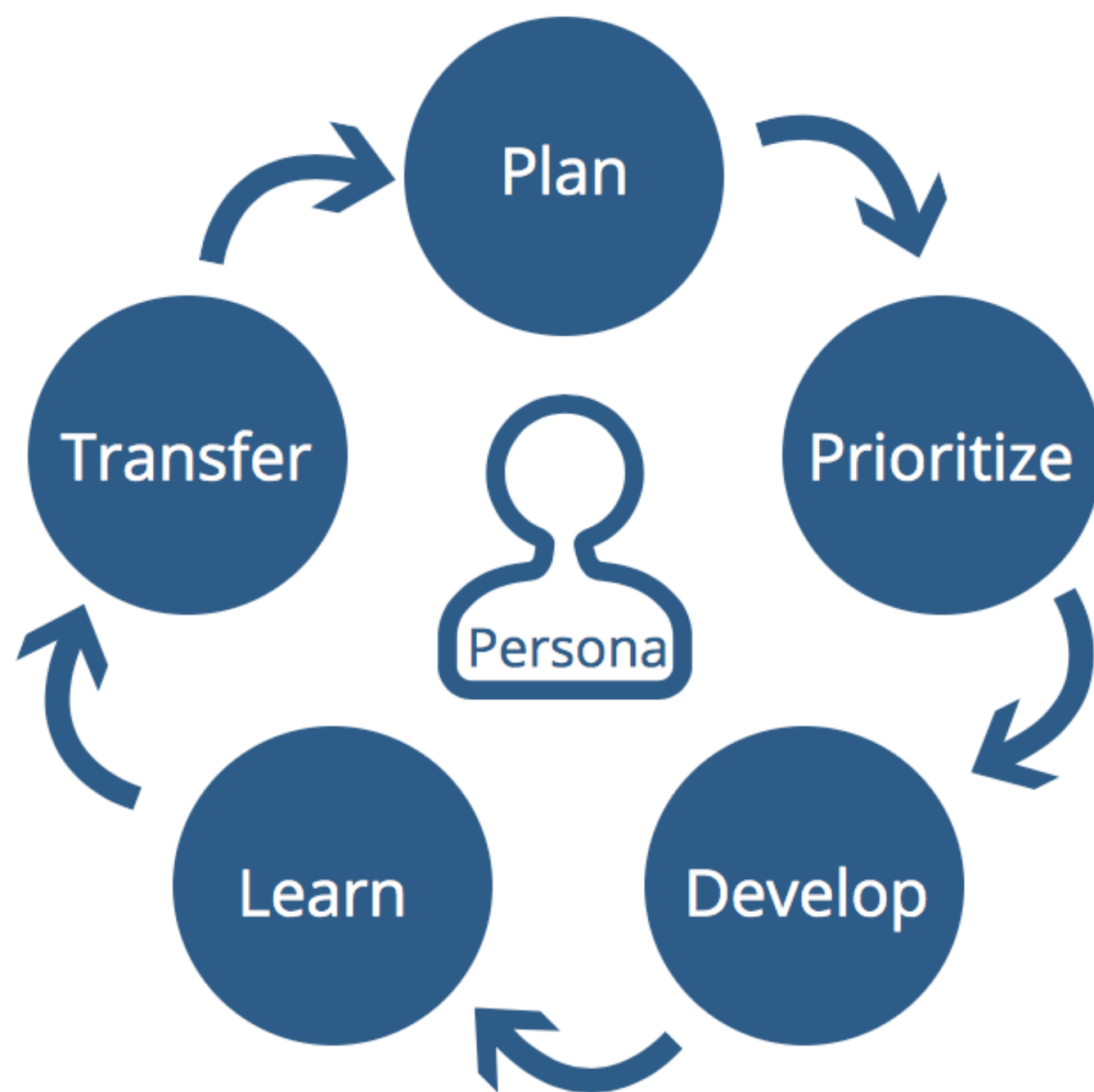
In basic terms, start by planning what you believe your ideal customers will respond to. Prioritize and develop your most critical activities. Test actual results and learn which activities were successful. Share this information throughout your company and repeat all over again.

The more frequent these cycles are completed, the more relevant and effective your website becomes.

Everything on your website is based on the individuals you are looking to attract (buyer personas). Step into the shoes of your best customers and consider their questions and pains. Everything has to relate to your buyer personas.

Step 1: Planning

Much like in the Launch Phase, you'll need to identify and prioritize the most impactful items at the current time. Focus on the top ones and add them to the current cycle.

Here are the steps you should take when planning website activities:

1. Performance Review – Take a look at the current performance of your website and compare with the goals that you're trying to achieve. This should help demonstrate which areas need the most improvement.

2. Additional Research – There is often missing information based on your performance review and goal setting. Maybe goals need to be adjusted, or perhaps there is more information that you'll need to track down to help clarify which new action items should be added to the list.

3. Learn from Other Departments – Connect with your marketing and sales teams to figure out what ideas they have and where the sales process could use improvement.

4. Brainstorm – Based on new circumstances, bring your teams together to come up with any new ideas or possible action items that could be considered. Leave no stones unturned.

In the end, you should have an expanded list of possible action items for your website.

Step 2: Categorize Your Action Items

Of course, you're going to have to make general website updates and changes from time to time. Beyond this basic upkeep, your action items should be categorized into the following 4 distinct areas:

Boosting Conversions – Items directly related to conversion rate optimization

Improving User Experience – Making it easier for users to navigate or find what they need.

Personalization – Crafting content best suited to each individual user based on past behaviors and interests.

Marketing Assets – Items on your website that hold great value for your marketing strategies such as contact lists, tools, calculators, social network accounts, blog posts, etc.

A good example of a marketing asset is Web Design Phoenix's Inbound Marketing Rater. Users quickly learn how qualified their company is for inbound marketing success.

Rate Your Company's Inbound Marketing Potential

Once all your new items are added to the wishlist, you'll need to prioritize using the 80/20 rule once again.

Identify a small number of items to move forward with. Development cycles are typically 1 month. It's better to select a small number and really focus on delivering great work with them. If you finish early, you can always go back and add items.

Step 3: Develop

Now that you've got a short list of the most impactful items for your website, it's time to implement them.

Each item is considered an experiment, testing for the impact it has on the website. Set up performance tracking to measure defined metrics for each item. Some items will need to be marketed specifically, driving direct traffic to gather results.

Step 4: Measure & Learn

After enough time has passed, yielding significant usage data, you're in position to learn about the success or failure of each action item.

Did results validate or disprove the original hypothesis? What did we learn about user behavior that we didn't know before?

Where possible, it's most beneficial to publish any findings so that the entire organization can benefit.

Step 5: Transfer

Take all the information you learned in the first three steps and bring it to other areas of your business.

Take some time to review each item and brainstorm how it could be useful to others. Maybe you picked up some interesting patterns about certain prospects that your sales team would love to know about.

Repeat...

Continuing this process means that your website will never be obsolete, and will always be delivering value to your company. Beyond that, you'll be using your website to learn more about your target audience that can translate to other areas of your business.

The more improvement cycles you're able to complete, the more effective your website will be.

V.
Final Thoughts & Next Steps

If you've come this far, then you've probably had some negative experience with the traditional website design process. You may have even come to accept that this is just the way it is.

These website nightmares are completely avoidable.

Take a small step back and re-evaluate the way that you've handled your website in the past, and how you are going to approach future redesigns.

Regardless of size, the companies that are adopting the principles of Value Driven Design are minimizing their risk, staying flexible, and continually deriving value from their website. Your website is your #1 marketing tool.

If you're ready to learn more about how to implement our Value Driven Design approach to your company website, here are some possible next steps:

Check out our **Resource Library** for other tools and books

Visit our **Educational Blog** for articles and ideas

Book a time for a **15-Minute Website Assessment**

Call us directly to chat **(480) 788-9755**

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