Building Your Website

Before you commission your web site, you should first ask yourself the following questions:

1. **Who is the intended audience for the site?**
Adults? Children? Parents? Strangers? Or All

2. **Is it to be a "shop window" e.g. to show of your school and attract new pupils**

3. **Who will create and maintain the site? (An in-school technician or outside company)**

4. **What are your aims and your motives for starting the site?**

5. **What sort of content and information should be on the site?**

6. **Where will the site be hosted, and will you have your own internet address (domain)?**

7. **How regularly will the site be updated?**

8. **Who will be the author the site? (The person who makes a final decision on content)**

Define your community

We decided that our site should be aimed at mainly parents, staff and current pupils with the proviso that it would and could be viewed by strangers, prospective parents / carers and prospective pupils.

Once the target audience had been defined, it was a case of thinking about the information that these groups might want or find interesting.

With our main visitors being parents and pupils who are already familiar with the school, they are more interested to see news, pictures of the latest events and possible examples of the pupils' work. However, we also needed to make it interesting and friendly for the strangers and prospective parents to tell them about our school and what we have to offer.

Stages of Constructing a Website

Once you have the idea and you have worked out your aims you can then start designing your web site.   First, you will need to collect together all of the information you will need and some images too. This is best gathered and stored electronically in one computer folder.

Please note:
There is now a statutory list of documents and policies that now need to be included:

Statutory Policies
Charging and remissions policy
Performance management policy
School behaviour policy
Sex education policy
Special Education Needs policy
Teacher's Pay policy
Data Protection policy

Other Statutory Documents
Admissions Arrangements
Accessibility plan
Complaints procedure
Freedom of information publication scheme
Governor's allowances (schemes for paying)
Home School Agreements
Instrument of government
Minutes of and paper considered at meeting of the governing body and its committees
Premises Management
Publication of equality information and objectives (Public sector equality duty)
Staff Discipline conduct and grievance (Procedures for addressing)

Design and Content

Once you have gathered all of the materials you can start planning the website. This can either be done by an outside body or within school. Either way you need to think about the layout and how many pages you will produce.

The entire Internet is full of web pages.

Try to look at a few that are more like your school to gather some ideas.

You then also need to think about the devices on which your site will be viewed.

Our single site has been designed for both full size computer/laptop or tablet/phone viewing.

Some companies/schools have dual sites, one for tablet/phone use and another for full size computer viewing.   The modern day technology works out which site to dispay but dual sites cost almost twice as much and take nearly twice as much time to compile.
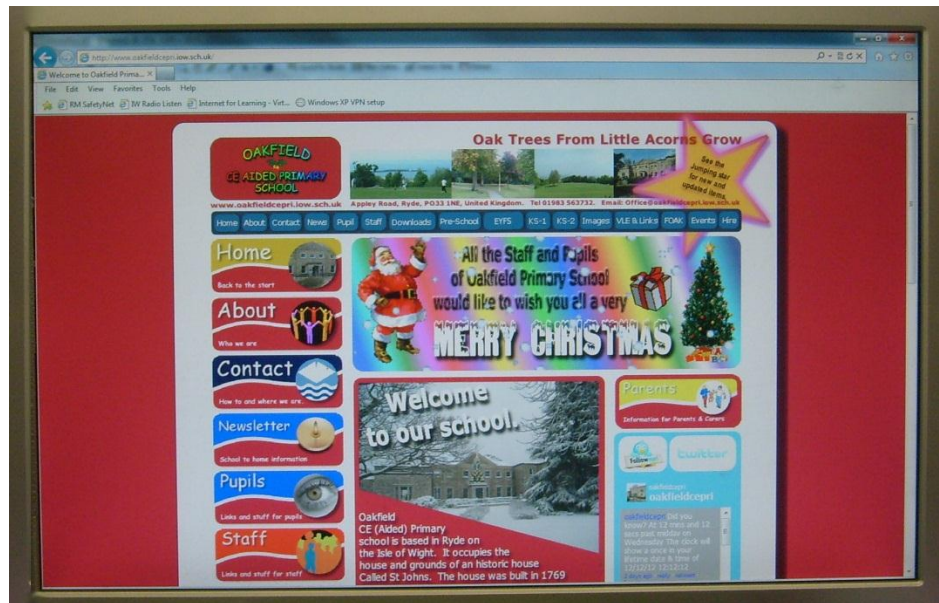
In our combined device viewing site sown in the examples above, the large side link buttons are readable and very accessible from touch screen devices where as the standard top naviagation link bar is more akin to full size computer use. So, we include both.

The width of the designed page is also very important. Too wide and on a tablet/phone you are forcing the user to scroll left and right as well as up and down. (Tablet/phone scrolling up and down has become an acceptable norm where as this accompanied by left and right scrolling begins to feel uncomfortable. Our aim was never to make the reader scroll left and right unless they wished to zoom into a protion of a page.

Putting the pages together

Now you are ready to start creating you first web site.

If this is to done by an outside body, you just need to direct them with some idea and shape of a final site; you may even wish to be guided by them.

If you are doing this in school, then it may require the purchase of a web building software package for the designated person to use. (We use Serif Web Plus but there are a large number of packages out there).

Either way don't underestimate the time it may take to set up a site from scratch, either as a basic design or in a fully operation up-loadable manor. Always try to draw a basic design of your pages out on paper first. However once it is up and running it can become a lot less time-consuming.

Websites

When you are designing websites, no two sites are the same or demand the same amount of effort. Our main school website is a 'high maintenance' site and needs regular updating. On the other hand, there are some sites that are designed purely to promote a school and only require the occasional updating.

Costs

A website can cost anything you like but it is actually possible, but not always practical or the best option to do one for free. If you know HTML, once your web site is finished, you can download a free version of an ftp program that lets you upload all of your web site files onto the internet to a host provider who lets you store your web site on their hard disks for free. Total cost: zero. However, it may not look professional and it will probably have adverts attached (often with some that you rather were not shown next to or included above or below your site). So, if you are more serious about creating a presence on the internet then you will need to pay some money.
For this you will need a host server (a place to store your pages on the internet which lets people have 24 hours access) and a domain name (the address on the internet where people can find you). Every school in England was given a domain name and your local education authority may be able to advise you on this and also who can host your website. On the Isle of Wight, All schools were issued a domain name in the form of 'yourschool.iow.sch.uk'. All end in.iow.sch.uk. They were originally hosted by RM (Research Machines) the ISP (Internet Service Provider) for the majority of Island Schools.
If you do not have access to or wish to use another domain name then there are many companies who sell them on the web. Prices start form around £10 per year. Hosting from RM is from around £90 per year (But other companies are available).

Advice for Interested Staff and Governors

When you come to create your first web site, keep it simple to start with and don't try to get too ambitious too soon. You may wish to get the pupils to write about things that interest them. That way it won't seem like hard work to them. Be prepared to learn from your mistakes. Surf the internet a lot to see what other people are doing. The internet is the best text book for learning.

How to Get Readers to Your Website

That old notion "build it and they will come" doesn't really work on the internet. There must be millions of web sites out there by now and your site is just a drop in the ocean. If you are doing a web site about your school then you already have a captured audience. But, what if you want more visitors? People can't find you unless you do some promotion.
There are some professional businesses that, for a fee, will help promote your site. But, if you have the time and patience, you can do this yourself by visiting some of the popular search engines and submitting your site. After a couple of weeks your site should be on their databases.
I think our best promoter was word of mouth.

Disclaimer

This page has been written to offer some basic advice and not as a how to guide.
Just like cooking, for some, it is a profession and for others a hobby or just a necessity.
Web design can be looked at in a similar way but a professionally designed web site can cost.
Just like a quality meal cooked by professional chefs in a top restaurant.
The larger the content package, the more intricate the graphics or buttons and the like will all increase the amount time it takes to design and built and therefore if using a professional designer, will quickly increase the price you pay.

However the general thing to remember is that the overall quality of the end product is usually relevant to the experience of the designer.