



Web Site Upgrade Process

An overhaul of an existing web site provides an important opportunity for your school or office to assess its site as you work to upgrade your web communication efforts. A web site is essentially a publication, so taking the time to resolve editorial issues is critical to the success of your site overhaul. The result of your assessment may not necessarily be a bigger web site. In fact, many locations would probably benefit from creating a smaller, more focused web presence. Smaller sites often improve user experience and make site maintenance easier.

Three Steps To A Better Web Site

Web Services suggests teams and webmasters improving a school or office site follow a process as they plan and implement their migration to a new site. There are three parts to this process:

1. Planning: The school or office staff assigned to the web site project assesses the current site and develops a plan for the new site. This includes developing the communication and editorial strategy, gathering the content, and devising the site outline and home page content. This is the most time consuming and most critical step in ensuring the success of your site.

2. Production: Your school or office webmaster, a volunteer, or a contractor creates the site based on your plan. It's helpful if they are involved in the planning process. This person does not necessarily fulfill the role of webmaster later.

3. Maintenance: After the site goes live, your school or office webmaster and possibly other staffers play various roles in updating content. You also review the site's content annually and delete any out-of-date material.

The Planning Process

Because planning is the most crucial step in this process, we've provided more details about the steps you can take to reorganize and improve your site.

- 1. Assign a Content Manager and Webmaster:** Designate a "Content Manager" responsible for understanding the site's communication objectives (message, audience, tone, content needs, etc.) and for acting as project manager. The Content Manager works closely with the Webmaster on site production and other issues and ideally gathers a team to work on the site upgrade project. Ideally, the Content Manager has a strong awareness of the school/office's communication objectives, is authorized to make decisions about what content is appropriate for publication on the site and continues in this role after the new site goes live. The Webmaster actually creates and updates the site. Often the Webmaster fills both roles.
- 2. Complete the Site Purpose Survey:** Why do you have a web site? Whom is it speaking to? What is your message? Your answers to these and other questions should help your group clarify and focus your site's purpose and content.
- 3. Conduct a Content Inventory:** What is on your existing web site? How up to date is it? Who is responsible for content on specific pages? Use the Content Inventory Worksheet to list all the urls (web pages) in your site. Note whether the content is up-to-date and relevant and who is responsible for it. Note whether a web page should be deleted, retained or updated. This inventory, while a tedious task, is critical to future steps in this process.

4. **Create a Site Outline:** Review answers to the Site Purpose Survey and the list in your Content Inventory Worksheet. This should help you determine the editorial content of your site. Create an outline of the new site's content. Content should be organized into three to five relevant categories or "chunks" -- which can later be navigation elements. (Office sites should resist reflecting the office's organizational chart.) Now is also the time to plan content for the "content well" (the center) of the home page, how often it will be updated, and who will do the updating.
5. **Harvest content:** The new site may require new content for existing web pages or new web pages for new documents. The Content Manager should harvest electronic versions or arrange to convert hard copy documents to Word documents or PDFs for the Webmaster.
6. **Scrub content:** Using the Inventory and Outline, delete web pages that are no longer needed and update out-of-date content
7. **Produce the new site:** With the Site Outline and electronic versions of the content in hand, the Webmaster or contractor doing html production can proceed with creation of the new site. This work is done on a personal computer while the old site continues on the MCPS server.
8. **Review and test the new site:** After the Webmaster has created the new site, the Content Manager and others on the team should review the site for editorial corrections or changes. They should also surf the site, testing links and navigation to make sure all works as planned. It's also helpful to conduct a quick "usability test" by inviting someone who hasn't been involved in the project to simply sit at a computer and perform a simple task on the site. This often uncovers any mistaken assumptions, which you can correct before launch. After these reviews, the Webmaster will make any corrections necessary.
9. **Launch the new site:** After your principal or supervisor signs off on the new site, place the new files on the MCPS server. Delete the old files. (You can move them to your own computer before deleting if you wish to archive them.) You should upload the new site at the beginning or end of the day. Use redirects if the url of a particularly critical page has changed and you want visitors to be automatically sent to the page. Web Services can assist at this critical transition stage.
10. **Congratulations! Be sure to promote your new, improved site to your target audience!**