

THINK ABOUT
WEBSITE MAINTENANCE:
Before You Start Building
Your Site

“By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail.”

– Benjamin Franklin





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Your website is the front door to your brand. It deserves attention.

Website maintenance is something you should start thinking about before you start building your site.

If your site is already up and running and you are struggling with maintenance or you just think things could be running more smoothly, the information here can help you get from being behind the ball to being ahead of the curve.

Proactive maintenance on your website is no different than preventative maintenance on your home or car. It prevents things from breaking. There is no magic in it. Simple, effective website maintenance requires proper planning, adherence to best practices, upkeep, and defensive measures.

Your website is the front door to your brand. It deserves attention.

Read on to see how proper planning and upkeep can ensure a well-oiled website for you and your customers.





Three Things to Include in a Killer Website Governance Plan

We always encourage customers to develop what we call a *website governance plan*.

The objective of a solid website governance plan is to have the right *people* in charge of the right *things* at the right *time* during the build phase of a new site that continues into the maintenance phase.

You'll want to be sure you've considered at least the three following things and include them in your plan:

ONE

Define Your Project Team and Steering Committee

If you are building a new website, the members of your project team should have clearly defined roles and responsibilities. After the site launches and the champagne has sparkled, your project team should morph into a steering committee that meets regularly to determine which changes to the website can be made and which cannot.

If you are already in the maintenance phase for your site, you can skip right to creating a steering committee. The steering committee is really just a smaller version of the project team, with the same structure and function. The structure of the committee will help ensure that any new proposals (a new landing page, new imagery on the homepage, etc.) meet a *specific and measurable business need*.





TWO

Define Your Change Control Process

A defined change control process is governed by the steering committee and spells out the questions, answers, and steps that need to be performed before someone in your organization makes any significant changes to the website. Your change control process must have the proper gates in place. Depending on the size, scope, and maturity of your organization, some of those gates may be:

- Reason/justification for change
- Security or risk reviews
- Rollback plan in case of issues
- Roles and responsibilities

THREE

Define Your Approval Process

To perform ongoing content updates to the website, you need a clearly developed approval process that works seamlessly between your steering committee, the people performing the maintenance, and other key members of your organization.

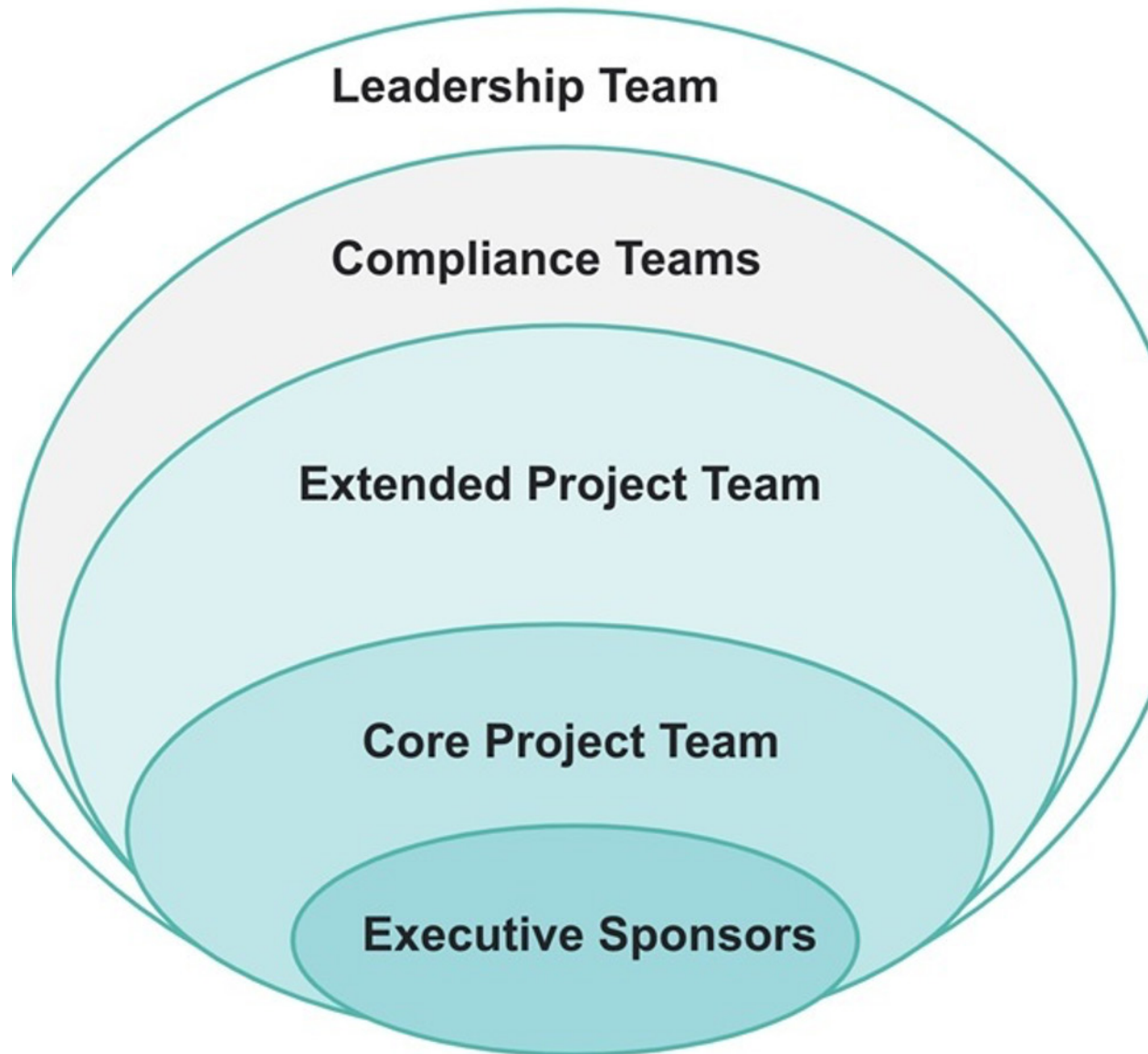
Create your killer website governance plan as early in the build phase of a new website as possible. This way, you start to establish good operational habits **before** the rush to launch and making updates to the site take over.





What A Project Team/Steering Committee Looks Like

Here is what a project team or steering committee might look like:



Before we go deeper into how to define these teams, keep in mind that with fewer decision makers, progress is faster. The more you can keep the core team engaged and making decisions, the faster and more efficiently the project (or maintenance) can move forward.



Fewer Decision Makers = Faster Progress

Although every organization may be different, here is a typical breakdown of team and committee members.

Executive Sponsors - Joint business and technical executive project sponsors. They are the ultimate decision makers/approvers on project objectives, deliverables, and success.

Core Project Team - Comprising people with key roles in Communications, IT, and Project Management. The day-to-day leaders of the website project provide expert knowledge of organizational needs, systems, and strategies to inform and approve website tasks and deliverables.

Extended Project Team - Comprising people from key lines of business (such as Communications, IT, Programs, etc.). They provide subject matter expertise for their area.

Business Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) – People with key roles in IT, members of the User Acceptance Testing (UAT) Team, and Content Leads.

Compliance Teams - Groups of subject matter experts critical to a successful website launch and maintenance who provide knowledge on organizational policies, as well as industry or government rules and regulations related to the website. They are engaged at regular project milestones to approve relevant work and to ensure the new website complies with internal policies, which may include legal, infosec, ISO (International Organization for Standardization) certification, HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996), etc.

Leadership Team – Members can include the Director of IT, the Director of Marketing, the Head of Project Management, and are the operational leaders for the project. They may not be involved in day-to-day activities but the Core Project Team likely reports to them.

The RACI Matrix

Once you have defined the teams, you want to lay out who is responsible for what tasks, and at what level. A responsibility assignment matrix, also known as a RACI matrix or linear responsibility chart, is a perfect way to do this.

The RACI matrix is collaborative and visual, so it is easy to share and workshop within the organization. The RACI matrix describes project roles, responsibilities, core tasks, and ownership. Each role is assigned a level of engagement for each responsibility and task.

LEGEND:		Executive Sponsors	Business Lead	IT Lead	Business Analyst	Project Manager	Content Leads	IT Resources	SMEs (Comms)	UAT
R = Responsible A = Accountable C = Consulted/Contributor I = Informed		CORE TEAM					EXTENDED TEAM			
PHASE / ACTIVITY	KEY RESPONSIBILITY / TASK									
1. Planning/ Communications	Define project objectives and scope	I	A	A	C	R	C	I	I	I
1. Planning/ Communications	Approve project objectives and scope	A	R	R	C	C	I	I	I	I
1. Planning/ Communications	Approve project budget and costs (including any changes)	A	R	C	C	C	I	I	I	I
1. Planning/ Communications	Define project roles and responsibilities	I	A	R	C	R	I	I	I	I
1. Planning/ Communications	Define project communications plan (i.e., frequency/method of communications, status reporting, issue/risk management, escalations)	I	I	I	C	AR	I	I	I	I
1. Planning/ Communications	Create and maintain Project Plan including tasks, deliverables and timing	I	I	I	C	AR	I	I	I	I
1. Planning/ Communications	Coordinate project status meetings	I	I	I	R	AR	I	I	I	I
1. Planning/ Communications	Produce and distribute weekly status report	I	I	I	C	AR	I	I	I	I
1. Planning/ Communications	Set up and maintain collaboration tools for filesharing and project communications	I	I	I	R	AR	I	I	I	I
1. Planning/ Communications	Engage Key Business Participants	C	A	I	R	C	C	I	C	I
1. Planning/ Communications	Engage Key Technical Participants	C	I	A	R	C	I	C	I	I
1. Planning/ Communications	Stakeholder Requests	C	C	C	R	AR	C	I	I	C
1. Planning/ Communications	Project Initiation/Kick-off Meeting	C	C	C	R	AR	C	I	I	I
1. Planning/ Communications	Project Update with Executive Sponsor, Core Team, & other Stakeholders	C	C	C	R	AR				
1. Planning/ Communications	Project Update with EGG and LT	C	I	I	R	AR				
1. Planning/ Communications	Executive Sponsor Meetings	C	I	I	R	AR				
1. Planning/ Communications	Core Team Meetings	I	C	C	R	AR	I	I	I	I

R = responsible; A = accountable; C = consulted; I = informed

When using this type of visual tool, your goal is to define what team is responsible for what actions, and who needs to stay informed. If RACI is not your cup of tea, you could use an alternative like [skore](#).

Using Templates and Creating Gates for Content

Now that you've defined a website governance plan, the project team and/or the steering committee -the who and the what- you need to define the how. More specifically, what tools and tactics your teams should employ on an ongoing basis, according to your plan, to ensure success. This is where content templates can help.

When In Doubt, Use A Template!

Most websites really only need four to six content templates. For example:

- Home page
- Landing page
- Sign up form
- Content section
- Detail page
- Others, if you're building/maintaining an ecommerce site

Your content editors should only go "custom," i.e., custom design a content solution if it's absolutely necessary. Nudge them to use a template for their campaigns, or content whenever feasible.

Create Gates for Content

Just having beautiful content for site launch is not enough; it needs to be cared for. As mentioned earlier, you want to make sure your change control process has the right gates to keep the gremlins out and to optimize your content.

For example, just writing that landing page for your next event is not enough. You also need a check for:

- SEO Keywords in the content
- Proper use of branding
- Voice - does it sound like you?
- Accessibility - do you have proper headings, alt tags, color contrast?
- Backlinking - have you linked to other relevant content like a blog post on the same topic?



3 Tips for Success

Have a well-defined creation and approval process for content

A little strategy up front can help you avoid introducing risk into your project or maintenance plan. Similarly, is your planned content derived from a solid strategy? If so, document it.

If so, document it. Have a well-defined marketing or communications strategy for your content creation and document it. Keep your plan in a centralized place, like Google Docs. Your content calendar should be derived from your content strategy and link back to the document. After that, each piece of content created should link to the calendar.

This strategy should be enforced either by the steering committee in a smaller organization or a subcommittee for a larger team.

Keep technology up-to-date

With website maintenance, an ounce of prevention goes a long way. Website maintenance also is not just about the content. [Be sure your website is secure and includes proper patching and defenses against hackers](#). Look into tools you should consider using on an ongoing basis:

- Digital asset management tools like [Sitecore's Content Hub](#).
- Site monitoring tools such as [Pingdom](#) or [Siteuptime](#).
- Application performance monitoring tools like [New Relic](#).
- DNS, or Domain Name System, monitoring tools such as [Site24x7](#).
- An ADA, or Americans with Disabilities Act, suite like [AccessiBe](#).
- Search ranking and performance tools such as Webmaster Tools from Google.
- An all-encompassing tool for digital growth and maintenance, like [Siteimprove](#), which can be expensive but may be a good fit for your organization.





Don't be afraid to cull and sunset content

Focus your attention, your SEO score, and your updates on content that is performing on your site and get rid of anything else. You don't want to leave "zombie" pages or content on your site that is not moving your mission forward. Worse, this useless content could be drowning out the good stuff by diluting your page rank or by opening your site up to hacker attacks (old pages and forms can leave open holes over time for cyberattacks).

Have a quarterly or monthly meeting with your teams and use tools like Google Analytics in concert with a website crawler that helps you improve onsite SEO, like the [Screaming Frog SEO Spider](#). You'll be able to see how your site is performing and what can get axed. If your content is performing, double down on it. If you move content around on your site, [don't forget about 301 redirects](#).



Get Started

Don't worry if you are not yet doing all of what we propose here. You just want to make sure you are strategically planning your website launch and consistently improving your maintenance over time. If you really want a gold star you can use a Maturity Model, like [CMMI](#), to measure your organization's improvement over time. This is likely not necessary for most teams. It's enough to set some goals each quarter and see how your website is doing.

Also, you should find out how your website governance plan is performing for you. For example, are you introducing a lot of bugs into the site? Are mistakes in content getting published on your website? Did you forget to initiate 301 redirects during your last content purge? Is your SEO tanking? These are all signs that your website governance plan may need fine-tuning.

We at Engine Room Technology Company have shared a lot of information with you. Don't get overwhelmed! Remember, the important thing is to get going. Get ready now, you can start planning to improve your website launch and maintenance plan.



About Engine Room

WE DESIGN, BUILD, AND SECURE DIGITAL MARKETING SOLUTIONS

At our core, we're seasoned technologists with decades of experience building complex solutions of the highest quality. We code, we test, and we tweak until everything is airtight. This leads us to security, the other half of our bread and butter. We take it seriously and build it into everything we do. It's never an afterthought, and it's always rock solid. We could talk all day about what we do. But we'd rather show you.

