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Web Project Scope - Right from the Start

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Abstract

Web project management is a subset of IT project management. For a Web project to be successful the project scope must be right, that is well-defined, from the start.

Management of any project, IT or not, includes five major processes initiating, planning, execution, controlling and closeout. Which process is most important? You might as well ask a physician which life process is more important to a healthy human being, brain function or heart function or, ask a Christian whether faith or good works is more critical to sound religion. Because the activities making up each process are interdependent and overlapping, each and all are essential for the success of a project. In fact, as a Project Manager, having seen projects fail to meet objectives due to failures in most if not all of the processes, I *might* find it impossible to say one process is more important than another for the overall success of a project. However, my experience has been that the inevitability of failure and the greatest failure consequences are generally linked to inadequate front-end initiating and planning processes, specifically, poorly defined project scope. Poorly-defined project scope means poorly-defined project objectives, poorly-defined project deliverables, poorly-defined project technical and quality standards, poorly-defined project responsibilities, poorly-defined project stake holders and communications, poorly-defined project schedule, and poorly-defined project budget. Web projects, like all IT projects, must be systematically and completely scoped.

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Defining the scope of a Web project in a document that forms the agreement between the project client and the project team follows basic principles. It is extremely important to know who the real client is before effort is put into defining scope. The project “Client” can be an internal sponsor or an external entity. The client is the person

(or group) ultimately authorized to set expectations, approve scope, accept deliverables and approve expenditures. Sarah Fleming puts it this way, “Maybe it [identifying the client in a Web project] seems obvious. The client is the person on the other end of the phone saying, "I want it yesterday," right? Occasionally, yes. But find out if that person is really calling the shots on the project. Are they authorized to make decisions related to the project, and can they grant approval? Find out who the project contact will be and, most importantly, who needs to sign off on the finished product.” (Fleming, 1998)

Once the client is clearly established, the next step is to do a client survey or assessment. Time spent on this document which will be the basis of the scope document and project plan is both critical and well spent. In general terms the purpose of this documented interview is to (Burdman, 1999):

- Identify the Project Objectives
- Identify the Users
- Determine the Project Scope

The assessment is a set of questions, provided and answered in writing to ensure considered and well-documented responses. To further clarify and ensure mutual understanding the results of the assessment are then discussed with the client and members of his team before being used as part of the scope document. According to Goto and Cotler common questions include [but are not limited to]:

- What are your business objectives for the site?
- What are the names, roles and contact information for key contacts?
- What is the intended launch date?

- Do you have a specific budget range and can the project be phased to accommodate budget and schedule? (Goto & Cotler, 2002)

Other typical questions include:

- Who will be the target audience of this site?
- What services will the site provide the users?
- Who will maintain the site?
- What content do you have in hand including amount and format?

Based on the outcome of the interview, a scope document is created for client approval which becomes the basis the project plan. The typical scope document which I develop for a small business client Web site addresses the following topics as a minimum:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project Overview: • Site Objectives: • Required Site Features (Including Table of Implementing Pages): • Site Graphics Requirements: • Copy Right Requirements: • Security Requirements: • Domain Name and Hosting Requirements: • Detailed Web Site Diagram 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliverables (Including Timetable for Draft and Final Review and Approval by Client): • Detailed Resource Loaded MS Project Schedule (Includes Deliverable Milestones and All Activities for both Developer and Client): • Standards of Compliance • Expectations and Commitments including how to handle scope changes and prevent scope creep: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scope of and Responsibility for Site Business Content and Timetable for its Availability: • Responsibility for Ongoing Site Maintenance and Webmaster Services: • Cost Estimate Based on Resource Loaded Schedule : • Project Termination Requirements: • Limit of Liability: • Nondisclosure Requirements for Both Parties:
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A well defined and formally-documented Web project scope with its resulting schedule and budget becomes both a plan and a standard of project success. The approved scope becomes the authority by which the project is managed and measured. Changes, however well meaning,

are not part of the project until formally incorporated as an approved scope/schedule/budget change. A clear scope is the “*Agreement*” in a process of project *management by agreement* that ensures cost, schedule and quality expectations set at the start of the project are met at the end of the project.

References

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