

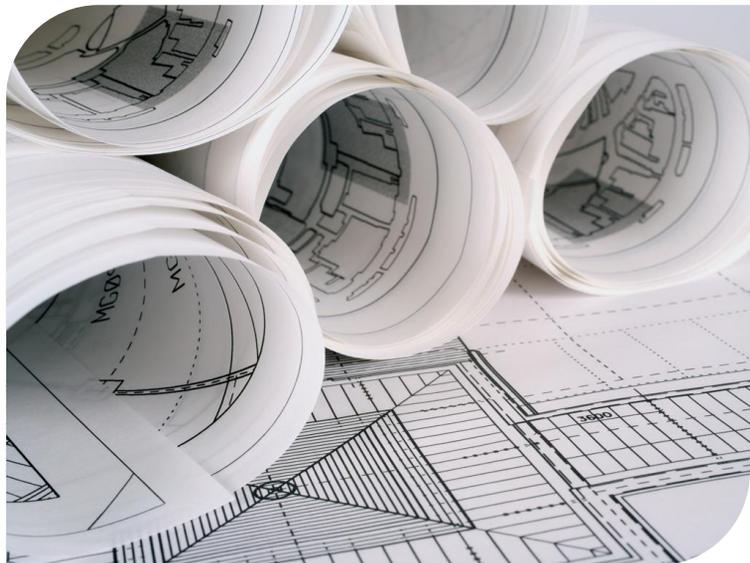
Panlogic

Digital Engineering

Web | Mobile | Applications

Our approach to

user
centred
specification



The challenges of website development

Current websites are complex beasts. Not only must they deliver content and functionality to a disparate set of audiences, but also they must integrate with an ever-evolving soup or organisational technology whilst still achieving organisational goals. The translation of these goals into an effective digital strategy is often the difference between success and failure. So how do you make sure that the people you need to serve are the centre of your project?

The first challenge is to define the full spectrum of a particular services' stakeholders, recognising that some are influencers, some onlookers, some in favour, some against, all with different agendas. If they are in favour of the service, they might need to be nurtured as advocates and evangelists for the project within the organisation. If they are against it, they will either need to be persuaded of its benefits or their influence will need to be neutralised. This sort of stakeholder mapping is crucial from the outset.

Once a 'stakeholder map' has been identified the task remains of working out what each of these groups needs and wants from the service (if anything at all), both immediately and going forwards. For a service to be truly successful it needs to deliver on these stakeholders' needs.

Without a detailed and comprehensive analysis of users' needs no service can truly fulfil the requirements of the organisation. The flexibility and variety of technical solutions available should also be defined by the specifications so that suitable technical platforms are selected (if applicable) to ensure the most efficient solution possible is ultimately provided. Specialised and independent experts in scoping the functions, uses and needs of any digital solution should be employed before identifying a potential service-builder.

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Ensuring the user is at the heart of the project

A Business Analyst should audit the current infrastructure and digital services to identify how a future system might need to integrate with these, which current platforms can be kept and which ones decommissioned.

Next comes the phase of identification of stakeholder needs and wishes against organisational constraints (time, budget etc.). This is typically done by a Consultant or Solutions Architect. To do this it may be appropriate to run a series of workshops and interviews with identified stakeholders which are then prioritised and phased.

Prioritisation is done via a two-fold process:

- A benefit vs. difficulty analysis
- A MoSCoW rules analysis (Must have; Should have; Could have; Won't have)

This is done in conjunction with the service's Senior Responsible Officer and/or Programme/Project Manager, as well as any other key stakeholders.

Phasing is then overlaid on top of these prioritisations according to the most sensible groupings of work from an operational, technical, marketing, channel and/or platform basis.

From the information gained above an Information Architect will develop a series of documents which will include some/all of the following:

- User personas
- User journeys for the identified user personas
- Sitemap: identifying the various levels of content labels under which individual pages will sit.
- Prototype: an online, iterative and visual walk-through of the new service identifying the structure, pages and navigation. Once signed-off, the prototype delivers out the wireframes which become part of the build documentation.

The Solutions Architect will then produce the following documentation:

- Functional specification: detailing functionality the service delivers.
- Non-functional specification: This would include technical architecture, Content Management System, content, design, user channel/platform, research, marketing, communications and other general requirements.
- Acceptance Criteria: detailing the criteria that will allow the project to be 'accepted' by the client.

All this would result in a handover presentation outlining the discoveries.

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The role of the solutions architect

A key problem in many organisations is the development of detailed specification documents which contain the views and wishes of all stakeholders. The increasing complexity of organisations results in a complex web of inter-dependent and overlapping requirements. An independent Solutions Architect will articulate the wishes of all stakeholders by using systematic and proven exercises to solicit requirements.

Equally, they will provide pertinent, focused, relevant and objective advice on what the best solution would be. They can help work out exactly what capabilities the systems need to have and what is required to keep data and information, safe, secure, readily accessible and easy to update by the relevant people.

They expertly extract the relevant information from different user groups using interviews, focus groups, statistical analysis of present system use, taking into account the work processes relevant to their roles and their interactions with systems and people. This allows them to map-out the user interaction process ensuring that the entire user experience is planned into the build of the website.

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Conclusions

By focusing relentlessly on users and stakeholders' needs from the outset, the services' key objectives will be met. To do this effectively independent experts in digital service design are required to ensure all users' and stakeholders' needs are accounted for and incorporated from the start. This avoids costly changes after going live by ensuring the service-builders know exactly what is required from the beginning.

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About Panlogic

Established in 1999, Panlogic is an independent, dedicated digital agency offering a full range of services, from idea through to execution.

Digital consultancy

Our consultancy offer provides independent scoping and definition services for digital (web/mobile/tablet) devices for applications/websites etc.

Digital support

Our second core offer provides long term, SLA backed hosting/support and maintenance contracts across a wide and certified set of technologies which we run up to 24x7x365 for clients.