

Where to Start a Project

The Fine Points

- **Know the capabilities and limitations of your audience**
- **Learn why understanding your audience is important to your success**
- **Resources to help you understand your audience**

Arguably, the key to having a successful project starts with your knowledge of your audience. No matter how good your design, technology, support, or product is; if the site you produce appeals to parachutists and you were trying to get to farmers, you're not likely to have the success you are hoping for. Knowing the capabilities and limitations of your audience is the first piece of reaching your goal(s). There are almost countless pieces of demographic information to consider, but some of the basics include:

- **Internet access** - does your audience use the Internet? If so, how much do they understand about the tools they use to navigate? How long have they been using the Web? If not, is there a more cost effective way to reach them?
- **Geographic location/Economic demographics** - even if your audience uses the Web, their location and economic status could impact their connection speed.
- **Audience expectations** - if your audience expects secure forms, you should provide them. If they expect two-hour response time to inquiries, you need to give it to them. Meeting (or exceeding) the expectations of your audience will bring them back to faster than a pretty site.
- **Software usage** - which browser does your audience use? Can you focus your design/development on the two main browsers, or will you have to design for the top 25?
- **ADA compliance** - will your audience include the handicapped? If so, how can your design meet their needs?
- **Children** - will children make up a significant portion of your audience? There are special laws and limitations on marketing to children?
- **Marketing** - how will your audience find you? When they do, why would they want to stay or have you provide them a service?

There are, of course, many more, but these questions should get you rolling.

Unfortunately, not all of you will have this information right at your fingertips, but learning some/most/all of this information up front will save so much time and headache later, that you need to be prepared to pull an all-nighter (or two or three...) to make sure that you consider such issues. If you want to start with the basic high-level considerations, and haven't any internal statistics to base you planning on, a good place to start is www.cyberatlas.com. Just as the URL implies, this site has a number of articles Web/Internet demographics. Once you have a good idea of the kinds of detail that you are looking for, visiting the "local" government home page will likely provide you with additional resources that you will find useful. However, if you are looking to make a very rapid entry into the Web, it is likely that the cost of outsourcing the project research to a Web design/development or marketing firm would be very justifiable.