

HOW TO:

**DESIGN &
DELIVER
YOUR SITE**

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TO BEGIN.

Well-designed websites offer much more than just aesthetics. They attract visitors and help people understand the product, school, and branding through a variety of indicators, encompassing visuals, text, and interactions. That means every element of your site needs to work together towards a defined goal - including your content.

So how do you achieve that harmonious synthesis of elements? We believe through a simple 3 stage process, each one with its own manageable timeline based upon your schedules, that takes both website form and function into account.

This guide will therefore provide the framework for each of those stages, and what will need to be accomplished on your side and ours, to achieve an exceptional (and measurable) end result.

Now a couple of important things to outline upfront:

- We can't scrimp on the timings of certain things. Building a site of so many pages with so much content, takes x amount of time. But, together we can make certain decisions that can affect these timings to ensure we meet your deadlines.
- Communication is key. We believe in open and honest communication at all times, as this not only creates the best relationships, but in our experience, the best results overall. So we will work with you to determine which method of communication suits you best, as well as the best times to reach you / work with you, which normally forms at least one weekly scheduled catchup meeting.

PROCESS OF THREE.

Let's start with an overview of each project stage:

1. Stage 1 - Data to Insight

- a. **Goal identification:** Where we work with you to determine what goals the new website needs to fulfil. I.e., what its purpose is.
- b. **Scope definition & timeline:** Once we know the site's goals, we can define the scope of the project in a creative brief. I.e., what web pages and features the site requires to fulfil the goal, and the timeline for building those out.

2. Stage 2 - Insight to Concept, Content, Creativity

- a. **Pages & wireframe creation:** With the scope well-defined, we can start digging into the pages, defining how the content and features we defined in scope definition will interrelate.
- b. **Content:** Now that we have a bigger picture of the site in mind, we can start using / creating content for the individual pages, always keeping search engine optimisation (SEO) in mind to help keep pages focused on a single topic. It's vital that you have real content to work with for our next stage:
- c. **Visual design & build creation:** With the site architecture and some content in place, we can start working on the visual brand - this is broken into 2 phases - the design and the build. You may already have a well-defined look you are after, but you might also be defining the visual style from the ground up. Tools like style tiles, moodboards, and element collages will help with the creative process, and once approved by you, our team will build the visuals to work within the site.

3. Stage 3 - Creativity to Review (to Insight)

- a. **Testing:** By now, you've got all your pages and defined how they display to the site visitor, so it's time to make sure it all works. We combine manual browsing of the site on a variety of devices with automated site crawlers to identify everything from user experience issues to simple broken links.
- b. **Launch & support:** Once everything's working beautifully, it's time to plan and execute your site launch! This includes planning both launch timing and communication strategies — i.e., when will you launch and how will you let the world know? After that, it's time to break out the bubbly and to look at ongoing support.

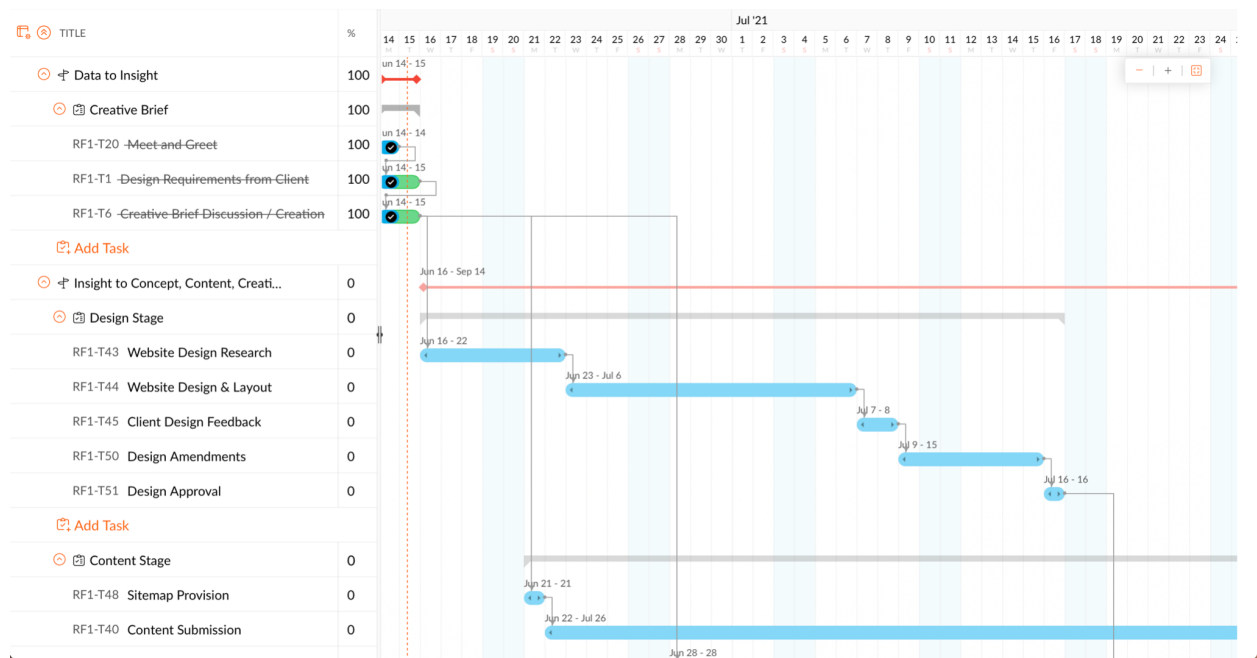
THE PLAN.

With the above in mind, to keep us focused on the deliverables set out, we will be using a Project Plan. Any project plan should be kept as simple and clear as possible, be easy to understand no matter whether you are a designer, developer, client or stakeholder, and be agile enough to adapt to change, intentional or otherwise.

So spreadsheets and documents just won't cut it. We want to see up to date, interactive timelines that allow us all a high degree of visibility over what should be happening and when, and of course, accountability, to help us deliver your new site.

Our project plans are done online, are broken down into the core 3 stages, and after we invite you to the project area, we will take you on a walk through of the software in a weekly project catchup meeting.

Your project plan will look a little like this:



SUPPORTING GUIDES.

Now that we have detailed what our three stage process looks like, how it works, and what outcomes we expect from each stage, we thought it would be useful to provide you with some further information that you can delve into at your leisure.

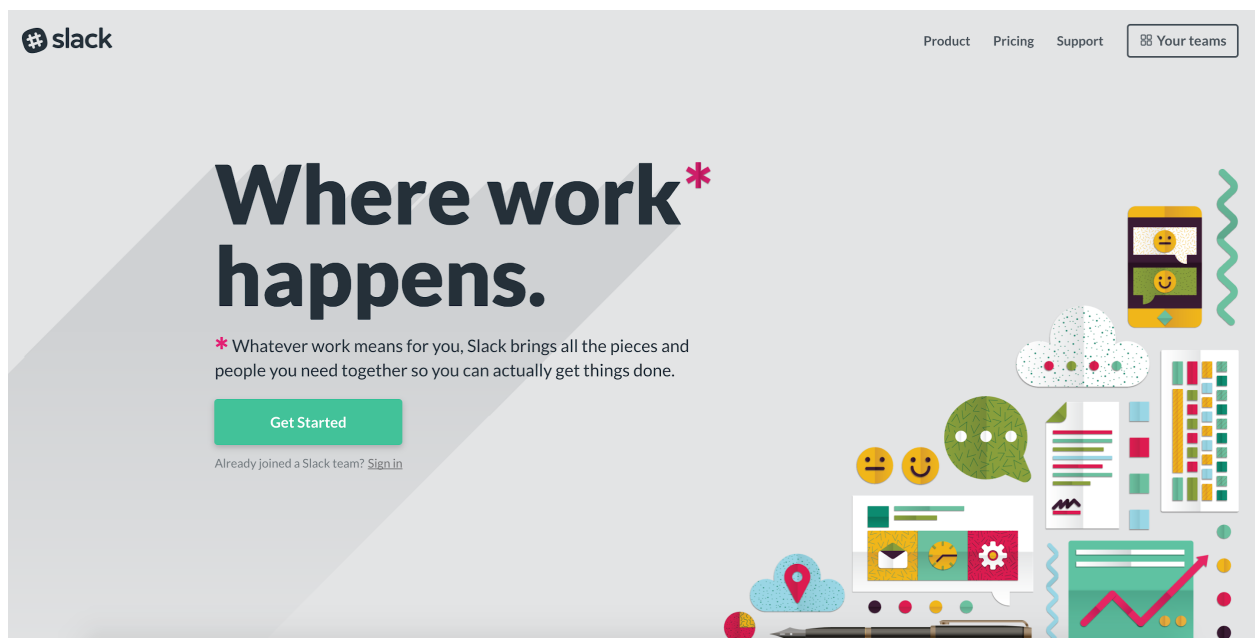
It's all useful stuff and recommended reading, but do pace yourself - there is a lot there. So to help we'll run through it all with you at the beginning of each of the relevant stages anyway, giving you the chance to raise any questions there and then.

SETTING GOALS

The beginning of any new design project is exciting. It's hard not to get caught up in the buzz of possibility. Brainstorming and the exchange of ideas strike sparks that light the fuse of creativity.

But with so much input, it's easy to lose sight of what's important. Fuzzy expectations lead to frustration and can slow down the process. That's why you need a clear sense of your project's goals early on. And why everyone needs to share the same vision for it to be a success.

KNOW THE WEBSITE'S PURPOSE



Slack's homepage clearly knows its purpose: to get you started with Slack.

Sure, a brand-new, eye-catching website is always a positive. But committing the time and money to build one can turn into a short-term investment if there aren't deeper reasons for doing so.

Whether you're starting from scratch, or you're doing a complete redesign, you need to know what you want a user to take away from your new site. What do you want to communicate with the content? What calls to action need to be woven in? Understand what these focal points are so that you create a design that magnifies them.

A website shouldn't be a lone outpost on the digital frontier, but should fit into a brand's broader strategy. It needs to complement this strategy as well as add value of its own. It's fine if the website

just provides a slice of fluffy entertainment — if that was your intent. But ultimately, your website should help fill the gap between what your audience(s) know, and what you wish they knew.

IDENTIFY THE PROBLEMS & FIND THE RIGHT SOLUTIONS

There may be more than one way to solve your problem. It's our job to find the best way to get there.

To identify the problems to be solved, and find the right solutions to those problems, we need to build good communication with you and your stakeholders - open dialog to find out what works on your current website, what doesn't, and what you think doesn't. Is the content solid but usability a nightmare? Is the admissions process so painful that you are losing parents? We need to learn what you consider the site's major problems to be, as well as gather any feedback you've gotten from people who've used it.

We will also need to do our own investigation. Digging deep into your current website and note everything that needs an upgrade. And we won't just fixate on what's wrong — we'll consider what works too. We may be able to incorporate positive aspects of the current site into the new design.

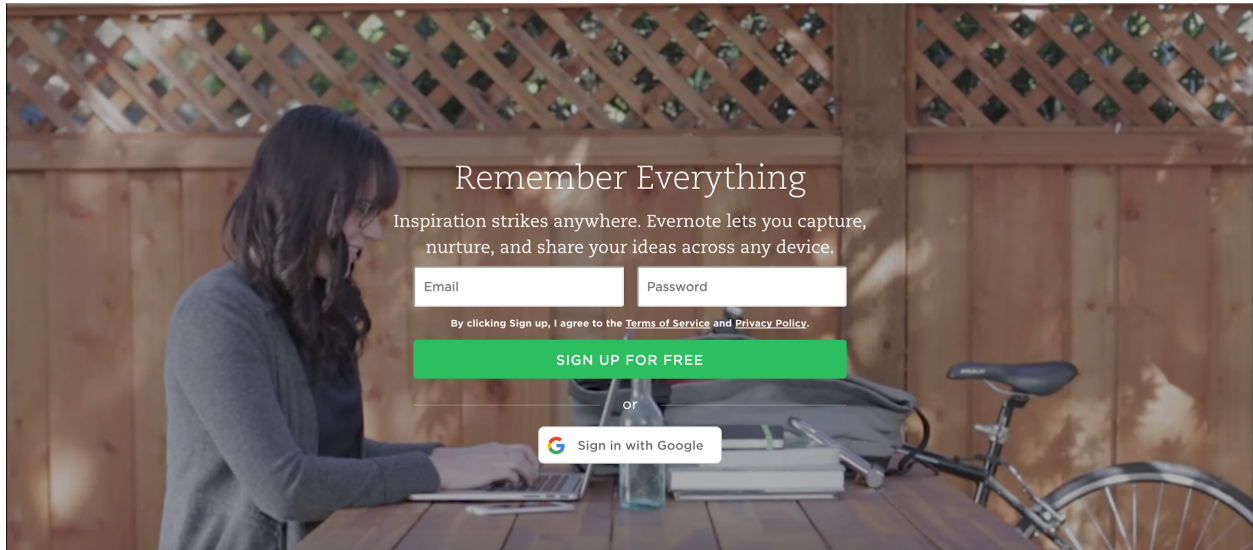
At this point, it's easy to get sidetracked by tiny details, but this isn't the time for details. We need to focus our attention on what the website is going to accomplish and how we're going to make it happen.

Often you will think that you fully understand the problem and have a sure-fire solution. Sometimes, you will have no direction, but just a gut feeling that what you have needs to be improved. As the design experts, it's our job to explore the options and recommend an optimal solution.

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE



Sign In Plans 



Evernote clearly knows its audience is filled with creative folks who have a million ideas, and don't want to forget any of them.

Knowing your target audience will guide you throughout the design process, simplifying decision making by forcing you to answer one simple question: **Is this useful for our audience?**

You should have demographic information such as income, gender, and age (in their Facebook page analytics, if nowhere else). You'll also need to know their consumer habits:

1. What other goods and services do they buy?
2. What websites do they visit?
3. What forms of media do they indulge in?

Knowing all this will help you create a design consistent with their other consumer experiences. If there's one goal all websites share, it's to connect with its audience. By knowing more about who you're speaking to, you'll be better able to effectively reach them.

WRITE A CREATIVE BRIEF

When the project goals are in place, it's time to put together a creative brief.

It's vital to assemble a creative brief so that us, you, and everyone else involved with the project understands its specifics. A creative brief needs to define the who, what, and where of the project, laying out the scope and what needs to be done to accomplish each goal.

DEFINE SUCCESS

Will you know the finish line when you get there?

Without defining what success looks like, you'll never know if you've achieved it.

Some measures of success are more obvious than others. People understand numbers. When they see traffic and bums on seats go up, they know they've achieved a kind of success, for example:

1. Improved rankings in search
2. Increased admissions

Knowing these two goals up-front makes all of our jobs a lot easier - as we know where we need to focus all of our attention and efforts - for example, spending the time on researching and writing SEO-optimized content to achieve goal 1, and implementing a better admissions workflow utilising more complex form design to achieve goal 2.

If admissions increase and your school makes the first page for a number of high-volume search terms, you would be happy right? The project would be deemed a success.

Of course, "success" can also be a bit less concrete. Improving a school's reputation and differentiating you from your competition can be hard to measure. But if we all set clear expectations, we'll be able to see this in the finished product.

Everyone involved with the project needs to know how they will determine its success. When everyone has a shared understanding of success, you'll all be able to assess and recognise the effects of all of your hard work.

SET YOUR GOALS

You can define any project in terms of deliverables and the people tasked to create them. But without well-defined goals informed by the target audience, no one will know why they're building these deliverables.

When people understand the why, they also better understand how to achieve their goals. Find these goals at the beginning of a project so that you can find success at the end.

PRE-LAUNCH CHECKLISTS

Even though nothing would make you happier than to get your site out there, you owe it to yourself (and your site) to check (and maybe double check) this 4-part new website checklist:

1. Design Checklist
 2. Functionality Checklist
 3. Content Checklist
 4. Analytics Checklist
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DESIGN CHECKLIST

It's all too easy to miss (or break) something during the many back-and-forths, feedback sessions, and other design iterations you go through. That's why we created the design checklist below will help you go back and check for any design mistakes.

To start, be sure to check your:

- Spacing: Is spacing consistent across the site (i.e., did you stick to that 8px grid, or let a rogue 18px in there)? Do all elements have enough breathing room?
- Colors: Have you stuck to a consistent, harmonious color palette? Are all instances of the brand blue actually the brand blue?
- Shadows: If you used drop shadows, is the light source consistent for each and every one? Did you use the same blur, opacity, and spread values?
- Typography: Is your font stack logical and consistent (i.e., is there a reason that element is set in a sans)? Are your heading sizes consistent? Have you used proper (not faux) italics and bolding? Do all text links look right? Is all text both legible and readable?
- Imagery: Do any images look blurry, pixelated, or otherwise funky? Are any images broken or crazily heavy in terms of file size? Do all non-decorative images have alt tags?
- Logo: It's (usually) just another image, but it's so important it warrants its own step. Is it the latest version? Is it crisp (not blurry or pixelated)?

Once you've made these initial visual checks, you'll want to ensure that your site's appearance is consistent and functional on any screen.

CROSS BROWSER APPEARANCE

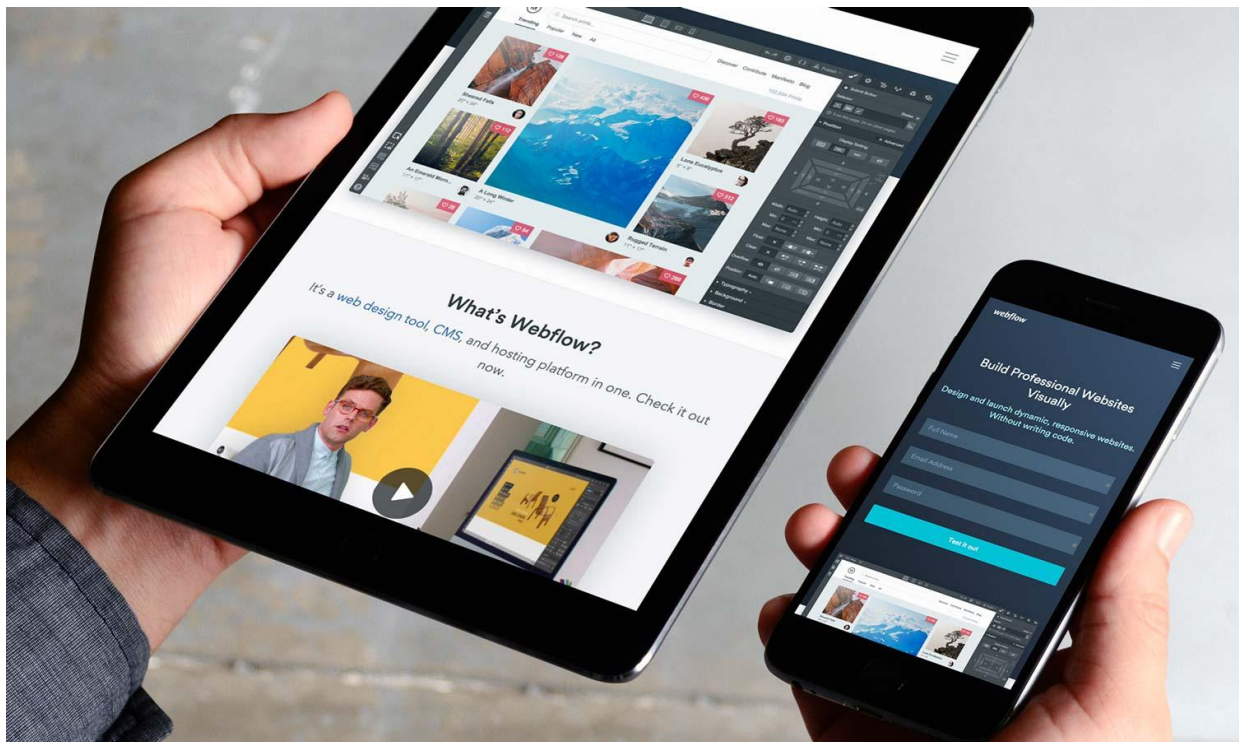
Different browsers may render your website in different ways, so it's important to test your site in different browsers. Take a look at [W3's browser stats](#) to see where you should focus your testing. (Though if you're working on a redesign, browser-usage stats will be more useful.)

During this process (and the next, in multi-device testing) you'll want to make sure your layouts, typography, navigation, and other design elements are displaying properly.

The elements that tend to vary most across browsers, and therefore are most important to check, are:

- Fonts
- Colors/gradients
- Images
- Logo

CROSS DEVICE APPEARANCE



Make sure your site looks and performs beautifully on any device.

There have never been more web-capable devices around, and with that comes a staggering array of screen sizes. Done right, your site should perform well on any screen size, but be sure to double check. (You are a perfectionist after all, right?)

This is also where mobile navigation is crucial. Be sure to test out the user's ability to navigate around the website on a touchscreen device, and make sure nothing gets lost in device transition.

In the Amais CMS, we make it easy for you to test the most popular devices and preview your website on almost any size, streamlining the process of cross-device testing all in one place. Of course, nothing replaces real-world testing on a variety of devices as small details may differ on the real device.

IMAGE OPTIMISATION

Images and graphics are an important element of many websites, so you'll want to make sure they display properly, especially on all those ultra-high-definition devices (like Apple's Retina screens) out there.

The rule of thumb is to upload your image at twice the size it'll display on your site. In some cases, you can upload two images: an actual-size version for lower-res devices, and another that's twice the size for high-res devices. Why? Because the heavier the image, the slower your page will load, and the worse your user experience will be (which also negatively affects SEO).

However, in Amais CMS, we automatically scale, compress, and optimize images for every device.

FUNCTIONALITY CHECKLIST

Design and functionality go hand in hand, but we like to isolate the two to make sure the website both looks the way it was designed to and that it performs as intended.

INTEGRATION TESTING

This one is super important, and can range from a quick task to a giant one, depending on how many integrations you have. Typically, we'll create a list of integrations as we add them.

Some common integrations to test might be:

- Web forms (check that the forms work and that submitted information goes to the right place)
- Autoresponders
- Marketing emails (MailChimp, Constant Contact, HubSpot, drip campaigns, etc.)
- RSS feeds

- Ecommerce
- CRM
- CMS

LINK TESTING

This one can be a doozy, simply because most sites have dozens (if not hundreds) of links. More often than not, there's a link or two that goes nowhere, and it's important to find them before your users do.

Some of the most important links to check are:

- Top navigation links
- Footer links
- Social media links (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)
- Logo (typically links to the home page)

Rather than doing all this manually, we would suggest a link crawler like the [W3C Link Checker](#), the Chrome plugin [Check My Links](#), or [Screaming Frog](#) (which is excellent for SEO audits, too).

CONTENT CHECKLIST



Give the king its due.

Content is king, and the testing process should be fit for one. Typically this involves making sure that all content has been updated and approved- we can't tell you how many websites we've come across that still have a lorem ipsum paragraph somewhere.

Now, if you practice [content-first design](#), you should have final content already in place, so you can focus on more fine-toothed-comb review, like proofing for spelling and grammatical errors. It's also important to note here that it's okay for content to be changed later on. Clients, team members, or you can always adjust text through a CMS. The main goal here is to ensure that your website content isn't complete gibberish.

SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMISATION (SEO)



Analyzing and optimizing your website after publishing is a never-ending process. And you need to consider semantic site structure from the get-go. But that doesn't mean you won't benefit from an SEO review before you hit publish.

There are multiple things that can be done to optimize your website for search engines.

Use proper semantic structure

Web crawlers (like Google's bots) read through your website to get an understanding of your content, so that search engines know to display your website when people search for it. To help them crawl your site, you need to use language they'll understand.

- Historically, this has meant using the following semantic tags:
 - h1–h6 (heading tags)
 - p (paragraph tags)
 - ul/ol (unordered and ordered Lists)
- You can also go above and beyond with some new [HTML5 semantic tags](#):
 - <article>
 - <aside>
 - <details>
 - <figcaption>
 - <figure>
 - <footer>
 - <header>
 - <main>
 - <mark>
 - <nav>
 - <section>
 - <summary>
 - <time>

These tags are important because they let you identify the content that's most relevant to users. In short: making it easy for search engines makes it easier for users to find you.

Meta SEO tags

Aside from on-page structure, you can also help web crawlers understand your site by titling and describing your pages as a whole. We outline a few tips [on website SEO on our blog](#), narrowed down to 2 main considerations below.

1. Meta title

Your page's meta title translates to the linked text people will see on search engine result pages (SERPs). It also displays on the browser tab when people click through to your page. Some best practices include:

- Define the page's central topic
- Keep it under 70 characters in length (including spaces)
- Use relevant keywords
- Put important keywords in the front of the title

2. Meta description

The meta description is a short sentence (or two) that describes what your website has to offer. It will (sometimes) show up below your meta title in search results.

Some best practices include:

- Include keywords that describe the page

- Don't go over 160 characters
- Write your description for people, not robots. (Google doesn't use descriptions in web rankings).

Open Graph settings

Social media has become a key element of SEO, so it's crucial that you amplify this process by providing effective Open Graph information. Open Graph settings include three pieces of content: title, description, and an image.

The title and description follow the same rules as their SEO counterparts, but instead of showing up in search results, they appear as the default title and description on social media platforms when shared.

This is hugely beneficial because it lets you determine what the messaging (and image) will be when others share your website, helping you keep control of your brand.

ANALYTICS CHECKLIST

The image is a screenshot of the Google Analytics website. At the top left, the Google Analytics logo is visible, along with navigation links for Analytics Premium, Adometry, Analytics, Analytics for Mobile Apps, and Tag Manager. A 'SIGN IN' link is located at the top right. The main content area features a photograph of two people, a woman and a man, sitting at a desk with laptops, looking at a screen. To the right of the photo, the text reads 'Turn insights into action.' followed by a sub-headline: 'Improve performance across your sites, apps, and offline marketing. Google's analytics solutions can help you turn customer insights into action for your business.' Below this is a large blue banner containing a testimonial: '“Google Analytics Premium helped us improve engagement by 33% and click-throughs by 21% for content promotions on our homepage.”' attributed to Mia Vallo, Sr. Director, Marketing Analytics, National Geographic. A 'LEARN MORE ABOUT PREMIUM' link is at the bottom of the banner.

Always be analyzing.

Website analytics are another crucial piece to set up before you launch. It's free to set up a [Google Analytics](#) account, and incredibly easy to integrate Google Analytics with Amais.

Once set up, you'll be able to track visitors and user engagement on your website almost instantly!