Formats: Web/Interactive

Digital media such as Web sites, CD-ROMs, and DVD-ROMS all share similar functionality and content options. They run on a computer, and they allow your audience greater latitude than other media formats to create their own paths through your educational content.

Basic Web pages use a code called HTML, or Hypertext Mark-up Language. HTML allows you to place text and images and, increasingly, to control how and where on the page these elements appear. HTML also includes coding tags that allow you to link from one page to another or one place in a page to another, as well as to define areas of an image that can also serve as links. Other compatible codes, such as JavaScript, can add further functionality to Web pages.

Software called a Web browser allows you to view HTML pages. You can add additional media types and interactive functionalities to a Web page using software called a plug-in. The user may need to install the correct version of a plug-in in order to see such elements. Plug-ins are generally available for free and can be downloaded from the Web.

Plug-ins allow you to include many different elements on your Web site, including video, print layouts, and interactive or animated materials. They add useful functionality to your site, but you should check that the plug-in you require is readily available and will work across various types of computers. If you require too many, or uncommon, plug-ins, your audience may be unwilling to use your site.

If users will need a plug-in to access features on your Web site, make that clear on the home page or other pages where the plug-in is needed, and provide links to the sites where the plug-in is available for downloading. Provide an alternate version of a feature, such as a text- and image-only version, that will be accessible to people who can’t use the plug-in version—because of its larger download size, or because, in the case of visually impaired users, the plug-in version is not compatible with assistive technologies, such as screen readers. (To learn more about Web-accessibility issues, see the Making Media Accessible section of this guide.)

CD-ROMs and DVD-ROMs are compact discs that run on a computer drive. They can serve as “hard copy” distribution for your Web pages, allowing people to see your content (but not links to other sites on the Web), regardless of whether they have a reliable Internet connection. These discs may be especially useful if your digital content contains many large media files, such as digital video, which can be slow or difficult to download from the Internet.

CD-ROMs and DVD-ROMs can also be developed using computer languages or authoring tools other than HTML and plug-ins. You will need to work with a skilled computer programmer to produce these interactive media. Producing a CD-ROM or DVD-ROM follows much the same
Formats: Web/Interactive (cont’d)

production process as producing a Web site, except that you need to schedule manufacturing and distribution of the final product.

Note that a DVD-ROM is different from a video DVD, which runs on a DVD player rather than a computer. You can add educational enhancements to a DVD of your video; these are described in the Video Formats section.

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Characteristics of Web/Interactive Media

- They are not time-restricted and are not subject to a broadcast schedule. People can come to them at any hour and can continue to use them long after the initial broadcast window of the video program.

- They are visual, textual, and interactive. While some people will read longer text passages on a computer screen, many are more likely to scan computer text than they are printed text. These media can present still imagery effectively and show limited amounts of motion video or audio. Users can control the way they access content and can “make things happen.”

- They are nonlinear. You can’t expect everyone to use them in the same way, nor in the same order. Web and other interactive materials can work sequentially if you want them to (as in a course or tutorial), but you must design the experience so you encourage users to approach the material this way.
It’s best to develop Web or other interactive components of your educational outreach project for flexible use. As a video producer, you may be inclined to organize these materials according to the structure of your video program, but remember that an educational audience may not use them in this manner.

It may be helpful to think in terms of several different types of Web/interactive components:

**Video Content Companion**
While you can’t guarantee that a user will see your program before or after coming to your Web/interactive materials, you can use the content of your program as a starting place for building these components.

Web and other interactive formats are effective for presenting complementary content or recasting the video content in ways that a linear program can’t (such as providing several alternative viewpoints, going deeper into stories, or elaborating your source or interview material). A video content companion can help your viewers answer the questions your program raises in their minds. Remember, though, that since users may not necessarily see your video in conjunction with these materials, the Web/interactive components must also function as stand-alone resources.

In addition to their use as general-audience educational tools, the elements of a content companion site can be incorporated into more formal educational structures (see Online Course, Workshop, Tutorial, or Lessons section below). In classrooms, they may serve as helpful curriculum supplements, especially if they can be used in a modular way.

To enhance the educational impact of your video, consider including a viewer’s guide as part of these materials. Because a viewer’s guide can’t serve as a stand-alone experience, most projects choose not to expend too much of their resources on this—but it might be appropriate for a small-budget site.

Example:
- *Poetic License* Web site

**Online Course, Workshop, Tutorial, or Lessons**
Formats: Web/Interactive

Types of Web/Interactive Media (cont’d)

These Web or interactive materials are aimed at more formal educational use, in classrooms or for professional development. They may make use of the elements you develop for a video content companion site. Those using materials of this type most likely proceed through them in a linear fashion, since they’re structured around a particular curriculum.

Examples:
- *Africa* online teacher tools
- *Cyberchase* online lesson plans

Digital Library
Digital libraries present resources of various digital media types in a database, where users can find specific items of interest through menus of topics and subtopics, or by searching for particular terms. It may be possible to create a topic-specific digital library based on the resources you’ve developed or acquired for your project, or you might provide these resources in formats that allow them to be incorporated into a larger digital library.

Example:
- *Evolution* digital library

For more on digital libraries, see the following section, “Building a Digital Library”.
Formats: Web/Interactive: Types of Web/Interactive Media

Building a Digital Library

Broadcast projects readily lend themselves to digital libraries, which can extend the reach of the program into classrooms and the home. You can develop a great collection of multimedia as you produce your project, among them:

- Video clips from the final programs
- Outtakes from interviews and other footage
- Interactive activities from a companion Web site
- Photographs and other images
- Animations
- Text transcriptions of source documents
- Sound reproductions

In addition to the multimedia materials listed above, you can enhance the educational value of your digital library resources if you include the following:

- Annotations: one-to-two-sentence descriptions of each item in the digital library
- Lesson plans that incorporate the materials in the digital library
- Background essays that explain the content of each of the materials in the library

Having this material online on the Web, or on a CD-ROM or DVD, makes it accessible to many on demand. You can present your digital library resources as an element of a video content companion and/or incorporate them into a larger, preexisting public television digital library.

Here are some things to consider as you think about developing a digital library:

- What kinds of materials are most useful to your target audience?
- How do your multimedia materials correlate with national and/or state educational standards and typical curricula?
- Who will select and digitally process all the materials for your library? If you are going to provide video, you need to consider digitizing, compressing, storing, and serving the video.
- Who will write any contextual materials you provide for your library resources? If you are providing a search mechanism, you will need to index your materials.
- Who will review your materials to assure content and pedagogical quality?
- Who will design and develop your digital library?
- Who will serve and maintain the site or distribute CD versions? How much material can they store and distribute digitally?
- What are the rights issues for distributing your material?
- How will people find the library and use it?
Building a Digital Library (cont’d)

The Evolution Library is an example of a digital library drawn from a broadcast series.

There are several nonprofit and for-profit educational digital library initiatives afoot in the public television system. You may want to consider providing your collection to one of these services. These include:

- OnCourse (http://www.oncourse.org)
- Teachers’ Domain (http://www.teachersdomain.org)
- United Streaming (http://www.unitedstreaming.com)
- National Science Digital Library (http://www.nsdl.org)
Animated Narratives
These graphic features reveal information progressively or along a user-determined path. They can be used for storytelling or to explain a phenomenon graphically. They employ plug-ins such as Flash.

*Cyberchase*: How It All Started "Webisodes"
http://pbskids.org/cyberchase/how_started.html
Traces the "back story" of the *Cyberchase* adventures

*NOVA*: How Cells Divide (from 18 Ways to Make a Baby)
http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/baby/divide.html
Provides an explanation of mitosis and meiosis, the two types of cell division

Audio & Video
You can make audio and video clips available on the Web using plug-ins such as RealPlayer, QuickTime, or Windows Media. Second for second, audio files are smaller in size than video, so it may be possible to use audio with still images to save on bandwidth. Since these files take a while to download, they may only be useful to users with higher-bandwidth Web connections, such as cable modems or DSL.

(To learn more about shooting video for the Web, see the Video Production for the Web section of this guide.)

*Poetic License*: Clips
http://www.itvs.org/poeticlicense/film_clips.html
Showcases young performance poets through QuickTime video clips

*Africa*: Africa for Kids: Swahili Folktale
http://pbskids.org/africa/tale/index.html
Plays a Swahili folktale in Real Audio
**Discussion Environments**
These provide a sense of community for Web users. In some cases, users can share their submissions with the larger audience, but this requires moderation on your part. It’s also possible to simulate submissions for non-moderated use.

*Poetic License: Poet-to-Poet*
http://www.itvs.org/poeticlicense/teach_poet.html
Matches two classrooms together and allows students to share and critique one another’s poetry

**Games**
These features are fun, and there may be a way to “win,” even though an educational agenda may be lurking within!

*Cyberchase: Games Central*
http://pbskids.org/cyberchase/games.html
Dozens of fun, interactive games that allow kids to play with and explore a variety of mathematical concepts

*Building Big: The Bridge Challenge*
http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/buildingbig/bridge/challenge/
Challenges users to figure out the best type of bridge to build for each location

**Illustrated Essays**
These “standard” Web pages of HTML text and graphics can serve as an effective way to get information across, as long as text is properly “chunked” to make the content digestible to users. Various graphic layout options can add interest. They are the least expensive type of Web page to produce.

*Africa: Photoscope*
http://www.pbs.org/wnet/africa/photoscope/index.html
Examines contemporary Africa in these five photo essays by photographers from around the globe
Formats: Web/Interactive

Web/Interactive Media Elements (cont’d)

*Culture Shock*: Flashpoints
Explores works of art that have crossed the boundary of what was acceptable in their time

**Interactive Images**
These graphic features let users roll their cursor over or click on an image to provide greater text or graphic detail, or panoramic views. They may require a plug-in such as Flash or QuickTimeVR.

*Wide Angle*: Info-graphic: Profits & Principles
http://www.pbs.org/wnet/wideangle/shows/cambodia/info.html
Allows users to click on areas of an image to explore the context behind the social policies of six global corporations

*A Biography of America*: Image as History: City Planning
http://www.learner.org/biographyofamerica/prog15/feature/index.html
Allows users to learn about city planning and the Columbian Exposition by exploring details of a photograph

*1900 House*: Virtual Tour
http://www.pbs.org/wnet/1900house/house/index.html
Explores a Victorian house room by room and item by item

*NOVA*: See Inside a Submarine (from *Submarines, Secrets, and Spies*)
http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/subsecrets/inside.html

**Interactive Maps**
These features add a temporal axis to a geographic map or allow users to overlay thematic elements on a map. These require the Flash plug-in.

*Africa*: Explore the Regions
http://www.pbs.org/wnet/africa/explore/index.html
Takes users on a region-by-region virtual tour of Africa, allowing them to zoom in for detailed country reports
Formats: Web/Interactive

Web/Interactive Media Elements (cont’d)

*A Biography of America: Emancipation and Slavery*
http://www.learner.org/biographyofamerica/prog10/feature/
Traces the geographic patterns of legalized slavery in the United States

*Masterpiece Theatre: Oliver’s London (from Oliver Twist)*
http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/olivertwist/olivers_london.html
Traces Oliver’s route through London

Interactive Simulations
These computer-assisted explorations allow users to simulate real-world situations, often allowing them to experiment with variables. They generally employ plug-ins such as Flash or may be programmed in languages such as Java.

*Building Big: Labs*
http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/buildingbig/lab/index.html
Lets users experiment with the factors that influence whether a large structure stands or collapses

*Evolution: Sex and the Single Guppy*
http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/evolution/sex/guppy/index.html
Lets users set up their own virtual experiment to explore how coloration and predation affect adaptation

*Misunderstood Minds: Experience Firsthand (Graphomotor)*
http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/misunderstoodminds/writing.html
Lets you experience what it may be like to have difficulties in writing

Interactive Timelines
These features present historical information in the context of other events of the period, organize events thematically, and allow users to read synopses and view images of people or artifacts. These require the Flash plug-in.
Formats: Web/Interactive

Web/Interactive Media Elements (cont’d)

*Mysteries of Deep Space*: Interactive Timeline
http://www.pbs.org/deepspace/timeline/index.html
Traces the development of the universe, beginning with the Big Bang

*Presumed Guilty*: Interactive Timelines
http://www.pbs.org/kqed/presumedguilty/2.0.0.html
Explores the detailed chronology of two legal cases brought before the San Francisco Office of the Public Defender

*Evolution*: Evolution Revolution
Presents the development of the theory of evolution in the context of society’s response

Polls & Provocations
These features engage users in a controversy, requiring them to consider both sides of arguments before registering their opinion. They may include a cumulative user-opinion poll.

*Culture Shock*: You Decide: Kara Walker
http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/cultureshock/provocations/kara/warning.html
Asks users to consider art that deals with issues of race, sex, and stereotypes, and reports results online

*Cyberchase*: Weekly Poll
http://pbskids.org/cgi-registry/cyberchase/polls.cgi
Allows kids to vote on questions related to the series, then reports sortable results online
Formats: Web/Interactive

Web/Interactive Media Elements (cont’d)

Resource Banks
These annotated collections let users browse or search through carefully selected topical resources, which can include text documents or essays; visual, audio, or video artifacts; and interactive features. It’s usually helpful to track content and production of these using an internal database, even if the final material is formatted as standard HTML pages. Resource banks can be incorporated into online digital libraries as long as their database fields and content specifications are compatible.

Building Big: Wonders of the World
http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/buildingbig/wonder/index.html
Presents facts and descriptions of notable large structures

Africans in America: Resource Bank
http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/rb_index.html
Exposes high schoolers and general audience to people and events, primary sources, and interview material about slavery and resistance
Formats: Web/Interactive

Web Production & Distribution

Here is a step-by-step process you can replicate for developing a Web site with your own production team, or in collaboration with an outside production team. Some Web development shops use a very linear approach—develop content, pass it on to a graphic designer, then pass the files on to a Web developer (programmer). However, you’ll develop the most effective and well-integrated Web site if the key players from all three parts of the project—editorial, design, and technical—coordinate with each other right from the beginning. This can happen whether your Web production is in house or whether you’re working with a vendor.

If you’re planning a site for PBS Online or for another similar educational service, there is a set of guidelines and deadlines you’ll need to follow. Most of what is described here fits into that process, but you should consult the latest version of that organization’s requirements. You can see PBS Online’s requirements in the PBS Web Production Manual (http://www.pbs.org/producers/webmanual).

If you’re working with a vendor, your vendor should follow this or a similar procedure. You’ll set one or more review milestones at each stage of the process, and you’ll be serving as gatekeeper to project “stakeholders.” Be sure that the bid you receive from the vendor includes all deliverables listed below that will be important for your project, clarify how much time you have for review, and how many and what types of revisions are allowed under the bid.

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  Example: Enhancing Education Site Schema
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- Final Delivery & Launch / Maintenance .................. 22
Develop the Concept
Developing a concept for your Web site is part of the project proposal process. As you begin the process, you should determine who the primary users of the site will be and what you expect them to get from the site. You should also determine how the site relates to the rest of your project. Some good questions to ask yourself are:

- Is there another important audience in addition to the audience for the video program whom your content can serve?

- Is there content that’s key to the subject, which you can’t, or don’t have time to, present well in video, but might work on the Web?

- What kinds of questions will your video raise that will drive your audience to your educational site?

- Is there content from the video that you’d like to present again, but in a medium that will remain accessible beyond the broadcast window?

- Will the site depend on users’ familiarity with the video material, or will it stand on its own?

- Will the site serve formal education (use in classrooms or professional development) or informal education (for a general audience to learn more/experience more about the topic)?

- What level of budget will be available for the site? How can the scope and complexity of the site be tailored to match the budget?

- Who are the key project people who can work or advise on and review the content for the site? What are their areas of expertise, and where will you need to supplement their knowledge?
Format: Web/Interactive: Web Production & Distribution

Pre-Production

Coordinate with the Project Team
Once you’ve gotten funding for the site and have identified your Web production team, you’re ready to begin pre-production. Your lead content person, lead graphic designer, and lead Web developer should all participate in this phase. These people should maintain communication with some of their counterparts on the video production team to be sure that any materials related to the video that have an impact on the Web site are compatible and available when the time to use them comes.

Some considerations to keep in mind:

- Are research materials, transcripts, and annotated logs accessible in some way to the Web team?
- Can the Web team see treatments/rough cuts/fine cuts of the video?
- Do third-party materials rights clearances, appearance or location releases, and talent agreements cover use of relevant material on the Web? If not, are reasonable options available to the Web team (either to re-clear or find alternate materials)?
- Are graphic design decisions being made so that key elements (fonts, logos, color) are compatible with Web display?
**Formats: Web/Interactive: Web Production & Distribution**

**Project Plan**

**Refine Your Concept**
When your production timeline is ready to begin, assemble your production team and define your project plan. You should also begin to identify a small team of academic reviewers (including both content experts and educational curriculum experts) and potential audience focus group reviewers.

One effective approach for the kickoff is to write an audience and mission statement. It’s helpful to keep this as short as possible and to think of this as your benchmark for making all future decisions about project content. You can also get signoff on this statement from all project “stakeholders”—funders (if they have editorial review), others on the project team, academic reviewers, presenting stations or online services, etc. This will give you some boundaries to work with in case a stakeholder asks for changes to the site that are beyond the mission. Here’s an example of such a statement, written for the Web site for *Building Big*.

Our primary audience is fifth to eighth graders in informal educational settings, but we also want the site to be appealing to adult viewers of the video programs. Our mission is to build awareness of (civil) engineering as a career choice and of the scientific principles that underlie its practice by creating an engaging and informative site about building large structures. The site should stand on its own, while serving as a companion to the TV series and complementing the other outreach materials and activities.

You might next consider bringing in your entire team, together with others who are working on other aspects of the project or on other projects for a similar audience, in a brainstorm session. It’s most likely been quite a while since the proposal was written, and this is your opportunity (and final chance) to rethink the content and approach. The brainstorm should have around 10 to 15 participants and should be focused around four to six key questions about site content or presentation.

The goal of the brainstorm is to generate at least 30 ideas in answer to each of the questions. You should have a timekeeper, a facilitator, and a recorder. The brainstorm should follow certain rules in order to keep the session focused and productive:

- Encourage wild ideas.
- Don’t make any judgment about ideas.
- Stay on the current question.
- Express an idea and then move on.
• Build on the ideas of others.
• Have only one conversation at a time.

After the brainstorm, the core team should reassemble to prepare the project plan. There may be new content ideas or new presentation approaches that were generated. The project plan should include:

• The audience and mission statement
• An outline and brief description of all the content sections of the site
• A description of the design approach you’ll be taking (use lots of adjectives!)
• An elaboration of the technical specifications for the site (Will there be any materials in other than straightforward HTML formats? Are there special database, server, or bandwidth needs? How well will this work on older computers or on slower dial-up connections?)
• A preliminary site schema, identifying the layers of home and sub-home pages, and the way these link to each other

Example: Enhancing Education site schema (following page)
As with the mission statement, the project plan should go to site stakeholders for signoff. You may want to get reviewers to comment on the site plan, asking your academic experts to determine if you’re approaching the subject fairly and comprehensively enough and if there are any content landmines you may encounter. And you may want to bring in a focus group representing your potential end-user audience to determine how well the site covers their needs and interests.
Formats: Web/Interactive: Web Production & Distribution

Sample Site Schema
Develop Storyboards and a Testable Alpha Site
You’re now ready to begin production in earnest, and it’s helpful to pick out some representative part of the site that you can actually look at, test, and send out to reviewers. This is known as an “alpha” or prototype version.

You might develop one example of every type of section you’ll have, or perhaps fully flesh out one topic. The goal of the alpha is to see how your content actually looks and works in a Web format, and to subject it to review and end-user testing.

To begin, you’ll need to develop some sample content. Your writers should develop scripts for the sections you’ve selected, which you can run by your subject-matter experts.

Since the actual design and coding work for the Web is labor-intensive, it helps to begin with storyboards which can be reviewed on paper. Storyboards indicate the general design and navigation elements that will appear on each type of screen you’ll encounter, and you can step through them as if you were following links on your computer screen. Taking this a step further helps clarify your process: Your designer can lay out the text from the scripts using page-design software and add in placeholder graphic and navigation elements (like menus and link buttons) to make a set of “wireframes.” You can use the wireframes to judge how the flow of copy is working, how text-heavy each page will be, and whether a user can navigate effectively from one page to the next. You can test the wireframes with representative end users, asking them to read the text and describe how they would move through the material.

When you’re comfortable with the wireframes, your designer can make real graphic elements for display on the Web. He or she should discuss how the pages will be formatted with the Web developer so that the developer can produce an HTML template.

If you’re producing any elements in Flash or other plug-in formats, you’ll need to involve designers and developers who are skilled in working in these environments.

Your design and development team will put together the pieces of the alpha, which you should send out for review and testing.
Beta Production

Produce the Site
Once all the feedback has come in on your alpha site, your team should assemble to decide on any necessary modifications to the content, design, or technical implementation. You are now ready to produce the rest of the site. From this point on, your production plan should be fixed: New ideas or changes in direction will throw you off schedule. If anything, you may have learned from your alpha that some content ideas are too ambitious, and you may need to cut back on some planned content, all the time keeping in mind how to best meet your mission statement, budget, timeline, and funder requirements.

If the site is large, you may want to divide up the production into several phases, bringing one part as close as possible to completion before starting in on the next. Try to develop an efficient schedule for getting content reviewed, copyedited, and delivered to designers and developers in a timely manner.

Beta Delivery

Final Reviews and Quality Assurance Testing
When each section of the site is complete, you have a “beta” version of the site that is ready for final review and quality assurance testing. You may want to do this in stages, or all at once if the site is small enough or contains many cross-links from one section to another.

As part of your quality assurance testing, you should confirm that all copyedits have been made; that the site works in the computer operating systems, Web browsers, and plug-in versions that you specified in your site plan; and that any special “server-side” computer scripts work on the final server environment where your site will reside.
Final Delivery & Launch

The Site Goes Live
After you’ve gotten all errors corrected, you’re ready to deliver the site to its final server. The organization serving the site will specify a procedure to your Web developer. Once you’ve launched the site, it’s time to celebrate!

Maintenance

Respond to Feedback and Errors
But it’s not over yet. You may be required to maintain the site for some period of time.

• If you include a user feedback link, someone should be ready to read and answer user e-mail.

• If you’ve included a Web board where users can post their thoughts on your topic, someone will need to monitor those boards.

• If errors are found on the site after launch, you’ll need to correct them to the extent possible.

• If your site includes links to external Web sites, there’s a good chance of “link rot,” where the site ceases to exist or its URL changes, and you’ll need to arrange to keep such links current.
Although the ultimate product of Web production is a technological presentation, the process of producing a Web site is people-intensive. So the bulk of your budget will involve staff time to conceive of and then put together the site.

You’ll need to cover the following roles in your staffing plan:
- Producer (editorial guide and project manager)
- Writer(s)
- Graphic designer(s) (to help plan the site organization and develop screen layout, visual media elements, and navigation elements)
- Programmer(s) (to code the site in HTML and in other Web-related formats)
- Content coordinators (to find and track assets, clear rights, and handle assorted paperwork)
- Specialized media developers (if your plan includes rich media such as video, audio, VR panoramas, etc.)
- Subject matter experts, advisors, and reviewers

Timing of your production cycle with respect to the rest of the project is crucial. If your site depends on information from other aspects of the project, you’ll burn staff time if you begin too early. On the other hand, if your goal is to launch the site as a broadcast companion, you’ll need to start early enough, with adequate information in hand, to meet the deadline. Also, launching an educational Web site prior to the release of a program can help build the audience.

While there’s no hard and fast rule for how long a production takes, it’s helpful to consider the scope of the Web formats you’ve selected.

The following directions will minimize actual production time:
- Use short, illustrated essays, with straightforward HTML coding.
- Use a small number of formats and templates, which are reused throughout the site.
- Use focused, limited content.
- Use research (and when possible, Web-savvy staff) from other aspects of the project.
- Stick to your project plan once production is under way.

On the other hand, a more robust site may be ultimately more interesting or useful to your audience, thus increasing the life of your program. But adding in the following will lengthen production time and increase your budget:
- Wider range of formats and templates, specialized for each element of the site
- A larger set of content topics and features
Formats: Web/Interactive

Web Budgeting & Scheduling (cont’d)

- Use of rich media, such as video, audio, Flash, VR panoramas
- New features or major alterations to your plan in mid-production

Don’t reject a more robust site simply because it is more expensive. You may experience a greater return on your investment by increasing the value of the education component.