

Benefits of Using Wire Frames

Wire-frames function as a bridge between raw creative thoughts and the final product. Think of wire-frames as architectural blueprints for a building and you'll understand why it is a critical tool in just about any development project. The fact is, constructing a decent, structurally sound building without using blueprints is inconceivable, and no sane real estate developer will partner with a construction outfit that does not use blueprints. Considering the vast number of wire-frame benefits, you should ignore them at your peril.

Similarly, projects such as software and web development rely on wire-frames to visually represent an envisioned product or product component. This is because wire-frames are much better than anything else at communicating the components, processes, and various relationships within a given system such as a website or a software application. Without wire-framing, any of these unfavorable scenarios could arise:

The stage at which stakeholders plan and strategize about a project will unnecessarily be hand-capped or delayed.

Developers will not be able to account for all expected outcomes when a system component is being used.

Poorly laid out interfaces result to substantial revision costs.

These are some of the reasons why competent project managers and professional developers insist on integrating wire-frames into the development process.

In its basic form, a wire-frame can be as simple as a manually drawn diagram that provides a visual representation of a system or a process. The visual detail need not be extensive as long as all the key elements are represented. Hence, a wire-frame is often referred to as a skeleton or an outline. At the other extreme, there are wire-framing software that are capable of producing highly detailed approximations of the product or application being envisioned.

A wire-frame example with many website elements

A wire-frame example (click to view larger image)

Wire-frames form the basis of creating websites and final software. They give you an idea about the space of the web page, positioning of elements and the navigation of the website. UI mock-ups are the next stage of the process, they give you an idea of the colors, fonts and images to be used in the final product. With Creately you can draw wire-frames and create the corresponding UI mock-up as well. This all in one solution makes it a very handy tool to have.

UI Mock-up done using Creately

A UI mock-up done using Creately with color, fonts and supporting images

Whether manually drawn or created using advanced collaborative services, wire-frames help create a product model that can be used by all stakeholders—managers, designers, developers, customers, and users—to tweak, re-layout or re-design different system elements more efficiently.

And there lies the advantages of using wire-frames. To be more specific, there are three main benefits:

First, wire-frames make it easy for a complete system mock-up to be produced. Based on customer specifications, a top level UI mockup can easily be created, which can then be used by both custom-

ers and developers as the basis for integrating details, features, and other enhancements. Early in the development process, wire-frames can be used as the platform for testing and feedback, allowing for the product to be refined easily. For example, how copywriters should craft and display website copy can be discerned much easier if there is a wire-frame that shows the positions and nature of the other display elements such as images, frames, buttons, and text links. Meanwhile, customers can use UI mockups to make refinements according to their branding or corporate image.

Second, wire-frames make it easier for developers to organize and establish the relationships among system or product components. In a mobile application for example, screen transitions resulting from user interaction with buttons or other interactive elements can easily be plotted and perfected. When this or that element is tapped, for example, this animation is played. This sounds simple but interactivity and navigation often spell the success or failure of a new product. Great products are those that are highly intuitive and closely predict user behavior. In the absence of wire-frames, the relationships among different components of a system are difficult to visualize, which increases the risk of launching a product with poorly designed interactivity.

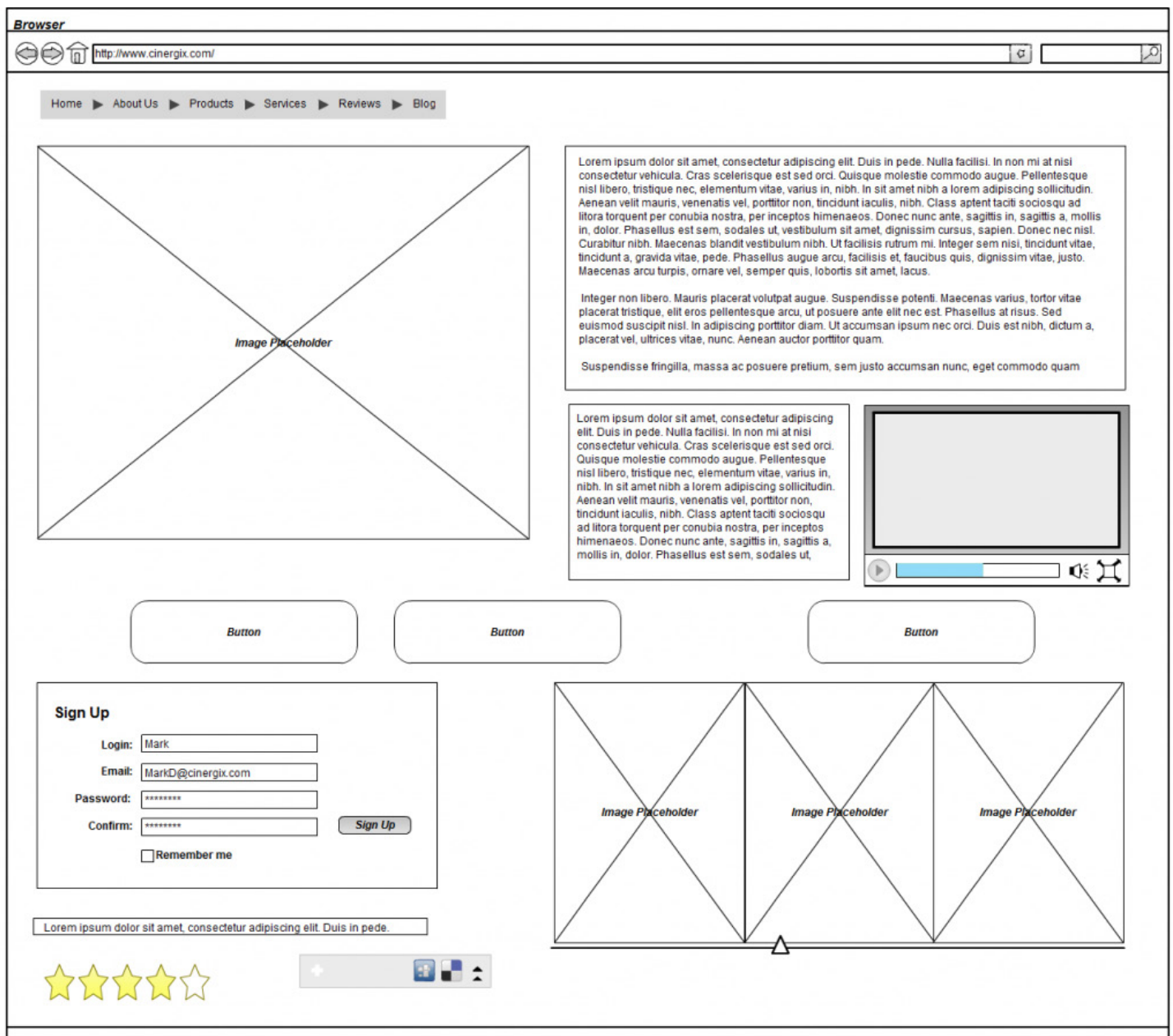
A wire-frame of a mobile application

A simple wire-frame of a mobile application

Finally, wire-frames provide a more cost-efficient way of making changes. By creating wire-frames first, developers ultimately conserve time, money and effort compared with immediately creating actual products such as a web page. This is the value offered by diagramming applications such as Creately's online service. By encouraging close coordination among all the stakeholders of a planned product, all the necessary features can be integrated more easily and quickly through a collaboratively built wireframe. This effectively avoids costly revisions that would likely have arisen had the development team bypassed the wire-framing phase.

Obviously, wire-framing has become a critical stage in the development process. That is, an initial product or system design will almost always require various changes after being reviewed by stakeholders. For example, customers who employ a website development outfit will surely demand tweaks once a mockup of the website is submitted for review. Just imagine the wasted development hours if actual web pages were developed and a major revamp were to be required by the customer. When wire-frames are used, implementing changes will not hurt at all since the real product is yet to be developed anyway. It will also help save time, especially if the development team is on a tight schedule. Contrary to the initial perception of some developers, immediately working on the actual product will not make things easier or faster for the simple reason that change requests are inevitable. By creating a wire-frame, problems, issues or challenges can be detected and addressed earlier in the development stage.

Given these wire-frame benefits, wire-framing should be conducted at the onset of development and should involve the collaborative effort of customers and product developers. This way, how the product is envisioned by the customer can easily be translated into reality by the technical and creative inputs of developers. To be sure, wire-frames are not perfect simply because they are not meant to be so. Instead, they are possibly the most cost-effective way of refining a product into perfection.



<http://sixrevisions.com/user-interface/website-wireframing/>

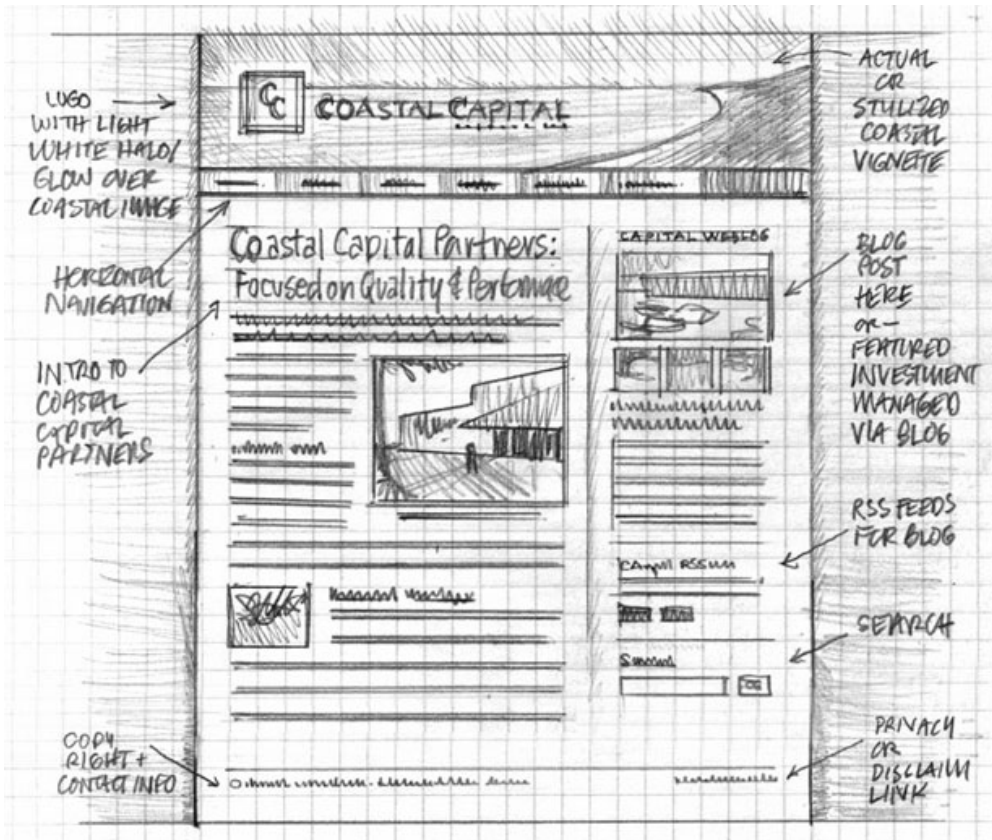
Creating a wireframe is one of the first steps you should take before designing a website.

A wireframe helps you organize and simplify the elements and content within a website and is an essential tool in the development process.

A wireframe is basically a visual representation of content layout in a website design.

The wireframe acts as a prototype that shows the placement of page features, such as header, footer, content, sidebars, and navigation.

It also specifies the placement of the elements within these content areas. If you want to develop a site that accurately matches the client's requirements and minimize project revisions, wireframing will keep you on track.



HEADER (600 x 100)

- [Email us](#)
- [Latest Events](#)
- [Mission Statement](#)
- [News](#)

MISSION STATEMENT

"Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination enriches the world." - Albert Einstein

VISION STATEMENT

"Art has the power to bring us together while fostering an appreciation for our differences and celebrating our similarities." - Val Vighotti, Founder

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A grey wireframe layout for website content blocks. It features a header with 'Logo' and 'Future Banner Ad Placement'. Below is a 'Main Navigation' bar. The main content area is divided into several columns and rows of rectangular blocks: 'Deal of the Week', 'Membership Sign up', 'Description of Site', 'Highlighted Partners', 'Pet Insurance', 'Last 5 Blog Posts (headers & summary)', 'Highlighted Categorized Deals', and 'Highlighted Discussion Forum Posts'. A footer block is at the bottom.

FLOWCHARTS

Basically your content will largely determine the navigation methods and linking structure you will use. In the example below we will use a relatively simple website which will have some main 1st level pages, some sub pages and a photo gallery. Navigation is extremely important for visitors to your website and for SEO (Search Engine Optimisation).

It is a good idea if at this stage you have any static content (content which will not change) written up and have some idea of the titles of the pages and sub pages you will be adding. Once the main content is written up or at least have a good idea of the pages and content, you can make up a navigation flowchart which will show how each page links up to make your website user friendly and easy to navigate. One of the most important things to consider when planning your navigation are these four questions:

Where am I?

Where can I go?

How can I get there?

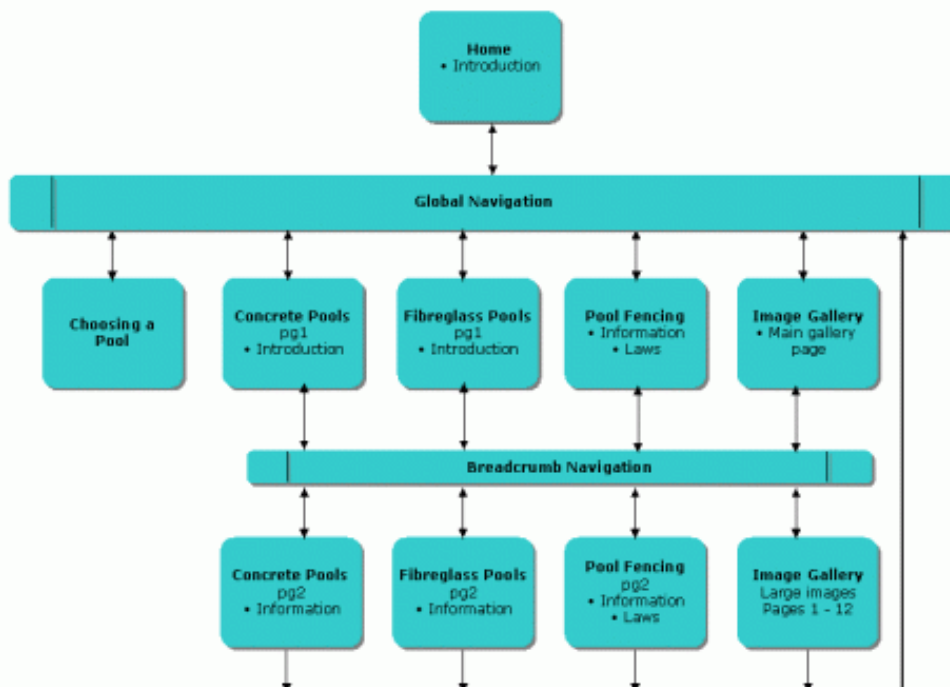
How can I get back?

(Fleming, J. (1998). Web Navigation: Designing the User Experience.)

Again, as like for the wireframe, you can use a variety of methods to get the ideas onto paper or screen. I personally like to use presentation software such as Open Office Impress which is like Power Point (only free). However you can use what ever you are comfortable with, even just a hand drawn sketch will do.

Write up a list of the web pages and how they will link to each other. The most used method for providing links to the main pages of your website is the Global Navigation Method which can be on the top or the side of your page and easy to see – (see wireframe for an example), another method which is also widely used is Bread Crumb navigation, this is ideal for sub pages which are not on the Global Navigation.

See the example below to get an idea of how to set out your navigation flowchart. It is important before going any further to have a plan of how your website will be hyperlinked to its content to make it easy for the user to get around and for the search bots to index your pages. More on SEO (Search Engine Optimisation) to come.



Domain name: Slamer's Dream House

