

Starting from Scratch

Hello and welcome to the Divi Stylist Academy lesson on starting a new web design project. In this lesson, I would like to inspire you to think about your process when starting a new project. I would like to give you a few steps, a few things to consider at the beginning and you don't need to do everything the way I'm describing it. I hope it will give you some ideas so that you can make it on your own, extend it or dial it back. But it's very useful to have some sort of outline on how to proceed when working with a new client.

The first and most important step is defining website goals. Next, before anything else, you should get clarity on what is the brand personality you are working with. Next, you can take the time to collect inspiration for this project. Next, you should take the time to wireframe the structure of the site without making any low-level decisions and looking into details. And finally, you can explore a visual style which kind of wraps the previous steps together. You can choose fonts, color palette, images or icons and create a mood board or style tile which you can then present to your client.

Defining Website Goals

You need to be able to define what is the goal for the website, what does success look like? If the site needs to make money then it might be easy, for an e-commerce site the goal would be to purchase a product. But if the site makes money through affiliate links then these affiliate recommendations should be the focus, should be in the front and

center. There are many different goals the website can have, it doesn't need to be purchase-related. The goal could be that they download a freebie or subscribe to something, donate or use some new feature. I included a list with many different goals you might find useful but the important thing is simply to write down these goals. This will have two benefits, first of all, if you don't know what the goals are you are only going to hit the goals by accident. It's also very important if you're working with clients if you are able to justify your decision based on the goal that is behind it. Your clients are less likely to undermine your every step, ask for countless tweaks and edits and you get to the finish line faster. Website goals are very important.

Determine your Brand Personality

Another thing to consider at the beginning is your brand personality and by brand personality, I simply mean what do you want your users to feel about you. Every website has some sort of personality, banking site might try to communicate „secure” and „professional”, while a trendy new startup might have a design that feels fun and playful. So, it's as simple as coming up with just a list of adjectives. When you're working with a client you start asking them questions trying to really get a handle of what kind of brand they are going for. These are some of the questions you might be asking: what are similar sites that you kind of look up to or think are doing something right that you also want to do right? And once you get a link you should dig deeper and ask what specific feeling they get from the site that they also would like to convey. Another question would be: why does your company exist? Why should people listen to you? Why should your customer trust you over your competitors? What do you believe that all your competitors disagree with? Maybe there's something here. What values do you hold

strongly that you'd be willing to lose money rather than violate them? This should give you some great examples.

Collect and Compile Inspiration

A lot of the time you will probably just have a gut feeling for the personality you're going for but if you don't, a great way to simplify the decision is to take a look at other sites used by the people you want to reach. If they are mostly pretty serious business maybe that's how your site should look too. If they are more playful with a bit of humor, maybe that's a better direction to take. Just try not to borrow too much from direct competitors; you don't want to look like a second-rate version of something else, right? Ideally, you should have your goals and brand personality defined before doing any design work. And once we do have these things in place it's important that you don't get hung up on making low-level decisions about things like typefaces, shadows, icons right away. Detail comes later. The easiest way to find yourself frustrated and stuck when working on a new design is to start by trying to "design" the website. When most people think about "designing" the website they're thinking about the shell, right? Should it have a top navigation or a sidebar? Should the navigation items be on the left or on the right? Should the page content be in the container or should it be full width? Where should the logo go and things like that? That stuff will all matter eventually but it doesn't matter right now.

Sketch and Wireframe

If you have trouble ignoring the details when working in a high fidelity environment like the browser or Divi or your favorite design tool, one thing I like to do and recommend is to design on paper using just a pen or better yet a thick sharpie because it's not possible to obsess over

details using a sharpie, so it is the best way to quickly explore different ideas and layouts. You should keep your goals in mind when doing a wireframe of the site, think of the flow of the page, the hierarchy of information, but work quickly, use wireframes and sketches to explore your ideas and leave them behind once you've made a decision.

Explore the Visual Styles

Once you have the idea of the main website structure, you can get back to exploring visual styles and here are some elements that define the visual style of a website: first, the typography.

Typography plays a huge part in determining how a design feels. If you want an elegant or classic look you might want to incorporate a serif typeface in your design. And for a playful look, you could use a rounded san serif, and if you're going for a plainer look or want to rely on other elements to provide the personality, a neutral san serif works great.

Next, color, there's a lot of science out there on the psychology of color but in practice, you really just need to pay attention to how different colors feel to you. Blue is safe and familiar, nobody ever complains about blue. Gold might say expensive and sophisticated, pink is a bit more fun and not so serious. All these different colors may have a different meaning and if you're just starting with some brand colors your client already has it's ok too, but it's important that it connects to the personality you're trying to convey.

Next, we have imagery. Beautiful, high quality photography gives a luxury feel while using fancy cartoons can be perceived as playful or even quirky. Things like border-radius, as small of a detail as it sounds, and how much you've rounded your corners in your design, can have a big impact on the overall feel. A small border-radius is pretty neutral

formal. Whatever you choose it's important to stay consistent. Mixing square corners and rounded corners in the same interface almost always looks worse than sticking with one or the other.

Next, we have language and while it's not a visual design technique per se the words you use in an interface have a massive influence on the overall personality. Using a less personal tone might feel more official or professional, while using friendlier a more casual language makes a site feel, well, friendlier. Words are everywhere in the user interface and choosing the right ones is just as, if not more important, than choosing the right color or typeface.

Starting a new web design project

Just to give you a sort of a recap here's what I suggest you do at the beginning of a new project:

First, write down what are the goals of the website, what are the goals the website should meet.

Next, define some adjectives or short sentences that describe your brand personality, take some time to get inspired.

Next, without focusing on any details, plan the structure of the page keeping the goals in mind, think about the visual hierarchy of each page layout.

Finally, take the time to prepare a brand board or a style tile that can include the fonts, main colors, sample imagery, just to create the correct feel for the site that correlates with the personality and goals.

The 5 Most Popular Brand Personalities

Now you might be wondering with so many different brand personalities and adjectives do I need to learn how to translate each one into fonts or

colors? The answer is - no, there are certain personalities you'll be working with 80% of the time and I really like the approach of a great designer, Eric Kennedy and he came up with these five different most common brand personalities. Let me walk you through each one of them.

The first one is the most common thing you'll hear from your clients, they request something clean and simple. So here are the elements you will see on a clean and simple website, otherwise described as neat and modern. Typography is often going to be san serif. Colors used are usually from the primary palette, the bright clean primary hues. Or you'll see monohue schemes where the whole site is just basically one main theme color and variation of that color. For imagery, they will use either photography or illustrations.

The second type of website is very easy to recognize when you see it. It is fancy, luxurious, stylish, kind of a formal brand. They might use serif fonts or light font weights of sans serifs. They are very likely to use the grayscale palette and there might be some gold accents. If there is any imagery it is going to be the highest quality photos, extremely beautiful stuff.

Next we have the friendly sites. You see the site and you immediately think "oh, this is casual, it's friendly, it feels nice". You might see different types of san serifs fonts here, rounded fonts, primary palettes or more playful palettes with a friendly side. Something you might see is cute illustrations or similar which you are unlikely to see on a really fancy site or if it is done it's going to be done in a very different style.

Next, we have quirky, interesting, unusual sites. Not a common request from clients but something designers like to explore. They might use

photography or illustrations.

Once you get comfortable and familiar with different types of design, different brand personalities, it will be easier for you to determine what kind of font, colors and imagery your project needs. And that relates to the previous lesson where we talked about finding and using design inspiration. Once you start analyzing great-looking websites, think how the visual styles correlate with their brand personality. It will help you develop your own design 'gut instinct'. I hope you give these methods a try in your next project which will help you develop your own system for starting from scratch.