What Is Growth-Driven Design? Hint: It's Agile for Web.

SmartBug.

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Introduction

Tired of blowing your budget on a website only to find that it doesn't deliver?

Design is perhaps the most crucial component of a strong marketing platform because of its impact on so many key assets that are used to attract, convert, and delight potential leads and customers. From the brand logo to websites, social platforms, paid advertisements, and physical materials—top-notch and consistent design can make or break a company.

Design can also be a daunting task for the uninitiated, especially when we're talking about the front page, lead-generating machine of your company—the website.

When you think about website design, what comes to mind? If it's the look of your website pages, what images accompany your content, or whatever your designer says to go with, then you're in the majority. But that's not what you should be thinking of.

Yes, looking nice is important—but you should also think about strategy, lead generation, reaching goals, and keeping customers happy. Why?

Because most website design doesn't promise performance—it promises pretty.

You might have heard of the term *agile development* being used in reference to start-up companies, especially in the software space.

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By definition, By definition, agile development means "relating to or denoting a method of project management, used especially for software development, that is characterized by the division of tasks into short phases of work and frequent reassessment and adaptation of plans."

The key here is "frequent reassessment and adaptation of plans" because it means an iterative development process that focuses on your key analytics and data—not just a pretty front page. It's an approach to web design that all businesses should take.

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The Shift to Agile

What Is Growth-Driven Design?

Simply put, growth-driven design (GDD) means building and optimizing a website to focus on achieving and exceeding your goals.

The entire site structure is built around known (or hypothesized) analytics, buyer personas, and data. This involves aligning design elements with conversion funnels and paths, content (pages, emails, offers, and so on), and structure. Growth-driven design websites are often iterated many times over, optimizing for performance and finding the best ways to connect with audiences.

GDD is not a new concept but traditional agency approaches to digital design are outdated and must be challenged. If you're unhappy with results from past design work or are looking to embark on a design project, keep reading to learn:

- Each step of our process at SmartBug

- How it benefits your company's bottom line

- How it complements inbound marketing

- The best tools to manage the process

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What Makes GDD Different?

Traditional web design can be similar to constructing a building—with full blueprints and key decisions made before the first code is ever written.
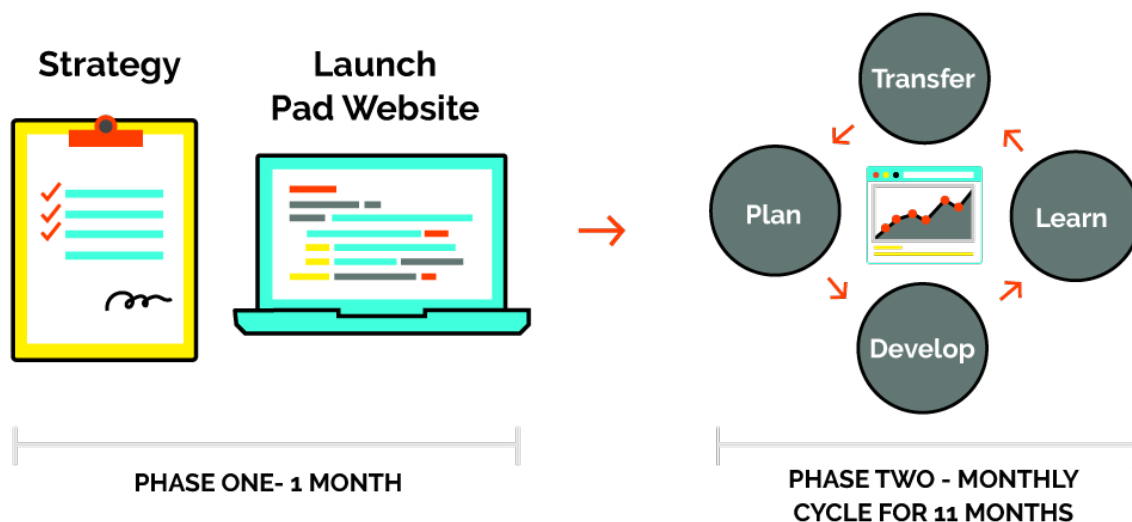
Source: Hubspot

With GDD, you start much smaller with a smart and agile process that can be implemented quickly. Once your first iteration is live, you use actual data to make decisions, instead of opinions and assumptions at the onset of a project.

The initial website build should be based on what you're most confident will work—so you'll want to choose a framework and relevant content that will best connect with your primary personas. Using these strong hypotheses, you can get started quickly and build confidently toward your goals.

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Once live, it's time to apply quantitative and qualitative research tactics to identify and build the next feature or iteration of your website. The goal here is to find what will have the most dramatic impact on results and goals—like traffic or conversion percentages. Over time, the process is repeated, keeping the website components that work and optimizing what doesn't.

There are three main pillars of growth-driven design:

1. **Minimized risks associated with traditional website design:** The shorter process of growth-driven design allows you to focus on real impact and continuous learning.

2. **Continuous learning and improving:** Constant testing, analyzing, and learning about visitors will inform ongoing improvements to reach peak performance.

3. **Closed-loop reporting:** Your marketing and sales team will also learn about this visitor behavior and improve marketing and sales tactics based on the findings.

Why Agile for Web (GDD) Is Effective

In a nutshell, growth-driven design shifts the primary focus of your website from talking about yourself toward solving the problems of your potential customers. So many companies get stuck on matching design to the brand and forget that the website is mainly about the customer. Of course, it should match the brand, but a well-branded static brochure is not going to help your customer as much as a well-oiled marketing machine delivering content and solving problems.

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How It Works

The growth-driven design process differs from traditional web design in a few key ways. First, let's see the two processes compared to each other:
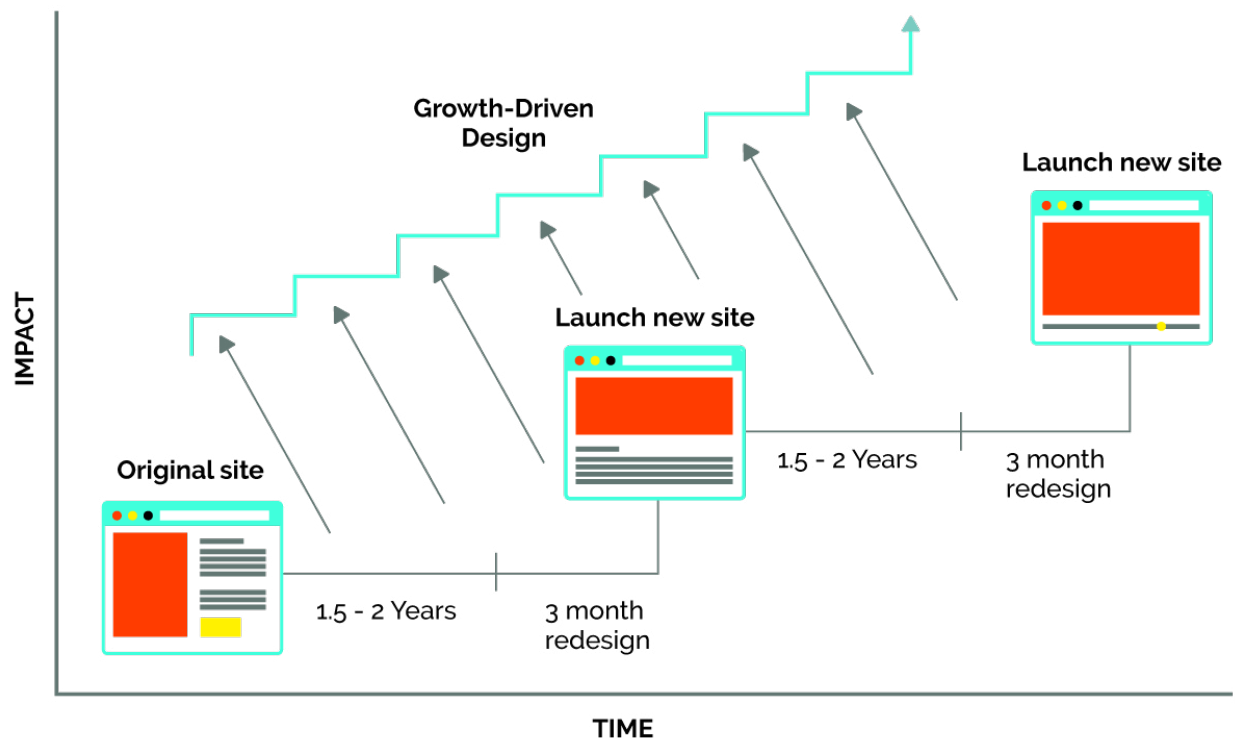
Source: Hubspot

As you can see above, growth-driven design is a much more incremental and iterative process than traditional design. Individual website elements are updated frequently to reflect what's working and not working for your audience in real time. Traditional processes move much slower, with new versions built on aggregate data and often meant to last a year or more. We believe this is far too slow a pace for optimizing an inbound marketing strategy.

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Strategic Planning

The first phase of any website design project is to developing a comprehensive strategy—whether or not you choose a traditional or growth-driven design process. Here are a few key steps to creating the perfect strategy.

- **Goals and planning:** What are you trying to accomplish with your website?

  > SMART TIP: Align your website with sales goals via inbound marketing!

- **Personas:** All good web design is centered around the user, so you'll want to fill out your personas as completely as possible.

  > SMART TIP: You should already have buyer personas created, but if not, check out our resource on how to create them.

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- **Research:** Conduct quantitative and qualitative research. What do your analytics tell you? What do your best customers think or want?

  > SMART TIP: Gather insight from actual users or even potential customers with heat maps and surveys. We recommend HotJar!

- **Hypotheses:** Use all the data you've collected thus far and hypothesize about your audience to create the first LaunchPad iteration of your website.

  > SMART TIP: Focus on your value proposition and key persona pain points first!

- **Page strategy:** With UX in mind, map out your dream site— but stick to the most crucial elements first.

  > SMART TIP: Align the core elements of your website with your buyer's journey and make sure to track the most successful topics to build for future iterations.

The first phase of any website design project is developing a comprehensive strategy.

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Wish List

Now it's time to gather your team and come up with ideas for what to add, remove, change, include, or edit on your site. Look at your data and decide what kinds of pages and content could best support potential visitors.

- Your list should include changes for user experience, visitor tools, features, functionality, design, and the most helpful website sections and pages.

- Sort by business impact: Decide what you need to have and what you want to have. Look at impact, effort, and metrics.

- Get consensus from your team about what you'll tackle first.

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After Launch

When your website is up and running, it's time to shift your efforts to continuous improvement and the next growth iterations or tests to run. This is accomplished through an ongoing cycle of planning, developing, learning, and transferring.

Planning

In this stage, you'll look at the changes you implemented and analyze the results. From that information, you'll decide what remaining things from your wish list you should implement next:
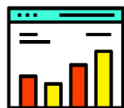
Performance: Is the website reaching the goals you set up? What things from your wish list can you implement to improve your results and reach those goals?
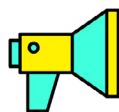
Learn from marketing and sales: Ask them what new information they're getting that is useful and what is still left out.

Prioritize: Look at your wish list again, and based on the new data you've collected, prioritize the items and/or add new ones.

Your action items should fit in a list similar to the below chart:

Boost Conversion	Improve User Experience	Personalize to the User	Build Marketing Assets
▪ Conversion Points ▪ User Path ▪ Testing Value Props ▪ Split Testing	▪ Navigation ▪ Blog Layout ▪ UI Improvements ▪ Mobile Experience	▪ Tailored Content Offers ▪ Smart Content ▪ Smart Forms ▪ Personalization Tokens	▪ Tools ▪ Marketing Resources ▪ Directories & Listings ▪ SEO-Focused Assets

Developing

After you're done planning, you should have a new list of changes or additions you would like to implement. Just like before, you will take that list and develop those changes on the site.

- Have the team implement the list items you choose.

- Test the impact each change has on the website and measure the results.

When your website is up and running, it's time to shift your efforts to continuous improvement.

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Learning

Growth-driven design allows you to learn from every change you make. So after you make additional changes, you'll go back through them and see what you learned from this batch of edits and additions.

- Once enough time has passed for you to collect enough data to analyze, you can begin to see if your hypotheses are correct and adjust new experiments accordingly.

- Based on the results, ask yourself some questions:

    Did the changes make any impacts?

    What did I learn about my visitors based on the results?

Transferring

Always remember to record what you've learned so you can transfer it to other parts of your website, effectively magnifying success in future iterations. The growth-driven design process is a continuous cycle and there is always going to be something you can improve on—so make sure you're taking the time to repeat the process.

> SMART TIP: Make a list of hypotheses and experiments so you can track results. The results of your work can even turn into valuable content for your audience.

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Implementation Tools

There are many tools that help with the growth-driven design process that we use in the inbound marketing process. Whether it's Google Analytics, HubSpot, or another CRM, you'll need some way to measure your initial website performance and the results you get from the growth-driven design changes.

Drivers

Drivers are the things that bring users to your website. Analyzing these will help you understand your visitors' intent, find out why they are there, and discover what they want to accomplish while there.

- Tools you can use to determine drivers include feedback polls, surveys, and user tests. Try using SurveyMonkey for your surveys.

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Barriers

Barriers are the things your site does or does not have that are causing users to leave the website. These could exist because of pricing issues, lack of trust, confusing or missing calls to action, bad user experience, and so on.

- Tools to use include heatmaps, conversion funnels, feedback polls, surveys, and recruiting user testers—like HotJar.

Calls-to-Action

Calls-to-Action (or CTAs) refer to the specific pieces of your website that promote conversions by offering your visitor a valuable piece of content or other information. These can range from converting first-time visitors to view your latest blog post or offering someone in the decision-making stage of your buyer's journey a demo of your product.

- CTAs are easily managed by HubSpot and often point to to e-books, webinars, and other premium content.

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Cost Benefit of GDD

Growth-driven design aims to preserve resources and time, and eliminate wasteful changes through continuous user-driven improvements. Simply put, it's more efficient. Let's look at a comparison of traditional marketing versus growth-driven design to understand the cost benefit.

Traditional Website Design	Growth-Driven Website Design
■ Large upfront cost ■ The website usually takes a minimum of three months to complete and requires a large team input ■ Cost and time can fluctuate You can test and debug a website for technical issues but don't typically test for viewer trial-and-error issues ■ After the launch, the website might not have any major updates for 1.5-2 years ■ Assumes what you are building is perfect and will perform the best	■ Able to optimize for any combination of cost, schedule or scope ■ Cost broken up into manageable monthly fees ■ Shortened launch time ■ Constantly improving and never permanent, thus allowing you to focus on real impact and continuous learning ■ With continuous improvements comes peak performance ■ Tightly integrated with marketing and sales

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How Does GDD Complement Inbound Marketing?

Example of Growth-Driven Design

Inbound marketing is all about testing, and as we've learned, so is growth-driven design. They work together to produce results. Let's look at an example.

Say you have a landing page that is underperforming. A lot of traffic is coming to it, but not many visitors are converting. You dig into the analytics and find out most of the users are coming from mobile devices. You can hypothesize from this information that the mobile users coming to the page don't want to fill out the long form that you have on the landing page. Based on this information, you test out a smart form that only asks for name and email when a mobile user lands on the page.

After the campaign runs for a month, you discover that the landing page has increased conversion rate by 20 percent. Based on those results, you can transfer this information to all of your landing pages and implement smart forms for mobile users site-wide.

> Inbound marketing is all about testing, and as we've learned, so is growth-driven design.

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What to Look for in a Growth-Driven Design Agency

There are a million web design agencies out there—so what sets some of the best apart? Check out a few of our recommended critical requirements for your next design partner:

Inbound marketing track record: Engage with an agency that has a well-documented track record in inbound marketing. The ability to create an inbound-focused website can mean the difference between a new design and a website that significantly increases leads and opportunities. Look for an agency that is a recognized leader.

CMS expert: Seek an agency that is recognized as an expert with the content management system on which you are building your site. CMS expertise ensures your site is easily updated without the need for developer help. Avoid agencies that don't have certifications or vendor awards.

Business-minded: Look for an agency that has a clear understanding of how your website can impact your bottom line. This ensures your investment generates a return. Avoid agencies that are design-only or don't have a strong consulting presence.

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Clean and modern designs: Engage an agency that applies clean and modern design elements to its websites. Responsive and mobile-friendly designers are just the tip of the iceberg. Avoid agencies that have design glitches or other quirks, as it is often the sign of poor attention to detail.

Trusted process: Find an agency that follows a sound design and development process—for both your launchpad site and each monthly sprint. A trusted process will minimize cost and schedule overruns and demonstrates the agency has expertise in agile web development.

Experienced in-house teams: Look for an agency that utilizes solely in-house design and development teams to provide continuity during the project. Firms that rely heavily on interns, off-shorting, or contractors can be prone to higher staff turnover, missed dates, and quality issues that can plague your project.

Personalization: Seek an agency that demonstrates expertise in personalization. The proper use of personalization can provide a better visitor experience and enhance conversion rates. Firms that document personalization on their wireframes often have a good understanding of this blossoming technology.

SMART TIP: Interview a few agencies to get the best sense of who's a good fit for your team and your budget. SmartBug is always happy to conduct a free consultation.

Summary

The key takeaway from this is the tried-and-true mindset of putting the customer first. Growth-driven design takes customers into consideration by looking at the analytics and assessing their behavior. Once you figure out how your potential customers are behaving on a website, you can better provide them with the information they need.

Look for an agency that offers SEO as a standard part of every website. This ensures your site will be positioned properly for success. Avoid firms that don't integrate SEO or don't handle SEO internally.

More than anything, bring the growth-driven design concept of "plan, develop, learn, and transfer" deep into the strategy of every part of your business from conception to completion, and you'll be amazed at the results you see.

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About SmartBug

SmartBug Media is one of a handful of HubSpot Diamond partners in the world and is the highest-rated agency in the history of the HubSpot ecosystem. We also boast the highest ROI documented from any HubSpot partner—3,558% and 14,500% ROI on a six-month and three-year campaign, respectively. At Inbound 2015, SmartBug Media was the most recognized agency, having won or been named a finalist in nine awards.

SmartBug Media is one of first HubSpot partners to implement growth-driven design and was an inaugural member of the HubSpot COS Advisory Board. For more than seven years, SmartBug Media has been helping businesses increase sales leads, close more customers, and enhance the reach of their brands. From building comprehensive online marketing programs to designing new websites, driving leads through social media or sales enablement, we're an extension of your marketing team that delivers.

For a free inbound marketing or web design consultation, or to learn more, visit www.smartbugmedia.com or call 949-236-6448.

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Curious how we can help grow your business?

Let's chat. Get the conversation started and let's talk about your organization, your goals, and how SmartBug can help you achieve them.

Let's Talk

SmartBug.