
Being Agile at a Small Agency

How to Apply Agile Principles in a
Not-So-Iterative Environment

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Introduction

A small, growing agency faces many challenges, chief among them dealing with **uncertainty** and **change**.

Introduction

Agile approaches attempt to address these challenges by accepting **change as a given** and working to encourage **communication and relationships**.

Introduction

One of the key aspects of agile - **an iterative process** - can be difficult to adopt for both a team and its clients.

Introduction

**How then to incorporate agile principles
at a small agency?**

What is *agile*?

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.

Oxford English Dictionary

Agile Manifesto Core Values

The *Agile Manifesto* (2001) is a statement of values regarding best practices in modern software development:

- **Individuals and interactions** over processes and tools
 - **Working software** over comprehensive documentation
 - **Customer collaboration** over contract negotiation
 - **Responding to change** over following a plan
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Why Be Agile?

Agile principles can address some of the key challenges a small agency may face:

- Communicating with clients
 - Creating better estimates
 - Limiting scope creep
 - Delivering better products faster
 - Nurturing an engaged staff
 - Building long-term client relationships
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Project Models

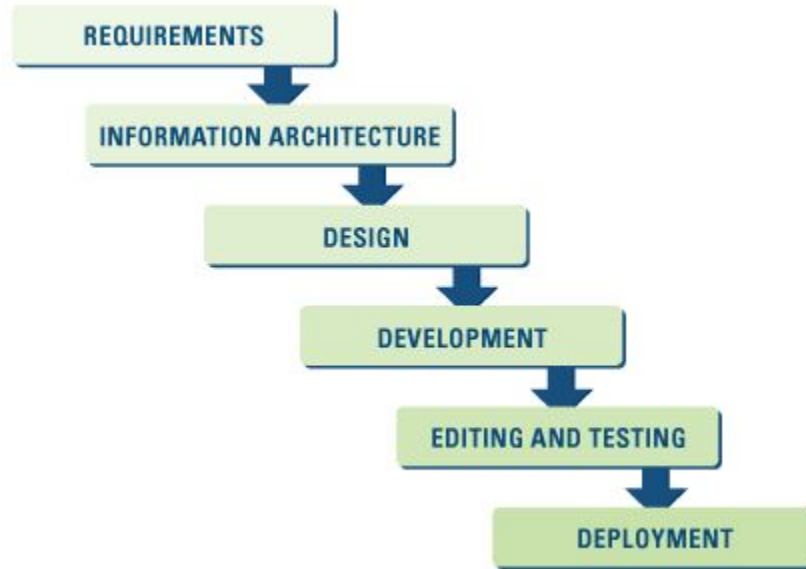
Waterfall Model

A traditional **waterfall project process** is divided into **successive steps** that lead from project **beginning to end**.

Waterfall Model

Each step is dependent on the work completed in the previous step.

Waterfall Model



Waterfall Model

Strengths of the waterfall model include:

- Simple and intuitive
 - Clear, well-defined requirements
 - Targets 'perfection'
 - Lends itself to small, straightforward projects
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Waterfall Model

Weakness include:

- Potential for bottlenecks and delays
 - Needs may change during the process
 - Late testing only reveals problems near the end
 - No value is created until the very end
 - Facilitates an *individual hero* approach
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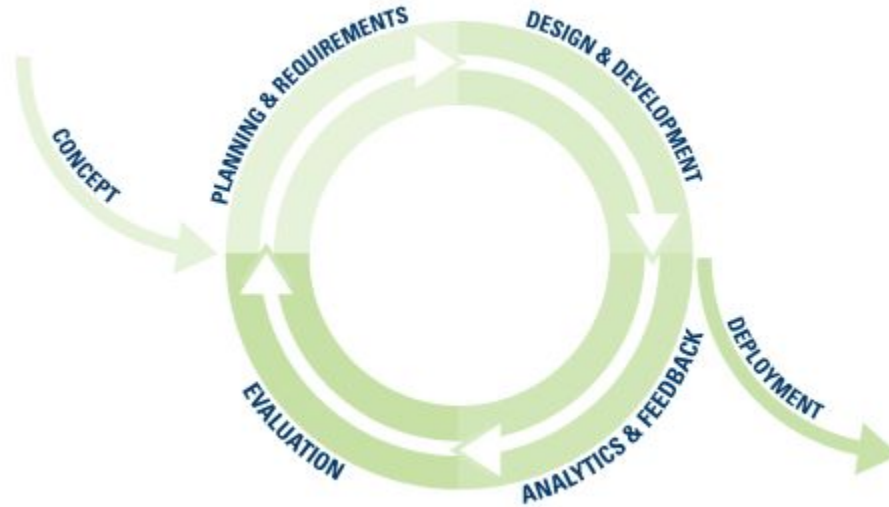
Iterative Model

Iterative processes involve **repeated cycles of work** geared towards **defining and refining** the project over time.

Iterative Model

Cycles tend to be **short and focused** in scope, and may allow multiple iterations to be pursued at once by different teams.

Iterative Model



Iterative Model

Strengths of the iterative model include:

- Flexibility and resilience to change
 - Promotion of communication and relationships
 - Speed and value creation
 - Take advantage of opportunities
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Iterative Model

Weakness include:

- Uncertainty about project scope
 - Necessity for engaged participants
 - Can lead to bloat with small projects
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Iterative Model

A cousin of iterative is the **incremental process**, in which specs are more fully defined at the outset and then **built in phases**.

Formal Agile Methodologies

Methodologies that today are called *Agile* have been evolving over decades. Some include: Scrum, Extreme Programming, Lean Software Development and Kanban.

Formal Agile Methodologies

Must you use a formal methodology to gain some of the benefits of the Agile approach?

No!

Problems Becoming Agile

A small team may find it challenging to make the move towards a more Agile approach for reasons such as:

- Daunting Methodologies
 - Client Skepticism
 - Inertia
 - Lack of Resources
 - Fear
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Tactics for Getting Agile

Individuals and Interactions

Invest the Whole Team in the Project

Hold kickoff event to focus on client identity and team, and projects goals and opportunities prior to strategy.
Build relationships!

Individuals and Interactions

Encourage Different Roles to Work Together

Use tools such as pre-made WordPress themes or page builders to facilitate collaboration between a designer and developer.

Individuals and Interactions

Use Collaboration Tools That Create Value

Collaboration tools like Slack, Invision, GitHub and Asana accomplish things that email can't - context for interaction around projects and topics, and creating lasting value themselves.

Working Software

Keep Timelines Short

Shorten your default timeline by half, then scope and plan the work based on that timeframe.

Working Software

Clean Code

Eliminate the need for documentation by writing it into the code.

For more, check out *Clean Code: A Handbook of Agile Software Craftsmanship* by Robert Martin

Working Software

Make Milestones Functional

Experiment with using WordPress to overlap with traditional IA and design tools. For example, build your wireframes in WP, which become the foundation for the website.

Working Software

Build Your Toolbox

Assemble a suite of themes, plugins and components that work for you, and customize them over time as a part of your projects.

Customer Collaboration

Make Project Specs a Living, Shared Document

Use one of your collaboration tools to put specs in a place that isn't just accessible, but forces itself in front of people, and invites them to consult & manipulate it.

Customer Collaboration

Use Tools to Bring Client Directly Into Process

WordPress admin allows us to bring the clients and even users into the production process. Content migration is a major user case.

Customer Collaboration

Launch Is Not an End

Schedule launch days, not a launch date. Anticipate and build in opportunities for follow up such as WP admin training, maintenance period, analytics review.

Responding to Change

Build in Feedback Collection Methods

Assume that the purpose of a website is to track user behavior, then structure and code it accordingly.

Responding to Change

Embrace Limitations

When there are solid rules to play by, play by them. For example, use WordPress core functionality and best practices as your foundation, so you can focus on responding to other areas of change and opportunity.

Responding to Change

Hold Retrospectives After Stages/Projects

Make a review meeting with the entire team a required part of your deployment process to incorporate lessons learned.

Responding to Change

Seek Out Change as Opportunity

Hold a 'What's New?' discussion -- invite your stakeholders to suggest new needs and opportunities, or alternate perspectives.

Getting to Iterative

Cultivating Iterative Projects and Relationships

1. Integrate agile principles into day-to-day work.
 2. Develop long-term client relationships, and take iterative approaches when possible (analytics and SEM campaigns are a good place to start).
 3. Identify new clients/projects that would be iterative friendly.
 4. Build in assessment methods and refine your own approach to work over time - iterate to iterative!
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“When you’re finished changing, you’re finished.”

- Benjamin Franklin

Summary

Uncertainty and change are inevitable challenges we will face as a web development team. (Not to mention in life!)

Agile values help us to build processes and relationships that address these challenges.

A small team can take small steps towards adoption of agile values and iterative approaches over time.

In the long run, we become not merely resilient to change, but beneficiaries of the opportunities it presents.

For More Information

Further Reading

- [Manifesto for Agile Software Development](#)
 - [Iterative Website Development](#)
 - [Clean Code: A Handbook of Agile Software Craftsmanship](#)
 - [Choosing an onboarding process for website \(re\)design](#)
 - [Agile Software Development](#)
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Thanks!

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