



## Internet Presence

### Building a Site

Creating a simple web site is not technically difficult – thousands of new sites are tossed up on the web every day. And “tossed” often describes the way they look and work. Creating a site that leaves a positive impression with customers and potential customer’s takes planning, organization and a bit of effort (or money).

#### Plan the purpose, look and feel of your site

Start the site planning by evaluating other sites produced by those in the same line of business.

Determine what is effective and ineffective about them. Ask the following questions:

- ❖ What does the design, use of graphics and color, and tone of the writing say about the business?
- ❖ Does the site offer easy access to the information that most customers want to know right away?
- ❖ Is there a reason to come back to the site? Are there indications that the information is updated regularly?
- ❖ Reviewing other sites can help the business focus on what it wants to accomplish with a web site.

#### Sketch the site

With a sense for the feel and purpose of the site, use a pencil and paper, or computer drawing program to sketch the site and page layouts. This is sometimes referred to as a “tree”.

- ❖ Site layout. The site layout serves a visual outline showing all the pages planned for the site and which pages link to others. Try to create a structure that has a logical flow that customer and visitors can recognize. Draw little boxes for the pages and add lines with arrows that illustrate the links between pages.
- ❖ Page layout. Draw a layout that shows the structure of a page on the site. While the content will change from page to page, this basic structure should serve as a template for all pages on the site. Having a standardized layout keeps from disorienting visitors. Again, look at the layouts of other web pages to help determine what works best.

#### Register a domain name

A business domain name is the address Internet users type into their browser to find the business’s web site, for example, [www.thecompany.com](http://www.thecompany.com). A domain name must be registered in order to own and use it – and keep others from using it. InterNIC ([www.internic.com](http://www.internic.com)) provides a list of accredited domain name registrars, like Dotster, Network Solutions and Go-Daddy for example. Most of these services can help determine if the desired name is available. Be prepared to use some variation on the domain name in case the name is taken. If the plan is to build a website but not for a while, then the business should go ahead and register the name in advance so others don’t take it.

### Find a Host for the Site

A website must live on a computer called a web server. The web server delivers the web pages to users who request it using their browser. For most small businesses, it makes sense to pay a hosting service or Internet service provider (ISP) to keep the site on one of their web servers. Professional service providers know how to monitor, maintain and secure servers so the site is available to visitors almost 100 percent of the time.



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### Build and Test the Site

To build a web site takes time. With the complexity, and sometimes-convoluted standards for web page coding, the business may wish to a professional web designer to build the business web site including an e-commerce site that would allow consumers to place orders online. A professional web building company can be costly. And their rate doesn't always equate to the best product. There are plenty of college students who are web site "geeks" and they normally don't command as high a fee. Consider a small ad in a college newspaper. Most anyone who contacts you should have a few web sites that you can visit as an example of their work.

Important: Whichever path you take to create a website, make certain, in writing, that the completed website is yours. Lawsuits have been filed where the person who actually did the labor to make the site, is claiming the site and "works of labor" belong to them. If you wanted to sell your business in 5 years, you'd want to include the website. This is where the dispute surfaces and you simply don't need those problems.

Once your website is completed, you will certainly want and need to update the site, add a blog, revise menus or specials, etc. If you are not a computer geek and don't understand computer code or how the whole thing works, then you have a couple of options, that need to be addressed prior to the actual build. You can be solely reliant on another person (usually the website developer) to maintain your site. This means that anytime you have a change, correction, addition, etc, you contact that person and they make the change. Almost always this is a per session fee, unless you have them on a retainer, which is not needed for this type of business. Your other option is to have the web developer construct the site, where you, the owner can access limited areas of the site to replace photos or text. A good website developer can give you access to those "changeable" areas, and lock down the rest of the site. If you want major revisions, you go back to the designer and let them do the heavy lifting, for a fee.

There is one other alternative for consideration. Many popular Internet providers offer templates with a hosting contract. Let's say you visit GoDaddy or Powweb – you'll have access to a limited variety of template web platforms where all you do is fill in text, add a few photos, add a logo and instantly you have a website. These are very affordable, and not always a bad choice. Explore the options and try to see what sort of templates you'll be offered for free, and how extensively you can make changes or additions. Some hosts will limit the number of pages, some will be pretty picky with photos, and most "free:" or template offerings will not interface with e-commerce.

### Maintain the Site

After the site is up and running – do NOT allow the site to get dusty. The fastest way to turn away a potential client is to have a website that indicates the last change was made 2 years ago! There are a variety of ways to show the site as fresh – your website designer will have suggestions, or you can actually get in and make a post, with a date. One other element to not consider – web or visitor counters. Sure, they sound cool and show that thousands of people visit your site. But a website that has a visitor counter visible that shows 000023 – sort of shouts out that nobody has been to your site. Through your website designer, or your web host, you can access all those web hits and activity data. Even as a novice, you should ask and learn how to access that type data. A good "report" will show you how many unique visitors, how many repeat visitors and ideally what pages they spent looked at and how much time they spent on that page. (Data will show a LOT more than this, but these are the important ones to you now). If your website has 8 pages (all important in your mind), but stats show that nobody visits 1 or 2 of the pages, maybe the page isn't needed, or maybe you've named it wrong, or maybe it's somehow confusing. Regardless of why, people are not seeing something you felt was needed. Examine why the traffic is so low on that page or section.



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On the other hand, don't be too concerned about some pages getting more attention than others. The "About Us" page isn't a hot topic, but the "Recipe Of The Month" should be, as an example. People come to your website usually with one mission – to learn more about something that caught their attention. They are not going to read every page, unless each page is very limited in text.

### Website is an Online Brochure

A web site gives the business a way to tell more about its service and products than any brochure. Not only that, the business can share its information with potential customers at a time when it's most convenient for them and when they're most interested. Try to make your website, brochure and business card carry a uniform feel, look and appearance. This is supposed to be a "set", like silverware.

### What is really Required

A businesses home page must contain the company's name and contact information. The standard contact method is a blind inquiry, where the visitor puts in their name, a contact option and asks a question. You can put an actual email on your site, but you are certainly going to attract added spam as a result. Either way, respond promptly to legitimate requests. Most personal chefs include a phone number, but you be the judge. The Internet robots that pick up and collect email addresses typically leave phone numbers alone. If your client is visiting you on your website, chances are excellent that they also have and use email. Facebook, Linked-In, Twitter and other contact methods will be discussed later. If you are "social media" person with the knowledge of these systems and are able to stay on top of input/requests, then you will want to include those as contact options as well.

### Get to the Point

A web site must explain exactly what it is the business offers - clearly and concisely. Telling people how the business does things will not engage them. Instead the business should explain how a service or product would help them. When a visitor reads the information, they are thinking, "What do I get out of it?" List the features of the service, but don't focus on them.

### Speed Loading Time

The first page of the web site is the most important. Try to avoid large and/or superfluous images or content that takes too long to load. Even with today's abundance of high-speed Internet connections, having a first page that takes more than a couple of seconds to display is a very bad thing. And with the proliferation of "flash media" and other similar website accessories, the temptation of building such a monstrosity is very real. Keep a fair balance between content and graphics, as most visitors will probably be too impatient to wait while the web-site loads.

### Bells and Whistles

Some web-designers delight in using little "tricks," such as input boxes, opening new browser windows, blinking text, animations or background music. First time visitors may be impressed. However, after a few more visits, the viewer will just be annoyed. It is best to stay away from these types of things. It's easy to overdo it with busy backgrounds and glitzy ornaments. A colored or textured background should never make the text difficult to read. Likewise, dancing buttons, blinking text and other bells and whistles can draw too much attention and detract from the overall effect.



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### **Make it Personal**

Functional, successful websites are neat, clear and concise, and they're also personal. Remember that the website is addressing human beings. Engage the visitors simply and directly. Design headings with an understanding of the type of information customers' need and the language in which they formulate questions.

### **Where should I go?**

Visitors need to know how to get around from page to page. When it comes to website navigation, cleanliness truly is next to godliness. Also, make sure that every subsequent web page has a link back to the main-front page.

### **Insure visibility on search engines**

Every day a new, improved or refined method comes along to index and search for websites. Just having a website does not mean you will be visible on the first page of a search. Inquire with your web hosting service or website designer about how to build your ranking. Google Adwords are one such method, but you are money ahead to seek input from a qualified web advertising specialist. Cross links are also important. If your website has a direct link to a cooking school, for example, and that cooking school has a link directly to you, search engines recognize the relationship, and your (and their) ranking is improved. Just having links that go one way are not of much importance in ranking your site.

### **Tooting the horn**

Posting testimonials from satisfied customers is a powerful way to build credibility. Use them and continue to update the postings by asking customers for a testimonial letter. We will discuss this later on as well. But don't be shy. Proudly post the words of others who think you are great. But as mentioned in the Maintenance section on the last page, don't let these get stale. A testimonial from 2 years ago is only good if you have several others filling in that time gap. A newspaper article or magazine story is treated the same way – if your only splash was many years ago with nothing since, the article may be pulled down.

### **Investigate SEO's**

SEO - short for search engine optimization - is about helping search engines understand your content, and helping users find your site and make a decision about whether they should visit your site through a search engine. You can hire companies that generate SEO's on your behalf, focused on you and your website.

Think of an SEO as someone writing a paper about your business, and posting this to the Internet. Search engines will pick up your URL and the keywords that this paper includes. The more SEO "papers/stories", the better. Search engines will see multiple different stories generated about you, and the more search engines that recognize "content" specific to you and your website, the higher the ranking score they will assess you at. When a person searches for "personal chef", all the websites with personal chef involved will display. The key is to have a LOT of SEO's ongoing. An SSEO should be a word count of 1,000 minimum. Since you probably do not have the time to write 300+ SEO reports – best to out-source for this. And that company should provide you with reports, showing which keywords are producing positive results. Take out the keywords that aren't producing, and add in new words. SEO's need to be fresh – using these over again tells the search engine that nothing is new, thus your efforts are wasted.