

## Planning Your Website

Keep it simple, organized and well advertised.

***83 million Americans have bought products online; in 2004, on a typical day 19 million Americans research a product online before buying it and 4 million Americans buy the product online.***<sup>i</sup>

**Data from the Pew Internet & American Life Project**

The Internet is a powerful beast; it can make or break a business. If you don't have a website or aren't visible on search engines, you miss out on these people. If your website doesn't make sense or isn't attractive, you lose visitors from search engines.

### **Starting your website**

Before you begin work on creating a website, you should do a little homework.

1. Get the big picture

What is the goal of your website? Is it to sell goods, present yourself or organization? Which demographic will be most likely to use the website, and what are their particular needs? If your website does not have a clear goal to begin with, organization will be hard later.

2. Put together a flow chart for your website

Your website now has a goal, right? Make a flow chart showing the organization of the pages you want. Ensure that the goal of each page is clearly stated in each blurb. With organization and a clear purpose, you will require less time of a web designer's help, and save money.

Now that you have a clear idea of what you want your website to do, it is now time to focus on preparing for and building your website.

#### **1. Invest in a domain name**

The Internet is a vast place. You need to stand out with a unique domain name. You can secure your own name.com or .net or .org on the internet from \$5-20 per year. This is a small price to pay for an invaluable tool. GoDaddy® Domains are the most simple solution for domain name purchases. The company is accredited the number one domain name registrar for .COM, .NET, .ORG, .INFO, .BIZ and .US domain extensions by the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, a nonprofit organization that oversees internet tasks.<sup>ii</sup> Visit GoDaddy® at <http://www.godaddy.com/>.

#### **2. Start paying for hosting**

Hosting is where your actual website will sit. Imagine a domain name as a brand, and hosting as the box for your content. The content is in the box and the brand lets customers identify the product on the shelf. Having hosting before your

website is designed has advantages. You can create a splash page for where your site will be and start including the domain name in your promotional materials, allowing for potential visitors to be attracted before the website is even up! There are two types of hosting:

A. Paid Hosting

GoDaddy® Hosting offers excellent hosting packages with the purchase of a new domain name. The servers have little down time and the customer support of these large corporations is unparalleled.

B. Free Hosting

There are quite a few free web hosts out there. Depending on your website, you may not need all the features of a paid web host, and could use the price break of not having to pay for hosting. These servers do not always have excellent uptime and often can leave you stranded by accidentally deleting your website. You pay the larger companies for peace of mind. One notable free web host is 000WebHost (<http://www.000webhost.com/>). **Caveat emptor, you get what you pay for.**

### 3. Set up email for your domain

GoDaddy® and other providers also provide email services. These will be important later on. Having your email addresses end “@hotmail.com” or “@gmail.com” send an amateur vibe. Millions of people use these addresses, but only your company will use your domain’s email addresses. These email addresses can become a key marketing tool for you later on if you choose to send out newsletters.

### 4. Commission Web Design

Now, you need to put something onto the server you just set up. This is the actual website. Many people choose to hire a Web Designer, and some choose to do it themselves.

If you create the website yourself, you would have to at least be proficient in coding HTML if you wanted to start from scratch. However, GoDaddy® and other websites offer free or inexpensive web design services that allow you to edit everything yourself. **However, these websites do not look professional.** If you have a Mac®, iWeb™ is an excellent program for creating aesthetically pleasing websites. Functionality of these websites can be limited, though. Many people utilize templates at TemplateMonster.com that satisfy their needs. It is very difficult to start off cold and create a website that successfully represents a brand or person.

Professionally designed web sites are consistent and take all the stress away from you. Often these designers are more seasoned to the diverse tastes of other web designers, so they may present you with solutions to problems that you never would have thought of. Using a web designer can also prevent you from running into five major problems that many websites face:

1. *Using your website as your sole marketing tool*  
"50% of Internet users who ever look up phone numbers, addresses or zip codes in their lives get such information online." <sup>iii</sup>

Websites contain phone numbers and addresses. When a potential visitor searches for something relevant to your website, they will often find that data right on your site. When your site isn't set up to be highly visible on a search engine, you lose lots of potential visitors and customers. **Websites are useless unless they are searchable.** Your website needs to be advertised elsewhere and should be submitted to search engines. Web Designers often offer a SEO (Search Engine Optimization) package with their design which allows your website to be searched through search engines. There are no guarantees through these services that your site will be the first result on every keyword, but you are visible. **Advertise!** If your website isn't advertised either online, in print or other media, people won't find you! Put that trusty domain name and email address you paid for on everything so that people can find and contact you!

2. *Slow speed*  
Many pages that aren't professionally created have slow download speed. This frustrates visitors on all computers. If you don't tailor your website to the slowest computer that will visit it, you will lose a lot of customers to sheer frustration. Flash websites are visually interesting, but take forever to load, especially on older computers. **Keep things simple.**
3. *Poor organization*  
Your website has a goal, right? Often websites that aren't professionally designed are organized in a fashion that makes sense to the creator, but not the visitor. The goal of your website must be clearly visible and easily obtainable by the visitor.
4. *Information overload*  
If your website has too much information that isn't essential, the visitor will miss what they are looking for. A visitor will usually decide within the first 10 seconds of browsing a page whether or not to stay. Web Designers know this and create easy to understand pages that are effective at getting the visitor to the goal. Never have two steps to do something when one will do. **Again, keep things simple.**

#### 5. *Inconsistent layout*

You or your company has a brand or image it exudes. Without a layout that is consistent through each page, a site looks horribly amateur. Each page should look like the last. Your brand has a particular way of presenting itself and an inconsistent layout makes a site look poorly designed. Often, people are inconsistent in web design because they need to present a lot of data a certain way. Web designers specialize in design and know how to adapt the data to be present in a functional yet eye catching way.

The book *The Big Red Fez: How to Make Any Web Site Better* by Seth Godin illustrates how to make any website effective by avoiding these mistakes. If you have a website that is consistent, easy to use and well advertised, it will effectively attract visitors and potential customers.

---

<sup>i</sup> Rainie, Lee. Horrigan, John. *Internet: The Mainstreaming of Online Life*, Pew Internet & American Life Project, Jan 25, 2005, <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2005/How-the-internet--has-woven-itself-into-American-life.aspx>, accessed on August 12, 2009. Page 3-7.

<sup>ii</sup> Source: Name Intelligence, Inc. 2006

<sup>iii</sup> Fallows, Deborah. *The Internet and Daily Life*, August 11, 2004, Pew Internet & American Life Project, <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2004/The-Internet-and-Daily-Life.aspx>, accessed on August 12, 2009. Page ii.