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Internet Software, Design & Development
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Ten Points to Consider Prior to Building Your Website

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The internet is ultimately about ‘selling something.’

Many prospects instinctively recoil when I bring this up in conversation, but it is true. It doesn’t matter whether you are a service organization, a vendor, a church, an information provider, whatever..., you are putting your message on the web to inform people of your existence, your ideas or philosophies or your products and services. If you don’t consider the market for these concepts and how to reach that market then you may as well stand at the seashore and holler at the waves.

The following ten points are designed to help you achieve success in your efforts to tell ‘*your story*’ on the internet.

1. What are your goals?

Devote time to think about what you want to accomplish with your website.

What is the story that you want to tell? To whom? Why?

Are you looking to post a static message on the internet or do you want the ability to include fresh, relevant content on a regular basis?



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If you elect to post fresh information on a regular basis, consider if you will really make the effort to do the work that it entails.

Nothing will damage your credibility more than a two year old message on your web site.

Will you want any special functionality or interactivity with your visitors? Do you want to collect information from your visitors, would you like them to be able to share information or interact with other visitors to your site? Would you like to develop a 'permissioned' e-mail database that enables you to send the latest information or topics to your visitors?

What type of design style appeals to you? Even more importantly, what will appeal to the class of visitors you want to reach? As in any endeavor, if you don't know where you are going, any road will take you there.

2. Think about the process.

How do people buy? How do they use the internet to find information or buy products, services or ideas? Do they really want to know all about you before they know if you have what it is that they are seeking? Strangely, a significant proportion of websites start by extolling their personal accomplishments long before they "capture" their visitor's attention with captivating descriptions of their products, services or ideas.



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3. Marketing.

It requires Marketing or to borrow a concept from Al Ries and Jack Trout, Positioning. Owning a place in the mind's eye of the consumer; understanding the market, the opportunity, your place in that market and how to own that place.

Don't know enough about it? Pick up the book, "Positioning, the Battle for the Mind" by Al Ries and Jack Trout. It's an easy read and just as germane today as when it was written.

If you are still not certain, seek help from someone who understands these concepts.

4. People cannot do business with you, if they don't know that you exist.

Search engines use spiders to crawl the web, looking at each site they find. They assess its content and determine where it should apply; prioritizing and presenting the most germane and valuable results (SERP's) when someone searches the web for information.

Gaining prominence on the web means attracting the Search Engines (Google, Yahoo, MSN amongst others) to your site. This process is called Search Engine Optimization (SEO).



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When we approach this subject with prospective clients, we almost unfailingly get one of two reactions:

“We know all about that and we are going to do it as soon as we get our web site built and on the internet”

Or

“I’m not convinced that SEO has any real value and I believe it is a waste of time.”

Step back for a moment in time. Think about how you use the internet to acquire information or products and services.

Now, think about how You would find You, if you didn’t know who you were?

You would probably go to your favorite search engine and search on the concepts that you believe will bring you the most relevant information regarding your area of interest.

We believe that optimizing web sites for search engines is an iterative process. It takes time, intelligence and good engineering. That said, there are certain optimization concepts that need to be considered before you build your web site. They are an integral part of the ‘bones’ of your website.



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Those who don't take time to consider these concepts in advance, invariably end up with a complete rebuild when they choose to optimize for search engines at a later date.

Suffice it to say, the most important concept here is "How would You find You, if you didn't know who you were?" Give it some serious attention, now, before the first line of code ever gets written.

5. Hosting.

Investigate the hosting options that are available to you.

What services are offered in the package price range that you are considering?

Does your prospective host offer the resources that you will need for your web site to operate effectively? Do they support the kinds of programming languages that will be used to create your web site? Do they offer reasonable access to the database technologies that you may desire to use with your web site? Do they offer e-mail service and for how many addresses? How many domains are included with the service?

Above all, ask yourself if this is a stable corporation that will be around to service your needs in the coming years?



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A year or two ago, we built two web sites for a client that had two different businesses. We weren't particularly impressed with their hosting arrangements and suggested that they make a change. They were reluctant to do so.

Last spring, we received a frantic early morning call; "Where are our web sites?" "How come we can't see them?" "This is costing us money, we are losing business opportunities."

Their hosting company had quietly slipped into bankruptcy without as much as a word to any of their hosting clients!

It took a week of serious work to set up a new hosting account, locate their domain information (they had no idea of where it was), get it transferred to their new host and upload all of the files for two websites to their new hosting location.

6. Documentation.

Whilst we are on the subject of hosting, whether you set up a hosting account or have someone do it for you, insist that you own it, not some third party. The account needs to be yours and you need to have the ultimate control over it.

Once the account has been established, make a permanent record of the account and all of the passwords associated with it.



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Store those records in more than one place and above all do not forget where that information is.

We have had countless experiences with organizations that either did not own their own accounts and domains or who lost that information. In each case, it cost them time, money and opportunity. Forewarned...

7. Visual Appeal

Contrary to all the “Content is King” chatter that prevails around the internet, in the first ten seconds, visual appeal ranks higher than content. Your prospect is traveling down the information highway at a thousand miles per hour, if your billboard doesn’t grab their attention, they’re going to keep on going.

Make effective use of proportion, color and graphics!

Less is more.

“A painting is never finished—it simply stops in interesting places.”

Paul Gardner



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8. Content.

“Content is King.”

Content really is king! Suitably confused? It’s a chicken and egg thing; without good relevant content in the first place, that prospect is unlikely to find your visually appealing place on the information highway.

If you have devoted any time to researching the web, you will have come across this concept frequently. Yet, many sites lead off with content that is not of primary interest to their visitors. Worse yet, many sites contain content that isn’t even current. Newsletters and events pages that are often years old convey the impression that your website is just an afterthought and not of primary importance to you.

Think of the web as your store window. Put your most enticing merchandise or concepts on display. Right up front!

Consider secondary content, resources and advice that will be of interest to your visitors. And, consider the kind of information that will lead them to return to your site frequently and encourage others to visit your site as well. Good traffic will ultimately lead to more transactions. A picture is worth a thousand words. Display your merchandise with good graphics!



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9. What does it cost?

Unlike Number One on the list, this is frequently the first question to arise when we meet with prospective clients.

The cost of producing and maintaining a website varies in proportion to the functionality required. Basic sites, that may not address many of the concerns and requirements you have, may be had for as little as \$1000 or less. Amazon.com spent over a \$billion for theirs and Barnes and Noble nearly as much.

This is not to say that you must spend huge amounts of money to make an impact on the web. However; these organizations sell relatively inexpensive products, yet they have made a substantial investment in the web to make the most favorable impression and gain market share. They recognized the importance of having the very best tools. You should too.



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10. Get some good help.

Implementing successful web sites entails more than just a bit of html.

It requires business acumen, sales, marketing and advertising skills, an understanding of user psychology and some really good engineering.

Seek some skilled assistance from someone who understands and practices these concepts, has good engineering skills and can actually communicate with YOU in the language of your choice!

The best advice we can offer: Go back to Number One on the list. Think it through.