Understanding the Website Design Process

The following are articles to help you understand the website design process. Some of this information may be redundant but we hope after skimming through these sections you will have a better understanding of the website design process.

The Key Ingredients to making a good website

- Intuitive Navigation
- Fast Loading Pages
- Attractive Colors
- Smart Page Layout
- Browser Compatibility
- SEO Friendly

Intuitive Navigation
When you run into the store to buy a gallon of milk, you want to find the dairy section immediately, right? The same thing applies when a visitor comes to your website. They want to find information or products quickly. By using intuitive navigation, site visitor will be able to find important information with ease. It is always a good practice to place your main links at the top of the page as well as the bottom. Sometimes it is more convenient for your users to click on a link at the bottom of your page than to scroll to the top of the page.

Another important part of the navigation is the menu design. With menus your visitors can easily see where they may navigate in the web site.

Slow Loading Pages
Internet time is warped. Seconds seem like minutes. Nobody, not even the most patient person in the world, wants to wait for a page to load. You literally have a few seconds to for your page to load or your visitor will click on to the next site.

High resolution graphics and rich interactive media are the typical culprits for slow loading web pages. When you work with a good web designer just as an example, graphics are handled in a special way so that you can achieve fast loading pages.

Appealing Color Scheme
This is an important and underrated element in web design. This is feel good time. This is time to add a little extra sugar to make it sweet. You want your

visitors to enjoy and savor the website - not to strain their eyes. A professional web designer knows how to use contrasting and complimentary colors just right.

Steer clear from dark backgrounds or bright ones like red, yellow or green which can draw attention away from the key messages. In addition, do not use dark text on a dark background. That's like burning the chocolate chip cookies. Above all, make sure your text is easy to read and is more prominent than the background.

Page Layout
Be consistent. Create a model in which carries throughout the site. If, for example, you use a two-column layout, then every page should have a two-column layout. The top and bottom navigation should always be in the same location. Have the important information located in the section that is most easy to find. Most of us are trained to view a web page starting with the top right corner and then going down toward the lower left on a diagonal. Layout your key points with this in mind.

Cross Browser Optimization
Just because your website looks perfect in Internet Explorer does not mean it will look the same in other browsers like Firefox or Safari. Each browser and version of that browser will handle HTML Tags differently.

Take Advantage of SEO
You wouldn't think of having jelly without peanut butter. So, why would you have a website and not optimize it? At the very least, you should add a title to your website, META tags, ALT tags, relevant content, title tags on links and other SEO practices. Internet marketing is its own beast to tackle.

Internet marketing takes a lot of time and dedication, but making sure your website is SEO friendly is the first step to attract targeted visitors to your website.

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Great Websites
We're all looking for one thing on the web: information - content that is useful and valuable to us. The web was born to make information sharing easier, not to sell. Therefore, we ignore anything that we relate to selling: banners, graphics, and animation. We focus exclusively on the information we are looking for.

Blatant advertising doesn't work on the web, but content that informs and educates us often makes us buy.

If you plan to make websites then this secret will help you create better, more successful and profitable websites than any web design software will. Give your visitors what they want, not what you want, and they will love you for it. You will earn their trust, they will recommend you to their friends and what's more, they will buy from you. How do you use this secret on your own website?

What People Want From Your Website
- People don't want to be sold to on the web. We can't turn off ads on TV and radio but when it comes to the web, we are all part of it, and we can decide on our own whether to accept advertisements or not. And most of the time, we don't.
- People look for information above anything else. Few of us are looking or willing to buy right away. Carefully written information, however, can persuade us to buy.
- Millions of web pages are competing for our attention. Make your own website stand out and watch it become successful Build Your Website Following These Steps

Websites that are successful all follow these simple steps. They don't trick or cheat; they simply give their users what they want.

How to Pick a Memorable Website Name
Most good single word and two word website names are taken so, unless you can buy florist.com or loans.com, choose a website name that's nearly just as memorable:
- Avoid website names with more than 1 dash (e.g.www.red-california-roses.com)
- Get a short website name. Two words maximum, preferably one.
- Use real or made up words that are easy to pronounce and remember. Avoid words that are awkward to pronounce.
- Find a website name that rolls in your mouth. Test this by asking your friends to pronounce and spell it.
- Pick words that also have an emotional charge to match the subject of your website
- Buy variations and .org, .net extensions of the perfect website name for your own website. Some people may misspell it while competitors will try to steal it.

How to Make Sure Visitors Find What They Search For
You must know what your visitors are interested in before you start to create content for your newly built website. The more your content matches what they are searching for, the more happy visitors you will have. Happy visitors buy more easily and gladly recommend your website to their friends.

Most people use search engines to look for stuff so use keyword tools such as Overture's term suggestion tool and Wordtracker's free trial http://www.wordtracker.com to see what keyword combinations they use to find sites with your subject.

You can also see what people look for by checking out some of these resources:
- Discussion lists, message boards, forums related to your subject
- Feedback from visitors if you already have a site
- Public feedback on other related sites
- Guestbooks on your own website or on others
- News sites such as Google News http://news.google.com
- Published interviews
- Government statistics or published on other websites
- Public surveys, Blogs and Polls
- Specialist communities and Online journals
- General communities like Orkut, Ezboard and then drill down to specific groups
- Groups and clubs such as MSN Groups http://groups.msn.com, Yahoo Groups http://groups.yahoo.com, Google Groups http://groups.google.com
- Things people ask on Google answers http://answers.google.com/answers
- Chat rooms and IRC networks

There is gold in doing this sort of research. You will get to know your visitors better than anyone else and be able to address their questions more easily and accurately. You will also never run out of ideas what to write about.

Build Good Navigation
Navigation works in the same way aisles in a supermarket do. They take you to the stuff you want to buy. But sometimes the signs above the aisles don't make it clear where the stuff you want could be. This is why it is so important to create good navigation on your web site.

If the information is not organized how people expect it to be, they might never find what they were searching for, however good your content might be. You can't afford to make it difficult for your users to go through your pages. Put links where people expect to see them. It's a good idea to embed links in your content to related pages, products or external sites.

What Background Colors Work Best?
Years of testing have shown that black text on white background works best on websites. We're used to read black text on white paper and the screen is simply a different kind of paper. Avoid creating your own custom graphics to use as background. Your visitors will find text on a background with patterns difficult to read.

Images have many colors and it's likely that the text color will blend in with the background. This makes part of the text impossible to see and read. Frustrated, your users will leave and they will not give your website a second chance. There are many more websites offering what you do.

If an image must be used as background it should not disrupt reading. Make sure the text color contrasts well enough to be easily read. If your text is white, for example, make your background image dark.

Often, the best choice for a background has proved to be a single color. When choosing the background color remember that users will not see it the same way you do. Screens of different quality have different settings and colors don't appear the same from person to person.

The rule of thumb is to build a website with dark text on light colored background. Some argue that the background should not be completely white, but just slightly darker. On some screens the black and white contrast is far too strong and tires the eyes. You don't want to give your users a headache.

If text, navigation and other features are clearly readable, then it will work for all your visitors.

What Graphics to Use
"How do I make my own website successful?". The secret to a successful website lies with words. The power of the written word is astonishing: it can make us laugh, it can make us cry or it can make us buy. The web is based on words and we look for our content every day, most of the time just because we want information.

Accept the fact that words are the core reason people visit your website. Graphics don't sell products, words do. Carefully crafted marketing talk can help persuade more than the nice graphics produced by any web design.

Graphics should be used only when they are essential to communicate something that is not possible to with words alone. If you want to sell products then show pictures of the product in use. Use pictures to help visitors imagine themselves using that product.

Avoid using graphics that have no relation to the surrounding text. This will make people lose confidence in your website.

What Should Stand Out On Each Page
A common mistake is to try to attract visitors' attention with everything you've got: graphics, animations, banners and advertisements. You're trying to keep them at your web site by confusing them and making it difficult for them to decide where to go next.

Make it simple for them to find what you came for. This is the realistic and effective approach to building a website. Create a list of important features to go on every page. Decide which is the most important element. On some pages it might be the marketing copy, the special offer link or the buy button. Make it singular; keep it down to a single important element per page.

If you want visitors to look at the special offer, don't distract their attention with other banners and graphics. Their attention span is very limited. Unrelated graphics often distract from making the sale if your website is commercial in nature.

Have someone glance over your web site and pay attention to where they look or click first. If it's the "Buy now" or "Special offer" link, or anything else that takes priority on that page, then you've created a successful page. If they first glance at the flashy graphics at the top then you've probably lost their attention.

How to Make the Text Easier To Read
The fonts that work best in print are serif fonts (e.g. Times New Roman). Serif fonts are extremely detailed fonts that don't read well on screen because of low resolution. Most printed material, however, is using mostly serif fonts because it's very readable on paper.

The types of fonts that work best on websites are sans serif. These are simplified type letters created to be very readable at small sizes and on most screens. You too have probably found it more difficult to read a web page written in Times New Roman than in Verdana or Arial (sans serif fonts).

Using the same font size throughout your text proves not only monotonous but discourages users from reading the entire page. How to make your text attractive to read? Make sure to use different sizes and colors for headings, subheadings and paragraphs proves and give plenty of space in between.

People who wear glasses should be allowed to increase font size for easier reading. Nearly all browsers have an option to increase text size but only if the web page is designed to allow it. This is one of the most common mistakes made.

Putting the font size in pixels instead of points or ems disables this feature. It makes the font size fixed and that can be too small to read for partially sighted people or for those wearing glasses. If they can't read the information they came for, they will go to a website where they can. No one is willing to strain their eyes to read information that they could probably find somewhere else.

Why Serve Information In Bite Sized Chunks?
Breaking up the information in smaller paragraphs can greatly cut the time people need to scan the content. People scan first to see whether what they search for is on that page. Long blocks of text can put people off from reading through.

No matter how good the screen or the conditions for reading are (e.g. colors, light); it is still much more difficult to read on screen than on paper. Writing for print (such as books or brochures) is very different from writing for the web.

Emphasis and briefness make content on the web attractive to read. A web page should have a primary heading describing very briefly what the page is about. It should also have secondary headings for each important section.

Break the text in short paragraphs (3-5 lines), use short phrases that read quickly and use as few stop words as possible (e.g. and, to, when, etc). Try to use words with few syllables that even 10 year olds can understand. Use a thesaurus to find alternatives to long and pompous words or both.

Dashes and bullets are excellent tools to increasing readability while bold and italics can make key points stand out. One and a half or double paragraph line height can be used but never use single line height or the text will look too crammed.

Your visitors can figure out what the page is about instantly and take in key points at first glance if you help them. Not only do you have to get your point across quickly but also make your writing concise. The more you say in fewer words, the more you keep your visitors focused on your website. Try to cut out all the fluff and make "every word tell".

How to Use Links on Your Website?
People learned early on that links were the blue, underlined phrases you can click on. Visited links were purple. All other text was black. Designers, however, started using other colors for links and text to blend in better. Nowadays we see links that are not underlined, have the same color as the rest of the text. The use of visited link color has dropped too.

Links should stand out and cry "I'm a link, you can click on me!" Don't take up the example of people who don't pay enough attention to links.

Website tips:
- Users expect links to be blue and underlined and text to be black. Keep these colors if possible.
- Links should always stand out and be easily distinguished from regular text.
- A color other than regular text should be used for visited links.
- Text color should contrast well with the background.
- Create a special effect on mouse over to emphasize that they're looking at a link If possible use web safe colors.

Why Put Load Speed above Everything Else

Your own web site should be all about load speed. Building your website for the widest possible reach means your website has to be blazing fast. Pages have to load nearly instantaneous even on slow modems. Cut load times to a minimum by doing the following:
- Take out any graphic that doesn't add to the user experience. A useful graphic is one that presents the information in a way that is not possible using words lone. Anything else is just one extra delay between your website and your visitors.

Websites and Search Engines

Most people use search engines to find the information they want on the web. If you can get top rankings for keywords that match the content of your website you are guaranteed to see a spike in visitor numbers. Some people use less than legit methods to rank high but their success can only last a couple of months. One way to make sure you can dominate the top of the search engines in the long term is to:
- Learn how to make your website easy to use by visitors
- Focus on giving out useful information
- Make sure your navigation works well
- Try, as much as you can, to follow the guidelines the W3C gives to make websites accessible and usable.

Conclusion

Users don't notice when a website works well for them because they're too busy taking in the information they came for. They do notice, however, when the pages take too long to load, the text is hard to read, that top right image is blinking all the time and they have no idea where to go next.

This is not a step by step 'how to' to making a great website. Following this advice, however, will help you make your own websites as well as those of others easier to use. If your websites are commercial in nature, then the advice will make you bring more money.

More Website Tips: Making a Web Site Accessible

Website Design Tips - Good Website Design
The design and layout of your site is the next most important part of building a website. Make a bad choice here and it won't matter how great your content is or how much advertising you do. If your site looks bad no one will visit and those that do won't stay long or buy anything.

Choose your colors carefully and keep in mind that your tastes may not be appealing to your target audience. Try a few different color schemes and ask some of your friends or family for their opinions about them. And remember this term, "white-space". In general, white-space is the cornerstone of good website design. Keep the background areas where your information or products will be displayed white or another light / pale color. Dark or oddly colored backgrounds distract your visitors from your information and also can make it difficult to read. Background images are also a big don't for the same reasons plus they make your pages load more slowly. Colored text should also be used sparingly.

Contrast is key; otherwise it can be very difficult to read. Here's an example. Try to use colored text only to emphasize important information. If you choose to use a color other than black throughout your site make sure it is dark.

The layout is how things are arranged on your pages. There are many different ways to display your content and we'll cover that a bit farther down the page. What we're going to discuss here are the elements that frame your content such as your navigation menu buttons, any graphical accents, logos, etc.

The name of your website, domain name, or business name should be prominently featured somewhere at or near the top of your pages either within your logo or near it. And it should fit within the typical boundaries of the page. If you make it too big or it contains too many words then it will stretch your pages so wide that most visitors won't be able to see the whole page unless they scroll sideways. Very annoying, and definitely not good website design. More about this later.

The placement of the navigation buttons or links of a website are usually placed in one of 3 different areas of the page; across the top of each page or down the left or right side. Regardless of where you choose to put them try to keep the text on the buttons or in the links as short as possible. Anything longer than one or two words will cause that part of your layout to be too wide and crowd your content area.

Where your navigation buttons or links appear on your pages should be decided by the number of main or primary pages you will have in your website. Primary pages are the pages organized just below your home page in the structure or diagram of your website.

In general, you can only fit up to 8 buttons (maybe less depending on how much text you use) across the top of your pages and if you choose that layout then how the subpage page links are displayed also may have a limitation. Some layouts with top page primary page buttons will also display subpage links in a second row across the top and others will display them down the left side of the page.

Navigation buttons down either side of your pages don't run into any limitations due to the endless amount of vertical space on every page. Remember though that the amount of text on the buttons will greatly affect the amount of space for content.

More Website Design Tips - Screen Resolutions
As promised, here we will discuss the topic of screen resolution or page width. One of the most frequent mistakes we see people make is they build their site in such a way that it looks great on their own computer, but terrible on just about any other. How can this happen you ask? It happens because of the various screen resolution or display settings available on every computer.

A few short years ago, monitors were so small that the best screen resolution setting on them was 640x480. Then as average monitor sizes increased the best resolution moved up to 800x600 and eventually the standard will move up again to 1024x768 or higher. The problem that occurs because of these different display settings is that a page created on a computer set to 1024x768 or higher will only be seen the same way on other computers set to the same resolution. Because we are at a time in the evolution of computers where the standard is currently moving between two widely used settings this issue occurs a lot.

The good news is that as long as you create your website with your computer set to the 800 x 600 resolution it will appear fine on any computer set to that same resolution or higher, which is 95% of all the computers connected to the Internet. Update - Spring '06

The above article was originally written way back in 2002. Unfortunately, the potential problems that can arise with varying screen resolutions hasn't gone away or gotten any better. In late 2004, many computer manufacturers started offering wide screen computers presumably to accommodate movie watchers. Now there are as many as 7 or 8 different screen resolutions commonly in use instead of the 3 or 4 that were common a few years ago. Because of that, we now recommend our customers use a percentage option when setting their site page width setting. The percentage options allow the site to automatically expand or contract to fill the computer screen up to a specific percentage of the screen width. For example, the 90% setting will fill 90% of the screen width regardless of the resolution being used by the computer.

Using percentages as the site width setting does make it easier for your site to look its best on as many different computers as possible. However, there is still the potential for problems. You should still check your site in various screen resolutions after each time you add new pages or content to make sure nothing is overriding the percentage option you set. For example, if you put a very large image on a page that prevents the page from contracting for smaller resolutions then visitor's browser won't be able to accommodate the percentage setting the site is telling it to use. Images and other graphics cannot automatically resize themselves on the fly based on the visitor's computer resolution. Your site page boundaries can expand and contract based on the percentage width setting, but only if the images and other graphical content give it enough room do to so.

Why Your Business Needs a Web Site
Web sites work. No matter what your business or profession, a web site can generate business, promote goodwill among customers and prospects, and deliver strong marketing messages - whether your business is small, large or in-between, well-established or brand-new.

People use the Web in greater and greater numbers, more and more every day. Even if you are a completely local small business, service, contractor or consultant, odds are people have used search engines to look for your web site - and if you don't have a web site... well, you get the picture.

Your business web page delivers that picture to your customers and prospects, and does it 24/7/365.

Perhaps the most common misconception about business web sites is that they must offer products for purchase, accept credit cards and process financial transactions, and so on. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

While e-commerce web sites are increasingly popular, the vast majority of business web sites are still information and communication rather than purchase-oriented. If your business offers products and services appropriate for retail sale over the Internet, then by all means you should consider an e-commerce web site (and read about such sites elsewhere in these pages.) But if, like most businesses, your products and services aren't intended for Internet sales, you still need a web page of your own..

The first thing you will need is a web hosting service
That's the address of your business web page, and the company that actually stores your business's web page on its computers and makes it available to Web users. Many web hosting companies, offers both domain and hosting services. Here are some things to consider as you apply for a web domain and hire a web hosting service:
- Name your business's web domain: Ideally the address of your website will match the name of your business, such as ABC.com; in reality, many

addresses are already taken. If that's the case for you, give some thought to an original web page address/name that reflects your business: ABCmytownname.com, perhaps, or something similar. Remember: your web page address should deliver your business's name as closely as possible, as well as being memorable and distinctive. Your website's address is a marketing tool too!

- Hire the right web hosting service: Clearly, we're biased about what makes a good web hosting service, but we also have some experience in the matter: Look for:
- A web hosting service that's well-established and has a reputable history
- Compare fees - and what services and features are provided for that fee
- Don't forget the future: you will find that your business web site can easily be expanded, updated, grown. Make sure your web hosting service can accommodate changes and additions, quickly and economically.

The next step is web design itself. There are a couple of ways to go about this:

Create a Web Site
- Using web site templates is the most economical way to build a website
- Get Custom Web Design: Custom web site designs costs more than if you make your own web page, so you'll want to be sure that both your goals for your business web site and the capabilities of your web designer justify the cost of having a custom web site.

How to Make a Website Road Map
Imagine if every time you go to your favorite store to buy toothpaste, they have it in a different location. There is no women's clothing section, no area for household cleaners--everything is just shelved haphazardly. Your favorite store would not likely be your favorite for very long.

Your customers will feel that same frustration if they come to your Website and cannot find what they want. That is why building logical navigation and robust search features is crucial when you create a Website.

Menus and navigation bars are primary ways customers find information. When you begin thinking about how to build a Website, utilizing these Web building tools is critical. You can incorporate several menus on each page, as long as they are distinct and their purpose is clear. For example, you might have a menu on the left side of a Web site page linking to main product categories and a list at the top linking to general information on your company.

Let's say you have a category for "health care products" and "sporting goods." If you list each category separately in your menu, when the customer chooses "sporting goods," they will be taken to a page focused on that merchandise. The menu on the side will now list "outdoor wear" and "camping equipment." At any

time, your customer can move forward through the links or go backward to the main topic. Creating a professional looking and easy to navigate Web site ensures that your customers will never get lost.

The Basics of Creating a Good Web Site for Your Business
When you start thinking about a Web site for your business, appearance will be a primary consideration. With a few simple pointers, you will be able to create a Blog or a Web site that is a pleasure to view and use.

Colors
One of the key components to designing a Web site that will speak to your customers is a great color palette. The colors for your site should convey your company's "personality." If you provide automotive accessories to mechanics, for example, pastel colors might not be the best choice. Sporty red, silver, black, and blue are colors typically associated with cars, so these should be high on the list for your Web site creation.

Typefaces
Fonts, or typefaces, should also be picked based on the personality of your company and the feeling you wish to convey to customers. Using the example above, if you are designing an automotive accessory site, you cannot go wrong with simple sans serif typefaces for the text. Typefaces suggesting movement would be ideal for headers and other important display text. Above all, when considering how to make a Web site that is user-friendly, you should never choose style over readability. If a customer is unable to read a product's description, they will quickly leave your page.

Pictures and Graphics
Last, but not least, choose pictures and graphics that display your products in the best light possible. If you already have a logo, make it an integral part of your site by displaying it on each page. Use your existing logo for clues on color palette and typefaces. Pick elements and graphics that will nicely complement your logo. Finally, make sure product pictures are large and clear enough that your customer will be able to see the appropriate level of detail.

With these few tips, you will be well on your way to learning how to make a Website that will be a joy for your customers to visit again and again.

Beginning your Website Development
So, you have decided that you would like to have a website to represent yourself or your organization online. Now what? The first thing you will need to do is determine what the purpose of your site will be. What is the aim of your website? To sell? To inform? To persuade? To entertain? These are some good questions to begin with. Once you have determined the purpose of your site, you can begin to shop around for the type of website design you need.

If you have decided that you would like to sell things through your site, then you will need to purchase a website development package that includes shopping cart software. While some website designs may incorporate the use of simple purchasing buttons like PayPal(r), if you plan to accept credit card orders directly through your site and not through a third party, like PayPal, then you will need a shopping cart software solution. The extra benefit of shopping cart software is that most contain easily managed tools to upload products and pricing quickly, as well as maintain your overall stock.

If you are planning to inform, entertain, or persuade with your site, then you might want to think about what specific features you would like to have in your website design. A good way to determine this is to look at some of the sites that you like or are in your industry - these can give you an idea of what types of features and designs you prefer. If you know what you want on your site before purchasing, it ensures that you do not waste time buying the wrong product that is too limited for your needs or getting a more expensive option that you may not need. This is especially helpful when choosing a package that includes professional designers to create your website.

Some common functions that appear on websites that will factor in to what type of package you buy are chat room features, database capabilities, site-wide search functions, multimedia files like movies and music, Flash components, and log in capabilities. These are more advanced features that are not included with most basic website design packages. If these are features that you would like to have on your site, then you will want to look for more customized website designs that companies may offer.

Essentially, the more you know about what you want for your website development, the more you will be able to utilize website designs services fully. So take these first steps to get you started and you'll be happier with the end result!

Information Architecture and Your Web Site
Information Architecture is a commonly used buzzword that describes how you structure the layout and content of your Web site. Effective Information Architecture always begins with proper Web hosting and with creating a website with the user in mind - your web site will perform well only if your customers and prospects think that it works well for them. Navigation tools, action links, placement of illustrations and text, colors, type faces and content, should be selected, designed and written to make users' experiences with your Web site simple, sensible and successful.

The first step is to determine the content of your site:

- What information will be beneficial to customers or prospects need
- How many pages will you need

- What type of information will be on each page
- How much information will you need to convey
- Arrive at a sensible set of navigation and action buttons that should include E-mail launcher, purchase button or shopping cart if you offer E-commerce, return-to-homepage button, and other navigation and action specific to your business (catalog requests, newsletter subscriptions, etc.)

When it comes to maximizing the effectiveness of your website design, choosing a simple design is key:

- Pick pleasing and legible color and type combinations
- Typeface and colors should be consistent throughout the website
- Keep the amount of text and the number of photos on each web page to a minimum on each page.
- Standard buttons that repeat on multiple pages should be in the same place on each page
- Page layout should be as consistent as possible and practical throughout the Website.
- Be sure to employ the same web design principles to new pages as you expand your website.
- Take multiple tours of your business website during the website building process. Look at your web pages from your customers' perspective, and ask:
- Is the site sensibly arranged?
- Is it easy and logical to navigate through multiple pages?
- Are buttons and standard features clearly and consistently located?
- Is there any aspect of the website that's difficult to use or that might discourage repeat visits?

And when the website building process is complete, go through the site twice before opening it to the public, making sure that ever aspect of your business's web information architecture will make your customers visits pleasant, meaningful and successful.

Remember: it's your website, but it's your customers who will use it.

Pick the Right Domain Name for Your Business Web Site
Your business' domain name - its' Internet address (URL) - can be a valuable marketing and branding tool. So you and/or your web designer need to make sure you have the best, most memorable domain name possible.

Ideally that would be the name of your business: XYZ1Company, for example, would optimally want www.xyz1company.com as its' Internet address. But many domain names are already taken, either by another business named XYZ1Company, or by cyber squatters, people who register many likely domain names and attempt to sell them, often at high prices.

There are services offered by reputable domain companies that can alert you to when your preferred domain name becomes available or help you purchase a domain name that's already taken. But if you don't want to wait – or purchase the domain name from the current holder at a premium price; how do you choose another domain name if your first choice is taken? Here are a few tips for electing an alternate domain name:

Localize you business domain name: if you serve primarily a local or regional area, think about adding that to your business domain name: oregonxyz1company.com, for example, or atlantaxyz1company.com Personalize your business domain name: if your business features your personal services and expertise, you can use those to you business Web site's advantage: janesmithxyz1company.com, for example. Shorter urls are generally better for business Web site domain names (they are easier to remember) -- so you might try janesxyz1company.com

Put products in your business domain name: if you have a distinctive line of products or services, use them for a distinctive business domain name: xyzc1ompanycatering.com, for instance or even cateringbyxyz1company.com Phrase making can make effective domain names: if your business lends itself to it, consider using a memorable phrase for your business Web site's domain name: a caterer, for example, might try sauceforthegoose.com. Done right, a cleverly phrased business domain name is not only memorable; it becomes a key part of your business Web site branding efforts Consider different web site extensions: think about xyz1company.org, xyz1company.net, xyz1company.edu, xyz1company.biz, etc.

Whatever approach you take, you can use some simple tools such as WHOIS to see if the domain name is available.

And once you have the right domain name for your business Web site, be sure to sign up for automatic registration renewal to insure that you don't lose the Web site domain that you have worked to secure.

Site Security 101
Your business Web site should represent every aspect of your business – and that definitely includes security, honesty, trustworthiness and ethics.

Fortunately, a few simple actions can insure that your business Web site more than lives up to the standards you set, and helps assure that no one who visits your Web site will get any unpleasant surprises.

Webhosting Security
The largest and most familiar online threats - viruses and worms, identity theft, hacking - will be the primary responsibility of your webhosting service, the

company that actually stores your business Web site on its computers, and may also maintain your Web site domain (address).

Reputable webhosting services and companies:

Maintain strong and constantly updated anti-virus, anti-spam and firewall software, as well as installing all relevant updates and patches as soon as they become available. Before signing up with any webhosting company, make sure that they help provide these fundamental security features.

Offer recognizable and respected secure communications, including high-level encryption (translation of confidential information into code) and transaction privacy protection.

If your Web site doesn't offer credit card and other monetary transactions - many small and medium-sized businesses don't - your webhosting service should still offer a Site Confirm Seal that you can post on your business Web site to confirm at a glance its trustworthiness and respectability.

Protect you against the hijacking of your own Web site by criminals or hackers who want to use it for malicious purposes. Review the list of features and services your webhosting company offers and ask about their anti-hijacking (and Web site domain name) protections.

Adhere to the same standards and respect for your customers that you do: for your business, your own Web site should not share or otherwise disclose the names (including e-mail addresses) of your customers, prospects and visitors.

Personal Approaches To Business Web site Security
In addition to security services provided by your webhosting company, there are steps you can and should take to add your own assurances to your business Web site's security profile:

Write a website policy that no customer or visitor information will be shared with any third-party, and post the guarantee (over your signature) on a special page within your own Web site. A link to that page from other business Web site pages provides an easy and effective way to put a "face" on your commitment to strong security practices and policies.

Write a computer and business Web site security policy for your employees, and insist that they sign it and follow its rules.

Take advantage of high-profile/low-cost graphical reinforcements of security practices and policies such as the Site Confirm Seal mentioned above; make sure that your web designer - or you, if you make your own web pages – post

such graphics prominently on your business Web site's home page and on all other pages.

A visit to your business Web site should be professional, informative and above all secure. By working closely with your webhosting service and web designer (and by following these rules yourself if you make your own web pages) neither you, nor more importantly your customers, will have to deal with security issues when dealing with your business' Web site.

Measure Your Website's Success
Is your business website as successful as it could be? You know whether or not you're actually acquiring business from your website. But is your website performing as well as it could be performing? How do you know? Measuring the effectiveness of your website is called web analytics, and the information that web analytics software collects can be invaluable in fine-tuning your website and website promotion efforts.

Simply put, web analytics track and report what people do when they visit your website: How many visitors? The simplest of web analytics is the number of visitors to your website, the number of times pages are viewed, tracked by programs called hit counters or web counters. Put simply, what web page hit counters do is log the number of visitors each page with your website receives. By monitoring these figures, you can use a web counter to give you a generally accurate sense of which pages within your site are the most popular.

While web page hit counters used to be prominently featured on many web pages - "You are visitor number XXX!" - This can be risky for business website: the web counter might show such slow increase in numbers that the results actually work against you!

How long do they stay? Web analytics software can also track how long your customers stay on your website, how many pages they visit, whether or not they are repeat visitors, and so on. Information from these web analytics can help you decide which of your web promotion design options are most effective, and which need to be tweaked or replaced.

Taking off from landing pages: More sophisticated web analytics tools can tell you which pages within your website are the most popular (often pages that have the largest number of external links or that respond best to search engine optimization tools.) Additionally, they measure and report to you which pages within your site generates the largest number of actions (sales, e-mail launches, etc.) All of which tells you which aspects and web design characteristics of your website promotion efforts are working best - and which are not.

Testing, testing: Web analytics can also help you test market different web promotion approaches, telling you quickly what is most effective and what needs

to be re-thought and re-worked. Web analytics are invaluable for what they tell you about your website; understanding and utilizing the reporting generated from this software is key to increasing the overall effectiveness of your site.

Web Site Mistakes to Avoid
Simple mistakes, as anyone in business knows, can have large consequences. And that's just as true online as it is to every other aspect of your business. Here are a few of the most common - and most easily avoided or corrected - business Web site mistakes:

- Slow loads: If your web hosting service can't deliver your pages quickly, your customers may not wait for your business web site to load. Make sure your web hosting service has the best, fastest and highest capacity servers and connections so that your web marketing speed isn't held back by their deficiencies. Change to a more sophisticated web hosting service if necessary. Even on fast, high-capacity web hosting services, it's a good idea not to have too many photos or other graphics on a business web page. Better to have multiple business web pages than to have customers leave rather than wait for your business web site to load.
- Too much web site for your customers: Whether you are building a web site yourself, or have hired a web designer to build a custom web site for you, don't feel that you have to include every fancy animation, sound or other special effect that's available. Not all of your customers, prospects and visitors may be able to handle those features on their computer or via their Internet connection. A sophisticated business web site and web marketing campaign doesn't have to be complicated or require a cutting-edge computer.
- Outdated materials: If your business web site contains dated materials or information, make sure they are removed once the date is passed. Few things send a more negative signal than out-of-date information. Special Note: Don't include a "web site last updated on" line on your business web site - that is a blunder waiting to happen for businesses that are not able to update information frequently.
- Errors: Misspelled words, typos, bad grammar and other common errors mark your web marketing efforts as sloppy, and may send the same signal about your web business efforts. Proofread all material carefully - and have someone else proofread it as well.
- Frequent Spam: Don't overload your customers with web marketing e-mails. It's just too easy to have your e-mails mistaken for spam. Send only those web marketing e-mails that you think that your customers will actually be interested in, use clear and concise subject-lines, and limit the number and frequency of web marketing e-mails you send as part of your site promotion efforts.

As you can see, most of these web marketing mistakes are not only easy to avoid, they also rest on common sense. Your web site customers will appreciate your efforts - and they may even come back to visit your site again and again.

How to Breathe New Life into Your Website in Order to Help Increase Sales
The familiarity that makes online customers comfortable with your online business can sometimes work against you.

Websites can become stale if there isn't an interesting reason to visit again and again.

You should plan to frequently update, upgrade and re-design your business Website in order to keep it fresh for your customers - just be sure you primary focus is on the goals of your business, not just Web design. Fortunately, there are plenty of website designs, web page templates and other tools available to help you accomplish this task.

Breathing new life into an existing business Website or online store design is easy, economical - and terrifically effective. Doing so will help breathe new, and renewed life into your online sales and web marketing success!

Why Hire a Website Designer?
No website can maximize its' potential without an attractive design. There are two options to create a design: hire a web designer or do it yourself. Here are some guidelines and factors to consider for both.

If you decide to create a website on your own, you might want to do some research before getting started. It takes time to design a good site, so only choose this option if you are prepared to spend the time and effort that it takes. Look at other organizations' websites in your industry to see what they did with their design. Websites that you like online are another good reference. Read how-to articles online that give tips and tricks for design and content. These are just a few ways to get you started.

On the other hand, professional website designers know which design attributes to use in order to help any site draw the eye of the public. These designers can help you increase your site's aesthetic appeal through a number of techniques, including those that might not be readily recognized by the general public, but are instantly noticed by website designers. For instance, the average person might think that since they like the colors of black and yellow, that they should make their site have a black background with yellow lettering. Professional designers will tell you that this is a huge mistake to make if you decide to make this your design. Website text is hard to read with this color scheme and font use. This is one example where web designers look at the design from many different points of view because that is how they are trained, as opposed to just the likes and whims of an average person that decides to make a website.

If your website is going to represent you professionally, it may be important to entrust a professional in creating your site. Not only will this save you time, it will ensure that your business is represented optimally and professionally on the

web. People that see a make-shift site for an organization assume that the business is run accordingly. Don't undermine your credibility, be honest with yourself about your design and online skills and consider hiring professional website designers.

If you have an eCommerce store, you may need a number of additional solutions, like a shopping cart, credit card transaction capability, etc. If this is the case, it may be best to look into the options which offer complete eCommerce solutions. If you want as much creative control as possible, then you might want to find a web designer that does highly customized work for your site. And, if you need more solutions than design, such as online marketing, then you will want to add extra services that include things like Search Engine Marketing and Pay per Click Advertising.

Does Your Website Have Sales Appeal?
Your business website homepage, and every page that follows, is an opportunity to tell your story to customers and prospects, to sell them on the quality of your work and products, whether or not your business accepts transactions and payments over the web. Taking advantage of this opportunity means paying attention to different web page design options and putting them to work on your web pages (as well as email and every other aspect of your web marketing campaign and website promotion.)

Let's look at a few simple techniques that can help increase the sales appeal of your website and help you to more effectively sell online. You should consider all of these techniques from the moment you begin creating a website.
- Link Clearly: From the business website homepage on, links and action-buttons (such as purchase or contact) should be prominently displayed, easy-to-find and in the same position on each page. Don't make your visitors work to find your e-sales tools.
- Don't Overload The Page - Or The Customer: Too much information applies to creating a website as well as to conversation. Effective business and sales web pages have one or two images, a reasonable and easily read amount of copy, as well as consistently located action buttons and navigation links. Spread your information over multiple pages rather than crowding everything onto a few. Think of it as the difference between a cluttered and cramped retail store, and a spacious, tasteful emporium - that's the difference between an overcrowded page and an effective web marketing site.
- Little "Extras" Work Well: But use them sparingly. Testimonial quotes, small announcement and promotional banners and so on can enhance a page's sales appeal. Just be careful not to overload the page. Be sure, to change or update the "extras" regularly. This is particularly important with specials, sales, and other dated materials. Website promotion can be undone by something as small as a long-out-of-date banner on an individual page.

- When creating a website and considering various design options and website promotion strategies, keep the ease of the customer in mind: pages should be open and clean, easily navigated, with action links easily found - that is a site with sales appeal.

Business Web Sites for Small Businesses
Small and purely local businesses need effective Web sites just as much as larger companies. Here's why:
- People expect it. Everybody is using the Web today, and it's a safe bet that your customers - and more importantly, potential customers who might find you by way of your business Web site - will expect you to be on the Web.
- Business Web sites send a serious business signal: creating a web site that represents your business on the Web helps send a clear signal that you are up-to-date and forward-looking. Your customers and vendors are all undoubtedly familiar with the Web, and they expect you to be.
- Business Web sites are available to do business. Because your business Web site is available 24/7/365 you have help to dramatically increase your marketing and sales potential.
- Business Web sites help with business branding. Whether you learn how to build a website yourself or hire a web designer to create a custom website for your business, you should make sure that every aspect of the web development and website design process works to build your brand. The name of your company, your logos and trademarks, E-mail signatures all contribute to effective Web branding via your business Web site.

Web sites can grow with your business. At first you may want only a small Web site, a few pages that contain a company overview, summarizes product or service offering(s) and provides address, phone and E-mail information. But you should plan for growth. Establish a clear and expandable strategy for web page layout, navigation, placement of logos and other branding materials, and so on. By attending to these matters when you begin creating a website, no matter how simple, you will be prepared to expand your business Web site when the time comes.

There is an old saying that there is no such thing as a small business when it's your business and because you do take your business seriously,

Update Your Web Site to Help Increase Online Sales
You know how important it is to regularly update your Web site in order to keep it fresh for customers and give them reasons to keep returning. Here are some important design, e-commerce and web marketing elements to keep in mind and put to work as you do so:
- Aim all updates at increasing e-commerce success. Whether you're considering expanding your business website, or just adding a new

product page to your online store, be sure to include web marketing and online branding elements:

- Use new product codes so that you can track the new online store elements' success
- Include existing and effective branding elements on new pages – and be sure to migrate new web marking and online branding elements to existing pages
- Don't forget the "must-haves" on every e-commerce and online store page: logo, e-mail launcher/contact button, navigation buttons and so on: and make sure they are placed consistently with their location on other pages in your online store
- Update regularly - and relate online updates to product expansions Synchronize/coordinate your online store and business web site updates and redesigns with new product introductions and "new season" product roll-outs. The more you integrate your online store updates with the expansion of your products and services, the more organic and memorable the update will seem to your online customers.
- Promote the update. Expansions, redesigns and even minor updates of your online store should be mentioned in e-mails to customer mailing lists, web marketing materials, search engine submissions, etc.
- Promote the update on your business web site as well: just don't do it too early or leave the "coming soon" announcement up too long. The purpose of the online store update is to keep your business web site fresh; be careful not to "date it" with announcements that have expired. * Add a news page or business blog Make sure to add fresh business news and online store items to it at least twice a week.
- Subscriptions are a prescription for profits. Give online shoppers and customers the chance to subscribe to e-mail newsletters and other web marketing materials, and use those materials to promote each online store update and business web site redesign. By keeping your business web site fresh, your online store will attract repeat visitors and contribute to ongoing e-commerce success.
- Give shoppers a reason to come back. Highlight new Web site features or updates, prominently display new product announcements/specials, and offer seasonal and time-critical specials to help motivate online shoppers to return to your web-based store.
- Online customers look for ease-of-purchase, your business website should be ready to easily and efficiently process orders every time a customer is ready to buy. Be sure you:
- Accept the top three credit cards
- Offer Paypal(r) or bank draft payment for customer who prefer not to use credit cards
- Consider adding a "Frequently Asked Questions" section (FAQs) to your web site to let customers get answers at-a-glance; place a link to the Customer FAQ on every sales and product web page within your we-based business.

- Discounts work! Online shoppers appreciate bargains, perhaps even more than shoppers in brick-and-mortar stores because they are able to check prices for the same products at multiple sites. Consider:
- Give discounts for volume purchases
- Time-sensitive discounts for repeat purchases made from your web-based business within a certain timeframe, for example, a week.
- Follow-up communications could mean follow-up sales - in addition to giving your online customers the chance to communicate with you, make sure you communicate with them:
- Send a "customer satisfaction" letter after the product or service is delivered in order to find out whether the customer was satisfied with the product. The e-commerce experience? The ease-of-use of your web-based business? Were there any areas of dissatisfaction?
- Ask if the customer's e-mail address can be added to your e-mailing list. Would the customer like to be added to an e-newsletter or other aspects of your online marketing campaign?
- Would the customer care to offer a testimonial - perhaps receiving a discount on future website purchases in return?

Knowing how your customers shop can help you make sure that your own online business is where they'll want to shop.

Preparing for Successful Web Marketing
In order to draw customers to your site, it's important to make your site accessible through a search engine. Submission to directories alone will draw far less visitors than high search engine rankings. Collaborating with professionals in Search Engine Optimization is the most surefire way to successfully boost your store in the Search Engine Result Pages (SERPs). However, you can take many steps, before or while you work with SEO professionals, to improve rankings and protect your site from penalization.

A basic understanding of how search engines work is key to building an SEO-friendly site. To establish rankings, engines use information gathered by robotic "spiders" that determine the value and subject matter of a site's content. Spiders consist of logarithms which aim to understand the primary subject matter of a site by noticing common keywords and phrases. Spiders also detect unethical SEO practices such as keyword stuffing. If they sense such foul play, they will punish the offending site with a bite of penalization, significantly lowering the site's rankings or casting it from the SERPs altogether. If you wish to build an SEO friendly site, concentrate on creating plenty of rich, pertinent content on a number of pages. Also, consider search engine submission. This will immediately let the engine know your site's out there (in time, however, it will automatically get noticed).

Using E-marketing to Drive Traffic to Your Website
Let's take a look at how you can create E-marketing campaigns that reach out to your customers to drive traffic and business to your website. Get your business website to work for you 24/7/365.

The first step is to consider the various approaches and E-marketing tools available to you:

- E-mail marketing: Just what it sounds like - using targeted E-mail marketing to let customers and qualified prospects know about specials, sales, new products, or just to keep in touch. E-mail marketing can be a very effective web marketing tool, but you should bear a few things in mind:
- Don't overwhelm the customers' E-mailbox: It is a rare customer who would appreciate getting daily or even weekly E-mail marketing letters. Think about how much E-mail marketing material you need to send, and then think about how often your customers want to hear from you.
- Have something to say: E-mail marketing works best - like other marketing media - when it offers distinct and special products, services and opportunities.
- Use a clear, distinctive subject-line: Make sure your E-mail marketing materials stand out from all the rest the customer receives. Your E-mail marketing subject-line should send your marketing message in specific, well-chosen words.
- Let them opt-out: Include a response-link that lets recipients notify you if they no longer wish to receive E-mail marketing materials (or newsletters, etc) from you. If a customer asks to be removed from this list, do it!
- Invite them to your homepage: Every E-mail marketing piece should include a link to your business website homepage or the relevant sales/special/new product pages within your site.
- Make sure your business website homepage (and other business website pages) match what you promise or offer in the E-mail marketing campaign! In
- other words, update the business website pages before you send the E-mail
- Marketing letters.
- E-mail newsletters: A specific, fresh and lively E-mail newsletter is a terrifically effective way to drive traffic to your website. Again, some points to consider:
- Create E-mail newsletters they'll want to read: Your E-mail newsletter should have something to say, say it clearly, and offer information or opportunities that the customers are interested in, rather than just general news or chat. This may mean you send your E-mail newsletter less frequently - but also that it'll be more effective.
- Consider a subscription offer: While you can simply send your E-mail newsletter to every name on your mailing list, give some thought to offering it by subscription. Include a small 'newsletter subscribe' button on

your business website homepage and all other pages, as well as a link to newsletter subscription-buttons in all of your E-mail marketing materials (including invoices, business E-letterhead, etc.)

- Make sure the e-mail newsletter matches the business website: as above, update the site before you send the E-mail newsletter.
- Bulk E-mail marketing: Huge E-mail lists are available for purchase from a variety of vendors. While there are advantages to bulk E-mail marketing - reaching a larger audience at far lower prices than traditional mail, global lists, etc., there are some points to consider before investing in bulk E-mail marketing:
- Do you need it? Are you looking to dramatically expand your business by trying to reach hundreds of thousands - or millions - of people? If not, you may be wasting your money.
- Are the names qualified leads? Probably not, unless you're buying a targeted (and more expensive) list from a trade association or list-qualifier you may be buying more irrelevant than relevant names.
- Is the bulk E-mail marketing list vendor reputable? Some aren't: check references and don't deal with "spammers."

Finally, notify all of your recipients that you won't re-sell or otherwise distribute their E-mail addresses or other private information, and include this information on your business website homepage, as well as in all other E-marketing campaign tools. And make sure you stick to your word.

Should You Pay To Advertise Your Business Website?
Suppose you gave a party and nobody came. That is the risk we take when we launch a business website. But customers and prospects can't enjoy the benefits of your business's web presence unless they know about your website. So how do you get the word out?

Web site marketing that includes Pay per Click (PPC) advertising!
In this article we'll look at the advantages of advertising your business website on other web pages, and whether advertising makes sense as part of your online marketing campaign.

If your business website is intended only to provide a web presence for a business that serves only local customers, you may still need to include advertising in your web site marketing mix. Check with local City Guide business websites and local newspaper websites to see if they accept banner ads, and consider placing your business in a banner.

And if you're looking for a larger audience:
- Pump Up The Volume: Programs that place sponsored Pay Per Click advertisements for your business website on leading search engine pages can
- be a phenomenally good and inexpensive investment:

- PPC means you pay only for actual visitors to your business website.
- PPC Click services often guarantee certain number of visitors to your business website each month!
- Look for Services that Include the Ads: When you use a recognized Pay Per Click service, your ads are placed on leading search engine websites in order to help generate traffic to your website - creating the ads should be included:
- The ads for your web marketing campaign should be based on a careful review of your business's nature and the nature of your business website * an effective keyword list should be developed that meets high standards of Search Engine Marketing. The list will be reviewed with you to make sure it meets your needs, and then an ad that meets search engine standards will be developed. This is the ad that will appear on relevant searches.
- Frequent reporting that shows the results of your ads on your business website - how many people click on the ad and get to your website - is an important part of the Search Engine Marketing service.

Web marketing with Pay per Click advertising can be a powerful tool for guiding your business website's presence - and building your business' customer base!

Some of this information may be redundant but we hope you now get the big picture :)