

Among the irresolute tasks that one undertakes to get their venture off the ground, one of the most uncertain is definitely your web site. With the time and expense that a well-designed site involves, most entrepreneurs often see it as an inevitable headache. Fortunately, it doesn't have to be. With the following suggestions, along with a savvy designer, you can have a well-built, effective web site in no time.

Set up your own web domain and hosting. A good rule of thumb when starting out is to have control of your own hosting account. I have had countless experiences of clients asking for me to work on their site, but not have any of the account information because the last designer disappeared with it.

There is a mixed bag of hosting providers available, and as one would expect, they are all vying for your business. Nowadays, one should not pay more than \$10 a month for a reliable service to host their small-to-medium business web site. One suggestion is 1&1 Web Hosting (www.1and1.com). At the time of setting up your hosting account, choose your domain name so that you have both on the same bill. A domain typically runs less than \$5 a month and is billed annually.

Determine your site's purpose. The first question you should ask is "what one thing do I want my visitors to do?" It sounds like a no-brainer, but it is dizzying how many web sites are built without a clear vision of the target response. Do you want clients to call you? Are you simply looking for investors? Are you looking to sell online? In determining the answer to the first question, you and your designer will lay out the site to accomplish just that. Come up with a statement that relays the intent of your website—what products or services you plan to sell, what demographic you plan to target, etc.

Content is king. You should spend a considerable amount of time on the content of your website before you bring your ideas to a web designer. It's hard to frame a design around little or no substance, and a designer may be able to pull ideas from the content you provide.

When developing your verbiage, there are a couple good points to bear in mind. First, you must realize that clicking is becoming as automatic as blinking and almost as involuntary. Many reports have confirmed that if a home page does not draw the visitor in within three seconds, most visitors will simply click to another website. Second, an average visitor will only scan the first 2-3 sentences of a home page and 3-4 sentences of a secondary page for compelling content before moving on. That gives you a tiny window to engage your visitor, so be sure that every word counts.

Build your site for the user. Your web site can have the perfect content and design, but if people don't know how to get to the content, or get lost, all of that hard work will be a waste of time. Consider the layout to be very similar to your favorite store, in that everything is laid out where you, the visitor, would expect it. Don't compromise design and substance for a good user experience, but try to blend the two together to both attract and retain users.

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