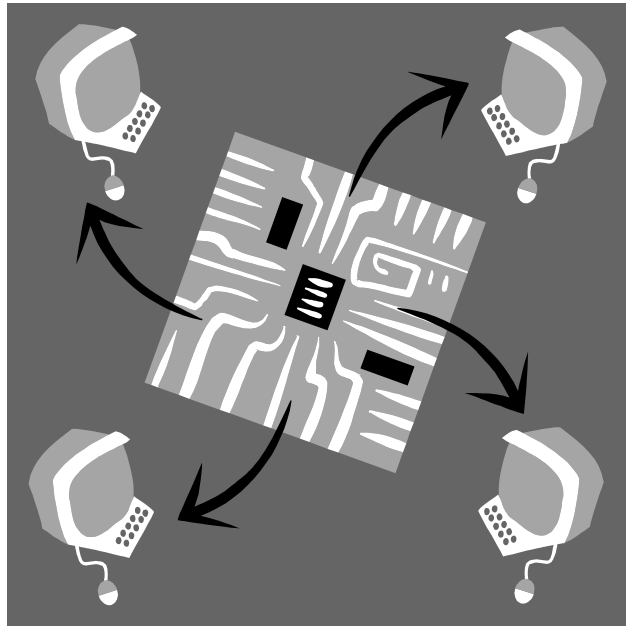


# Getting Started with Web Site Development



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## Introduction

Deciding to build a web site for your organization or business is a bigger decision than most people realize. On the surface it seems like a simple enough undertaking, but as most people quickly learn, there are many decisions that have to be made along the way. This can be a daunting task for those who are not familiar with what goes into the development and maintenance of a web site. To make matters worse, there are many crooks and unscrupulous businesses out there preying on those unfamiliar with the landscape.

This guide is designed to give you an idea of what you need to consider in the development of a web site and what to look out for when signing a contract. We'll also introduce you to some of the technical topics you need to be aware of so that you can make the best decisions for your web site development.

## What Will The Web Site Be Used For?

The first question that must be addressed is: what will the web site be used for? The answer to this question will have a significant impact on the type and cost of the site you need. Here are some of the more common reasons for developing a site:

### **Building Your Brand**

A web site is terrific marketing vehicle allowing for a rich variety of media to be presented to the site visitor. The content can be changed as often as the site owner wants allowing coupons, daily specials and promotions to be added with ease. A much more colorful, detailed description of the business can be provided at a fraction of the cost of the Yellow Pages.

### **Sell Products or Services**

You may want to sell your products or services through your web site – either exclusively or in addition to traditional sales channels. E-commerce (ie accepting money on the Internet for products or services) is very common in web sites today. While there are many security concerns both as a consumer and business owner, the convenience of online commerce seems to outweigh the concerns of most users. Work with your web developer to determine what security is appropriate for your site.

E-commerce sites are typically bigger and more complex than an information only site mainly because of the added security requirements, transaction processing (credit card etc...) and database functions (product catalog). It is reasonable to expect to pay more for a well designed e-commerce.

### **Provide Customer Service and Support**

With so many consumers now on the Internet, it is almost a mandatory requirement to provide some form of customer support on your web site. It may be as simple as soliciting feedback on your product or service or as complicated as a database driven online customer support service. Many site owners start out with a simple customer support function and gradually add more features over time.

### **Save Time and Money**

Web sites can save money in many different ways. Processing orders directly online can save money and eliminate costly data entry errors. Having an online catalog saves a tremendous amount in print and distribution costs. Communications with customers can be made more efficient through e-mail and online forms resulting in time savings. For example having a FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) page can solve many customer questions online thereby reducing the amount time and cost of customer support.

### What Will You Have on Your Site?

After deciding what the site will be used for, you will get a better sense of what kind of content you want or need. The pages you need for your site will depend on what kind of business your site is for. To get some ideas, go on the internet and look at other sites that are in the same line of business as you. Decide what type of presentation you find appealing. Here are some common pages that can be found on most if not all sites:

#### **Home Page**

The Home Page is typically the first page a visitor sees so it should make a good first impression. You should be able to link to any of the major information areas on your site from here. Eye catching graphics can be a good idea but don't get carried away with too much animation or slow loading graphics. Many visitors will leave if it takes too long to get the information they are looking for.

#### **About Us**

About Us pages are used to give some background or history on the business and is a good opportunity to convey a sense of what the business owners' philosophies are. You don't want to get too wordy as the visitors have a short attention span.

#### **Contact Us**

A Contact Us page is essential if you need to interact with the site visitor. This page should be easy to find and contain any relevant contact information including address, phone, fax and e-mail. Many sites use a contact form instead of e-mail, however, some visitors will not fill out a form because it's too much work. Having both options available will ensure that people can get in touch with you however they like.

#### **Portfolio**

A Portfolio page is used to display samples of the work you have done. Often in the form of digital images, this is a great opportunity to show off your products or services. Be careful to use high quality images – poor photo quality can sometimes have a negative effect.

#### **Services**

A services page is where you document what you do. If the visitor has made it this far, it usually means they are interested in what you are selling. If you can describe all your services on one page that's fine, but don't short change yourself. You can add links to other pages describing your services in greater detail. Remember, at this stage you have the visitor's attention so don't hold back.

#### **Links**

A Links page can have several strategic purposes depending on the type of business you are in. In general, you can add links to any other sites that may be relevant to your business and would be of interest to a visitor. A contractor may wish to include links to a Builders Association or suppliers they recommend. A physician may wish to include links to educational resources for patients.

### What to Look for in a Contract

#### Price

Price is an obvious element of any contract but with web site development one has to be extra careful as to what is included in the price. Typical pricing for web development averages around \$60/hour or \$100/page. Of course, these rates will vary depending on the complexity of your site. Other considerations:

- Is your site hosted by the developer? Many web site developers charge low rates for development and make it up on hosting fees. Hosting fees should NOT be included as part of your web site development contract. As a reference, the monthly hosting fee with Go Daddy (a reputable hosting company) is **\$3.95/mo** for their economy package which is suitable for most small business informational web sites. Many developers have legitimate hosting services but they should be dealt with separately.
- Do you own the code? This issue is often tied with the hosting strategy: you get a low cost web site and pay a nominal amount every month for hosting. If you choose to go to another hosting company to save money you would have to start a new web site. Make sure it is stated in the contract that you own all the code for your web site.
- Support. Web developers should guarantee their code to be bug-free for at least a year. Most will guarantee the code forever as long as no one else modifies it.
- Updates. Does the price provide for any modifications down the road? Normally specified in terms of update support hours with 2-3 hours being the norm. This allows an additional page or two to be added should it become necessary. More and more web sites are being designed with a Content Management System allowing the site owner to make modifications and additions through an easy to use interface.

#### Schedule

Scheduling a web site development is quite difficult because a web site tends to be more art than science. For example, you may start out thinking blue is the best color but once you see it on the screen you may decide red is better, or maybe brown, or yellow etc...

Allowing for this, it is still reasonable to expect the developer to adhere to certain milestones, particularly in the absence of any changes on the site owner's part. If your site is expected to be over 10 pages, ask for some form of schedule or milestones so you can track the developer's progress. Just be aware that if you keep changing things it will delay the project. That's not necessarily bad; you want to get a site you'll be happy with. On the other hand, you don't want to get bogged down with details that will be lost on your customers.

#### Payment Terms

Most developers will want a portion of the cost up front and have the balance paid at the completion of some milestone(s). **NEVER PAY THE WHOLE COST UP FRONT.** If a developer asks for this – walk away. It is reasonable to pay as much as 50% up front, but no more. Larger, more complex sites will typically have three payment milestones. Most small business sites will have the up front fee and the balance paid on completion.

## Web Sites 101

### **Hosting**

Hosting refers to the computer system on which your web site resides. Hosting functions include things like:

- internet connectivity
- data storage (disk space)
- security

Hosting packages are typically sold based on how well or in what quantity they provide these functions. Let's look at a couple of key factors:

### **Disk Space**

A typical web page is about 50 Kbytes in size including graphics. That means a 10 page site needs about 500 Kbytes of disk space. Go Daddy's Economy Hosting package provides 5 Gbytes of disk space! That's enough to store 100,000 pages! Talk about room to grow!

### **Transfer Bandwidth**

Transfer bandwidth refers to how much data can be transferred from your site every month. If you exceed the limit, you will usually incur some additional charge. Let's do the math to see where we're at: Go Daddy's Economy package provides 250 GBytes of transfer a month. Assuming our pages are 50 Kbytes each we could transfer 5 million pages a month or 166 thousand pages a day. If you had a 10 page site that would mean some 16,000 people a day could check out the entire site! Once again, don't feel compelled to upgrade your service.

### **E-mail Accounts**

All hosting packages provide for some number of e-mail accounts. Any company can usually make use of 3-5 accounts in addition to an account for each person associated with the site. Go Daddy currently offers 500 accounts with their Economy Package.

### **Do We Work For Go Daddy?**

No, we don't work for Go-Daddy. We *do* use Go Daddy because it's a good value – but the examples are intended to demonstrate that a suitable hosting solution should cost no more than **\$10/month**. If someone is asking for more, make sure they are offering some real added value.

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### **Domain Name**

A Domain Name refers to a portion of your web site address or e-mail address that defines your space on the web – your domain. For example, Webomodo has the domain “webomodo.com”. Any e-mail to be handled by the webomodo domain will have @webomodo.com in the address indicating that it should be processed by a mail server (a computer that manages e-mail). If someone is looking for the webomodo web site, they type [www.webomodo.com](http://www.webomodo.com). The www indicates that the user request should be processed by the web server (a computer that manages a web site, not necessarily the same computer used for e-mail). The common element is the domain: webomodo.com.

When you set up your web site, you’ll want a domain name that is appropriate for your business, for example, “bobswidgets.com”. Domain names are registered by certain authorized organizations called Registrars. You pay them an annual fee (\$9.99/year or less at Go Daddy) and they take care of the administration of the name on the internet.

A domain name will have 3 types of contact information associated with it:

- **Registrant:** The legal owner of the domain. Make sure this is you and not your hosting company or web developer.
- **Technical Contact:** Typically the name of someone in your Information technology group. For a small company, it’s usually you again.
- **Administrative Contact:** Sometimes the person who pays the bills or takes care of multiple domains. In a small company...you again

Remember, domain name registration is cheap. Prices do vary, but don’t let anyone charge more than \$10-\$20 per year. Also, consider getting multiple domains especially if your domain could easily be misspelled. This way, visitors can find you even if they make a typo. You can have all your domain names point to the same web site.

### Conclusion

The business world is changing rapidly with the internet taking on a larger role in all businesses from large corporations down to the smallest businesses. As more and more consumers get access to broadband networking through cable and DSL technologies, the demand for an online business presence grows. The number of searches for local businesses online now equals that of the Yellow Pages and will surpass it very soon. Any business needs to get online to capture this growing market base, yet overcoming some of the technical barriers can be challenging. This guide introduces some of the concepts involved in getting a web presence established. Your next step is to find a web developer that will develop a great site for you and be there to help you as your internet needs grow.

At Webomodo, your web site development is just the beginning of a long term relationship. As part of the Infomodo organization, we offer technical and marketing expertise that may not be available with all web developers. To take advantage of everything Webomodo has to offer, go to [www.webomodo.com](http://www.webomodo.com) to get started.