

Getting Prepared to Build a Web Site

Before you start paying for design time, it is strongly recommended that you have some decisions made about what you want.

Look around the internet at businesses similar to yours. See what they are doing. Make notes about what you think works and what you'd like to do.

Try to imagine you are the visitor. Just because a site looks "cool" doesn't mean it's appropriate for you business.

Print out webpage samples as a guide.

Page 4 of this Guide offers a visual layout of a web page. Feel free to print this out to "sketch" your ideas.

I already have a site

Domain name

Web hosting company

Am I happy with them? Why or why not?

E-commerce site (store front, catalog, auction, donations)?
Does this need to be changed? In what way(s).

Who manages the site (makes changes when needed)?

Do I want to continue with this plan?

What do I like about my current site?

What do I **not** like about my current site?

What would I like to see different?

What sorts of specific changes am I thinking about?

Budget restrictions?

Time restrictions/deadlines to publish the site?

I Do Not Already Have a Site

Domain name:

If not, any ideas for one?

Hosting company:

If not, any ideas?

Who is going to manage the site?

Am I going to need a monthly contract outside the business/group?

What is the main purpose for this site? Information, networking, selling products, showing creative talent, advertising services, etc.

Do I want or need an e-Commerce solution (catalog, accepting payments, store)?

Who is writing the content for the site?

Do I have an "identity" to incorporate into the site? (logo, colors, themes, images)

Budget limit?

Time deadline?

What sites on the web do I like? Why?

Budget Considerations

Domain registration options

- Registering a domain name on your own: GoDaddy, Enom are reputable registrars. The basic cost for most common domains (.com, .org, .net) is \$9.95 per year.
- Registering through a hosting company: Varies by hosting service. Be sure the domain becomes your property and not the property of the hosting service.

Design

- Do your own on the web: Many hosts have a build yourself interface. Dubbah Design offers RVSiteBuilder with every account.
- Do your own with software: There are open source web editors and commercial ones such as NetObjects Fusion and Dreamweaver.
- Hire a designer: Costs vary by complexity of project. Dubbah Design charges \$35 per hour for custom design. Brochure site design estimate: \$300. For a more accurate estimate, please contact rob@dubbahdesign.com

Hosting

Big hosting companies oversell space. They advertise more space in the plans than is actually on the server. This is a marketing tool. In reality, most average sites do not use more than 50 mb of space or 10gb of transfer in the course of ordinary business. The upside with large hosting companies is getting a lot of space. The downside is oversold servers can cause delays. Some hosts do not allow script installation or ftp uploading.

Some small hosting companies tend to limit what you get for your money. Instead of overselling, they overcharge or don't even tell you what you're getting. Shop carefully. Ask questions.

Dubbah Design has realistic plans at realistic prices. You'll know what you're getting. If you need a few more email accounts, no problem. Just ask. Need to upgrade to a larger account? Easy.

Management

- Self-managed: Someone in-house who knows enough about the web will take care of changes.
- Content management system: Have a site built using a content management system (CMS) that will allow you to login and make changes. This usually requires a database. Dubbah Design can use Wordpress as a content management system. Why Wordpress? It's the easiest to learn. Many hosting services are promoting and using Joomla or Drupal for content management. While these are two fine products, they require an exceptional amount of time to learn even just to manage the site. Another method of content editing is using a standalone editor, which changes the content without a database.
- Management Service: Hire outside your business for web maintenance. Dubbah Design offers on-demand and contractual agreements, based upon your needs.

SEO

You've probably heard of SEO. It's Search Engine Optimization. It means that your site has the code in it that search engines like. This improves your site's visibility. Optimization such as document declaration (dtd) in the header code of each page, image alt tags, unique page title tags, keyword and description tags.

Another step in web visibility is site promotion through the use of inbound linking (links on other sites that point to you) and advertising.

Advertising with the search engines such as Google AdWords, Yahoo and Ask.com works like this: you set up an account with them, you decide how much you want to spend each month, you create a short text ad, choose keywords based on your site content, decide how much per click you'll pay. Activate the ads (it's good to have several variations of the ad). When people use that search engine with those keywords, your ppc (pay per click amount) competes with others. The higher your ppc, the more likely your ad will appear on their search results page.

Design Planning

Basic web page layout is a Header area, navigation area, main and side content areas and a footer. Other areas can be added, but these are fairly universal. Feel free to make your own layout on paper and keep in mind there needs to be an area for the menu (navigation). Sidebars can be on the left, right or both. This layout would be called a 2-column, because of the sidebar and content areas. Navigation can be horizontal at the top, bottom, both or vertical in a side column.

