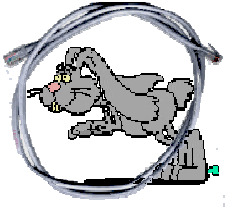


# So, you want to weave a web...

## Web Site Design Hints



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You are greatly mistaken if you feel that “building” a web site is enough. The total management of an Internet or Intranet web site goes way beyond the “I’m going to build a home page” concept. There are actually several questions that need to be answered in order to build and maintain an effective site. These questions need to be answered during the initial phases of your decision on whether a web site will be beneficial for your company or you as an individual.

- Who are your customers?
- What are the goals of your web site?
- Who will build and host your site?
- Getting the Information together
- Design concepts? (content, readability, layout and customer interaction)
- Ongoing Management and taking responsibility.

The goal of this article is not to address each of these in great detail, but to give you enough information to get you thinking about the question. The answers to which will not come all at once but with time and planning!

### Who are your customers?

Whether you are building a site for your business, an organization, or even your personal home page you need to “know your customer”. The team that is planning the web site needs to ask themselves who will visit the completed site and what is its purpose. You will need to identify your visitors needs, what will cause them to visit your site and what will keep them coming back. You also need to account for your needs. After all, if the web site serves its purpose well, by serving your customers, it will also serve your goals! These basic elements of web site planning are really the most important! What you decide during this phase of planning will help you later when it comes time to think about web site content as well as help you in your decisions about hosting services.

### What are your goals for this web site?

Every good web site needs a purpose. With the amount of information being placed on the web each day, if your site does not serve a purpose, it becomes a waste of time. There are many reasons to place a web site on the Internet. Goals include everything from sharing simple text information to extensive customer interaction and electronic commerce.

Start this part of the planning process with an open mind. Think big and brainstorm all of the possibilities. Over the last couple years there have been some tremendous advances in technology. This has made it possible to do some really creative things to produce very interactive sites. In fact you may be surprised what can now be done. Always start big! Later, as the planning process continues you can always decide to rule out a few of the initial grand ideas due to feasibility and resources.

## Who will build and host your site?

There are many things to consider here. With the technology available in the past an individual could build a home page in a few hours and place it on the Internet. For the most part these web sites consisted of static non-changing pages that at best shared some basic text and graphic information. As we mentioned above, due to fast changing technology we can now accomplish so much more! It is unfortunate however that these advances have come with a price. The business web site of today needs to be planned, built, and hosted by a professional service. Today's provider has to work hard at keeping up with technology. In order for your web site to be current, dynamic, and always changing, the provider has to know how to utilize all of these new tools! The provider you choose needs to help guide you through the planning process with the terms "dynamic", "database", "current", "changing", and "not outdated" at the front of their mind!

There are many businesses ready to help you build and host your site. Rates are competitive and over the last year have become very reasonable. It is up to you to look at your options and choose a provider that will best meet your needs. When looking for your provider, take into account all of the information you have gathered about your customer and your goals. Then choose a provider that can build a site that meet these goals! Knowing your goals will also help you decide whether or not your site can be hosted by a provider off-site or if you need to have it on your own local servers.

## Getting the information together

Now that you have determined the goals for this site and chosen a provider, it's time for information! A good service provider can help you plan your site and do all of the technical work to place it on the web. They are not however the experts at what you do. **The information that will eventually be placed on the Internet needs to come from you!** Once the initial goals are determined, you need to work with the provider and gather a lot of the information they will need to put your site on the Internet. Things like preprinted articles, pamphlets, and photos can certainly help with this but keep in mind that the Internet is a communication medium requiring it's own rules about content and layout. The provider can guide you through these rules as it relates to the content you choose for your site. My suggestion is to implement a "Content Team" that includes a person or group from your business that knows your organization and it's web site goals and a representative from the provider to act as a technical guide. In most cases the actual site will start to get built after the provider has received the actual content from you.

## Design concepts? (content, readability, layout and customer interaction)

There are many ways to design a web site and with today's tools you have lots of options on how you interact with your customers. There are however design rules that need to be followed. It is important to make a page that is fast loading, readable and serves the purpose you have intended. Your service provider can help you create your site with these design rules in mind. It is important for you to do some research! Take time to visit Internet sites taking notes on things about each site you like and dislike. If your competition or an organization has a similar web site, visit it. Look at what appears to work or not work about that site. Look for examples that can be used as part of your new site. Write the URL address down and give them to your service provider. They will look at these examples to help them get an idea of your needs.

## Ongoing Management and taking responsibility.

Once your site is on the Internet you can take just a moment to set back and admire your work. Please do not sit back too long! In order to keep people coming back to your site it needs to be maintained and kept up with current information. Depending on the type of site originally designed it may mean that the core design team maintains regular review and design meetings. It is extremely important for you to take responsibility of your site and keep it current. You need to plan for ongoing maintenance expenses. Please make certain that you talk about ongoing maintenance with your service provider. Once they have a idea of the type of site that needs to be built, they should be able to give you an accurate quote as to what ongoing maintenance will be needed and the costs involved.

It is very important to identify who is responsible for the site on the web site itself! There are so many Internet sites that have no one responsible for the content and no way for a user to send feedback to the responsible party. Taking responsibility of your site and identifying that responsibility on the web pages gives your web site and the services it provides validity. It also proves that someone cares about the content and will keep it maintained properly.