

Designing Your Website

Wait a minute! Aren't you going to be designing my website? You may be thinking that when you see the title of this document. In order to design a website that meets your needs and you are satisfied with, the following questions need to be addressed. Take some time to go over the following items and preferably type your answers and save them on disk or write them out on a piece of paper. Of course I'll help you with this!

All web sites have a domain name. This is the name you type in to go to that site (e.g. www.microsoft.com). This can be up to 67 characters long, but remember it should be easy to remember and identify what products or services you offer. What domain name would you like to use for your company? Most for-profit businesses end in COM, and non-profit businesses end in ORG. Several other extensions are available like NET, US, BIZ, INFO and several others. Since COM is the extension most people will try, you should try to obtain a domain name with this extension for for-profit businesses and ORG for non-profit organizations. List three or four choices and I can check if they are available. If you need help in choosing a domain name I can also help you brain-storm for ideas.

Static or Dynamic Information? Do you want the information on your site to be updated regularly or will the information remain fairly static? Do you plan to maintain the site after it is completed, or would you rather pay a web designer to maintain your site? The answers to these questions affect to some extent how the site is designed.

Do you have a logo for your business? If not, talk to me about it. Your web site will look much more professional with a logo.

Do you have any favorite colors or themes you would like to use in the background of your pages?

How would you like your web site organized and what content would you like on each page? Most web sites have the following pages:

- **Home page** - Identifies your company name and the reason you are in business. This will normally be the first page that people will see when they come to your web site. This page should entice your visitors to continue looking at the other pages in your site.
- **About page** - This page goes into a little more information about your company. You may want to include some of the companies history, credentials, certifications, etc,

- **Products or Services page** - This should identify the products and services you sell. You may want to include a few pictures or images of your product or service.
- **Contact page** - This is the page that tells visitors how to contact you. It should include your address, phone number, e-mail addresss, and fax number if applicable. You may also want to include directions or a map to your address (Mapquest.Com allows free links to their maps). You may want to have multiple e-mail addresses if you will have different people answering e-mails. You may also want to have a comment as to how quickly you respond to e-mail. Some sites also use forms which visitors can fill out to find out more information or to be sent a catalog or other information. These fields may contain Name, Address, Phone, Question or Comment, E-Mail address, and any other fields important in your situation.
- **Other types of pages you may also want to include are:**
 - **Employment page** which identifies any positions that may be available in your business.
 - **Frequently Asked Questions page** (also called FAQs) where you provide common questions and answers. This is used mainly with larger sites.
 - **Mission Statement or Values page** which provides the mission, beliefs, and values of the business.
 - **Testimonials or Reference page** which provides testimonials or references from people who have used your product or service.
 - **Images page** which show pictures or graphics of your product or service.
 - **Calendar or schedule of events.**
 - **Any others you feel would be appropriate with your business.** Be creative! You can have up to 12 pages with my plan.

Images which include pictures, or graphics are a good way to describe or show your product/service, or even to add some variety to your web site. These should be used sparingly however, since many people do not have fast internet connections. The more images your pages have, the slower they will load. The slower they load, visitors will be turned off to your web site. Think about what images you would like to use.

Links are also used commonly on web sites. There are basically two types of links - web page links which take you to another web site page (on your own site or another web site) and links which open up or download a file (perhaps a Word document or Adobe Acrobat file). Perhaps you would like an interactive map identifying how to get to your business. You can talk to me further about this topic if you need further clarification. If you belong to organizations or associations you may want a link to these sites. Remember to notify these organizations and associations after your web site is completed so they can have a link to you!

E-Mail - Email with your company domain name is included with web hosting. For example you may want Sales@yourcompanyname.com or JohnDoe@yourcompanyname.com where yourcompanyname.com is your domain name. These e-mail accounts can be used with Microsoft Outlook. You can also setup e-mail auto-responders which tell others you are on vacation or you are out of the office. You can also access these e-mail accounts through web mail. Think about who in your company needs to have a separate e-mail address.

Search engines are used on the internet to help people find sites they are looking for. Sites have what are called meta tags which help in describing their web site in the search engines. There are three main types of meta tags. **Each** page in your site should have each of these tags - Title, Description, and Keywords.

1. The **Title** should be between 50-80 characters long.
2. The **Description** meta tag should be three or four sentences which describe your business. This should not exceed 250 characters.
3. The **Keywords** meta tag should be up to 25 words (less than 1024 characters) separated by commas that people on the internet may enter in a search engine to find your business. If you have trouble figuring out the meta tags to use for your site, I can help you with this.

Remember that your site is a work in progress. It can be updated or changed anytime afterwards. Most cosmetic changes take little time at all to change. I am available to make changes to your web site at my hourly rate. If you have other web site needs that are not addressed above, talk to me about it. I do want you to be satisfied.