



Not Having a Website is Like Not Having a Business Phone Number

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The Internet has changed our lives. We use it to shop for everything from cars and homes to professional services and gifts. We plan vacations, check airfares, and research information on the 'Net. In this day and age, websites give validity to businesses. **You should no more start a business without a website than you would think to start one without a phone!**

Benefits of Websites

- **Websites give you a virtual "storefront" that's always open.** People can learn about your products and services, get pricing information, directions, your business hours, and more – all without picking up the phone or getting into a car. It's 24/7. People surf all hours of the day and night. They can check out your business even when you're sleeping.
- **The web presents the small entrepreneur on an even footing with "the big guys"!** If you have a well designed website, potential clients can't tell if you're doing business from the top floor of the Sears Tower ... or if you're in your pajamas at home!

Remember the old Yellow Pages TV ad that said, "Let your fingers do the walking?" Nowadays fingers are surfing through web pages! But a poorly designed web page can work against you just as a surly employee can ...

What makes a good site?

- **An easy-to-remember name doesn't make a good site, but it gets you off to a good start.** Designers used to say, 'keep it short.' Now we say, 'keep it easy to remember!' Before going to a search engine, many people try just typing – guessing at site names. Consider registering more than one URL for your business.



- **Pretend you're the person visiting your site.** What will you be looking for? Can you find it simply ... without having to wade through pages of extraneous information? *Are clients looking for directions to your location?*

Put them on the main navigation bar. *Do they want to see examples of your work?* Create a portfolio page link on the main navigation bar. *Do they want information about your industry overall?* Consider a links page. *Do you run frequent sales?* Put ads on your home page.

- **A professionally done site presents your business in a good light.** Are the colors appealing? Are they appropriate for your business? Keep things consistent – pages should all have a similar look to them.
- **Include meta-tags.** Make it easy for search engines to index when they do find your site. Write a description of the contents of each page and keywords. Ask your developer to include these on each page. Search engine optimizing firms have differing opinions about whether keywords and metatags work, but most agree they don't hurt.
- **Target your audience.** If you have two completely different audiences, consider two sites. If you're appealing to kids, make it bright. Older people? Use large type. Think about your customer BEFORE creating your pages. It's more cost effective.

What are the bare essentials?

If you already have marketing materials, keep them in mind when designing your site. You want your site to be an extension of these already-created materials. Use your logo, your colors; use your business identity on your site. Remember that you are reinforcing your existing marketing materials.

Costs ...

The good news is costs have gone down! Plan on these...

- **Registration of domain name.** Generally you can register your domain name for less than \$25 a year.



- **Hosting fee.** This generally ranges from \$7 to \$1000+ per month. There are some very reliable hosts available – with great customer service – costing about

\$10/month. Even a very small business can usually afford \$120 a year. Expect to pay more for e-commerce sites. Inexpensive shopping cart programs are available. Quite often these tie into your merchant account and offer secure-site capabilities, so you can receive payments and process orders on line - a real time-saver for a quick sale!

- **Development/design fees.** Investing in a professional who knows how to design effective, professional websites is usually a good use of your marketing dollars. Shop designers. Find one who's easy to communicate with and with whom you enjoy doing business. At the very least, this will make updating your site more fun! If you have any interest at all in possibly making text changes to your own site, ask your developer if he/she is amenable to this. And, ask about fees.



Remember ...

www.yourbusinessname.com is a lot easier to remember than the 10 randomly generated numbers most of us have in our phone numbers!

Deb Manning is a graphic & web designer who conspires and consults with dozens of website owners, designing and updating sites. She also designs print materials – logos, newsletters, business cards, letterhead, educational handouts and books. Deb stays current by continually learning new software, studying design trends and updating technology.

Call 630-668-0603 to start a partnership with a designer ... or visit www.debmanning.com today!

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