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Establishing a WEB Presence

Marketing Your Business with a Website

Websites have become an essential element to market your business in today's world—to advertise and communicate with prospects, clients, and partners.

Building a website can be compared with constructing a rental unit. This article discusses site selection and putting the foundation in place. The next article will address architecture (design), furniture (content), and ergonomics (usability).

Four Steps to Build Your Website's Foundation

Continuing with the rental unit construction analogy, the following steps are required to build a strong foundation including the infrastructure for your website.

1. **Select Your Location:** Choose your web address (your domain name).
2. **Obtain a Building Permit:** Register your domain name – how to find a registrar and what information the registrar will need.
3. **Notify the Post Office:** Link your domain name to your physical website address.
4. **Choose Your Physical Plant:** Select the web and e-mail server.

Choose Your Domain Name

Your domain name represents your company, product and image; your domain name is the center of your Internet identity. As you begin to set up your website, consider how you want the world to view your business:

- **Brand Recognition:** Does your business name, logo and slogan communicate a clear picture representing your business image?
- **How can you use your brand to enhance your web presence – to communicate your image visually?**

Design your website to support your image: Use various elements in your website (such as website address, e-mail address and e-mail tagline) to reinforce your brand.

Mechanics of Naming Your Website: What's in a Name?

A domain name is an alphabetic name, such as propertymanager.com, that is linked to a physical numerical location on the Internet known as the IP address. When a prospect types your domain name into a web browser (such as Internet Explorer or FireFox), your website home page displays.

A domain name consists of a top-level and a second-level domain. A top-level domain is the part of the domain name located to the right of the dot; “.com” is the top-level domain in propertymanager.com. The most common top-level domains are .com, .net and .org. Other popular top-level domains include .info, .name and .ws.

Some top-level domains are restricted such as .aero, .biz, .edu, .mil, .museum and .name. Restricted domains require the registrant to represent a certain type of entity or to belong to a particular community. For example, .edu is reserved for educational entities.

The second-level domain is located to the left of the dot; “propertymanager” is the second-level domain in propertymanager.com. Second-level domains are the descriptive part of the address that refers to the organization or entity behind the Internet address. Each second-level domain must be unique and registered with an accredited registrar.

Suggestions for Selecting a Domain Name

- Pick a .com top-level domain. Most people will try the .com extension first when searching for a website.
- Find a short descriptive name; it is easier for clients and prospects to remember (and type without error) if it is short, but it should clearly represent your business. Domain names are not case sensitive and can only contain letters, numbers and dashes.
 - Identify a number of domain choices and ask your clients and associates for their thoughts. Is the name easy to say and remember? Is it difficult to spell? Is it necessary to explain the name?

- Register quickly to reserve the domain name you have chosen. Most of the good names have already been taken and the rest are going fast. You don't need a website to register the name. You can "park" your domain at your registrar while your site is under construction.

Register your Domain Name

A domain name registrar is a company accredited by the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) and/or by a national authority to register Internet domain names. Each registrar sets the price it charges for registering names, and prices vary significantly among different registrars. A list of registrars accredited by ICANN is available at: <http://www.icann.org/registrars/accredited-list.html>.

After identifying a registrar, you will need to provide them your contact information. This registration information is published on a "Whois" site, which is used to resolve technical problems and to permit enforcement of consumer protection, trademark and other laws. The contact information includes:

- Registrant – the owner of the domain; if someone registers your domain name for you, make sure that they put your name and e-mail address here; there are many sad stories of people who lost their domain because their "techie" put their name here and disappeared.
- Administrative – the administrator of the account (billing, manage users).
- Technical – the person to contact regarding technical questions (edit DNS entries).

You can register multiple domain names to help create a dynamic online identity:

- Keep your competition from registering a domain that draws customers to them instead of you.
- Promote the different products/services you offer.
- Provide customers more ways to find you when searching the Internet.
- Acquire common misspellings of your domain name to capture more visitors.

Select the Domain Name Server

Your Domain Name Server (DNS) is the "phone book" for the Internet that matches IP addresses with domain names. The IP address is the physical location of a server where the networking equipment delivers information, such as a request to display one of your web pages. The DNS facilitates web page (<http://>), file transfers (<ftp://>), e-mail and other requests to be routed to the appropriate computer server. This is such a critical function that it is advised that you have at least two Domain Name Servers associated with your domain name (one as a backup for the other).

Select a Server: Hosting Options

The next step is to select a server to process your e-mail, deliver your web pages and translate your domain name (DNS). Your e-mail server, web server and DNS can be hosted on the same computer hardware or separately. Although you could use your office server (if it is connected to the Internet), there are a number of advantages to using a commercial hosting service:

- High reliability through redundant power and Internet connections (you don't want your clients to get a "server not found" message).
- High throughput via high bandwidth Internet connectivity (your web pages will display faster).

Most domain name registrars will host your DNS as part of the cost of registering your domain name. This approach is recommended if your e-mail is hosted separately from your website. If your e-mail and website is hosted on the same server, it is generally recommended to also host your DNS there also.

COMING NEXT MONTH: PART 2: WEBSITE DESIGN.



Get With the Flow

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