

NEED A WEBSITE? GET THE 411



Getting Started

Domain name(s). Good domain names are short and memorable. If your company has a long formal name, abbreviate the domain name with an acronym or shortened words. The .com and .net suffixes are the most common; the .org suffix is usually reserved for non-profits. It possible, register more than one domain name or both versions of the domain name in .com and .net, if they are available. All domain name versions can then be pointed to your primary site.

Hosting. This involves the online “office space” where your site pages are archived and displayed. Hosting usually comes with an e-mail server so that the e-mail addresses include the name of your company. For example, www.homteam.com is our web address and my e-mail is nancy@homteam.com. An inconsistent e-mail address such as @gmail.com, if attached to your website may be viewed as unprofessional.

We can host the site, and platform rates will vary, depending upon the level functionality of your site. Hosting an online store is more costly than hosting a simple, electronic brochure website because of security issues.

Ask Yourself

- Do I want a static, electronic brochure of my company or do I want an interactive web site?
- Will there be a secure login area for my customers to access proprietary information?
- Will written content will be available as source material or will I have content developed from scratch?
- Do I want to do website updates myself?
- How much traffic do I want to generate for my website?



Planning

A good web designer/planner will interview you extensively about your business and the expectations of your website. The more information you can share, the greater the ability for the bid to accurately meet your budget and the plan of action for your site.



1. **Define Your Project.** Who are my target audiences? What functionalities would they want from the website, such as searchable content, the ability to make a purchase, and more? More importantly, *what is the desired action step that you want your site visitors to take?*
2. **Site Map.** Like an architectural plan, a simple site map charts out each page of your site and how pages interconnect. A good web planner will provide an initial site map as the basis for the bid, allowing you to compare apples-to-apples on web development bids.
3. **Creative Direction.** How your website looks, feels and sounds is reflected in the design and the writing style. When meeting with your web designer, supply a list of websites that you admire as well as sites in your industry or category that misses the mark.
4. **Development.** Back-end functionalities may include a database, a search engine, an online store, secure login elements and more. For frequent content updates, you may want a site that allows you to update yourself via a web browser. This may cost more initially, but you'll save money over time.
5. **Deployment.** Indicate whether your site will require a test or beta version before going live. Allowing enough lead-time is important, especially if content is being developed from scratch or your site that requires significant testing of the back-end functions before it goes live.
6. **Search Engine Optimization (SEO).** Considering today's powerful search engines you'll want your new website to rank high on the search result pages. SEO is done through 'optimizing' the code on your website, links to site pages, and keywords that reside in your content and html code. Your site will be one of many, and you want to make it easy for people to find you. (For more details on how SEO works, look for our *Get the 411 Web series: Vol. 2 by our SEO alliance partner SyncSmartLLC.com*).
7. **Marketing Your Site.** How will people find you after you launch your website? Through search engines, ads, or complimentary links from other sites? Will you be issuing a press release? Do you to build a community of users? These answers may require a marketing component and allowance to your website plans.
8. **Budget.** It's important to assign a budget for: (1) web site design and development; (2) SEO; and (3) marketing. Even if you don't have a clear idea of how much these things cost, you should assign a number that is commensurate with your marketing spending. Any good web development company will ask you for a budget and can give you reality check on what you can get for the money.