



jd WebWorks Web Site Planning Guide

Plan Now - Success Later!

The most important part of getting an effective and successful website online is the planning that goes into it before the design process even begins. This guide is intended for those who are planning to create their first site - but also applies to anyone planning to update or redesign a web site.

This worksheet can help you understand what may be possible and choose the different capabilities you want/need for your website. It asks a number of questions to which you should try to answer before you start a new or redesigned website. Not all items may apply but it's good idea to read through the entire document.

A good example of the web development process is that of ordering a new car. You need to make many small decisions that dictate what features you want on your web site, just like you would on a new vehicle. You have to balance your budget and with what features you may require. The purpose and content need to be clearly defined, similar to choosing a car or truck depending on whether you might want to carry people or cargo.

Also keep in mind the medium. Successful web sites have many common features but may differ on many levels in look and feel. There are many very visually attractive websites on the Internet that ignore user engagement and proper copywriting, almost guaranteeing that the website will not be successful. Details count and there is much more to an effective website design beyond the look and feel.

Time spent in planning and determining features can lower the cost and increase the effectiveness dramatically. A good approach is to list priorities and add features as the site matures or develops a steady revenue stream to pay for any new capabilities.

Take your time and create a realistic plan for your web site, the savings and benefits are worth the efforts.

Planning your site

- Overview
- Design and Development
- Hosting
- Maintenance and updating
- Budget

Please feel free to print this page and use it in your planning. Sit down in a quiet place and work through each section. This can save you both money and time on your web site. It will also give a roadmap for developing your site.

Overview

What is the purpose of the site?

Decide in order of importance which of the following you wish to do - a good website will be clear in its purpose so not too many should be chosen.

- Serve the needs of existing clients
- Explain your products and services
- Bring in new clients to your business
- Take online orders
- Provide information for your staff
- Other

Define Your Target Audience

- Who is the primary audience you site is aimed at?
- Who might be looking for your site/services/products?
- Who might be interested if they reach your site accidentally?
- What will you offer on your site?

Content & Information For Your Website

- Company Information
- Details of your services
- Product Listings
- Online ordering
- Online support for existing customers
- Articles & Information on Subject Matter
- Photos, illustrations, graphics, logo, terms and conditions
- All current brochures, literature, newsletters, etc.

Marketing Plans

- Do you have a Unique Selling Position?
- How do you plan to market the site to bring in visitors in the first place?
- What fresh content/regular news are you likely to have?
- How Will You Create Reciprocal Linking with Others?
- Press Release content
- Marketing in Newsgroups/via E mail
- Business cards, Letterheads, Brochures, et.
- Offline media advertising
- How would you define success for this site?

Design and Development

- What will you call the site?
- Do you have an existing domain name?
- Is your business name available as a domain name?

- If not are you able to come up with a good alternative?
- Are you planning on a .com, .net, .org or. i.e. name? Or another suffix or number of those?
- What keywords, phrases, or terms do you think clients, and potential clients, might use to search for your site? (List as many as you can think of)
- How do you want your site to look?
- Do you have a preference for colors?
- Do you have existing artwork? e.g. logos, photos, items used in brochures etc
- Will you need new graphics created? What sort?
- Rate the sites of 3 businesses similar to yours - stating clearly what you like and dislike about them.
- What sort of content are you planning?
- Will you need mainly short pages or do you have a large body of text based information to impart?
- Will you need forms, video, audio?
- Do you plan on a newsletter and autoresponder series (sends a series of emails on planned schedule)?
- Do you need a special landing page for promotions and marketing projects?

Site Hosting

- How are you planning to host your site?
- Hosted on another site? (www.existingsites.com/your-site)
- Hosted with an ISP without a Domain Name? (www.earthworks.net/your-site)
- Purchasing a Domain Name and web hosting? (www.your-site.com)
- How many different e-mail addresses (e.g. theboss@your-site.com, info@your-site.com)?

Maintenance and Updating

- How often will the site need to be updated?
- Will some sections need more regular updating?
- Do you want to add syndicated content, which automatically updates?
- How do you plan to update content?
- Do you need forms/templates to allow sections to be maintained/updated by your staff?
- Will you want training for you staff to do simple updating and posting?
- What about background maintenance tasks like auto backups, problem alerts, security, etc?

Budget

Always create a budget during your initial planning. Some costs are difficult to determine due to the nature of the creative process and but you can adjust as you go. Be realistic in goals versus costs. As in the example with the car purchase, you can buy an econo box if all you want or need is basic transportation. But if you need speed and comfort due to your business, it's going to cost more. The trick is finding the balance between cost and effectiveness. If you are on a really tight budget and timeline you should go take a look at our Ready Made Websites here: www.jdwebworks.com/ready-made-websites/. They may not fit everyone's needs but they are very reasonable in cost and can get you online quickly.

Here are some general cost/expenses you can start with and adjust along the way. Domain registration and hosting are nominal, especially on the initial cost. If you website grows quickly you may have to upgrade your hosting plan due to

volume of visitors but that's actually a good problem. And you may be able to reduce certain costs if you have some skills that apply (like copywriting, shooting your own photos, etc.) or already have lots of content and graphics.

Many, if not all, hosting companies offer a free domain registration. Considering a domain registration usually is under \$15 this is not a big deal and if there is any trouble ahead you may lose that domain. To me it's not worth the risk. Another consideration is that if you are starting or running a business, you should treat it like a business. Always consider the return on investment (ROI) with any expense but realize there are some costs. Domain registration and good hosting service will only be about \$12 per month (\$150 annual). Ongoing maintenance is nominal for our websites since we automate most processes and also provide training for you or your staff as part of our website design process.

- Domain registration
- Design and Development
- Hosting set up
- On Going Marketing Costs
- On Going Maintenance
- Additional Development Costs

This planning guide is just that, there is nothing written in stone. Every online business can be unique due to subject matter, products, and services. This handout is designed to inform and educate on what's possible, you may not need or want some of the items mentioned.

And don't worry about all of the technical details, during our initial meeting/discussion we will be happy to answer any specific questions. We will also create a timeline and list of materials we will need from you, and a complete estimate of cost.

And once your website is up and running, that's just the beginning of the story. We provide some great materials on how to market and advertise, tips and tricks on promotions that work, and a resource list that saves you money, time, and frustration.

Thanks for your interest and if you have more questions just shoot us an email at manager@jdwebworks.com. We use email or a phone call to get you all the information you need to make any decisions.