

A Website is not One-Dimensional

A website is not just something you stare at on a glowing screen. These days, a website is a multi-dimensional beast, a complex character that deserves thought and attention. Great website development involves so much more than just design and color scheme. Creating a great website is a careful, step by step process that begins with domain name selection and ends when visiting customers convert to sales. And once your website is designed, up and running, continued maintenance and promotion is key to keeping visitors coming back for more.

Let us take you through a brief description of each step along the Yellow Brick Road of Web Design.

Domain Name Registration

Your domain name is what you type into the address bar of your browser (it is your URL). It is what your visitors will be typing into their browser, so selecting an easy to type and understand domain name is important. It is your home on the Internet. Make it easy to get to. Some examples of domain names include directoryone.com, google.com, and NBC.com. You know exactly where you are headed when you type those into your browser. However, with millions of domain names already registered, it may feel like all the good ones are taken. But be creative and patient and the right name will come along.

Web Hosting

If your web page is like a paper flyer, than your server is like the bulletin board you stick it on. You will need to sign on with a web hosting service so you can store your files on their server. Your host is who makes your site available to the public, not just to you. When choosing a web hosting company, you should take into account how much space you'll need, how much bandwidth, access, and so on. There are numerous web-hosting terms that may be new and confusing for you. For example, you may come across will be "Secure Server" which you will need if you plan on doing any sort of eCommerce. Another strange term you might see is "FTP Solutions." FTP is short for File Transfer Protocol. FTP is what is used to "upload," or move your site from you computer to the host computer "bulletin board."

Design

Although design is not the only important aspect of creating a website, good design is still *vital* to having a successful site. You only get one chance to make a first impression, and studies show that the average person's attention span is only about 8 seconds when looking at a site. Make those 8 seconds count by having a clean, clear, easy-to-read site that conveys information while also being aesthetically pleasing to view.

While graphics and animation are snazzy and fun, they aren't necessary to making your website work. Sometimes simpler is better, easier on you and easier on the customer. If you do choose to use advanced graphics and animation, remember that good visuals should be eye-catching but NOT distracting. Do not crowd your page with spinning vortexes and dancing bears. Utilize appropriate graphics that go with your company.

Remember: Sloppy website design does not make your product look very desirable. If your website is quality, it implies your product is quality, too.

Layout

Your layout is an aspect of design so important we gave it its own category. Layout, navigation, and usability are the active components of your design. The color is important to the eye, but how your site is navigated is important to its utility and efficacy. "Navigation" refers to how your visitor moves about your site. What do they read? What links do they click on? How is information organized? If you have lots of information, do not dump dozens of pages of links into one section; break them up under various categories to make them easier to look through. A carefully planned website can make it easier for your customer and for yourself. Also allow for growth, since your business will develop over the months and years, and you need your website to grow along with it.

Content/Copy

Your text, information and page layout is called your copy. It is the words on your page, but equally the charts, graphs, pictures and the layout of all these items. Remember that Internet copy is different than paper copy, and oftentimes a wall of words will overwhelm a visitor to your site. Keep your copy clear and concise, since visitors' attention spans on the web are notoriously short. Determine your site's chief purpose, your thesis. Are you about building your brand, selling your product directly over the Internet, or getting a buyer to visit your store? Keep your purpose in mind as you create your website copy. Tell it like it is.

Maintenance

Your company will be growing, so your website should as well! As you organize, allow for new categories, new products, and new links. You should perform regular maintenance to make sure your links are working, your contact information is correct, your forms are working, and that everything is up to date, including copyrights. You want to keep your content current.

You can also use tools that will track what is working best for your website, what is getting results, and what pages are being visited the most. Good statistics about where your visitors enter your site and how they move through it can help you tweak your site to improve sales and to create more effective layout, copy and design. You never know where your company may go, and good maintenance of your website will keep it, and your customers, with you every step of the way.

Marketing

You want other people to see this website you put so much hard work into, so you need to find marketing solutions to get it out there. These days one of the best ways to reach your customers is via Search Engines, because that is where customers are looking for you.

A search engine is a site such as Google or Yahoo where one can go and type in any sort of keyword and be led to sites that feature whatever they are looking for, be it “mouse ears” to “oven racks.” In order to ensure that YOUR website is among the top of the list of results, you need to practice what is called “search engine optimization.” You see, search engines rank the results they find, and if you sell staplers in Butte, you will want to be sure your site will rank well when someone types “Butte staplers” in the search box. Search engines rank their results based on very specific information from the copy and underlying code of your website. There are millions upon millions of websites that search engines have to sift through for each search, so “optimizing” your website will make it easier for a search engine to recognize that your site is relevant. If you have the time and the inclination to learn, you can optimize your website yourself. However, optimization is something many companies choose to outsource.

Remember your website is not like a printed document. It is not a one-dimensional, non-interactive page. Your website is a completely new kind of marketing medium and must be approached as such. >From choosing the right domain name to converting visitors into buyers, through the creation and implementation of your navigation, copy and design, from choosing your host to search engine optimization and marketing, every aspect must be carefully considered. Best of luck!