

Do you need a web site and why?

If you sell products or services, the answer is, "Yes." If you have a business of any sort the answer is, "Probably."

Don't dismiss your presence online because your product or services do not seem to lend themselves to internet sales. An audience of more than 20 million shoppers cannot be If it can be imagined, someone will find a way to sell it online.

This isn't to say that This isn't to say that efforts into selling weaving over the internet. Even if you're not planning on making sales, your presence on the Internet can still be essential.

Today a web site is like a street address. It's a way for you to be found. If you are being frequently asked what your site address is, or being told "I Googled you, but I couldn't find your site," then you need a site!

What will a web site do for you?

When it comes to a web site, the size of your business does not matter. A small enterprise can have as big an impact online as a large business. The internet levels the playing field when it comes to business presentation.

A business of any size can make a good impression, but beware there is rarely more than one chance. Visitors do not come back to cluttered, ill-conceived pages. A well designed site is essential.

In fact, having no site at all is preferable to having one that puts your business in a poor light. Your site advertises you and your business. If it screams, "Hey, my nephew just taught himself site design, isn't he clever?" then you may not be delivering the message you intend to deliver.

A 12-Step Program

The basic steps are:

1. Obtain a domain name
2. Define an email address
3. Create a starter page
4. Create the site map
5. Write & edit the text (edit again!)
6. Gather & optimize your images
7. Design the site
8. Gather and test the links
9. Contract for the hosting
10. Contract to receive online payments
11. Launch the site
12. Maintain the site

Domain Name: A domain name will cost a little over \$10 per year or less. Any more and you're being ripped off! The domain is yours for as long as you keep paying your \$10, though it can be beneficial to pay a few years in advance.

As many names are already taken, be prepared with second, third, or more choices. Domain names can be obtained from a variety of sources, but of course I recommend my service: www.wildsouthwest.com

Wildsouthwest is a reseller for GoDaddy. The names come with an email address, a Blog, and a Starter Page. There's even an option for a free "ad-supported" web site. Yes, all included for \$10 a year.

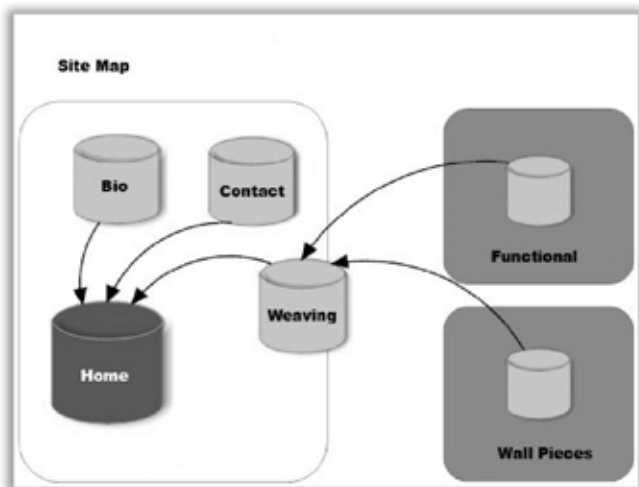
Email account: A name of your choice with the @ symbol and your domain name is your email address, e.g., janedoe@yourdomain.com

Your address is independent of your service provider (ISP) and is yours for as long as you own the domain name. Never again will you stay with a provider because you dread changing your address.

Once you contract for hosting you will have 500 addresses or more!

Starter Page: This is a rudimentary page. Someone looking for your site will view this and not an error. The page can explain that the site is under construction and provide a link to email or other contact www.weavetech.org is an example of a starter site.

Site Map: A graphical interpretation of a database is a site map. It is a plan of the overall site, the pages, and the links between the pages. The map can be simple or complex, as the site itself can be simple or complex.



Text: The Internet is a visual medium. The less text the better!

The adage that people do not read, and the more you give them to read the less likely they are to read it, is doubly true for online reading!

It cannot be over-emphasized that well-written well-edited text makes all the difference in the quality and effectiveness of your message.

Read it frequently, read it again, show it to others, read it again. Take out all extraneous words.

Try to write in the 3rd person and edit out as many "I, me, my, mine" as is feasible. When you think it's about as short and tight as you can get it, have someone else go over and edit it down some more.

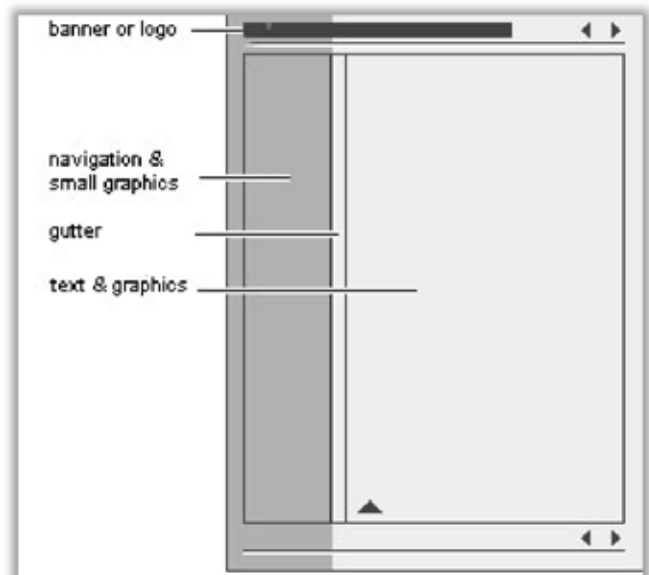
It is highly recommended that you use the services of a professional, if not for the entire text, at least to review the final copy

Graphics and Images: A logo or a banner or an appropriate image on each page can serve to unify the pages. All graphics need to be of the highest quality that can be obtained. Then they need to be "optimized" for the site.

Optimizing reduces the image size so that it displays well on the viewers' monitors, but does not take too long to download. Large images make a site slow to load. Visitors may leave before they've seen your products.

Design: The layout defines the overall look of each page. Consistency is the mantra.

The goal of a well-designed site is to make the viewing and navigation attractive but also easy. A clean design, with consistent style and readily accessible navigation buttons goes a long way to reaching that goal:



Design is where you display your own vision. The area that makes the site uniquely yours (or the designer's), but the overall purpose of the site must be kept in mind.

A professional web site should not be confused with a blog (see discussion later).

Computer Programs: When creating a site from scratch (as opposed to customizing a template) graphics programs allow creation or manipulation of line art in vector format and photographs in native or TIF formats. Optimized images in JPEG, GIF, or PNG formats are launched to the site.

Adobe's Creative Suite® is the current choice of many professionals, but it is costly, and individually the programs are more expensive. There are alternatives. Both Corel Draw® Suite and Xara® are worth exploring.

For ease of design WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get) programs are essential. They create the HTML code in the background, while the designer views the design screen. Less and less knowledge of the underlying technology is required.

Adobe Dreamweaver® is one such popular program. Many technical developers have moved to Dreamweaver rather than continue to code HTML or XHTML by hand.

For developers of a single site, there are less expensive and easy to use programs such as SiteSpinner® from Virtual Mechanics.

Adobe Flash®, an animation effects program, can add interest to a site, but it is not essential. A little Flash goes a long way.

Adobe Flash® is not cheap, and it has a steep learning curve. Free Flash headlines are widely available online. Another, relatively inexpensive

solution is to purchase a site template that includes Flash. Each page of a template has to be customized by the purchaser.

Links: A page with links to other pertinent sites can be to your advantage. Set up the links so that the linked site opens in a new window and the viewer is not taken away from your site.

Hosting: Reliable hosting for a site, exclusive of a shopping cart, can be obtained for about \$5 a month (www.wildsouthwest.com). Reliability and security are the two factors to weigh. You want a server with lots of back up!

Shopping Cart: Carts are functions of the hosting package which can be contracted for at the same time. The costs start at \$6 per month and cover an amazing array of services. They allow a business to easily and securely accept payment via credit cards, PayPal®, and other

methods. Security is built into the cart by the hosting provider.

An alternate, less expensive, but less comprehensive route, is to create a page with a link that accepts payments via PayPal®. This does not require the purchase of a secure shopping cart and is a frequent choice of small businesses.

Launch: When the site is complete, checked, edited, checked again, and all links are functioning, it is time to launch.

For smaller sites the built in FTP (file transfer protocol) with Windows Explorer or inexpensive programs such as Fetch for MAC's are easy to use. It is not necessary to purchase expensive software for the purpose.

Using these programs is often a simple drag and drop function.

Maintenance: It would be nice to sit back at this point and take a break, and you can, but it is only a break.

Sites need regular attention. A site at which products are sold needs even more attention updating prices, changing products, etc. Links need testing and sometimes changing. Calendars need updating, and publications may need to be added. Regular maintenance keeps a site relevant and interesting. It doesn't have to be an entire overhaul, but changing the graphics occasionally can also spruce up a site. Be sure you schedule some time for site maintenance each month.

Miscellany

Tags and Google: To be found on the Internet your site needs to be noticeable. Tags are one way to attempt to have your site pop up when someone types in, say, "weaver", but they do not offer a guarantee.

There are any number of different systems to position your site so that it is found by those looking, and even more enterprising folks willing to take your money promising such services. View all with skepticism.

A unique name helps; the longer your site exists helps; paying in advance for more than a couple of years for your domain name says that you're serious, and helps.

The more frequently your site is sought with a search engine, Google for example, the more frequently it will appear. Finally, your hosting service will provide options to submit your site to search engines. All useful tools, but none are guaranteed.

Type and Color: Sites are not just viewed on the site owner's or designer's computer! They are viewed on many, many different systems.

The screens can be small, tall, or wide; they can be digital or analog video; the colors can be warm or cool or totally off! How a web site is viewed is outside the control of the designer—it is determined by the monitor and system being used by the viewer.

Web safe colors, web safe fonts, and rasterizing text are methods used to attempt to control the way the site looks. While these are important, they require much more extensive treatment than can be accomplished in class handouts.

General Design Issues: When should you use serif or sans-serif fonts? How many fonts are appropriate? When are bold, underline, or italic text treatments appropriate? How about text justified to the right and left, or jagged?

These are all questions to be addressed when creating any publication, not just a site, but sometimes the answers are different depending on whether the publication is print on paper or electronic to be viewed on a monitor.

These topics along with rollover buttons, drop down menus, and design protocols which contribute to making an attractive site, also require more extensive discussion.

Blog: As mentioned earlier, a site can represent you as a weaver, a jewelry maker, a publisher, or a photographer. These are professional sites and it is advisable to keep them professional.

A blog is the place for things of a more personal nature. It is the equivalent of a published online journal. A place to share musings, journal entries, photographs, travel exploits, bragging, poetry, humor, personal opinions, children's or grandchildren's accomplishments, your annual seasonal letter—all are appropriate for a blog.

Blogs are easy to maintain and much less expensive than a site. There are many sources for free or inexpensive blogs. (As mentioned earlier, a blog comes free with every Wildsouthwest domain and probably most other hosting servers.)

Acronyms: Internet Acronym Dictionary
www.netlingo.com/

- FTP File Transfer Protocol—method for transferring files/web sites from one's own system to the server
- HTTP HyperText Transfer Protocol—precedes all URL addresses to enable a computer system to locate a specific site
- HTML HyperText Markup Language—the language used to create the web pages
- ISP Internet Service Provider—the company providing an individual or business with internet access, AOL, ATT, Comcast, etc.
- URL Uniform Resource Locator (the web site address)
- WWW World Wide Web controlled by a consortium known as W3C (world wide web consortium)
- XML eXtensible Markup Language (also XHTML)—a newer and tighter form of the language used to create web pages

Resources

Creating handouts in advance for a class on a technology that daily, if not hourly, evolves, means that the handouts are quickly out-of-date.

The preceding 4 pages were created 4 months before this page. Additional links to resources discovered since then are listed here. In order to accumulate appropriate links in one online PDF document, all the links in the original handouts are repeated.

Extremely long links have been reduced in size with:

www.tinyurl.com

A great deal of thanks for support and for providing many resources goes to Jo Earl, hardworking CW web mistress!

General Information

www.forbeginners.info/web-hosting/

Gizmo's Tech Support Alert is a site which has become the Wikipedia® for Freeware:

www.techsupportalert.com/

"About" covers an amazing number of topics, for web site design a good place to start is:

www.about.com/compute/

Graphic Design

"About" has an intensive section on graphics design:

<http://tinyurl.com/yqzbzu>

Web Design Rules of thumb:

www.firelily.com/opinions/thumb.html

Photoshop & Illustrator:

www.adobe.com

Less expensive alternatives:

www.corel.com

www.xara.com

Free or very cheap:

www.gimp.org/

<http://tinyurl.com/5r5ke5> (Serif)

Web Design Software

This software allows for web site design to be accomplished in a WYSIWYG environment:

Dreamweaver:

<http://www.adobe.com>

Free or less expensive alternatives:

<http://nvudev.com/index.php>

www.virtualmechanics.com/

www.chami.com/html-kit/

For those interested in exploring HTML and its variations, another great suggestion from Jo Earl is to Google "Html Tutorials Notepad."

Templates

Templates are inexpensive and relatively easy to customize. Many designers customize templates for a nominal fee:

<http://allwebcodesign.com/>

Hosting Reviews

www.hosting-review.com/

www.absolutely-free-hosting.com/

Domains, Design, & Hosting

Some of the following resources offer very inexpensive, even free sites. This may work for you, but be aware that ads may be a part of the package, and reliability may be an issue.

www.wildsouthwest.com

<http://hostpapa.com/index.shtml> ("green")

www.hostgator.com/

www.namecheap.com/

<http://tinyurl.com/ynwdwu> (Start Logic)

www.jimdo.com/

Acronyms:

Internet Acronym Dictionary:

www.netlingo.com/