

Web Design & Development Q&A

Planning:

1. What are the first steps to getting my web site up and running?

There is a saying that if you fail to plan, you might as well plan to fail. So it is best to clearly define your site purpose. Without understanding what goals you want to achieve, it is difficult to establish a well defined strategy. So my recommendation is to work on your vision statement for your website and its mission – what you want to accomplish. Once this is established, it is easier to start working out the 3 main objectives you are trying to achieve and then the tactics you need to meet those objectives. Have a good idea who your target audience is. Consult with a web strategist or advanced web designer to discuss these steps.

2. What kind of budget am I looking at for getting a web site?

I typically suggest to my clients to consider 5 budget areas:

- Pre-development site market research 10%
- Web URL registration + Web Hosting 5%
- Web Design & Development 50%
- Maintenance & Future Updates 10%
- Online Marketing 25%

3. How do I register for a domain name? What is a domain name? (URL)

A domain name is your unique web address and typically has a suffix of .com or .ca, there are others, but those are the main ones. There are many domain registrars that you can find online. You will need to search your requested domain name to see if it is available. If it is, you can buy it for a minimum of one year. You do not own your domain name rather you are leasing it for the time frame you purchase. If you forget to renew, you could lose it, so beware, write it down in your calendar and set a reminder call.

4. Should I go with a friend to do my web site or someone more professional?

There is an old saying, “you get what you pay for” or “buyers beware”. I am not saying your friend may not be a good designer, but make sure that whoever you hire, you get referrals, review their current portfolio, make sure that you like their tone and style, ask for references, make sure they can work within your budget. You can also perform a search on the Internet for local designers/developers. Find out who is doing what work, or whether they are outsourcing.

5. How do I know how many pages I need?

It is always recommended that you look at other web sites that are in your field see what your competitors are offering. Also based on your objectives outlined during your planning stage, you will get a sense of what materials and content you will need to help achieve that goal. Always put yourself in the shoes of your audience and think about what kind of information or guidelines do I need to make this decision to sign up, buy or interact with the site.

6. What mind mapping tools or wireframe software do you suggest using?

Basically I use just paper and free-hand much of my information, free flowing without editing. It is

good to get all the information down on paper, worry about organizing it afterwards. The following sites can be used to help you: <http://bubbl.us/>; www.smartdraw.com/; www.mockupscreens.com/; www.axure.com/. I personally use a word document.

7. What sites do you use for keyword research?

Keyword research can be done simply by looking at the page source of your competitors and look at their meta-tags in the <head> section of their HTML code. But there are software applications that can be used to extract from your competition such as www.compete.com or you can use <https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal>; www.ispionage.com

8. What questions should I consider when thinking of selling online?

- What are you trying to accomplish? ← think of your goals, mission, expectations
- Are you prepared to make the time and financial commitment?
- What is the likelihood that your products / services will sell online? Review the online-sales forecasts for your type of product / service.
- How will your online store differ from that of your competitors?
- Are you prepared to deal with the customer support issues? Volume of messages, shipping, return policy, technical troubleshooting etc.
- Do you have or need a fulfillment strategy?
- What are the costs involved in selling your products / services online?
- How will you find your customers and how will customers find you?
- How soon can you be profitable?
- What features do you want your online store to have?
- Charge fees for payment gateway, security, transaction fees, other fees

Web Design:

1. What are the latest trends in design for web sites?

The trend is leaning toward designing around content and communicating your message. Most modern websites are designed using simple 1 and 2 column layouts around a central axis, streamlined and subtly incorporating icons and images that hint at the message. Gone are the days of FLASH intros, multiple usages of JavaScript rollovers or expandable images. The audience brain makes decisions in just a 20th of a second of viewing a webpage. If people believe a website looks good, then this positive quality will spread to other areas - such as your content.

2. What colour scheme should I use, font styles and sizes?

It's best that you keep your audience in mind to determine colour and font styles. Some larger font for some areas help draw attention to it, but it should be used sparingly, the same with usage of italics, and bold. Rule of thumb is not to use more than 2 font styles. Best read font style on screen is Verdana.

3. Why are most sites so boxy looking?

The interface structure is rectangle in shape, however, with the larger screens now, designers have more flexibility to creating effects that are showing designs outside of the rectangle, so it doesn't look so boxy, as well we are seeing trends move more into rounded corners, abstract art and pop-up figures created in FLASH that give more dynamic feel.

4. Are there any design factors I should consider for designing a search friendly site?

There are a few elements that can affect the search engines ability to access your site, including the design. Heavy usage of graphics without using ALT tags (image identifiers in the code), text graphics will also not show information for indexing. A complete site developed in FLASH is also not search engine friendly.

5. Why can't I use fancy fonts for the site, my developer said that it isn't wise to do so?

Again, besides the typical font styles that are compatible across all browsers/operating systems, Arial, Times New Roman, Verdana, Helvetica, Georgia, most other font styles will not always work, if your user doesn't have that font on their computer, and thus may see little boxes or other graphical interpretation of that font.

Web Development:

1. I want to be able to maintain my own site, but I don't want to learn code, how can I do this?

There are different ways to maintain your site content. One of the ways is to hire your current web developer to make the changes for you. Typically they have a discounted maintenance rate for ongoing clients, however, if you wish to maintain the site yourself, you can have a content management system (CMS) built into your overall development when you first build your site or later if you have an existing site. Many of them now are very simple to use and are similar to that of MS Word. Because of the nature of the CMS, more programming work up front is needed to incorporate into the site and therefore will be costly at first, but in the long run may tend to save you money and time, and not have to rely on your designer to get back to you.

2. To database or not? Pages created on the fly? What does this mean?

Databases are useful when you have a lot of information that needs to be collected, cross-referenced, written to multiple areas of your site, or for transactional purposes. Databases are used for features such as surveys, request for consultation forms, shopping carts, update content, or any use for a relational database. Database development is higher skill and not all designers can program. Therefore, look for designer/developers who can provide this skill set.

3. What is an FTP?

This acronym stands for file transfer protocol. It is the process needed to get your site files from your desktop up to the host server, for the rest of the world to see your website. If you are switching host providers, your developer may ask you for this information, and you would need to give them your host name, typically <ftp.yourdomain.com> and a username and password.

4. How do I create a Site Map – why is this important?

You can develop a site map in different formats, HTML, XML and TXT. Typically we develop sitemaps so that it makes the search engines life easier to find all your pages, especially if you have site sections three deep (section, subsection, sub-sub-section). Site maps have been extremely useful in search engine optimization, and anytime you make major changes to your site architecture or add new content, it is worthwhile creating an updated version of the site map to re-submit to Google.

5. What can I do to prepare for the web developer, to reduce on time and be more efficient with the process?

Review a few of your competitor web sites to get a general idea on how they present themselves, this will give you an idea what you like and dislike. Create a suggested site map based on your findings, with the different sections that you would like to elaborate on, remembering that there should always be minimum of the following pages, Home | About Us | Contact Us and Privacy Policy, the other sections should be related to your products and services and other value added pages for your audience. Collect a list of 20 keyword phrases that you believe your audience will use to find you, share this information with your developer. Write up your features or requirements that you feel you would need, and pay careful attention to the budget – review #2 in the planning stage. Work closely with your developer to keep communication lines open, and participate through total awareness, so you can be part of the project.

Online Marketing:

1. What kind of tactics can I use to help drive traffic to my site?

Generating traffic can be as simple as telling all those who meet you, about your website, through having your web address (URL) on every piece of correspondence that leaves your office, business cards, telephone message, advertising, press releases, building mutual links exchange relationships, web advertising, pay-per click advertising, search engine advertising, sharing content articles, blogging, participating in forums, website launch party, television radio, print advertising – practically anything that grows awareness to your web site.

2. What kind of tactics can I use to generate leads?

Generating leads is another way of saying how do I get to know my audience and build a way to have continuous conversations and build relationships. There are a variety of tactics including, newsletter sign-up, free downloads, sign up for white-papers, subscribe to a blog, subscribe to be a participant on a forum, leave a comment, fill in a survey, a poll, participate in a webinar, fill in a form to participate in a contest. There are so many different tactics to generate leads, that depending upon your audience you can use a few of these creatively to keep the relationship going.

3. Why can't I convert more click-thru's to sales from my Google Ad Word campaign?

Take a good look at your keyword choices, are you utilizing as many keyword options for your campaigns. Consider doing some split testing advertisements to see which ones give you the most response. Review your ad content. Are people getting what they expected from the ad, or was it misleading or not providing the benefit they had expected. Are you using your keywords in your title and your ad body content? What landing pages are you using for your ads? Are they ending up on the homepage, yet there is nothing on the homepage that is talking about that ad content. What is the metrics saying? How saturated is your marketplace?

4. Are banner ads dead?

Banner ads account for less than half the ads on the Internet, but almost 50% of B2B (business to business) banner ads receive direct response. Thus, for certain industries, this format is still proving to be a viable option for advertising. Consumers however are becoming banner blind. If you want to consider purchasing banner ads, consider wholesale buying on niche sites or blogs. Review their traffic numbers, ensure that your audience will be in that traffic.

5. How effective are webinars or podcasts?

Webinars offer interactive ways to get your message out. Podcasts can complement a webinar, by providing ongoing mini-lecturers. People on the go or don't have time to attend off site seminars, now can have on-demand information at their fingertips, can listen to podcasts while walking their dogs. Web 2.0 has given the control back to the viewer.

6. Why do not all web designers know about online marketing?

Over the years web design has evolved drastically from a simple graphical interface on the screen to a more sophisticated approach that takes the site owner's goals to a new level. Site owners are tired of having spent tons of money for an online brochure and are expecting much more results to occur from their sites. Web designers who have no or little background or experience in getting results for their site owners are falling to the wayside. Expectations are greater, thus more demands for sophisticated level of understanding and business acumen is greatly needed. There is no sense having a wonderfully designed site, if no one is able to get to it or find it. Review with your potential web designer their comfort level with respect to three major objectives, how they intend to drive targeted traffic to your site; how to generate leads; how to convert visitors. These three objectives can be met by implementing certain elements or features on a site. If they have no idea, make sure to find someone who can.

Miscellaneous:

1. How much is hosting and is this a monthly cost?

Hosting can range from \$8 - \$35/month for shared hosting service. For dedicated these can range from \$199 - \$599 per month. The key to hosting is their suggested uptime, customer service, control panel access, where the data servers are located, redundancy, tech support.

2. How long has InSite Creations been in business, what is your specialty, and can we see some examples of your work?

We have been in business since 1995, just at the start of the Internet era. We have had both entrepreneurial and corporate experience. Our uniqueness is being able to provide our clients with full service – web design, programming development, online marketing and business development all under one roof. We work from our home, so the lower costs are shared with our clients. Our portfolio can be found at <http://www.onlinesitedevelopment.com/portfolio.html>

3. What is the typical time frame it takes to create a web site (say up to 20 pages, 10 sections)?

This really depends upon the complexity of the functionality. A basic HTML site of this size typically takes 50 hours in total from concept to implementation. We spend quite a bit of time ensuring we understand the objectives and goals, before proceeding with design and development. This way, we typically can see results much more quickly.

4. How do you keep the communications flowing between all the various Internet proponents (ex. Website, email, e-newsletter, blog, video, lead generating downloads – such as e-books or white papers, webinars, social media, etc.)?

It is important that each of your mediums have various touch-points rotating the audience from one to another, always ensuring there is a reason for the audience to participate with the next offering. The key is to ensure that you always have permission from them to involve them with the next

offering or give them the option to receive or not receive. I typically like to set up a communication map, to see how I am moving the audience from one medium to the next or how one can enter/exit that map. Build your product/service offerings around these elements always keeping in mind all your various touch-points.

5. What are the upcoming trends for the Internet and how will that impact my business?

- Social Media marketing should be part of your 2010/2011 efforts – excellent format of online networking. This is a great way to generate referrals and get your name out to a connected group of people.
- Article sharing – a great way to mass publish your article with back links to your site, drive interested parties back to your website.
- Create ways to get your message out via online video – consider web based interviews, promote a new product, and provide a viral marketing link for easy sharing.
- Use of 3rd party widgets offer many wonderful tools to add to your website. There is no need to re-invent from scratch, instead, you can get a developer to easily install and customize. Google is a wonderful example of having multiple tools both for the site owner and web developer.

Additional Resources:

Google Account setup: <https://www.google.com/accounts/NewAccount>

Create your own Google/Yahoo Site Map: <http://www.xml-sitemaps.com/>

Sign up for Constant Contact, Email Marketing:

<http://www.constantcontact.com/index.jsp?pn=insitecreations>

Page Rank Checker: <http://tools.seobook.com/firefox/rank-checker/>

Larry Chase Web Digest: <http://www.wdfm.com/>

Web resources: <http://mashable.com/>

20 things I learned: <http://www.20thingsilearned.com>

Google Places for your Business

<http://www.google.com/support/places/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=177896>

Freelancers Tool Kit: <http://www.cogniview.com/convert-pdf-to-excel/post/the-freelancers-toolset-100-web-apps-for-everything-you-will-possibly-need/>