

RMH Web Design

Web Site Design for the Small Business Community

<http://www.rmhwebdesign.com>

PO Box 86 Algoma, Wisconsin 54201 (920) 487-9868

New Site Information Packet

There's no time like the present to get your business on-line. A web site is an essential asset to almost any business as the Internet provides a dynamic landscape to trade in. RMH Web Design has prepared a web site design and development guide for new clients to help you plan your site from start to finish. This is an exciting venture, so let's get started!

Determine your objectives and target audience before planning the layout and design of your site.

Determine your objectives. It's one thing to know you need a web site-but do you know *why* you need one? You are the expert at your business and your input into the process is vital to your site's success.

Before you start designing your site, have a clear set of goals in mind. For instance, which of these objectives fit your web site plans?

- Provide potential customers basic information about my business (brochure site)
- Help customers contact me
- Enable customers to secure your services or purchase my products via telephone or mail-order
- Allow customers to purchase directly online
- Save time answering the same questions over and over
- Reduce the cost of marketing. (i.e. – print literature, postage.)
- Share my expertise with others via articles
- Other

Profile Your Target Audience. A profile of your target audience will help you determine your content presentation, layout and design. For example, if your audience is conservative and serious, a classic, toned-down theme may be best. A young and energetic audience may prefer brighter themes and more multimedia.

Things to consider:

- Who are my potential customers/visitors based on things like age, gender, occupation, location, income and so on?
- Am I looking to do business with other businesses (B2B) or is my potential customer base 'regular' consumers (B2C)?
- Are they looking for the least expensive option or will there be potential customers who are looking for the latest and greatest product/service out there?

Develop Your Site

You have now determined your site's objectives and what general information you would like it to include that will appeal to your target audience. It's now time to organize your information. Gather resources such as product/price lists, brochures, logos, company information, photographs, etc.

Use A Flowchart To Organize Your Site. Try and visualize your site and write it down on a flowchart. This will help determine how many pages you may need, what content will be on them and how they will link together. The following outline is a general guide that can be used to determine what pages you may want to include. Feel free to edit the list to suit your needs.

- A. Home page/Start page
- B. Company Profile and History/About You
- C. Products/Services /Prices
- D. Order Form
- E. Customer Service/Order and Shipping Information
- F. Contact Information
- G. Privacy Policy
- H. Legal Information/Disclaimer/Site Terms of Use
- I. Helpful Links/Resources
- J. Site Map for larger sites
- K. Directions to your facility
- L. Articles/Helpful tips pertaining to your industry
- M. Industry Affiliations
- N. Photos
- O. Calendar of Events

One of the primary goals of practically every web site is to share information. The information you choose to share as the content of your site is essential to its success. Once you have determined everything you want your site to accomplish, you can start thinking about how your design and content will support these goals. Based on your outline above, jot down what you plan to include on each page.

The Site Design

Now that you have gathered the information you wish to publish on your site, think about what kind of design and layout that you want to use. What is the overall mood that you would like to project on your site (professional, whimsical, formal, or informal, etc.)? What colors do you want on your site? Do you have a company logo? What color scheme would look best with the logo?

A good rule of thumb is to keep your site as simple and easy to use as possible while still using enough graphical elements to make it visually interesting.

Take a look at other sites in your industry. Make a list of 5 – 10 sites that you like and list what you like about them. Do the same for sites that you do not like.

Just a few things to take into consideration when deciding on a design:

Navigation - Customers will want to know where they are and how to get to where they want to be on your site. If you use a graphical navigation system (buttons) you will also want to include a text link for those who do not have, or choose to turn off, graphics in their browser. As a rule of thumb, it should never take more than 2-3 clicks to get to any *major section* of your site. The navigation menu should appear in the same place on each page.

Download time – Pages should load quickly, especially your homepage so be sure to optimize any images you wish to use.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) – Text should be user friendly while at the same time incorporating essential keywords to increase your visibility in the search engines. SEO should be part of your site development from the beginning.

Call-to-Action – Use clear terminology so that your visitors know how to make a purchase, hire you, contact you etc.

Purchase Your Domain Name

If you haven't already, you should purchase a domain name for your site. With domain names disappearing by the 1000's each day, reserve your name as soon as you come up with one so that it is not taken when it comes time to launch your site.

Domain names can run anywhere from \$6.00 to \$35 per year, depending on where you register your name. RMH Hosting offers free domain name registration with the purchase of any hosting plan.

Your domain name should be meaningful and easy to remember. You can try the name of your business. If that is not available, try it with hyphens. For example, if the name of your business is XYZ Auto Repair and XYZAutoRepair.com is not available, try X-Y-Z-AutoRepair.com or xyzar.com. Domain names are NOT case sensitive so, xyzautorepair.com is the same as XYZAutoRepair.com. You can also try the name with a different Top Level Domain extension like xyzautorepair.net. And although domain names can have up to 63 characters, the shorter the better – make it easier to remember!

You can (and should) reserve your name with your registrar and have it "parked" until you are ready to launch your site. If you purchase your name from someone other than your hosting company, you will then transfer your name to "point" to the hosting company's servers. RMH Web Design will help you do all of this if needed.

E-commerce

If you plan to sell products or services from your site, you will need to look into what e-commerce package will suit your needs. Do you need a shopping cart system? A way to accept credit cards on-line along with an Internet Merchant account and a payment gateway?

Taking Orders - If you plan to take orders on-line, you will need to consider a shopping cart system. Some hosting companies supply e-commerce packages or you can "bolt on" a shopping cart to your pages.

Then there is the issue of accepting payments. If you already accept credit cards with a terminal, you can go to your bank and ask if they offer Internet merchant accounts. Then you will need a payment

gateway, which transfers the payment from your customer's bank to yours. Although these items can increase your cost of doing business, there are free and low cost shopping carts and payment systems available.

Hosting

When your site design is complete you will want to upload it to a host server for the rest of the world to see! To do this, you will need a hosting company – a company that provides storage space for your site files on a computer called a server. This computer is always connected to the Internet and is ready to “serve” your site to visitors around the world!

Questions to consider when choosing a hosting company:

- How much storage space do I need?
- How many e-mail addresses do I need?
- Can I edit my site online or do I need to have my own software?
- How much bandwidth is needed?
- Do I need an e-commerce enabled site?
- Will I need a secure server?
- Are site stats provided (hit counters, referrals, etc)?
- How is the customer service/technical support?
- What is the percentage of uptime?
- What is the cost?

The more features you require, the more it could cost. RMH Web Design owns and operates RMH Hosting – <http://www.rmhosting.com>, where you can get a basic package for a starter site for under \$6.00 per month. With each hosting package you will get a free domain name (must be used at time of registration), 24/7 support, an online site builder, 99.9% uptime, Spam control, tutorials and more.

Other Things To Consider

There are several other things you may want to include when planning your site:

- Site search
- Weather
- Map/directions
- Interactivity (polls, contests, etc)

- List company or personal accolades, memberships
- Customer Testimonials
- Newsletter signup
- Discussion Forums/Blog

Marketing Your Site

Once your site is up and running, you will want people to find it. Place your web address on all your marketing and office materials and use it in your e-mail signature. Leave your URL on your answering machine message.

Submit your site to the major search engines and directories. Some of the major companies are now charging a nonrefundable fee simply to look at your site but this does not guarantee that you will get listed. There are still a few free engines and directories to submit to however.

List your site in your local online AND offline directories.

Get sites to link to you. Link popularity is becoming a major factor in the search engine rankings. If you can swap links with sites that compliment your business and are higher in the rankings, this may help your rankings as well.

Send out flyers, postcards, prepare a press release, advertise in the newspaper, get your domain name in your yellow page ad, start a blog, word of mouth...the possibilities are endless!

Maintaining Your Site

How will your site be maintained and updated once it has been launched? Consider whether maintenance is included in the cost of the site. How much updating do you anticipate? Can you do it yourself? Do you have the proper software, personnel and time to maintain the site? Will there be someone available to answer e-mails from your visitors?

Getting your business on-line is an exciting venture. With the proper planning, you are sure to develop an outstanding site!

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: How long will it take to get my site up and running?

A: Getting a site up and running can take a day or two or several weeks, depending on the size and complexity of the site.

Q: How much does it cost to have a site designed?

A: For the initial layout and first page that we design, the fee is \$175.00 USD. Each additional page created based on that first layout will be \$20 per page.

Q: What if I have already purchased a site template elsewhere?

A: We will be happy to set up your purchased template for \$100 and re-create this template for the rest of your site for \$20 per page.

Q: What payment methods do you accept?

A: We accept all major credit cards, money orders and business checks.

Q: Can I maintain my site once it is up and running?

A: Absolutely.

Q: Do I have to host my site with you?

A: While we offer affordable hosting solutions for businesses of any size you can host your site anywhere you choose. We will work with your hosting company to get your site up and running.

About RMH Web Design

RMH Web Design is owned/operated by Robyn M. Harper. She began designing sites in April of 1999 as a hobby and professionally in April of 2000. Robyn works primarily on the Macintosh platform, but is well versed in Windows applications.

As a member of the International Webmasters Association/HTML Writers Guild (IWA/HWG), Robyn received her Web Technologies Certificate in November of 2005 and is currently preparing to take the Certified Internet Webmaster Associates Exam, the first in a series of exams leading to certification as a Master CIW Web Site Manager.

Contact RMH Web Design today and claim your place in cyberspace!

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info@rmhwebdesign.com (920) 487-9868