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2300 Fairview Road Ste. O-103
Costa Mesa, CA 92626
714.556.7468 ph / fx
info@jvmediadesign.com
www.jvmediadesign.com

Thank you for downloading our free information packet, "Getting Started on the Web".

At JV Media Design, we believe smooth interaction and effective communication between client and designer are paramount to successful project completion. However, we also understand that clients often want to do their own preliminary research without having to pay for professional consulting.

We hope that this information packet will benefit prospective clients and teach them a little bit about our world of web design, ecommerce, and marketing.

Please feel free to contact us with any questions or if you would like a free estimate for your project.

JV Media Design
1.714.556.7468 ph/fx
1.866.909.4586

info@jvmediadesign.com
www.jvmediadesign.com

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714.556.7468 ph / fx
info@jvmediadesign.com
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Why Your Business Needs to Have an Internet Presence

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Even with the steady growth of the World Wide Web, many businesses do not have an online presence and some think that they do not need to have a presence at all.

"My business is doing fine as it is." That's great! But, it's almost impossible to answer 'no' to the question, "Can my business be doing even better?" One of the easiest ways to help your business gain more exposure and potential customers is to have a professionally developed website. There are many advantages to having a professionally designed website.

Consider some of the points below:

1. Make a great first impression of your business to first-time visitors to your site
2. Reach a wider, global market
3. Increases credibility
4. Use as a promotional tool
5. Increase sales
6. Generate new leads
7. Improve customer service
8. Use your site as an informational tool for your customers, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
9. Unlike printed material, your website can be changed very easily, anytime
10. Reduce operating costs

In order to compete in a local to a global market, you have to be available to it. Having a professionally designed website gives your business an edge, saves time, reduces operating costs and improves your image. You can increase your sales by being able to complete transactions online, anytime. Whether you are a large corporation, or an individual who simply wants to have a personal space on the internet, your site can serve as an informational tool you can refer your customers or interested parties to.



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How a Custom Designed Website Can Help Your Business

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Over the years, the internet has grown into a marvelous avenue to promote your business. In my previous article, "Why Your Business Needs to Have an Internet Presence", I discussed 10 valid reasons why your business needs a website. In this article, I discuss some things to avoid and how a custom, professional website can help your business succeed.

Professional is the key. Remember, the internet has a global reach. Some of your new potential clientele may be learning of your business for the first time by visiting your website and the old cliché, "you never get a second chance to make a first impression", still rings true.

When a business makes the decision to gain an internet presence, whether they are the largest corporation or the smallest home business, they may be tempted to take what appears to be the "easy way" to get the company website up and running fast. The three major potential pitfalls here are:

1. Some hosting comes with "do it yourself" capabilities and pre-made templates. Although this is a great way to upload photos of your summer vacation for your family and friends to see, this is not a good way to make that great first impression for your business. In short, these "solutions" really do not present a professional image, and often use very minimal templates and overall poor layout and design.
2. Many companies now sell website "templates" for low cost, making it easy for you to get up and running quickly. While this is true (you can get up and running quickly and many of these companies do sell more professional designs), you run the risk of other businesses using that SAME design. And to buy a "unique" copy of the template the cost is often just as, or more expensive, than if you were to hire a professional company to create a custom design for you.
3. Complete websites for \$100! This may be a bit of an exaggeration, but I have actually seen advertisements for complete websites for very low prices. You must remember that you are investing in your business when you decide to have a custom website developed, and you really do get what you pay for. A professional design firm creates original designs, from scratch, tailor-made for each individual client - and the prices for that work can vary a lot, but do expect to pay a reasonable amount for the services.

These three potential pitfalls aside, the process of getting your business onto the World Wide Web does not have to be a confusing, time-consuming, and costly affair. Below is a succinct outline of the process.

1. First, you need to design on your domain name for your website. Avoid names with "-" in them and very long names. Try to be as succinct as possible. It is easiest for your visitors to remember a URL that is your company name, or at the very least, keywords that describe your company. For instance, if your business is ABC Accounting, you could consider abcaccounting.com or something such as accountingservice.com. You may find that your first (and second!) choice for a domain name may already be taken, so you may



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- have to get creative. Just remember that a domain name that reflects your business is key.
2. Shop around for the right design firm. There is no shortage of companies who can handle the design and development of your website. Do not be afraid to shop around. Prepare a detailed RFP (Request For Proposal) that outlines things such as the goals of your website, your target market, the information you would like to have on your website, and advanced features such as ecommerce. Review the portfolios of companies and send out your RFP to the ones you feel have the skills to do your job. When you've narrowed down the prospects, do not be afraid to ask for personal or telephone interviews. Find out what their design process and work flow is like. Ask for recommendations about what type of web hosting your site will need. Also, make sure to review the design agreement or contract with the company you choose (a professional company will ALWAYS require a contract before work begins).
 3. Have a basic idea of what you would like your finished site to look like. It's a good idea to do some "surfing" of the web to see what your competition and similar companies are doing, but look outside your industry as well for designs that catch your eye. This will give your design team a place to start and an idea of the style of design you expect for your own website.
 4. Work on your "content". The content of your site includes all the text you wish to display. This is a very important aspect to your site. Although you do not want to overwhelm your visitors with nothing but pages and pages of text, you do want to offer clear, concise, professionally composed and edited information. Proof read, proof read, proof read! If you are in doubt, it is best to consider hiring a professional copy writer. Remember that grammatical errors shout "unprofessional!" to the viewer.
 5. Once your site is up and running, don't be afraid to add or edit your content periodically. This keeps your pages "fresh" and shows repeat visitors that your business is active and "takes an interest" in staying up to date.
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How to Work With Your Design Team

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As the Creative Director at JV Media Design, I oversee and manage all creative projects and staff. In order to undertake this task, I have developed an outline for our team to follow that facilitates the process which takes each project from concept to completion. Part of this process involves educating each of our clients on what we need from them in order for the project to move forward.

Although some design studios may not be as organized, it would still benefit each client to know in advance what might be expected of them before proceeding with a design job. Successful projects come from not just a talented design team, but also close interaction with the client throughout the process.

Below is a general outline of how you or your company can work with your chosen design team.

Consultation, Planning, and Choosing a Representative

The most important step in many things is the first and that rings true in the design field. Your designer should set up a phone or in-person consultation with you prior to the beginning of your project. Here, you should discuss every detail of your project so that the designer can plan the workflow and milestones. Some designers will also offer you a questionnaire to fill out to help determine this information. It is very important, especially when working on interactive/multimedia and custom programmed (database/ecommerce) websites to have more information than not enough. If you discover that you forgot to mention a key function in your initial consultation it could not only set your project back, but also cost you more money to add it in after you have already signed a design agreement or contract.

After the initial consulting and planning for your project is complete and you have signed a design agreement, the next task is to choose a single representative from your company to interface with the design team throughout the project. This prevents many problems such as conflicting information before they even have a chance to happen. The chosen representative's responsibility is to:

1. Get the design team any content (text, chosen images, etc.) necessary for the project
- 2) Respond to any questions or requests from the design team
- 3) Notify the design team of any changes or modifications necessary on the project
- 4) Sign off on any milestones

Content

Content is possibly the most important aspect of your website. It is equally important to make sure that your content represents your company the best possible way. Before giving text content



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to your designer, you need to check and recheck it for grammar, punctuation, and spelling errors. You may also consider hiring a professional copywriter to produce content for your site. Either way, most design companies do not reread your content checking for and/or correcting errors and will charge an extra fee for this service. Just make sure your content is the best that it can be when you hand it off.

The Design

Most design companies will offer a number of "mock up" or concept designs for your project with a certain amount of revisions. It is important for you to review each design with your associates and make any changes necessary to achieve the final look for your site. Once a final design is approved, if you make additional modifications you may be liable to pay additional charges. Your design team should help you avoid this by working closely with you and making suggestions during the concept phase.

When Problems Arise

It is important to remember that although your design team relies on computers to create your site, they are only human. There are occasions when an instruction may be misinterpreted or not as clear as it should be. It is up to your design team to ask questions when things are not perfectly clear to avoid problems and it is up to you to give as much description and detail in order to complete the project. Phrases such as, "We are looking for something edgy", or "We'll know it when we see it" really do nothing to help the progress of your project.

Additional problems such as delays can usually be avoided by keeping a clear line of communication open at all times. If you have questions during the process, do not hesitate to bring them up. Your design team should be available normal business hours via phone, email, and/or an instant messenger service and be able to solve any problems that arise quickly and professionally. If they cannot, make sure you receive adequate explanation (there may be extenuating circumstance in any case) or refer back to the agreement you signed with the company.

Completing the Project

Your design team should thoroughly check your finished website to make sure that it works on the top internet browsers (Internet Explorer and Firefox) and has no errors in functionality. They should also be available to make any final edits and/or changes before the site is taken live on the web.

When the project is completed to your satisfaction, many design companies will present you with options for maintaining your site such as; "on call" maintenance or a monthly, quarterly, or yearly contract.

In Conclusion

For a successful project it is important for both the client and the design team to work together. It is up to the client to explain the project thoroughly and give the design team a good idea of what



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is expected and it is up to the design team to keep lines of communication open, ask questions when things may be unclear, and use experience and expertise to do the job.



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Web Development Terminology - or How to Know What Your Design Team is Talking About

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Hosting and Domain Name: Most people do know about web hosting and domain names are these days, but every now and then some confusion might arise as to whether they are independent or one in the same. Basically, your web hosting is the space you "rent" on the internet to place your website. Your domain name, also called your URL is www.your_website.com. Some hosting companies will offer the purchase of your domain name at the same time you purchase your hosting account. Often times however, you purchase a domain name separately from a company such as Register.com or GoDaddy.com.

FTP or Login Info: When you are asked for this information, this refers to the host name, user name, and password needed to access your hosting account. This will come from your hosting company when you sign up.

Site Map: A site map is exactly what it sounds like - a flow chart or outline of all the pages on your website. This is created to help organize the way your website is put together.

Menu or Navigation: Often times before creating a concept (see below) for your site, a designer will ask you what Menu items or Navigation you would like. These are simply the "buttons" within your page design that help a visitor get around to the other pages. For instance: About Us, Our Services, Our Products, and Contact Us could all be menu items.

"Mock Up" or Concept: When designers mention these terms they are talking about the initial or concept designs for your project. In the case of a website, the concept will most likely be delivered to you via the web and be an example of how your site will look. These concepts are created and revised to achieve the final look of your website. Also note that designers often use "dummy text" (see below) if you have not already provided "content" (see below).

Royalty Free or Stock Photography: Royalty Free and Stock Photography refers to photos and graphic images that you or your designer purchases to use within your design or on your website pages. These images can vary greatly in price, depending on the company they are purchased from. A good designer will have their own selection of images that were already purchased for you to choose from. Even so, sometimes the "perfect" image(s) can not be found so you must turn to other sources.

Screen Resolution: The resolution for images and graphics for the web is 72 dpi (dots per inch). If you supply images to your designer, they should be of this resolution or higher. If you expect to do any printing (say, you want a brochure made to match the look of your website), your images will have to be in print resolution or 300 dpi.



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Vector Graphic: Designers will sometimes ask if you have your logo as a vector graphic. Vector graphics are shapes, lines, text, even illustrations which have been created in Adobe Illustrator or Macromedia Freehand. What makes a vector graphic different from a regular graphic is it's ability to be resized (especially larger) without distortion or loss of quality.

"Dummy" or Filler text: Designers (both web and graphic) often use nonsense text in place of your real page text when first creating your site. Do not be alarmed! This is just to show you the areas where text will be placed. Once you provide your actual text, the designer will place that in those spaces.

Content: Content refers to any text or special images which will go on your website that you will need to provide to your designer.

Meta or "Head" Tags and Keywords: The meta (often called the head tags and keywords) of your page are special code to help search engines find your page. If your designer ask you for these you should provide the following: a description of your company/site (this can be several sentences that include your company name and a few keywords about what you do); page titles (what you would like each page of your website to be titled - this shows up in the browser window); keywords (these are single words and short phrases that you believe your visitors might type in a search engine in order to find your website).

CSS or Stylesheet: CSS stands for Cascading Style Sheet. It is a system of coding that helps control things like the font on your page, link colors, page layout and many more.

Static HTML or Static Page: Most websites are created with the language of HTML. Often times, a designer will call something "static" to denote that it is 1) not Flash (see below), or 2) not dynamically generated from a database. This is simply a "regular" website page.

Flash: Flash is the software from Macromedia® that designers use to create motion and animation on your website. This can be in the form of a presentation, moving graphics, or even a game. The applications for Flash have grown along with high speed internet connections such as DSL and Cable.

"Splash" Page: This is usually referred to as a page that loads up before the main pages of your site. It can be your logo, or a Flash animation. Most designers are trying to steer their clients away from such a page as the attention span of the average internet user is quite short these days!

Blog: Blog is short for Web Log and has fast become a very popular feature on many websites. Basically, a blog is a way for you to keep your site content fresh by posting articles and other information on your site.

Online Marketing: A designer might mention Online Marketing to you as something to consider to help promote your site. This can include: affiliate programs, search engine optimization (see below), banner advertising, placing your website link in directories on the web, email advertising, newsletters, and online press releases.



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Search Engine Optimization (SEO): Although most designers do not perform this type of Optimization, they might mention it if you show an interest in ranking better in the search engines. SEO is the process of manipulating your page content and Meta tags in order to achieve better rankings.

mySQL or msSQL/SQL and Databases: Unless you have custom programming or an ecommerce shopping cart on your website, your designer most likely would not mention these things. Nevertheless, sometimes they do come up if some of these things might be happening at a later stage. mySQL is the type of database that you would need to have set up if you are hosting your website on a UNIX server whereas msSQL is the type that is set up if your are hosted on a Microsoft Windows server.



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714.556.7468 ph / fx
info@jvmediadesign.com
www.jvmediadesign.com

Setting up E-commerce on Your Website

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According to the U.S. Department of Commerce the estimated total of e-commerce sales for 2005 was \$86.3 billion, which is an increase of 24.6 percent over 2004. Overall business successes can sometimes hinge on that business' ability to accept transactions over the internet. In addition, the internet can help turn a local company into an international company and open up new avenues of business.

However, creating an e-commerce website does not automatically mean website sales. In a future article I will focus more on the aspects of actually operating an e-commerce website, but for now, I will cover the basics that will answer most questions for businesses who are considering the move to selling online.

First Steps

Let's assume that your business already has a professionally designed website. We ask new clients with existing websites who would like to start selling on the internet a series of questions to help determine the best solution for selling online:

Who is your target audience? It is important to know who your customers are when taking into consideration the design of your e-commerce website.

What type of web hosting do you currently have? The type of hosting can determine what type of programming is used on your website. Also, if you do not have sufficient resources to have an e-commerce website, then it is important to know this in advance so that we may suggest a suitable host for a client's needs.

How many products are you going to be selling? Sometimes a client may only have a handful of products, in which case, a shopping cart (either pre-developed or custom) is not necessarily the best solution.

What type of special features would you like your shopping cart to have (example: coupons, affiliate program, downloadable goods, etc.)? This is quite possibly the most important question because the answers to our special e-commerce website pre-development survey are usually the basis for understanding the specifics of a client's needs and for determining the price and time necessary to complete the project.

Explaining E-commerce



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2300 Fairview Road Ste. O-103
Costa Mesa, CA 92626
714.556.7468 ph / fx
info@jvmediadesign.com
www.jvmediadesign.com

The next step in the process usually involves explaining to the client exactly how e-commerce works on the web. Below is a brief explanation of the technology behind the process and what is necessary to sell items on the internet.

The Process

Once a customer visits an e-commerce website, adds product to their cart, and then clicks to check out, it officially begins the transaction of the sale. Programming in the shopping cart enables the credit card information to be sent to what is called a payment gateway. The payment gateway's sole purpose is to offer a secure way to pass this information through the merchant account and on to the credit card processing bank. The processing bank sends the information to the customer's credit card issuer and the transaction is either approved or declined. From there, the results of the transaction are relayed back to the payment gateway where they are stored and sent to both the customer and merchant for verification. At this stage, the shopping cart usually issues a receipt to the customer and a notification of the order to the business.

A Merchant Account

The first thing a business needs in order to accept credit cards online is a merchant account. The merchant account is usually a business bank account that is either set up through a Merchant Service Provider (for example, <http://www.cardservice.com>) or through your regular bank. When a transaction is approved on your website, the merchant account provider will deposit the funds in an account such as your business checking account.

A Payment Gateway

A payment gateway is the online terminal for encrypting and sending transaction information back and forth between your website, the merchant account and to the processing bank. One of the most popular gateways is <http://www.authorize.net>. Most merchant account providers can also sell you a payment gateway.

A Secure Certificate (SSL)

A secure certificate is a necessity when running online transactions as it provides your customers with a secure webpage in order to enter their personal and credit card information before it is sent through the gateway. How can you tell you are on a secure order page? Simply look for a small lock symbol at the top of your browser next to the website address and <https://> before the web address.

Shopping Cart Systems

Through discussing all of the details of a proposed e-commerce business website, we can help our clients determine what the best shopping cart solution is; whether it is a pre-developed cart, or a new custom programmed cart. We go through an extensive interview process to make sure each e-commerce solution is custom tailored to the client's needs.



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714.556.7468 ph / fx
info@jvmediadesign.com
www.jvmediadesign.com

In Conclusion

I hope this information will be helpful to businesses that are just starting out with e-commerce, but remember, these are only the first initial steps to setting up your website to sell online. In a future article I will cover what happens after your internet store is "live", how you will be able to perform updates to your store on your own, and some tips on how to market your site and products more effectively.



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Costa Mesa, CA 92626
714.556.7468 ph / fx
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Useful Ways to Market Your Website

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Often times when we complete a website for a client we then assist them with marketing strategies to help them succeed.

The number one question we get is, "Do you do Search Engine Optimization?" The short answer is, no, simply because it has been our experience that Search Engine Optimization has changed so drastically over the past 5 years that a lot of the original tactics are no longer relevant. For example, the top engine's robot (Google) pays little attention to META tags past the description of your website page. SEO experts used to spend hours on selecting and then packing META tags full of keywords (and there were many elaborate formulas on how to do this).

We have also encountered many clients who want to rewrite their web content to include more keywords. We all agree that well written content is a crucial component to your website, but what is most important is targeting your (human) viewers and not the search engine robots. What happens when you write just for the robots is you end up with poorly written content with a lot of keywords thrown in. Content written in this manner has little appeal for an actual person who may want to read it. Statistics show that visitor's attention spans are very short on the web, so packing your home page full of keyword-laden text is not the best way to reach your target audience.

So how do we solve some of these dilemmas for our clients? We actually start while we are building the website pages. We will ask our clients for unique titles for each of their website pages that describe what the page is about, the service they are offering, etc. Titles are still relevant to the world of search engines and do not deter your human visitors either. We will also encode IMG tags (code used to place images on your web page) with relevant keywords pertaining to that image or the company itself. We will also prepare a robots.txt file for you and a Google sitemap for you to submit when the site is complete.

It may seem like "SEO" is dead, but there is a bright side to marketing on that web and that is that you do have many options.

Engines now are scanning for sites that present relative and useful content to a human reader. One tool companies can use to help give their website more recognition is the Blog (short for web log - I've written an article about there here: <http://www.jvmediadesign.com/blog/blog.php?id=38>). As an example, you can see our blog here: <http://www.jvmediadesign.com/blog/>. When I have time, I will write articles relevant to our viewers or our business. If I don't have time, I will grab similar articles from sites such as <http://www.goarticles.com> or <http://www.ezinearticles.com>. Those are both free sites. People found that having a blog often hits those two main points the engines are now looking at: well written content and timely site updates. I try to update our blog once or twice a week, but that is only because we're in a very competitive market. And, if you do actually write articles yourself, you can submit those articles out to places like <http://www.goarticles.com> and if you make sure to include your website link in the article, people



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who use it on their site will be automatically linking back to you (another key point engines like Google still look at - how many inbound links does your site have).

Another solid way to get some online exposure for your site is to pay Yahoo's fee for a sponsor advertisement. Many of our clients have a good amount of success with their sponsor ads. You can see more info about that here: <http://searchmarketing.yahoo.com/srchsb/sse.php?mkt=us>

Similar to Yahoo, Google has their own ad system with Google Adwords and Adsense ads. We use their Adwords advertising ourselves. What we liked about this was that you don't have to have a huge monthly budget. Granted, the more budget you have the more clients and potential clients you may have but since you are a niche market, you may be able to get by with just a small budget. All about those two options are here: <http://www.google.com/intl/en/ads/>

Still another thing to consider are similar to directory sites but more targeted to businesses - such as the SBC online Yellow Pages and sites such as <http://www.merchantcircle.com>.

One more recommendation we give to our clients in regards to web advertising is simply to submit your site to relevant directories. Yahoo is technically a directory and there still is a way to submit your site for free but there is no guarantee you will be listed or at what position. There are many other directories on the web and a lot of them are free and once you submit your URL, it also gives you an inbound link back to your site.

There are a couple more points I may not have touched on here in another article I wrote: <http://www.jvmediadesign.com/blog/blog.php?id=139>

We also always recommend to our clients to diversify their marketing strategies - never relying on only internet marketing even if all they have is an online business. Even small things like making sure to include your website address on business cards can help. Other more traditional marketing tactics including print advertisements, flyers (or mailers), conventions, press releases and more should not be overlooked. We can help with all of these and always give free estimates to new (potential) and existing clients.

I hope this information is helpful to you.

About the Author:

Sherry Holub received her degree in design from UCLA in 1995 and has been in the design business ever since. She is now the Creative Director and Lead Designer at Southern California firm, JV Media Design. Sherry is also a member of the NAPP (National Association of Photoshop Professionals), AIGA (American Institute of Graphic Arts), IAVA (the International Academy of the Visual Arts), and Cambridge Who's Who.