

Website Development

Things to know about website development

In today's business environment, having an online presence is an essential element of your business. It brings an unprecedented power to access customers 24 hours a day, seven days a week, anywhere in the world. The Internet is truly a revolutionary way to reach the market. Knowing you have a presence round the clock, accessible from anywhere in the world and at relatively low cost, is truly an empowering feeling for any small business.

While the Internet is much more than just the World Wide Web, this aspect of the Internet is where most e-commerce takes place. Therefore, establishing an effective online presence in practical terms means building and maintaining a great website, ie. one that encourages people to use it and works well with your existing business practices. One of the main advantages of web communications over printed media is that sites can be altered and updated as you go – this will give you the ability to alter offers or information daily, or even hourly, at minimal cost. This is the power of the internet at work.

Website Brief-- Before you set out to find a suitable web developer for your website, it is important that you have created a proper brief which broadly includes what you wish to achieve through the website, and what will be the critical feature, including any unique visual elements such as flash animation, or may be an online newsletter feature. Without a proper brief, it will be very difficult for any web developer to provide you with an appropriate quote. You should include your preferences, and any details that are critical for the website. Remember, you do get what you pay for, but without fully understanding both your requirements and the process to be undertaken, mistakes can be made if the communications between client and developer are not adequate. In preparing a brief, start with some preliminary research, perhaps an analysis of what your competitors are doing. Clearly, you want your site to be at least as good as those competing for your market, so a review of other sites using an Internet search engine will help you to find out who is already offering your particular products or services, whether in Australia or overseas. This comparative review will also give you an idea of the functionality they offer, for example secure online payments, 'shopping carts', email bulletins, site search facilities etc. The brief should also include background information on your business, the overall goals and objectives, timeline and key performance indicators. It should be written simply and avoiding the use of business jargon. Consider everything you can think of (even allowing for future expansion if you can't afford to do it all now), but keep it succinct, clear and precise.

References -- For the developer to be able to understand your preferences in terms of 'Look and feel', it is advisable that you provide some references. Whether these are some great looking websites, or even simply some poster or a calendar that you may have seen recently. Visual references are important for the designers as these will be important to align the website design with your own expectations, in addition to the colours, appearance and usability of the site. It is an important consideration in site design and is what gives your site its uniqueness. The best sites are easy to use, offer good services and have an appealing, uncluttered, clean look. If you have an established visual identity for your business, eg a logo and corporate communications look and feel, your site will usually integrate that. Your design should also reflect the type of product or service you are offering, and it should appeal to your target market. Once provided a clear brief to the developer, it is best to step back and let them exercise their creative freedom to develop a solution that fits the bill. The developer will generally provide you with a concept with different layout options (for larger projects) or just a home page design (for smaller websites). These will give you a preliminary look and feel of your new website. These design are loaded onto a test link, so these can be seen online by you for your feedback. You can then fine tune it as required. If the designs are approved, the project continues to the next phase, and rest of the site is developed. While changes can be made, beyond a certain point they will be at your expense. The clearer your instructions to the developer are at the outset, the quicker and less costly your final product will be.

Budget -- Before you approach a web design or development company you also need to have an idea of how much can you afford to spend. Ask friends and colleagues who have websites, what they believe is reasonable. Remember to allow for set-up and ongoing costs associated with the development and hosting of your site. Cost will be determined by a number of factors including size (ie. number of pages), complexity and functionality. Industry standard rates are anywhere between \$80 and \$200 per hour depending on the designer/developer. You will also need to allow for ongoing site maintenance and hosting. A typical small business website can range from between \$2000 for a basic site including hosting and domain name, to over \$40,000 for an integrated e-commerce and business resource planning tool. If your project has the potential to increase revenues or reduce costs, then work on a return on investment (ROI) basis. This will enable you to allocate a budget that has a payback factor worked into it. Ideally, all commercial sites should do this. The extent to which they do can often be a matter of good measurement of returns so be sure to integrate into your businesses

processes a way of tracking how much business your site is generating for you.

Content-- Your content is vital to the success of your website. By 'content' we mean the text and graphics on your site. They must be kept fresh if you want people to keep coming back. They must be compelling if you want to command their attention and move them to action. This means you will have to make a commitment to sourcing good content and ongoing editorial support. You can do this yourself if you have the necessary skills, otherwise you may need to subcontract it out. If you prefer to build the site content over a period of time, it may be more advisable to go for a 'content management system' so that a person without web design skills can edit the site using plain text or a word processing program. This makes the insertion of new text or images very straightforward. However, the cost of website is likely to be fairly higher with a comprehensive CMS feature.

Text -- Writing for the web is a specific skill. There are plenty of sites that can give you tips on how to write for the web, but if writing is not your forte, use a professional writer. Remember, this is the voice talking to your customers. Badly written text, obvious spelling mistakes and confusing instructions will not create good impression on customers.

Some of the best sites involve the minimal use of graphics. The heavy use of graphics can make your site slow to load and frustrating to use. You should also clarify with the developer who will own the copyright to the site itself. The fact that you are paying them to create it does not automatically mean that you own the copyright. Generally, in fact, the copyright remains with the person who does the creating. If this is an important consideration for you, you should insist that the developers 'assign' their rights in the site to you as a condition of the job. Make this clear at the outset though, not after the job is complete.

Your site should also have a Privacy Policy. Most users these days are concerned about protecting their personal information, and you should be too. Good sites these days always include a privacy statement. Have a look at some larger sites to get an idea of what is involved. You may also want to get some legal advice on this. While you are at it, you should also consider the Terms and Conditions of your site, and legal disclaimers to protect you from legal liability, as far as you are able to do this. Again, look at what other sites have done and get some advice from a lawyer who knows about these things. It need not be expensive, but could save you money in the long run. The Terms and Conditions must be obvious enough that users will have adequate notice of them. Otherwise they may not be of much use to you in the event of a dispute.

Hosting & Domain Name -- In addition to having a website developed, you also need to more essential things to get your site up on the internet – Hosting and a domain name. The Domain name is basically your website address, which internet users can type into the web browser to view your website. But for your site to be visible on the internet, it also needs to be hosted on a server, so all the website content can be called onto the browser via the internet links.

Once you have got everything organized as above, you are ready to have your business online. But wait there is more.....!!! Having a business online does not necessarily mean that the search engines will find your website when users perform a search. For your site to work effectively with the search engines, you will also need to think about how to promote your website on the internet, particularly among the search engines.

Steps to getting website developed by Asia Pacific Direct

- Provide a detailed brief of your requirements ideally via e-mail, with some references.
- We will contact you to discuss the details of your project, and will advise you on how to optimize the use of various features on your website with minimal development cost. After the discussion, we will provide you with a written quote with breakdown of various key features included in the quote, and indicative completion time.
- Once the client has approved of the quote, we will require 50% advance to start the work, whereas the balance 50% will be due at the completion of the project.
- Once the advance payment has been made by the client, we will begin the work on the project.
- We will show you different layout options (for larger projects) or just a home page design (for smaller websites) for your approval. These will give you a preliminary look and feel of your new website. These design are loaded onto a test link, so these can be seen online by you for your feedback. You can then fine tune it as required.
- If the designs are approved, the project continues to the next phase, and rest of the site is developed. While reasonable small changes can be made within the scope of the original quote, beyond a certain point changes may incur additional charges.
- After the website development is completed, and tested, client pays the remaining 50% balance.
- Once the final payment is made, we make the site LIVE.
- Once the site is LIVE, APD will continue to provide any correction as per the warrantee conditions outlined in our terms and conditions.



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