



## An **Axia Marketing** White Paper

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## **Creating a Web Site**

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## **Creating a Web Site**

Most companies will benefit from having a web site. Often just having a functional site and a unique web address for your company legitimizes your business in the eyes of your customers and prospects. However, it's important to "do it right" because your site is a 24/7 extension of you and your business. The main goal of a web site is to highlight your products/services and show why someone should choose you over the competition. This white paper provides the basics of creating a web site and how to work with a writer, designer and technical programmer.

### **Aspects of a "good" site**

A "good" web site is easy to define. Think about the web sites that you like and use often. They're easy-to-use, engaging and attractive with clear usability. You don't need to search for information—everything is logical and cohesive.

The fundamentals to focus on are:

- clear navigation
- solid information
- value-added components
- visually pleasing

### **Initial steps**

As you start to think about building—or updating—a web site, there are some initial steps for you to consider to get ready. These are different than the "next steps" if you decide to proceed. A web site is a big undertaking, both exciting and challenging, and doing your homework before you jump in will serve you well in the long run.

Prep work:

1. Review your existing marketing communications: determine whether or not they properly reflect your brand; and if they do reflect your brand, determine how you can build off of them.
2. Pull together existing content—your elevator speech, brochure copy, presentations, proposals, etc.—to review what you are currently saying about yourself. Work with what you have and start to build and polish your story. It's much less important to talk about yourself than it is to talk about why you're different and what you have to offer that stands out from your competition.
3. Think through what you want your site to do and convey about your business. Do you want an online brochure? Do you want an interactive tool? Do you need a transactional site?
4. Map out all of the sections you envision for your web site and think through how those different sections or pages will connect to each other.

5. Pull together examples of web sites and other materials that you like and don't like. Sometimes it's easier to start with what you don't like, although ultimately you need to drive the process of determining how you want to present your business.
6. Explore domain names, both availability and cost. Available domain names can be purchased for a minimal amount, usually in the range of \$20 per year.
7. Explore hosting options through your current internet provider or other sources. Monthly hosting costs are usually in the \$15-to-\$25 range.

### **Key components**

There are three main aspects to a web site. First, a site should embody the brand and be an extension of the company, its values and all other communications. Second, it should have a concept and meet clear goals as a marketing vehicle. Third, a site should have a main or primary navigation system which highlights information and offerings as well as a utility navigation for supportive functions such as a contact vehicle and site overview.

#### **Brand**

- convey your “essence”—what you and your company stand for
- reflect your tone, voice and personality—for example, if your business is professional but somewhat informal, your words and images should also be professional and informal
- coordinate with your other brand elements and existing communications so that they all work together and support each other

#### **Purpose and goals**

- addresses what you want people to do on your site
- conveys a concept or strategy: an over-riding plan or theme for the site so that it makes sense and isn't just “design for design sake”. For example, an HR consultant business “enhances performance through the human side of business”. Their web site literally reflects that balance between the softer human side and the nuts-and-bolts business side of their corporate clients
- provides additional information such as related offerings and services

#### **Usability**

- primary navigation
  - what's in it for them—why your offerings are different
  - what you're offering—your products and/or services
  - home—to allow visitors to easily return to your home page
- utility navigation (also known as secondary navigation)
  - contact method
  - privacy policy
  - site map

## **The process**

The most efficient way to work on a site is to think of it in three stages that are inter-related. Each stage is critical, and as you move through the process there will be some back-and-forth as you make certain decisions.

- Stage 1: site map: the flow, how to get to the different areas
- Stage 2: copy: your “voice” and your message
- Stage 3: design/images: your identity and unique “look”; the use of graphical elements, photographs and illustrations to complement your look and message

Only after you have thought through most of these issues, should you engage with a writer, designer and/or programmer. The clearer you are about what you want for your site and what your goals are, the better they can support your efforts. Creative collaboration is invaluable, however it is your role to direct and guide your web site. It’s an extension of you and your business and should not be delegated to anyone else. One additional note to consider is that the less prepared you are, the more it will cost you. Various versions or “rounds” take time, and time is money for everyone.

### **Working with a writer**

You can work with writers in a few different ways, and their perspective and expertise can be invaluable. Writers can edit your copy, they can flesh out your copy for you, and they can also craft your entire story. It is often difficult to write about yourself, and it’s also common to be “too close” to your business. Ideally you want to work with a writer you feel comfortable with who can help translate what you do into plain English and offer marketing “polish”. One caution: it’s critical for your voice to come through, so don’t post copy that you can’t easily repeat. A disconnect between you and your marketing is a red flag to customers and prospects; truthfulness and honesty are not negotiable.

### **Working with a designer**

Often the “designing” part of any project is considered the “fun” part. It definitely can be fun, but there’s also a serious art to design and a discipline to the design process. Most graphic designers have an undergraduate degree in design or fine art, and they bring a wealth of experience and a different perspective to your project. You’re hiring them for their expertise, and to get the best results you should respect that. The standard design process is to show 2-3 initial design concepts to convey the gist of the idea and how the elements will work together to support your brand and goals. For web sites, showing the critical home page and a subsequent or secondary page is typical. You need to see both so that

you understand how the design concept is brought to life and how that idea will be fleshed out through the site.

Early on it's important to decide on an underlying structure, which is essentially a grid system or specific placement order of information to create a foundation. There are standard navigational structures to consider, i.e. the main navigational bar being at the top of the page or the left side. And it's important to keep in mind that a less complicated arrangement will ensure that your site is clear and not overwhelming.

As you go through the process, it's critical to stay focused on the big picture—which is the concept and how things work. Details like specific colors and shapes are often secondary and should be resolved as finishing touches. For example, it's human nature to focus on the colors that you personally like, however you really need to step back and be objective about your business and what will resonate with your customers. If you love the color blue, that's great, and perhaps you drive a blue car. However blue may or may not be appropriate for your business. Because if you focus on subjective and personal decisions, the process will be more difficult than it needs to be and the end result may not be successful.

Two other things to keep in mind are basic color theory and the connotations of certain image choices. "Cool" colors have blue undertones; "warm" colors have yellow undertones. Navy, hunter green and maroon are often considered traditional "corporate" colors. Yellow, orange, and softer greens and blues tend to be "people" colors. Graphic images can sometimes be more bold but less warm and personal. Photographs can be direct and intimate, although using "stock" photography can result in very generic images. Illustrations can be unique as well as whimsical.

### **Working with a technical programmer**

Technical artists and programmers can start to build your site from your initial site map. With your supplied content and graphic files, they have the building blocks for the site foundation, however if you include them in the overall design process they can offer a fresh perspective about how your users will move around your site. They will be able to add links between sections as a layering tool, and this will allow the users to move about your site on their own terms. It's helpful to note that many designers are also capable of programming, so you maybe able to find a resource to fill both roles.

## **Other things to consider**

Beyond the basics, there are some additional points to keep in mind as you embark on your web adventure.

### Bells and whistles

Unless you're in a very high tech or creative industry, technical bells and whistles may work against you. Sure they're fun and engaging, but they're usually more about you than your audience. Large graphic files and specialty software can take a long time to download—or worse—not load at all. Something viewed once can be a novelty, however something viewed repeatedly can be annoying if it impedes you from getting the information you want quickly. If you go this route, be selective. You don't want to frustrate your viewers on any level before they have a chance to engage with you. Think in terms of more substance than flash. The old adage applies: you only get one chance to make a first impression.

### Maintenance and refreshing

Factor in regular updates to keep your web site fresh and give visitors a reason to visit again and again.

- depending on your business and industry, monthly, quarterly or bi-annual updates are ideal; do annual updates at a minimum.
- describe new and updated products and/or services
- list new projects and clients
- offer additional value-added components, i.e. educational pieces and business tools

### Costs

Costs vary greatly, and start-to-finish expenses range from \$1,000 to \$10,000 depending on how complex your site is and how much support you need. Individual rates range from \$25-to-\$150 per hour, usually with a minimum of 40 collective hours invested in a simple site. One way to offset some of the expenses is to consider bartering or exchanging services and goods.

## **Summary and Next Steps**

Crafting and launching a web site is a terrific opportunity to clarify your business goals, sharpen your communications and grow both personally and professionally. After completing the initial preparation steps and considering how you want to proceed, follow the next steps below to begin your web adventure!

Next Steps:

1. Purchase a domain name(s).
2. Draft a site map for your site.
3. Research resources and ask for professional recommendations for writers, designers and technical artists.
4. Think through an approach and a concept for your site that ties into your business and your overall marketing approach.
5. Draft your site copy.

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*Axia Marketing works with organizations who want to re-imagine and streamline their marketing efforts. We balance left brain and right brain thinking, and our specialty is that we both “think and do.” We help our clients think through their needs and then assist them in moving forward in new and sometimes unexpected ways. We’ll help you take a fresh look at your marketing and the way you do business. Please contact Wendy Kershner for further information at Axia Marketing, 610-376-0635, [wkershner@axia-marketing.com](mailto:wkershner@axia-marketing.com)*