

website development:
Building A Successful Online Presence

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Objective

The purpose of this document is to outline and offer advice on the process involved in creating a successful online presence.

Building a Successful Online Presence

Creating a successful, cost-effective online presence appears to elude many organizations. What many companies or non-profits wind up with is often not much more than a static online advertisement. And while an online brochure website is arguably better than nothing, most organizations could achieve more benefit from having an online presence that builds community, conversation, and content into their website.

Building community, conversation, and content into a website requires a lot of planning and thought, with a clear understanding of the objectives and the audience that will be using the website. The fundamentals of developing a successful online presence include:

1. *Planning* – Extensive planning is important for a successful website. Understanding the needs of the websites different audiences, setting goals, and anticipating future growth are all essential.
2. *Ease of Navigation* – To quote an Arthur Anderson study "more than 83 percent of Internet users are likely to leave a web site if they feel they have to make too many clicks to find what they're looking for." Clear, well-thought-out navigation is one of the best opportunities to create a good impression and keep people on your site.
3. *A Strong Welcome* – The website will serve as the first impression for many potential customers, partners, prospects, investors, employees. It is therefore important that it is a positive one. This is accomplished through aesthetics (design, images, colors), well positioned text, and the relevance of the site to the user.
4. *Writing Suited for the Web* – Quoting web usability expert, Steve Krug, "get rid of half the words on each page, then get rid of half of what's left". This is because people do not read website pages but scan them (based on usability studies). Effective websites are like a conversation versus a brochure – warm, welcoming and personal.
5. *Community, Conversation, and Content* (3 Cs) – Fundamental elements in retaining and generating a return user base.
6. *Using the Full Potential of the Internet* – Internet work doesn't end with the website. Announcement lists, search engines, links on other sites and other features of the Internet are all important in a successful web strategy.
7. *Marketing Outside the Internet (promotion)* – Integrate consistent Internet presence into overall marketing and support programs. With internet and email addresses on all company publications and business cards.
8. *Testing* – Understanding that not everyone thinks, knows, or uses the web in the same way, testing ensures that a website is effective. Testing is a simple and inexpensive process that can certainly be done for free if you can find individuals willing to volunteer their time.
9. *Measuring Success* – Success can be measured in many ways including number of new visits, repeat visits, visitor involvement, increased membership, etc. What is important is to identify what the measure of success will be prior to the launch so that it can be tracked.

The following 'Website Plan Worksheet' will help make sure that you consider all the elements necessary to planning, building, hosting, and deploying a successful website.

Website Plan Worksheet

- 1. Statement of Purpose**
 - What do you hope to achieve with your website – increase customers, offer complimentary services, provide company information, offer a resource for customers, partners, and employees? A statement of purpose will help solidify your objectives and keep everyone involved on the same page during its development.
- 2. Why Build a Website?**
 - Attract new customers, partners, employees
 - Offer new services and support
 - Streamline existing offline processes
 - Increase awareness
- 3. When Will It Be Done?**
 - Establish a reasonable timeline
- 4. Who Is The Intended Audience?**
 - Who will be viewing the website, who do you hope will view the website.
- 5. What Will Attract Them To The Website?**
 - Community, conversation, and content
- 6. After They Are There, What Do You Want Them To Do?**
 - Purchase
 - Contact you
 - Demo software
 - Learn
- 7. What Will Keep Them Coming Back?**
 - Content
 - Community
 - Convenience
- 8. How to Measure Success?**
 - Number of new visits
 - Number of repeat visits
 - Reduced calls/expense
- 9. Who Will Host the Website?**
 - A Third Party Hosting Service
 - From \$4.99 to \$150.00 per month
 - Reliability and Customer Support Is The Key
- 10. Basic Site Outline**
 - Generate a website outline to be reviewed and discussed
- 11. Check With The Lawyers**
 - Trademark/Copyright
 - Domain names
- 12. Re-evaluate Budget**
- 13. Assemble Authoring and Utility Software**
 - Training
- 14. Develop the Overall "Look and Feel"**
- 15. Build Skeleton Site**
- 16. Fill in Details (content)**
- 17. Test**
- 18. Market To?**
 - Employees, customers, partners, general public
- 19. Update & Refresh Content**

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