

# **Questions to Ask Before Setting Up a Web Site**

## **Do I need a Web site?**

**If you're reading this, the answer is probably yes.**

In years past it may have been acceptable to forego a Web site for your business or association, but those days are gone.

**These days prospects and customers *expect* you to have a Web site.**

They *expect* to be able to learn about you, your services, your products, and get directions to your office or store any time, day or night. They *expect* to be able to make purchases from you in their pajamas and have their products delivered the next day.

**Like the fax machine and telephone before it, a Web site has become a requirement for business legitimacy.**

Businesses, associations, and professionals risk looking amateurish or even disreputable if they don't have a Web site...even if it's just an online brochure. People will wonder about the prospects of a company that doesn't have a Web site. What's the first thing *you* do when you want to learn more about a company? That's right, you visit their Web site.

**Not having a Web site will cost you business.**

If your prospect jumps on Google or Yahoo searching for a product or service you provide, your competition *with* a Web site is going to get that business. Search engines can deliver this business to you...but only if you have a Web site they can link to.

## **What are my business goals?**

**To build a Web site that builds your business, you'll first need to clarify what your business goals are.**

Your goal shouldn't be to create a beautiful, elegant Web site full of bells-and whistles...although that's a nice outcome. Your goal is to improve your business. Your site needs to serve your business needs, and for that to happen you need to be clear on what you want to achieve. If you've never sat down to outline your business goals, you're overdue. It's impossible to succeed if you haven't defined what success means to you.

**If you're a business, are you trying to sell more products?**

Go after bigger clients? Introduce a new product line? You'll also want to consider who your competition is. Is it other companies, different services, or a misperception in the marketplace?

**If you're an association, are you trying to create grass-roots support for a cause?**

Grow your membership? Build a community? Offer new services to members? Collect dues and donations electronically?

**If you're a professional or small group practice, are you trying to get more clients or patients?**

Branch into new areas? Establish yourself as an expert in your field? Once you've uncovered and clarified your business goals, you can create a Web site to support them.

**How can a Web site help me reach my business goals?**

Depending on your goals, this answer could vary greatly. You'll be looking to find the appropriate tools that match up with your goals. Although there are an unlimited number of solutions to reach every goal, here are a few examples to get you started.

**If you're looking to increase your association's membership base or offer more benefits to current members, you can offer additional services online.**

You can include a password-protected Members Only area to your Web site with articles and resources not available elsewhere. Your online store can offer discounts to members. You can offer membership applications online. Additional online tools like discussion forums, chat rooms, and an email newsletter can help build community and support for grass-roots activities. Also consider taking online donations through a shopping cart or PayPal solution.

**If you're looking to sell more products or bring a new product to market, you can add e-commerce to your site.**

There are several ways to add e-commerce to your site. If you don't have a Merchant Account already, you may want to start by just dipping your toe into the e-commerce ocean with PayPal. By choosing PayPal you can take Visa, MasterCard, American Express or Discover payments securely online without having to pay any monthly or startup fees...just 2.9% plus \$.30 per transaction. You can include Buy Now buttons or a rudimentary shopping cart to your site as well.

**Who is my audience and what are they looking for? One of the biggest mistakes companies make is trying to be all things to all people.**

People naturally gravitate towards specialists, not generalists. Your Web site should focus on your target audience and their most pressing problems.

**Determine who your best prospects are and what their needs are.**

Are they single adults or parents? Men or women? Businesses or consumers? Why are they coming to your Web site? What are their problems, needs or desires? A common mistake companies make on their Web site (and other marketing material) is putting the focus on themselves and not the concerns of their customers. Don't take this the wrong way, but your prospects don't care about you, how long you've been in business, or your mission statement. Not at first, at least.