



Setting up a website

A website allows you to conduct and market your business 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Its ultimate aim as a business tool is to make it easy for users, business partners, clients, visitors, suppliers and distributors to do business with you.

You can achieve this by creating a website that:

- has an appropriate design for the business
- is quick and easy to navigate
- is client focused
- provides content and features that interest users
- offers relevant information, e.g. contact details, product details and services offered
- provides numerous opportunities for two-way communication including email, weblogs, chat lines
- provides a variety of convenient ways of ordering and paying for information, products and services
- entices people back
- is regularly updated.

How to create your website

When you develop a clear idea of why you want to set up a website, what you expect to get out of it, and what benefits you want from it before you begin, you're more likely to develop the website that you want. Other benefits may include the ability to improve productivity, share information, open new markets, project a favourable corporate image, communicate with clients, increase sales, generate income and cut costs.

Register a domain name

The first step in creating a website is registering a domain name. The domain name is the part of a website address just after the 'www', e.g. www.business.qld.gov.au is the domain name of this website.

You generally find that an internet service provider (ISP) or web-hosting company can register the domain name for you as part of their service, you can do it yourself.

In Australia, look at domain name registration at either AusRegistry or the Australian Domain Name Administrator (auDA). For a global domain name, research the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN). It is important to check both Australian and overseas websites, as different criteria apply for the various types of domain names. The easiest way to register a name, or to check whether it is available, is to go to these websites and follow the instructions. All of the rules about how to register a domain name are on these sites. But briefly, to register a domain name in Australia:

- You will need to pay a fee.

- The domain name you want to register must not already be registered. This can be a shock to some companies that find they have missed out on the most obvious domain name for their company.
- If you are a non-profit organisation, educational organisation, association, government body or other non-commercial organisation, you may be better advised to register a domain name ending in .org.au, .edu.au, .asn.au, .net.au, .gov.au.
- The name can be made up from consecutive letters that are in the company name or registered trading name. For example, if your company's name was Joe Blow Engineering, any of these would be acceptable domain names—joeblow.com.au, jblowengineering.com.au, blowengine.com.au, jbengineer.com.au.
- Ensure your chosen domain name does not infringe someone else's rights. If it does you may be sued. Check with Intellectual Property Australia (IP Australia).

The following are recommended:

- Think of a domain name that is easy for users and clients to remember.
- Don't use uppercase letters in domain names, as internet users generally do not expect this.
- Don't use hyphens and underscores as they are difficult to type.
- Don't make the name too long or too difficult to type correctly.

Once you have registered a domain name, you don't actually need to set up a website straight away. Your registration will prevent other companies registering the same name, whether your own website is online or not.

When you come to setting up your website, you can delegate the domain name to the web-hosting company (or of course, to yourself if you are setting up your own server), and they can publish the domain name on the internet, so that computers around the world will be able to find it. If you need to change your web-hosting company, you can re-delegate the domain name to the new company, and your website visitors will never know the difference.

Find a web-hosting company

All of the major ISPs or web-hosting companies can host your website on their computers. These companies offer web-hosting services to their clients, generally including hosting the website, hosting the domain name and providing multiple email addresses. Some people prefer to host it with a local ISP or web host, just so communication and action is quick and easy.

You may find there are a range of monthly fees depending on how large your website will be and how many hits or visits it is likely to receive. If you require very advanced features—e.g. photographs for a catalogue—or have very high use rates on your website, you may find that the web-hosting company will charge higher fees. It is a matter of deciding what the value of these services will be to your company.

The web-hosting company will probably include as part of its package the provision of detailed statistical information on how often your website pages are being visited. This information can be extremely valuable, and can include details of how often your site is visited from various countries around the world (very important export information), which pages inside your site have been looked at (helps you to understand the most popular areas of your website) and the websites the user visited before they clicked onto your website (valuable information for online referrals). There may or may not be additional cost to receive this information.

While some ISPs allow you to set up and host a simple website for free, this would not include your own domain name.

Find a website developer

There are literally thousands of companies that create websites, for prices ranging from \$500 up to \$500,000. The steps below can help you make sense of this.

- You need to have a very clear idea of why you are setting up a website, what your business objectives are and what you want to get out of it.
- Work out, if you can, what you think the website will be worth to you, and therefore what you are prepared to spend to achieve these potential returns.
- Research other websites and find one that you like. Information about the website developer is usually at the foot of pages in a website.
- Look towards the future and try to build a long-term business relationship with a website developer. That way, if you plan to provide additional features later on, you have a developer who understands your business.
- As you would do with any new supplier, try to determine if the developer has been in business for a while and is likely to be there in a year's time to help you with changes to the website.
- Strive for professionalism—your website will represent your company as much as street signage, letterhead or brochures, and therefore needs to be professional in appearance. At the same time, don't pay a fortune for slick, animated graphics and 3D modelling if that isn't the normal business style.
- It is very difficult to be prescriptive about what you might pay for an initial website design. Research shows small businesses pay around \$2000 for a reasonable site.

Things to consider

- Have you checked with IP Australia to ensure your domain name does not infringe any trademarks?
- Have you allocated a budget to developing a website?
- Have you considered involving clients and suppliers in the design and development of your website?
- Do you have material to put on the website?
- Have you considered the load time of your home page? (this can become slow if you are using video images)
- Is the website dynamic and easy to use?
- Have you investigated, with your bank, options for your clients to pay their bills electronically on the website?
- What will be the daily, weekly and monthly costs of maintaining the site?
- Do you have a web-based marketing strategy that is fully integrated into your business plan and processes?
- Do you have the appropriate marketing, graphic design and technical expertise in-house to construct a web-based marketing strategy for your business?
- Is the website address on all corporate stationery, business cards, facsimile and other promotional material?

- Have you included a search facility to help users navigate your site?
- Have you subscribed to search engines, browsers and online directories in an effort to attract prospective clients to your site?
- Have you established links with complementary product or service providers?
- Does your website have online ordering, email and information retrieval facilities for your clients' ease of use?
- Have you included contact details, such as names and telephone numbers, for your business during office hours?
- Have you planned a website launch with media coverage?
- Have you provided client feedback mechanisms on every page, e.g. your email address?
- Are there service guarantees on the website?
- Have you included a Privacy Policy or Security Policy at the bottom of every page, explaining how you capture and treat email addresses and the level of encryption provided?

Privacy and confidentiality

Carefully consider the privacy and confidentiality issues when developing and implementing a website.

The *Privacy Act 1998* (Cwlth) requires website owners who collect personal information online to take reasonable steps to ensure the client is aware of who is collecting the information and how it will be used.

Because the Privacy Act also requires firms to protect people from unauthorised access and disclosure of personal information, business owners also have to address data security issues. Firewalls, passwords and encryption technology are some of the more appropriate ways to ensure the safety of information sent electronically.

The National Privacy Principles can be obtained from the Office of the Privacy Commissioner.