

Building a web site

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My service business needs more customers from the Internet. Our Web site is a few years old and pretty basic. It's time to build a new one. Any advice?

Building a Web site can be as simple, or as complex, as inexpensive or as expensive as you want. You can have one vendor or build a team. There are a number of skill sets to consider. SEO, or Search Engine Optimization, and pay-per-click build traffic, design and copy convey your message, offers compel people to interact with you, and computer hosting powers the site.

Design is paramount. It encompasses the overall look of the website, color palate, page layout and mix of content and visual aids. Copywriting tells your company's story. A good copywriter will be able to interview your existing customers, review documents you use to sell and market your firm, and then make suggestions on how best to convey what makes your firm unique and compelling. Programming insures key words are picked up for SEO (see below).

Even if your website is an online brochure, you want to get visitors telling you who they are so you can follow up with them. Offers get people to engage, and are put together by the copywriter and designer. Every page on the website needs an offer. By varying offers throughout the website, you can test what visitors respond to most.

Picking the right hosting service is also important. Ask your IT service person and the design firm for recommendations. Make sure your site is hosted with a company that offers tracking reports, and that the speed is fast enough to get your website to open quickly.

SEO is the way you get to the first page on the internet when people search for key words. This is an area where lots of promises get made, lots of fees get thrown around, and lots of results don't come to fruition. Be careful. Look for sites that are at the top of their categories.

Start SEO with local key words, then regional. Make sure whoever programs the website knows how to program for SEO. Pay-per-click is like paying for ads in a newspaper. It gets you on page one for specific key words.

Ask business associates for referrals. Go on the Web and search for websites that you like. Inquire as to who did their sites. Check out what your competition is doing. Make notes on things you do, or don't want.

Ask what people learned during the process of building their sites. Ask what they would do differently, now that they have a new site up and running. See if it's relevant to your situation.

Make a list of vendors to contact. Best bet is to build an Excel spreadsheet, to track information, by vendor, about references, services offered, pricing, etc. Then make your calls. Ask each vendor to briefly describe his services, what he excels at, and who is his target customer.

Ask for 2-3 references to talk to, and make those calls next. Ask the references about the working relationship they had with the vendor, who else they looked at and why they chose this vendor. How close to on time and in budget was each vendor? Would they hire the vendor again?

Decide if you want to act as general contractor and coordinate a team of people from different companies, or if you want the firm you hire to do it all. Most firms are strongest at one discipline, such as design, or copywriting, or creating offers, or SEO.

Build a budget to predict and control costs. Ask vendors to submit written proposals including pricing commitments. Lay out a timeline based and expect things will take longer than planned. Decide if you need to take any interim actions, such as putting up a temporary site.

Looking for a good book? Try *The Ultimate Guide to a Successful Business Website- The Non-Technical Person's Handbook on How to Hire a Web Designer and Manage the Creation, Design and Marketing of a Successful Business Website*, by Jason P O'Connor.

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*If you are a business owner and you have a question or would like to discuss some aspect of your business, call **1.877.238.3535** or send an email to AskAndi@StrategyLeaders.com.*

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