

## Seven Steps to a Web Presence

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# WORKBOOK

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## **Overview**

This guide was developed, in conjunction with the "Seven Steps to a Web Presence" seminar, to assist small businesses with getting started on the web.

It is designed to be a practical guide, breaking down the process of launching a website into seven steps:

1. Domain Name Registration
2. Determining Your Web Image
3. Web Content Options and Essentials
4. Web Design
5. Web Hosting
6. Web Maintenance
7. Search Engine Placement Strategies

Most people realize that there are limitless features that could be added to a website. The reality, however, is that very few of these features are actually *needed*. We touch on only the most common considerations for small business: E-Commerce, Media-Style Content and other Common Application Options.

It is our objective to provide, through the workbook, seminar and panel discussion, enough understanding of these options to enable you to make practical decisions about options your business might consider now, and in the future.

## **Questions**

Remember, this is a "workbook", not a textbook. As such, there are several questions posed throughout.

These questions are questions which you are to ask yourself: "Should our business", "Should we", "Are we"?

As with any major change in your business, getting started on the web requires some self-examination, and these questions are meant to get this process underway.

## **Notes**

Space is also made available for notes at the end of most sections. If there is not enough space, lined pages appear at the end of the workbook.

## **Domain Name Registration**

It is no longer acceptable in business to have a website with a name like this:

`http://www.members.some-isp.net/~joesplumbing/index.html`

You need to have something shorter, simpler to remember, without unusual characters like dashes (-), underscores (\_) and tildes (~), and something truly your own (not a folder on somebody else's website, like the example above). It is more common now for people to call into question the entire legitimacy of your business when your website is in a folder, or your e-mail ends with @hotmail.com or @yahoo.ca.

Domain names are how things are organized across the Internet (the Internet has a parallel system organized using numbers, but that is a topic for another seminar).

Here is a sample of a domain name:

`joesplumbing.ca`

Usually when you think of a website, you think of these names, only with "www" in front (`www.joesplumbing.ca`). While "www" is the conventional prefix (technically called "host name") for websites, a website owner could easily choose a different host name if they wanted. However, we strongly suggest people use the "www" standard.

So the remaining "domain name" is split into two parts, separated by a period: the prefix, technically called "sub-domain" ("joesplumbing"), and the suffix, technically called "top-level domain" ("ca").

### **The Sub-Domain Name**

While there is some flexibility in selecting the "top-level domain", there is a nearly unlimited range for the "sub-domain". The only limiting factors are the length (the smaller the name, the more memorable), and the availability (does someone else already have that name registered). As a result of its flexibility, this is the most defining part of the name.

Other than letters and numbers, a dash/hyphen (-) may be included in your domain name. However, we strongly recommend using only letters, as numbers and dashes tend to confuse people.

**QUESTION 1**

What do we want our "sub-domain" name to be? Write out at least three variations.

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The Top-Level Domain

Traditionally, people would choose a domain name ending in .COM by default. Now there are numerous "top-level domains" which compete with .COM. When selecting your domain name, you may wish to consider some of the alternatives:

**.CA** – Surveys show that most Canadians know this is "Canada's top-level domain", therefore if most of your business is with Canadians this might be your first choice.

**.BIZ** – If your chosen name is taken in .COM, it may be available with the new top-level domain, .BIZ. This top-level domain has been pitched as an alternative to .COM, and will likely become more popular (but probably never more popular than .COM).

**.NET, .INFO, .PRO, .TV, .ORG, .FM** – These are some of the many other choices available (i.e. "TV" for television, "NET" for network business, "PRO" for professionals, "ORG" for not-for-profit organizations, etc.) It is our opinion that unless your business is specifically in the industry the names implies, small businesses should stick to .COM, .CA or .BIZ.

For an idea of costs related to domain name registration, here are some of the top-level domains we offer through our registration-only service, and their prices (before GST):

<b>Top-Level Domain</b>	<b>1 Year Price</b>	<b>2 Year Price</b>	<b>5 Year Price</b>	<b>10 Year Price</b>
.BIZ		\$41.90	\$97.25	\$169.50
.COM, .NET or .ORG	\$21.95	\$42.90	\$99.75	\$174.50
.INFO		\$42.90	\$99.75	\$174.50
.CA	\$24.95	\$48.90	\$114.75	\$204.50
.SR	\$500.00	\$1000.00	\$2500.00	\$5000.00

We include .SR (for sites marketed toward seniors) in the list above to demonstrate just how widely the price varies based on the top-level domain selected.

## **QUESTION 2**

What top-level domain should our business/organization use?

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### The Registration Process

There are numerous places on the Internet where you may register domain names.

Many web design companies have a preferred person/company to use for domain name registration, or they have their own service.

Our company, for example, has a separate business division, *dotcanuck Web Services*, where we offer Web Hosting (discussed later) and Domain Registration.

Some people prefer to shop around on the Internet for the best price, or for specific extra services they would like included with their domain name registration. If you prefer this approach, use our table above to compare prices. Remember to be sure whether prices quoted are in Canadian or U.S. Dollars. If they are U.S. dollars, you will need to convert the price into Canadian to see whether an amazing deal is really as *amazing* as it appears.

### Domain Name Availability

To see if your domain name is available, you use a tool called WHOIS. If your desired domain name is available, this tool will return a message to that effect. If your desired name is not available, it will show you who the current registrant is, and when the domain name expires (sometimes if a domain name is expired, you may wish to try to register it in the case where the previous registrant does not renew it.)

There are numerous WHOIS tools on the Internet. Our WHOIS tool will check for .BIZ, .CA, .COM, .INFO, .NET, .ORG, and .TV domain names.

### **Notes**

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**Determining Web Image**

Before your website is designed, it's a good idea to give some thought to the *image* you want to present to your customers.

If your business is *selling balloons*, then certainly you will have a different look and feel to your website than a *corporate law* business.

In this task, you are at an advantage when you have a pre-existing business. You know the image you want to present to your clients and prospective clients, so the only question is how this translates to your website.

It is important to put forward a consistent image with all your promotional materials, including your web site. However, getting started on the web gives business owners a chance to have a fresh look at the image they put forward, and to look for ways to make improvements. If you are considering a major departure from your existing image, keep in mind the costs of carrying this image through to the rest of your business.

**QUESTION 3**

Describe the image we currently present (or the new image we want to present) to our clients. Use descriptive words, i.e. conservative, professional, fun, high-tech, affordable, lucrative/exclusive, down-to-earth/folksy, experienced, etc.

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**QUESTION 4**

Do our existing promotional materials, logos, business cards, etc. present this desired image successfully? If not, are there obvious ways we could improve upon it?

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Logo and Colour Scheme

The other two image-related ingredients of a website are a company logo, and a company colour scheme.

Sometimes a logo designed or colour scheme for print does not translate well to a website. This could be determined with your web designer when it comes time to design your web site.

A note about gradient images: Since you are sending your picture to anyone who views your website, those with lower monitor resolutions may see a highly distorted image. Also, these images tend to be much larger in file size, making your website slower to load. If your logo involves use of gradient, you may wish to have a similar non-gradient logo for your website.

**QUESTION 5**

Do we have a logo and colour scheme we already use? Do we want to keep it or choose a new design? Will it translate easily to the website?

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**Notes**

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## **Web Content Options and Essentials**

Now that you have determined the image, it is time to think about the actual content for your website. The two most important factors in determining the cost of launching your web site are *image* and *content*.

For this reason, we split content up into two categories: the *essentials* and the *options*. While you may find *essentials* are absent from many business web sites on the Internet, we call them "essential" because we feel they *should* be there.

### Essential Components

#### **QUESTION 6**

The essentials of a website are listed below. Check ("√") the appropriate space below to indicate whether or not the company's *existing* material sufficiently covers each of the items, or if you need to *Update* the item for the web site.

<b>Item</b>	<b>Use Existing</b>	<b>Update</b>
Company name (i.e. a different name on the web)		
Contact information (i.e. phone, fax, e-mail)		
Hours of operation (i.e. different web hours)		
Payment methods (i.e. different web payment methods)		
Basic company information and description		
Information about products and/or services (at least very basic)		

In addition to the items above, you need to understand what the visitors to your website are looking for. Consider that if a customer or prospective customer visits your website and does not find what they are looking for, you may lose their business.

#### **QUESTION 7**

Assume for the time being that website visitors do not randomly *find* your site on the Internet, but that they all found your website from your business card, brochure, other advertising, or by being referred from another customer. What might they be looking for on your web site?

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E-Commerce Options

One of the most popular options for a website is *E-Commerce*. While it is a fancy buzzword largely associated with the dot-com boom and subsequent crash, it should not be discarded as a serious option simply because of this association.

E-Commerce is the sale of a product or service online. It could be as simple as an order form that sends a message to your e-mail box for you to phone the client back (see "Other Common Application Options"). Or it could be as complex as a system integrated directly with your supply chain and inventory database, with instant online payment. Most E-Commerce systems operate somewhere in between these two extremes.

Many businesses find their products/services are a natural fit for e-commerce (i.e. software sales, standardized financial products). Others experience less success with e-commerce simply because their product is less prone to online sales.

**QUESTION 8**

Think about your product or service, and answer the questions in the table below.

<b>Question</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Are our products highly standardized or mass-produced?		
If our products are targeted to consumers, is the price range of our average sale between \$30.00 and \$500.00?		
Is there enough <i>common knowledge</i> of our product that people could make a decision to purchase without needing a live visual demonstration?		
Does our product typically match the expectation our customers have of it? (Answer "No" if customers often need to call to inquire about different features, or flaws/deviations that occur as a matter of course.)		
Have our competitors made a success of selling online?		
Do we sell mostly to other businesses?		

The more questions you answered "Yes", the more likely your product would sell successfully online. If you answered "No" to many questions, this does not mean your product will not sell online successfully. It may just require a more creative sales strategy.

### Media-style Content Options

One strategy businesses use successfully online is to draw customers to their website by including media-style content.

#### *Example 1: Boat Parts*

If you are in the business of selling boat parts, you have a pretty good idea that your customers either a) own boats, or b) build boats. To draw new customers to your website, or keep old ones coming back, you might include content about "How to build a boat", "Boat maintenance", or "Sailing Instruction".

#### *Example 2: Sports Shoes*

If you are in the business of selling sports shoes, you know your audience is interested in sports. You might include content about "upcoming marathons", "Basketball Game Variations", or "Safety on the Court".

In either of these examples, you are providing information about a topic you know plenty about, and you are offering it to free to anyone.

While you might question the judgment of imparting such knowledge at no charge, consider the potential benefits:

1. Your customer may learn about a new product or service on your web site, and they have an instant opportunity to contact someone about it – namely, you.
2. By providing a positive, non-pushy public service, you build loyalty to your company. You go from being "the company selling shoes" to the "company that cares about your sports health".
3. Search engines are more likely to find you when you have content. If somebody wants to find out about "Basketball Game Variations", they may find your article by conducting a search online. Then they might find your article, and also see that you have a sale on *the perfect shoes* this month, and make a purchase.
4. Regular articles keep existing customers coming back. If your products could be purchased at one of the big box stores for 20% less, why does a customer come back to you? Because you are more knowledgeable, and because interesting media-style content helped keep you on the top of your customer's minds. Above all this, many consumers make a very conscious effort to support you, the "little guy", when they feel that you really care.

Most businesses should have at least some media-style content on their web site, even if it is not something as elaborate as a regular weekly feature.

This is because people enjoy using the web to research products they are interested in. If they find that you have a product, but no information about how it works, they will be unlikely to purchase the product from you. However, if you are able to provide a customer with the information they need right away, then they may just decide to initiate the purchase sooner – and from you.

**QUESTION 9**

What media-style content should we definitely include on our website?

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**QUESTION 10**

What media-style content should we consider implementing in the future?

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**Other Common Application Options**

There are numerous *common application options* which people can add to their website easily, quickly and at little extra cost.

However, most of these “free” options are not very useful, and may actually deter customers.

Here are two items to definitely avoid: “guest-book” (instead, have your own “customer comments” page, and a link for feedback to you), “page view counter” (you need to know how often your web site is visited, but your customers do not).

Here is one item to consider: “form-mail” (allows contents of a web form to be e-mailed to you automatically). This is especially useful for “newsletter”, “signup” or “feedback” options, and simplified order or inquiry forms.

**Sample Feedback Form**

Website Address:	<input type="text"/>
Company:	<input type="text"/>
Contact Name:	<input type="text"/>
Phone:	<input type="text"/>
E-mail:	<input type="text"/>
Would you like a review of your website for Search Engine Optimization?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Additional Comments:	<div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 200px; width: 100%;"></div>
<input type="button" value="Submit"/> <input type="button" value="Reset"/>	

## **Web Design**

With your *domain name* registered, your general *image* determined, and an idea of what *web content* to include, you are ready to begin the design process.

### **Should I Go It Alone?**

In the early days of the Internet, *everyone* was a web designer. More books and software were sold in the late 90s on this subject than perhaps any other subject on earth (except perhaps, "how to invest in dot-com stocks and make millions").

The net result of all the do-it-yourself hype is that millions of very poorly designed websites appeared all over the Internet. One popular technology editorialist referred to this phenomenon as "The World Wide Wasteland".

Tragically, successful businesspeople have found their businesses failing because they were neglecting them (opting to design or update their website, instead of focusing on running their business). Interestingly, these people often became successful originally by recognizing their own strengths and weaknesses, and realized the power of delegating tasks to others. But because of the hype, they thought they should learn this aspect of business themselves.

It is good to have knowledge about what is *being done* (one of the purposes of this seminar and workbook), but there is no compelling reason to actually *do* it yourself.

### **Your Ideas**

Web designers are brilliant people, but they are not mind readers. Just like getting your hair cut, you very likely have some ideas in mind already.

It is better to confess all this up front, rather than be disappointed later. Ethical web designers will not steal copyrighted images, etc., but they certainly will look at existing websites to try to capture broad design or content navigation concepts that you are fond of.

### **Things to Avoid**

When you are looking at design ideas for your website, there are a few things you may wish to avoid.

First, avoid animated clip art – spinning globes, waving flags, flashing icons, etc. Besides being poor design elements, these often detract attention from the information you want website visitors to see.

Avoid background images with text or other elements over top. Usually a background image is distracting. Even in cases where it is subtle and seeming enhances the effect, different monitor resolutions, brightness, contrast, and even different browsers and operating systems will cause it to look different, and will cause text and other elements to be placed in different locations on the screen. So it may look great on one computer, but be unattractive (or worse, unreadable) on another.

You are probably also familiar with *Flash*. While having this technology included on your website makes it very impressive (to those who have the ability to view it), it is generally more expensive to develop a flash web site (especially since you will also want a non-flash version for those visitors who do not support flash, effectively meaning you need to have two websites designed instead of one). If cost is a major concern, put that Flash design you had in mind off for now.

**QUESTION 11**

What design elements am I going to insist be included in the design of my website?

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**QUESTION 12**

What were some of the design ideas I already had in mind for my website?

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## The Design Process

With all the determinations made up to this point in the workbook, you are ready to sit down with a web designer and discuss how your website should be implemented.

Before you do this, collect any text which you will want to use as content on your website (electronic format is better than a printout; saving the time it takes to retype content will also save you money).

Also, collect together copies of existing promotional material, photographs or electronic images you want to include on your website, competitor's website addresses, websites with design or navigation concepts you like, etc.

We suggest you bring this completed workbook along (even if you choose a competitor company), since your answers will help your web designer understand your needs better.

Generally, the design process occurs as follows:

1. A consultation occurs, where you go over all the material you collected with your web designer. This is better in person, but it could be an e-mail and/or telephone exchange.
2. The web design company will put together a quote, often including some rough samples of what they have in mind for your website.
3. When you approve of the contract, the web designer develops a site as specified in the proposal (both in the original consultation, and any feedback given based on samples provided earlier).
4. A "beta" product is made available to you to review.
5. At this stage, the back-and-forth communication between you and the designer increases. You provide feedback on changes which are needed, discussing these on the telephone or face-to-face when needed.
6. Once you are satisfied with the web site developed, the contract is signed off (we recommend asking your web designer for a complete copy of the source code for the web site, and copy it to disk, CD or your computer for safekeeping).

If you already have your Web Hosting in place (next section), your web designer will often upload your web site live to the Internet for you.



## **Web Hosting**

Once your website is complete, you need to make it live and available to the world on the Internet. You already have your domain name (the first section of this workbook), but typing the name into the web browser right now does nothing.

To make your web site *live*, you need a service called "Web Hosting".

Here are some of the things to consider when selecting a web hosting package:

1. **Cost.**
2. How much **disk space** do your website files use up? Most web hosting packages include more than enough for the average website, but find one with at least 15 MB of disk space.
3. How busy do you anticipate your website will be? Every time someone requests to view your web site (by typing your domain name in their web browser, for example), the web-hosting computer must transfer files to the person making the request (then the browser displays them to the person in a nice format). This "transfer" process consumes "**bandwidth**", which is measured the same way file sizes are measured (in Kilobytes or Gigabytes). Make sure the package you select includes enough bandwidth (at least 250 MB per month).
4. How are customers served? Sometimes **customer service** is only available via e-mail, and requests are not answered until 24 hours later (sometimes cheapest is not always best). Find out if you are permitted to call on the telephone.
5. How many **e-mail addresses** may be assigned? Some packages are limited to 3 or perhaps even 1 e-mail address. This may not be sufficient for your needs.
6. Does the package include **website statistics**? This allows you to see where your visitors are coming from, how many there are each month, etc.
7. What **page formats** are permitted? If your website is programmed using basic HTML pages, you do not need to worry about this. However, if your website contains ASP, PHP or JSP pages, you need to make sure the provider has the ability to deliver these pages properly. (Your web designer will be able to tell you if your website falls into these categories.)

Once you have Web Hosting in place, you need to upload your files to your website to make them available on the World Wide Web. We recommend arranging with your web designer to do this for you. (Most will do this at no extra charge.)

## **Notes**

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**Web Maintenance**

At this stage, your website is finally completed and launched! Have a *launch party* and relax!

But you are not finished. You need to make sure that your web site continues to evolve along with the normal changes happening in your business.

Too often people mistakenly look at having a web site like they look at print advertisements in a newspaper. With a print advertisement, you follow a design process that is much the same, but when you are done, you *are* done. With a web site, there is no such thing as *done*.

Are your prices changing? Do you have a sale on? Getting a lot of the same questions over and over again? Time to update some of the media-style content? Are your customers demanding more features on your web site?

In the web design business, these things are lumped together into a category called "web maintenance".

**QUESTION 13**

What are some items that may need to be regularly updated on our web site?

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Give some thought to this now, but the answer may not be clear until your website has been operating for awhile.

**Notes**

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## Search Engine Placement Strategies

It is very useful on the Internet to be well placed in Search Engines. This allows people to find your website, even when they do not know the address.

Each business will have different needs depending on their stage of development, and their target market.

Many businesses will be setting up a website strictly to complement their existing business and serve their existing customers. The ability for new customers to find them online is not as critical, and sometimes not necessary at all. For example, a physician may set up a website. If the physician is not actively recruiting new patients, but likes to make some information available to her patients online, then search engine placement is not important at all.

This said, most businesses fall into the other two categories, where optimum search engine placement is either "desired" or "critical" to their business.

### QUESTION 14

Question	Yes	No
Will potential customers who are unfamiliar with our business be more inclined to buy our products if they find our website?		
Is one of the objectives of developing our website to generate <i>new</i> customers for our business?		
Is it absolutely <i>essential</i> that our website generate new customers?		

Considering the answers above, how important is Search Engine Submission to our business?

Critical \_\_\_\_\_ Desired \_\_\_\_\_ Not Important \_\_\_\_\_



