

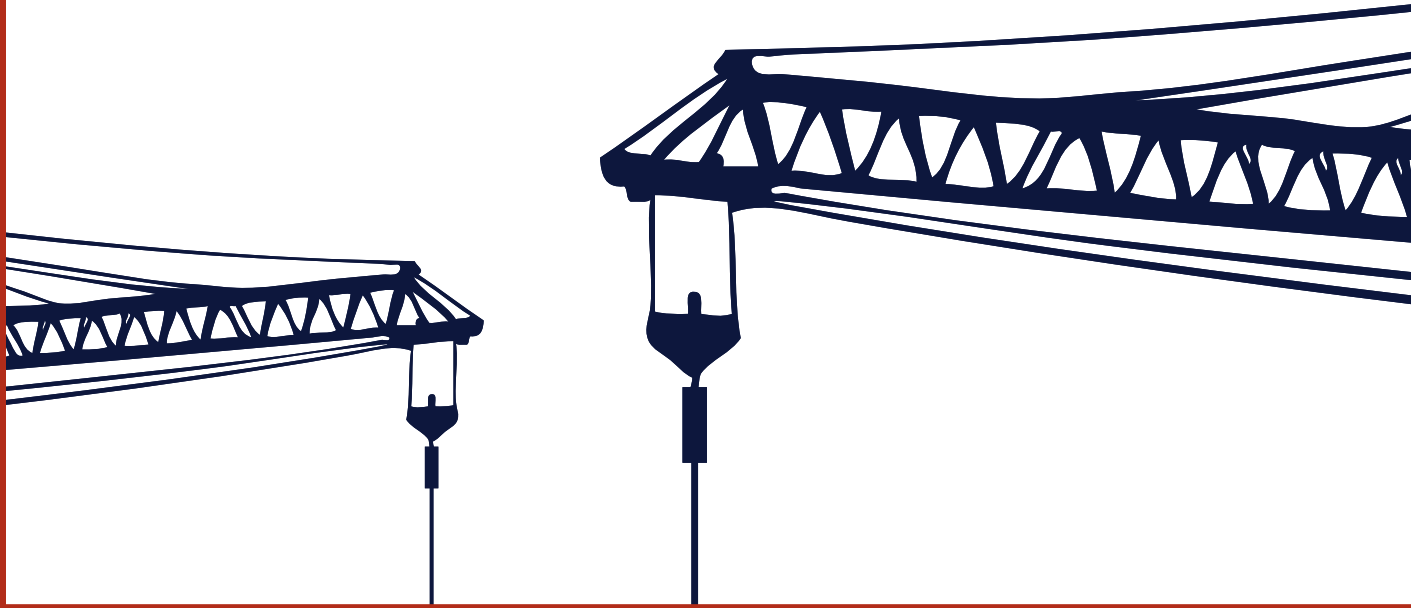


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A GUIDE TO **WEBSITE** DEVELOPMENT

An overview of the strategies, methods and technologies involved when creating your presence within the World Wide Web.



INTRODUCTION

"When I took office, only high energy physicists had ever heard of what is called the World Wide Web – now even my cat has its own page."

Bill Clinton

Who is this guide for?

This guide is primarily aimed at those who do not have a web presence but would like to establish themselves within the World Wide Web community. However, even if you do have a website, you may find some of the topics discussed informative and this may help clarify certain issues. It doesn't aim to be exhaustive but should provide a sound overview of the necessary steps when approaching website construction and implementation. Indeed, there are many books and websites that deal with the topics discussed in far more detail, for which references will be provided.

and Robert Caillau pioneered the concept of the World Wide Web in 1989, which was developed to make it easier to retrieve research documentation. A year later, they wrote the first browser and called it "World Wide Web".

However, it wasn't until 1994, when more sophisticated browsers for viewing these sites became available, namely Mosaic X, that the web exploded. Before then the World Wide Web consisted of no more than 150 websites but by 1994 it exploded to 3,000, a year later 25,000. Currently, there are over 70 million websites with at least one to three million added each month.

Online it's all happening; shopping, gaming, email, conversing, entertainment, research, online booking, education and business are some of the areas which the Internet and the web are pushing the boundaries in the way in which we conduct our day to day lives. Faster access speeds allow for remote conferencing and immersive online entertainment – all connecting people in real time. The pioneering spirit of the Internet continues to flourish and we all want to be part of it. We want our stake of virtual real estate, to make our presence known and felt globally.

So how do you go about creating your online presence? Where do you start?

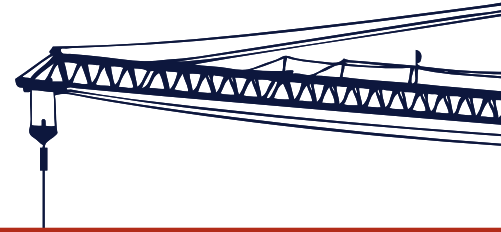
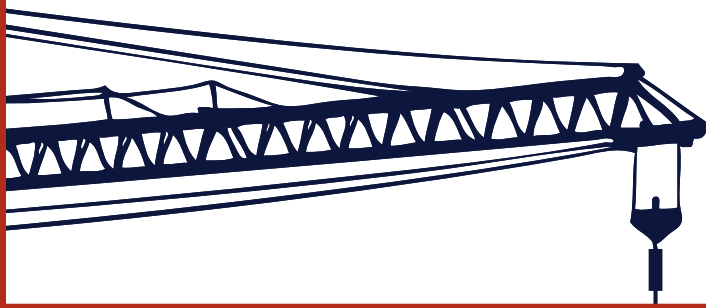
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History

The World Wide Web is not the Internet. In fact, without the Internet there would be no web. The Internet itself is a 'network of networks'; computers linked to other computers in a complex weave of protocols, DNS addresses and other strange and mysterious star-trek inspired techno jargon.

The World Wide Web itself is simply a network of sites that can be searched and retrieved by a special protocol known as a Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP). Sir Tim Berners Lee



Think of a website as one element in your armoury of marketing collateral – it will help and support your activities and will provide visitors with the information they need about you.



Initial questions

Websites can be as complex or as simple as you want to make them. It is important at the outset that you set clear objectives.

Probably the most important question you will need to ask yourself is: Do I need a website? This may sound flippant but many people decide to have an online presence without actually knowing why. Ask yourself how a website will benefit you or your organisation. Don't expect a website to be a golden chalice of potential wealth, it won't be (well, not immediately). High profile stores such as Amazon and Lastminute.com have had to make huge losses, investment and time before making a profit. Think of a website as one element in your armoury of marketing collateral – it will help and support your activities and will provide visitors with the information they need about you. It is in transforming those visitors into prospective customers that is the real challenge. A website *can* generate revenue but only by putting in the time and effort.

Once you have resolved that question you will need to look into the nature of the website, the role it will play and what you hope it will achieve. Some questions to consider are:

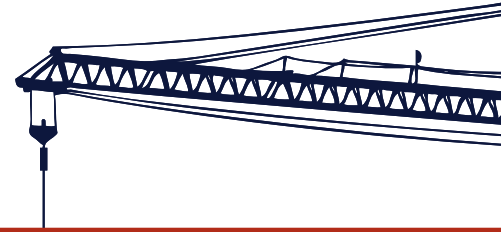
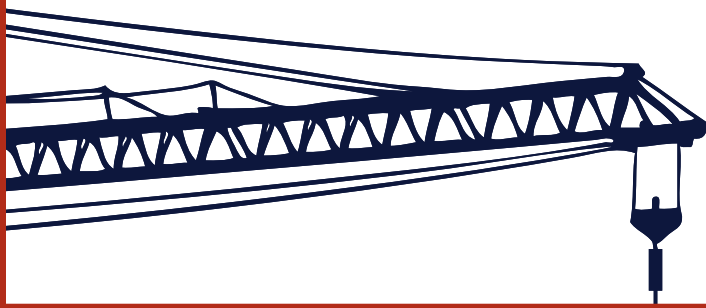
- 1) Who will typically use your site and what will they expect from it?
- 2) How often do you expect them to use the site?
- 3) Will you offer customers the ability to browse products?
- 4) Do you intend to use the website as an online brochure or to trade from it, or both?
- 5) Is community a factor? Do you want places where people can discuss related topics (such as forums).
- 6) If you expect to trade, how many orders do you expect over a month or a week?
- 7) How do you intend to manage and update the information contained within the site?
- 8) If taking credit card details, what security measures will you implement?
- 9) How important is near 100% access to the site (sites do 'go down' occasionally, so it's an important consideration)?
- 10) How will the site develop in the future (plan ahead)?
- 11) Do you have the time and experience to design and build the site or will you require someone to do it for you?

PLANNING YOUR SITE

How your site will be used and by whom will impact on the way it is designed and subsequently hosted. The structure and content of the site needs to be noted down with any special requirements that need to be implemented. Look around at other websites and highlight any functionality you like. However, keep in mind that even the most simple requirement can be costly and time consuming for website programmers.

How will it be structured?

When planning your website, where to find information and what areas are available are essential. The most common form of website structuring is the hierarchical, tree diagram approach. The first page (or root) a customer arrives at will be the homepage and is where the major sections of a website are attached. Each section can lead to further areas and topics, which can then lead to others (a term known as 'drilling down') and so forth. Bear in mind that the website needs to be easy to get around and logical, so don't make it more complex than necessary. Clear signposting is



essential and, if the site is particularly large, look into the use of 'breadcrumbs' a means by which the user can clearly identify where they are within a site at a glance (i.e. text which displays: 'You are here: services/analysis/self assessment'). This is especially important if a visitor has arrived at your website via any other page except the homepage.

Writing your site – content is king!

Without good and relevant information, don't expect visitors to take whatever you have to say seriously or, more importantly, return for more.



The content of a website is the most important element. The more useful and interesting the content is, the more successful it will be. Without good and relevant information, don't expect visitors to take whatever you have to say seriously or, more importantly, return for more.

Writing for the web is not the same as writing for a brochure – attention spans are fleeting so keep copy short and to the point. It is well documented that people 'scan' pages picking up salient bits of information whilst a minority will read word-by-word. Use bullet points, highlighted keywords and sub headings in order to break the monotony of text flow.

When writing, always consider your target audience and try and make the style original and unique otherwise it will come across as the same as other sites. It is also important to check spelling and grammar – misspellings and poor grammar will not endear you to your visitors who may think you are unprofessional.

Update your content as often as possible and keep it fresh and interesting (this will entice people to return and see what's new – refer to the section entitled 'stickiness' towards the end of this document).

Finally, it may be prudent to employ a professional copywriter to create the text – if so find someone who has some experience in writing for the web.

Weblink

How Users Read on the Web
by Jakob Nielsen
useit.com/alertbox/9710a.html

Books

Web Copy That Sells: The Revolutionary Formula for Creating Killer Copy Every Time
by M. Veloso

DOMAIN REGISTRATION

One of the first steps is to register the name of your choice with a hosting organisation (preferably one that will eventually hold or host your website, see later). Before registration you need to decide on a name.

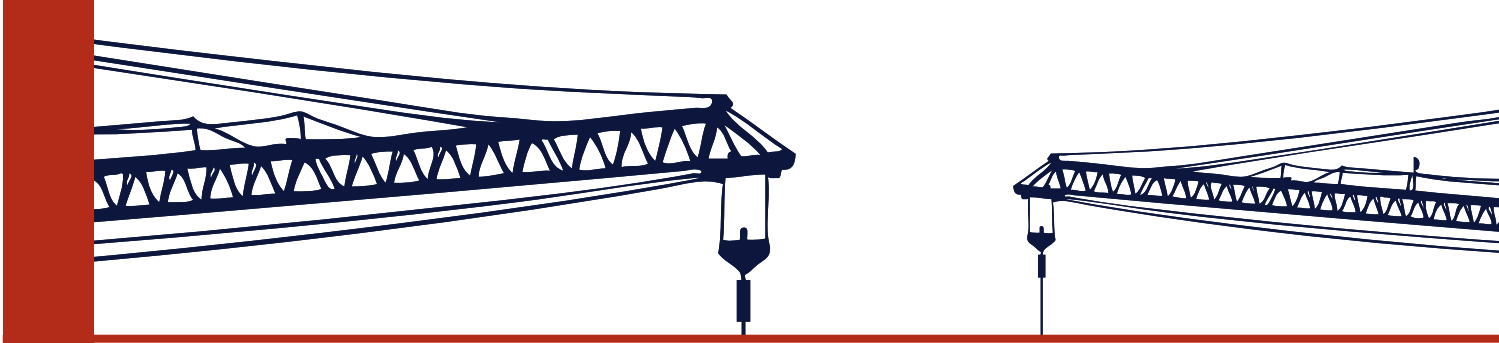
What is a domain name?

A domain name is the unique address (or URL – Uniform Resource Locator) that identifies the location of the website such as the BBC (<http://www.bbc.co.uk>) or the HCIMA (<http://www.hcima.org.uk>). Breaking down the individual components the 'http://' is the protocol used to access the site; 'www' is a

subdomain and finally 'hcima.org.uk' is the address. You can access any website without having to type the 'http:/' into your browser address window – simply typing 'www.hcima.org.uk' will get you to the HCIMA website (it is now possible to avoid using the 'www' altogether).

Why are domain names used?

Every website has a unique webserver with each being assigned a specific number or IP address to identify it (for example 209.170.32.50). Because these are difficult to remember, a system was introduced as an



easy-to-remember way of mapping the server address and the web server location.

Choosing a name

When choosing a web address you should consider the following:

- Do you have a company name? If so then this would be the most obvious one to choose.
- Does the domain name describe your website content?
- Does the name contain words that are spelled differently in other countries (such as colour and color).

Whatever the outcome of the above choosing a name should be:

- As short as possible (within reason if it's your company name)
- Memorable
- Relevant

The extension

A vital secondary component to the name is the extension that can take the form:

.com

Very popular and widely referenced for commercial websites

.net

Service and network providers

.org

Non profit-organisations

gov

Governments

Domain names can also be country specific such as: .co.uk (United Kingdom), .us (USA), .ch (Switzerland) or a mix of both such as .org.uk .gov.uk.

Unfortunately, with the ever-increasing number of websites and a high number of domain name registrations every month, there is a chance that the domain name of your choice may not be available. Therefore, consider other domain names or possibly a

combination of words – it will help to compile a shortlist of names and extension variants.

It's already registered

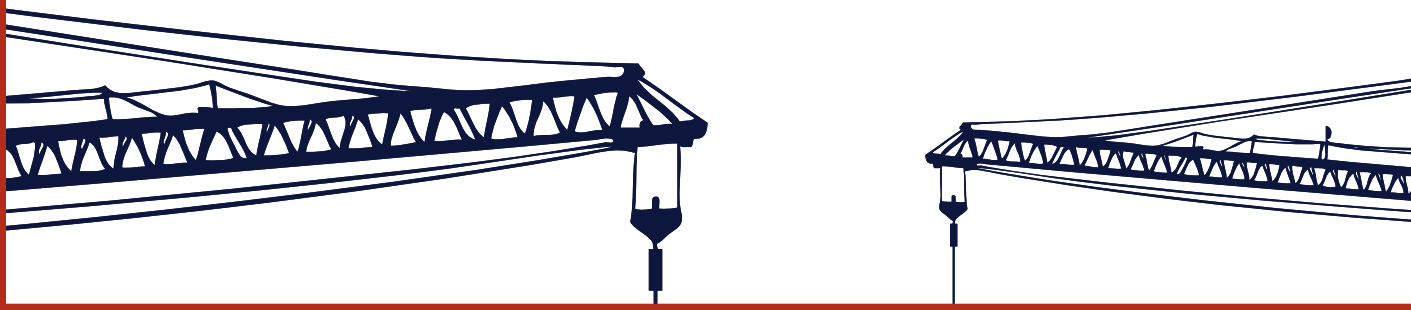
If someone already holds the domain name you want, you can find out more information by visiting www.register.com where the owner's details, the host it is registered with, the server address etc can be found. In some circumstances, if the website the name belongs to seems out of date and not maintained, you can get in touch with the person who owns the URL and possibly negotiate a transfer of ownership. If that isn't viable, you will have to source other names based on your shortlist.

It's available, I want to register

You can register the name of your choice immediately or hold on until you have decided who will host the site. The hosting company can do both at the same time (often domain registration comes as part of a package). This is important, as you don't want to register the name with one company and host the site with another (it would mean you would have to transfer the domain over to your host company which could take a while). For more information on website hosting see the section entitled 'Hosting' towards the end of this guide.

In some circumstances, if the website the name belongs to seems out of date and not maintained, you can get in touch with the person who owns the URL and possibly negotiate a transfer of ownership.





OUTSOURCE OR DIY?

Once you have clarified the purpose of the site, it is time to decide whether to outsource the design and coding or take matters into your own hands.

Website design and construction requires a number of different skill sets. These can be summarised below:

- HTML programming (the base coding methodology for building websites).
- CSS programming (Cascading Style Sheets – part of the requirement to make websites accessible and helps separate design from content – see later).
- Graphic design (branding, composition, image manipulation, colour and typography)
- Navigation/usability design (Clear and efficient navigation to help people get around)
- Developing accessible websites (conforming to accessibility standards)
- Database programming (integrating an online database)
- Flash programming (animation)
- Marketing and business experience (search engine friendly, copywriting and marketing the site)

Outsourcing

It's highly probable that if you choose to outsource then finding one person who has the expertise to do all of the above, at a sufficient standard, will be rare. More often than not, they will need to outsource at least some of the above disciplines. However, larger web construction organisations will have in-house resources to cope with most of the above (even then they may need to outsource some elements).

The advantage of such an approach is the expertise you will be paying for and the fact that technical issues are down to them as well as building in usability and accessibility elements. Additionally, they will be tied to an agreed timescale, so you can be sure the website will be up and running as agreed. Web developers live, breath and sleep their subject and are well versed in many aspects of creating a site – it is as much a hobby to them as a job and they get paid for it.

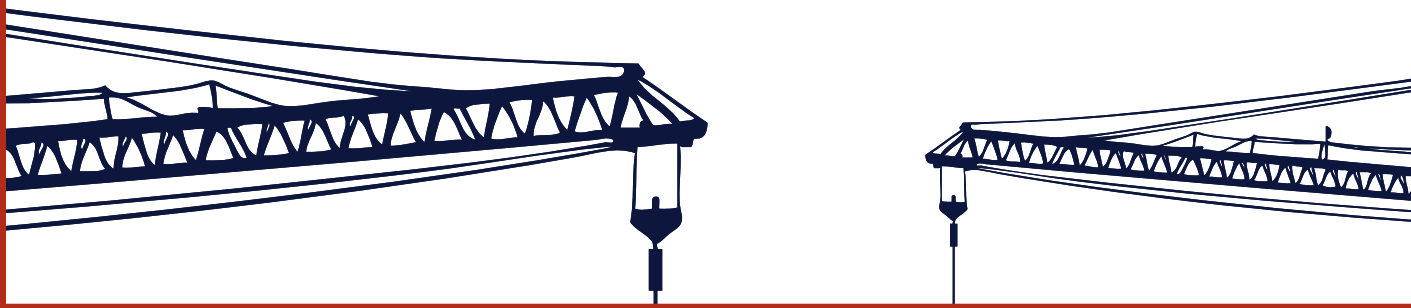
No web development organisation or individual are created equal and it can be a bit of a lottery finding one with the correct technical skill set as well as the design acumen to give justice to your site and for a good price. When approaching anyone for web development expertise it's wise to ask about their existing portfolio and real-world examples. Ask for web addresses of sites they have developed and find out what their part was (maybe they just programmed the site and someone else designed it or vice versa or, indeed, both).

It is also important that whoever designs the site has experience in building sites for organisations with a visual identity (or branding) already established. Provide designers/developers with as much visual collateral as possible such as brochures, flyers, logos etc. This will aid in making your website reflect your brand values and style (and will help maintain visual consistency across the board).

The disadvantage of outsourcing is first and foremost, cost. A typical 20 page website can cost anything from £2000 upwards. When other elements come into play such as database development, form creation, search functionality, message boards etc, then this figure will increase. The more bells and whistles your site has the higher the cost. Web development companies will charge far more than individuals due to higher overheads but they have the advantage of having resources in-house. It may be wise to ask people you know who have websites, which you

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particularly like, who developed it and the cost.

Make sure any organisation you use spell out, in writing, exactly what they agree to do, the cost and provide a firm deadline by which their work will be completed (this will be negotiated based on who writes the content and when it will be delivered). Partial payments should be made as specific milestones are reached and approved. Indeed, you may be required to pay half the cost of the site up front and half on completion.

Another consideration is to ask the web development company to design and code a homepage and subpage template, so that you can then add your own content and as well as additional pages. This is less expensive than a full site and is a good compromise but does require some programming knowledge, unless you choose to use a Content Management System (see later).

It is possible that you know someone who will design and develop the site for free. If this is the case, be sure they have the commitment to see the project through to completion and to a set standard. It is quite possible a person doing web development for free will lose interest with a project's timescale becoming more protracted.

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DIY - Getting your hands dirty

Your time, experience, knowledge and budget will be driving factors as to whether you choose to forgo outsourcing and do it yourself. There are number of advantages to this not least of which is cost (but then there is the price of development software and hosting of course) and the control over a project you have.

The first question you need to ask is do you have the time to learn web design and construction? Many people are self taught so there is no reason why you can't be, however, it takes time. You can prepare yourself by reading and consulting web design books and magazines which will provide some invaluable reference material.

Weblinks

webmonkey.com
webreference.com
builder.com

Magazines (UK)

.net

Monthly magazine for developers covering news, review, programming articles etc)

New media age

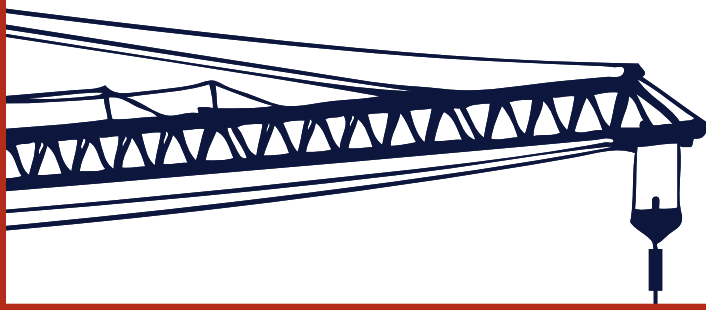
Weekly newspaper covering interactive media)

Books

Web Design for Dummies
by Lisa Lopuck

Learning Web Design: A Beginners Guide to HTML, Graphics and Beyond
by Jennifer Niederst

Web Design in a nutshell: A Desktop Quick Reference
by Jennifer Niederst



THE TOOLS

If you choose to develop the site yourself, the next step will be to arm yourself with the necessary tools in order to create your website.

The leading packages are Dreamweaver and Frontpage which, although sophisticated, can be used by novices as well (they show you at a glance how your site will turn out as you program it). These programs allow you to create a website from scratch but also provide 'wizards' which are automated ways of creating the main body of the site (you only need to place the text and graphics). However, using these templates won't give you a unique or a particularly visually appealing website, but it's a start if you don't have experience in web programming or design. There are costs involved, however, with products such as Dreamweaver costing around £340 and Frontpage £200.

Additionally image-editing programs will need to be purchased to help manipulate and scale your images. Adobe Photoshop (£550) is very expensive but is comprehensive whilst programs such as Paint Shop Pro (£80) are less sophisticated but cheaper and should be sufficient for basic needs. In all cases buy some reference books for whichever products you purchase (the manuals are fairly thin and are not wholly sufficient).

There are websites that offer templates that can be visually appealing and distinctive. These templates are normally supplied as layered Photoshop images (as well as flattened Jpegs) together with their HTML/CSS source code. Because these pages are preformatted you may not require all the text and images areas that are provided, therefore you will need to edit the code in order to remove the elements you don't need. Again don't expect something wholly original as you are developing within a predefined framework that other people will be purchasing as well. Use templates as a way of experimenting and familiarising yourself with the construction and typical make-up of a website.

Sketch don't run

If you choose to develop the site from scratch, and don't want to use templates, then the other important tools are a pencil and paper. Before your hands touch the keyboard to start their journey into web development, it's worth deciding on the layout, navigational structure of the site (the planning stage, already discussed, will help in this) and colour scheme. It's crucial to put your ideas and thoughts on paper first as this will make life easier when constructing the site and save you time in the long run.

One additional element to this process is to take the structure and use a program such as Photoshop to construct a 'dummy' page. A page like this doesn't function like a website, it just looks like one and will enable you to decide on dimensions of images, text areas and paragraph spacing etc. When outsourcing, most designers will provide an initial mock-up of a site in this fashion, so you can get a 'look and feel' without the commitment of having coded the site. This process is also useful as final construction is made easier as dimensions have already been established (which are all made in pixels – dots on the screen).

Weblinks:

Template store

coolhomepages.com/store

Macromedia Dreamweaver

macromedia.com/dreamweaver

Microsoft Frontpage

microsoft.com/frontpage

Adobe Photopshop

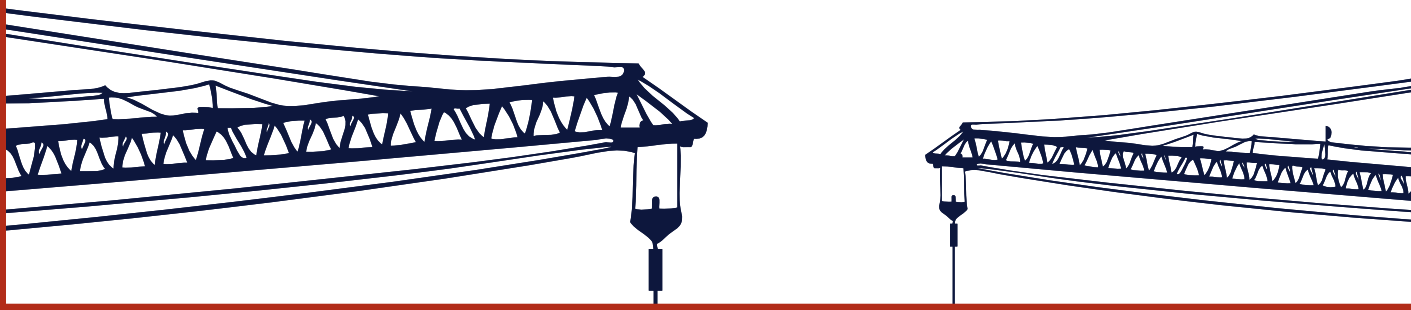
www.adobe.com/products/photoshop/main.html

Paint Shop Pro

www.corel.com

Before your hands touch the keyboard to start their journey into web development, it's worth deciding on the layout, navigational structure of the site (the planning stage, already discussed, will help in this) and colour scheme





TESTING THE SITE

Once you have coded your site it's time to begin testing in order to make sure it works under a variety of conditions. As a general rule it is worth testing the website as you go along, thus when it's finished you won't have any nasty surprises (such as text reflowing, broken links, browser incompatibilities and others).

Browser issues

Browsers, those programs that allow you to view webpages, do not come in just one flavour but many. Microsoft Internet Explorer, Netscape Navigator, Mozilla Firefox, Safari, Opera and many others are popular (some more so than others) with some adhering to certain conventions better than others. To make matters worse, as each program is improved and refined new versions are released. For example, there are a number of people using version 5.0, version 5.5 or version 6.0 of Internet Explorer (version 7.0 is on its way as well). Each version will treat webpages slightly differently as they try and refine and conform to set standards. If that isn't enough, each product and version is generally available on different platforms such as Apple Macs and those PCs running Unix based operating systems such as Linux.

With this mind-numbing variety of browsers it can seem a daunting task to develop a site that caters for all of them. However, by defining your audience you should be able to narrow down the browsers that you will support from the start. Although it is the most widely used, Microsoft's Internet Explorer has a number of quirks and elements (not to say security flaws) which are considered non-compliant with certain standards. As such, using a standards compliant browser such as Mozilla's Firefox or Opera will be a good reflection of how a website should look and behave. If you are developing using CSS then you can be fairly confident that any website you create will not only be standards compliant and accessible but viewable under

older browsers. This does lead to a conundrum, do I develop for a browser that doesn't strictly adhere to standards, such as CSS, but is widely popular or do I develop for a browser that is compliant but is less popular (although, it is argued, Mozilla's Firefox is eating away at Microsoft's dominance). The answer lies somewhere in the realms developing for a standards compliant browser first but have an understanding of Explorer's quirks at the same time (which you may need to circumnavigate).

Usability testing

Additionally, you may want to look into usability testing to see if the way in which your website has been constructed and signposted with navigation works – feedback on the quality and relevance of the content of the site will also be vitally important. Good usability can improve the chances of a visitor making a purchase or an initial enquiry and is vital to the long-term success of a website.

Checking your site for usability issues can be achieved by asking co-workers or friends to test the site and provide feedback (ask them to use the site as a potential customer would). However, there is no substitute for asking people who actually are part of your target audience to do this instead - they will be a more relevant barometer of what works and what doesn't.

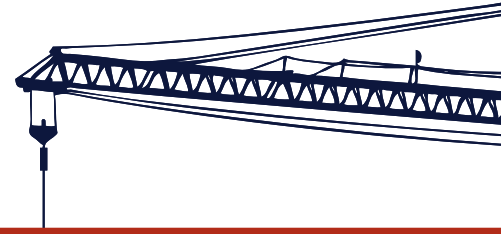
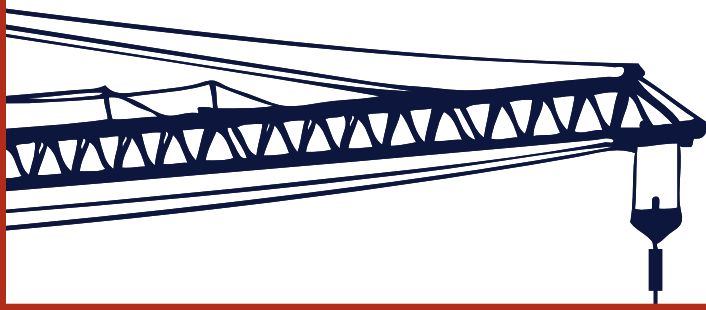
Additionally, there are organisations that specialise in this area such as theusabilitycompany.com who specialise in business-focused analysis of a website's usability and accessibility.

Screen resolution

The screen resolution at which a visitor will be viewing your site will also play a role in the testing phase and affects how much of the website a visitor sees (ideally it should have

Good usability can improve the chances of a visitor making a purchase or an initial enquiry and is vital to the long-term success of a website.





been buttoned down in the planning phase). As monitors becoming larger and colour fidelity improves, goalposts are shifted. Whereas ten years ago 640x480 pixels and 8bit colour were the standard resolution, today the most common screen size is 1024x768 pixels at 16 or 24bit colour. Therefore if you have a large 22 inch monitor running at 1600x1200 be careful to check how the site you have designed will look on smaller screens. It is also advisable to take into consideration other lower resolutions than the most common, as some users will be using older hardware, or may not be aware that their monitor supports higher resolutions.

PDF DOWNLOAD

USABILITY

New Media Age usability guide
theusabilitycompany.com/resources/NMA_Usability_Supplement.pdf

Weblink:

USABILITY

organisation that specialises in usability and accessibility studies
theusabilitycompany.com

ACCESSIBILITY

The RNIB has approached two large companies with regard to their websites and accessibility – both companies, subsequently, made changes to their websites rather than face legal action.



"Global Village" is a term coined by writer and media analyst, Marshall McLuhan in the late 60s and refers to his observation that with the increase in mass media communication traditional barriers are being eroded enabling people to communicate on a global scale. As with any 'Global Village' the diversity of social and cultural backgrounds as well as the needs of a community are diverse. Traditionally people with disabilities have been neglected by website developers and designers. In the rush to produce eye-catching and innovative websites certain sections of society were marginalised, with most websites deemed 'inaccessible' by standards agencies and groups.

With the introduction of the Disability Discrimination Act in 1995, companies could be liable for prosecution for not making their websites accessible. This was put into practice in Australia in 2000 when a blind man successfully sued the Sydney Olympics organising committee over their inaccessible website. Additionally the RNIB has approached two large companies with regard to their websites and accessibility – both companies, subsequently, made changes to their websites rather than face legal action.

Assessing if a website is accessible

The W3C (Worldwide Consortium) is the Internet governing body and produces tools, checklists and guidelines aimed at helping website developers make their sites more accessible. It offers three levels of compliance:

Priority 1

Which must be satisfied according to the W3C. All sites will almost certainly have to be adhered to this level as a basic requirement.

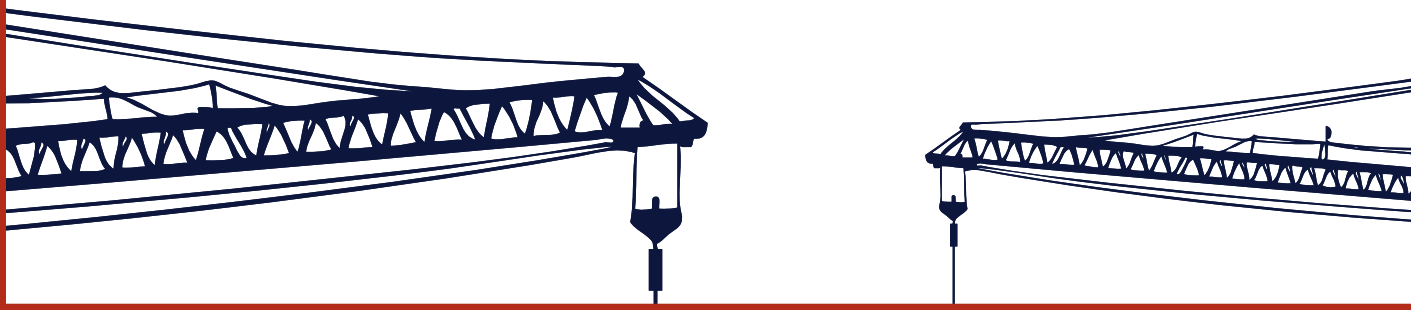
Priority 2

Which should be satisfied and are the EU recommended level of compliance.

Priority 3

Where a developer may address certain issues.

The following is a ten step guide to making your website accessible (taken from W3C.org):



Images and animations

Use the 'alt' attribute to describe the function of each visual (these are discussed in the next section 'Search engine optimisation').

Image maps

Use the client-side map and text for hotspots.

Multimedia

Provide captioning and transcripts of audio, and descriptions of video.

Hypertext links

Use text that makes sense when read out of context. For example, avoid "click here."

Page organisation

Use headings, lists, and consistent structure. Use CSS for layout and style where possible.

Graphs and charts

Summarize or use the 'longdesc' attribute.

Scripts, applets and plug-ins

Provide alternative content in case active features are inaccessible or unsupported.

Frames

Use the 'noframes' element and meaningful titles.

Tables

Make line-by-line reading sensible. Summarise.

Check your work

Validate. Use tools, checklist, and guidelines at <http://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG>

Although you are not 'forced' to take on board these recommendations, it is important that you are aware and make an effort to implement those that are possible.

Weblinks

useit.com

Home of Jakob Nielsen, the internet's primary advocate of good usability and accessibility.

w3c.org

International industry consortium founded in 1994 to develop specifications, guidelines, software and tools to promote accessibility and usability.

Books

Constructing Accessible Websites
by Jim Thatcher



SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMISATION

When a potential customer is researching similar organisations to yourself via a search engine, making sure that it will pick up your website and rank it as highly as possible is a black art. However, here are a few basic guidelines which will help get you on the right track:

The page title of a webpage is one of the most important considerations when optimising your website.



Be patient

Getting listed in a search engine can take weeks, even months.

Keywords

Be descriptive. If you are to submit your main pages to a search engine, make sure you place keywords and phrases that are descriptive and not too general (i.e. instead of 'shoes' use 'imported Italian shoes'). Think about what keywords people may use in order to search for a site like yours. Have a look at the 'source code' of a competitors website who is highly ranked (to view the code click the 'View' at the top of your web browser then select 'Source', or 'Page Source').

Title Tag

The page title of a webpage is one of the most important considerations when optimising your website. It is recommended you use between 50-80 characters in the page title with a couple of important keywords thrown in (but don't list keywords otherwise search engines will think you are spamming).

Optimise your page copy

Search engines read text on a page much the same as you and I. However, it is keywords and phrases they are most interested in, so keep them logical and use ones that are found elsewhere in other tags such as meta, alt,

headings and title. Additionally, consider using tips, how-to articles and tutorials to fill out the copy (people may link to these page externally which can help page rank).

Optimise meta tags

Meta tags were introduced in order to help search engines find pages that may have been otherwise hard to categorise using related keywords or phrases.

Two meta tags which can help, **but are not unique to**, search engine optimisation are the meta keyword and meta description.

Meta keywords

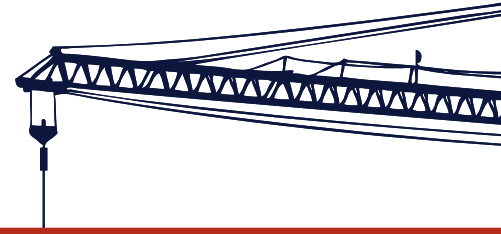
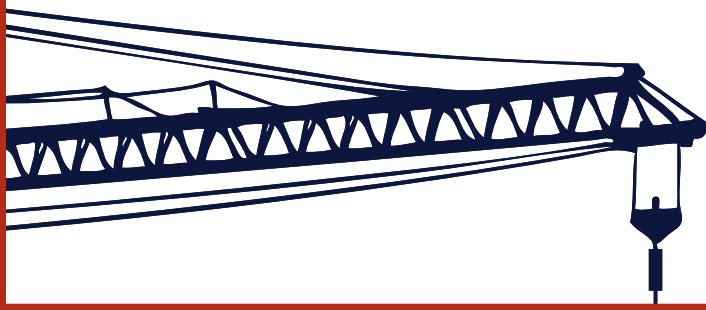
Meta keywords are keywords found elsewhere in the website (in other tags, body text etc) which relate to your organisation and its services. When adding Meta keywords consider the use of plurals and misspellings of popular, related words as a means of trapping variants.

Meta descriptions

Meta descriptions are descriptions of your page and are normally found in the first couple of lines after a page is located in a search engine. When adding a Meta description, make sure it is accurate and include three to four of the most important keyphrases (possibly putting them at the front to reduce the chance of a search engine cutting them off if the description is too long).

Optimise 'alt' tags

Images can help with search rankings too. All images have an 'alt' tag which are alternative text-based descriptions which will display if a browser has images turned off or is unable to find it as a result of a broken link. It is also one of the tenets of good usability and accessibility – users with sight impairment can



be read the description via a screen reader. Be sure to use one or two keyphrases within the descriptions that are found in other tags and areas of the site. Don't list words but describe the image in a sentence or two.

What you shouldn't do

Don't try and trick search engines into getting yourself a higher page rank, otherwise they may well blacklist you for 'spamming'. Developers should not:

- Trick the search engine in to giving you a higher ranking.
- List keywords in the body of your webpage.
- Use the same colour text as the background in order to hide keywords. Search engines detect this.

- Use more than one title tag.
- Submit the same page to a search engine within 24 hours.
- Use keywords which do not relate to the content of your page.

There are other ways to help search ranking which may be used, such as text hyperlinks and heading tag optimisation, information for which can be found via the links below.

Weblink

searchenginewatch.com
Comprehensive search engine website.

Books

Search Engine Visibility
by Shari Thurows.

HOSTING

For most purposes, a Unix based server such as such as Apache which runs open source operating systems such as Linux will be sufficient.



The decision of who will host your website will be influenced by your budgets, technical requirements and the size and nature of your website. With hundreds of thousands of web hosts available it can seem daunting. Here are some guidelines when making the choice.

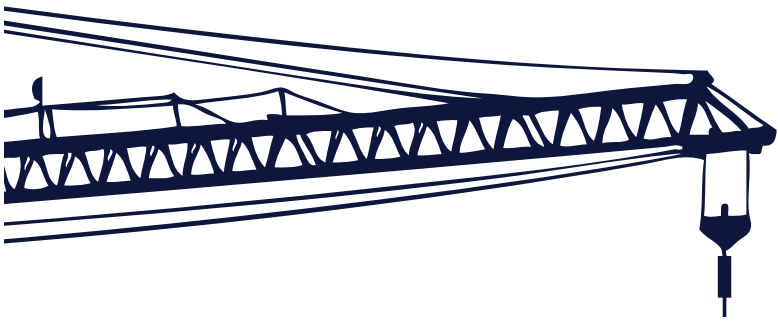
Unix or Microsoft?

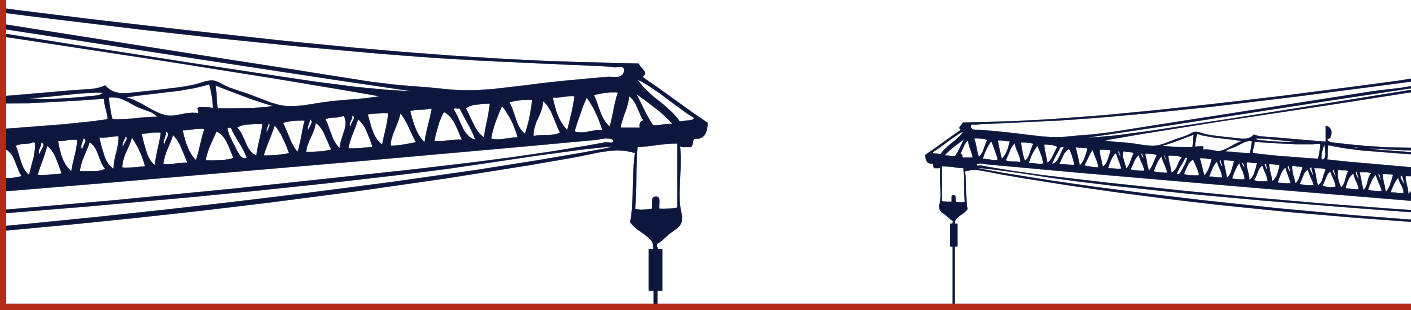
If you plan to use database applications such as using Microsoft's .ASP then a windows server is recommended. However, for most purposes, a Unix based server such as Apache which runs open source operating systems such as Linux will be sufficient. You can use PHP and MySQL on these servers so database requirements can be fulfilled.

Free or Paid?

If you are testing a site, or if it is for personal use, then free web hosting can be a useful. These can be found as part of your ISP package (ie Telewest, Virgin, BT) or via webhosts who will insist on placing advertising banners on your site. Bear in mind that ISP based hosting will force you to use their own web address such as myname.blueyonder.co.uk or similar (however this can be circumnavigated by buying a domain name of your choice and redirecting any traffic from that address to the free webspace). However, don't expect these hosts to support all your requirements as they will have restrictions on what files and programs can and cannot be used and the type of site it is.

If you are a business then paid hosting is recommended as unwieldy domain names are not only lengthy to type but project a bad image. Hosting packages vary in cost





SITE MAINTENANCE

'Stickiness' refers to the amount of time spent on a website. Ideally you want visitors to stay on your site as long as possible, finding out about your organisation and its products/services which, in turn, can lead to sales, orders and enquiries.



One often neglected part of website development happens once it goes live. More often than not websites are left to their own devices with owners assuming traffic will be consistent and that it's 'doing its job' just being there. Not keeping content up-to-date and fresh can lead to low return of visitors if they feel the site is being neglected. News sections are a prime example of this and must be kept current (especially if they are date stamped). If you don't have time to update your site, get someone else to do it for you (or employ someone, if necessary).

CMS (Content Management System)

In order to help facilitate a cost effective method of keeping a website updated you may want to consider a CMS. CMS software automates many content-related tasks within an approachable and non-intimidating framework and includes tools for publishing, format management, revision control, indexing, search and retrieval. There are costs involved but may be worth considering if the people updating your site don't have programming experience and are not comfortable with editing program code. Macromedia, publishers of Dreamweaver, have launched a product called Contribute that makes updating webpages very simple and is aimed at the novice user.

Stickiness

Once you have decided to (semi)regularly update your site, how do you keep people interested and active whilst they are there and keep coming back for more? 'Stickiness' refers to the amount of time spent on a website. Ideally you want visitors to stay on your site as long as possible, finding out about your organisation and its products/services which, in turn, can lead to sales, orders and

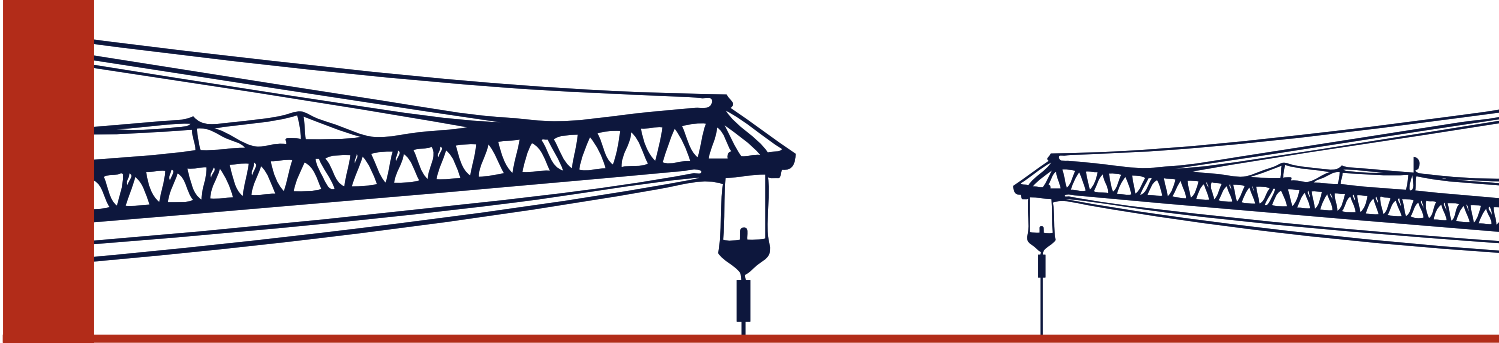
enquiries. Achieving this will be due to a mix of design and quality of content and can include:

1. Providing content the user really wants.
2. Making it attractive and consistent.
3. Keeping navigation logical and relevant.
4. Making a daily change ("today's speciality is...") and rotate content regularly with special offers.
5. Building online communities (forums and guestbooks).
6. Inviting user feedback via forms.
7. Offering an online newsletter to subscribe to and be sent.
8. Don't use unnecessary graphics or animation which slow down the site (i.e. large music file playing in the background which needs to be pre-loaded before it is played).
9. Add helpful links to pages if there is related content that will keep the visitor active.

Are you sticky?

How do you measure 'stickiness'? Figures on daily usage of your website known as web logs can help calculate daily visitor length (which many web hosts offer via site statistic software). However, this method of calculation can be a little unreliable, as it doesn't consider the time a user spends waiting of each page to load. Another is to analyse only those who are 'active' and 'inactive' in order to get a rough average of time spent on the site. The associated links provided overleaf will help to clarify the various methodologies you can employ.

The other advantage of 'stickiness' is that it can be traced over a time period so you can see what areas are keeping visitor interested, those which are being ignored and the effect that any changes are having.



Weblinks:

CMS

A comprehensive guide to all things CMS
cmswatch.com

Macromedia Contribute
macromedia.com/software/contribute

STICKINESS

Company site that has a good discussion on the art of 'stickiness'.

i-on.com/1-888-ION-IDEA/library/article_76.asp

Discussion of stickiness as well as methods of analysis
computerworld.com.au/index.php?id=3822760

MARKETING YOUR SITE

Use the signature feature of many email programs (such as Outlook) to put your company details including web address at the end of each correspondence.



So your website is up and running. However, people won't visit you unless they know about you.

Offline marketing

With all this talk of online this and search engine that, it's easy to forget the more traditional methods of communicating with your potential customers. Here are some ideas for getting your new website address in front of people:

- Make sure your website address appears in all your printed literature
 - Advertisements
 - Stationary
 - Press Releases
 - Brochures and leaflets
- Create a specific marketing campaign to tell people about your website which could take the form of
 - Advertising
 - Postcards/Direct Mail

Online marketing

You can maximise awareness of your website online by:

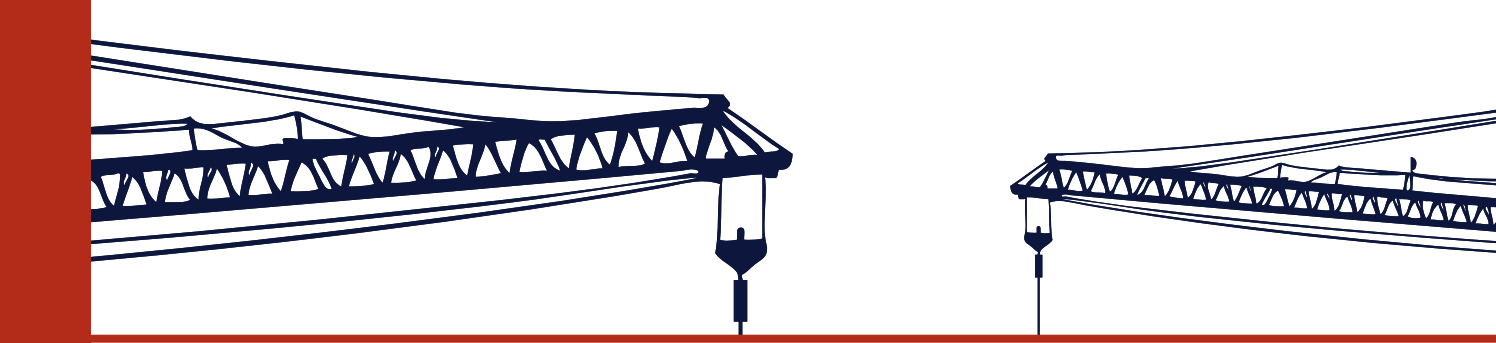
- Registering with search engines and directories.
- Using email and mailshots (although be careful about 'spamming').
- Use the signature feature of many email programs (such as Outlook) to put your company details including web address at the end of each correspondence.

There are specialist web agencies that will be able to help you with online marketing as well. However, there are also a number of books which will guide you through the process if you want tackle it on your own.

Books:

Cybermarketing: How to Use the Internet to Market Your Products and Services
By Pauline Bickerton, Matthew Bickerton and Upkar Pardesi (Chartered Institute of Marketing)

Online Marketing Handbook: How to Sell, Advertise, Publicise and Promote Your Products and Services on the Internet
By Daniel S Janal



CONCLUSION

By now you should have a basic overview of the procedures and technologies in creating a website (or getting someone to do it for you). Remember that content is king with usability and accessibility important factors as well. When weighing up who should design and develop your website consider cost, control, experience and time. It may seem daunting (and you may decide to outsource as a result) but with time and experience it will become second nature if you choose to develop your own.

One final factor when and if you choose to build your website; have fun. Yes, it may be frustrating and you will wonder whether it is worth it, but persevere and you will certainly feel a sense of accomplishment and pride once you have overcome the many hurdles web development throws at you.



The HCIMA acknowledges Julian Knott as the author of this brief

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DISCLAIMER

This brief is intended as a guide only. While the information it contains is believed to be correct, it is not a substitute for appropriate professional advice. The HCIMA can take no responsibility for action taken solely on the basis of this information.

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