



Effective Web Sites

Information provided by Paul Turner from www.houddini.com

Your mission

Who are you and what is your product or service? Every site needs a basic purpose--a mission that will drive your team, focus your site, and eventually attract your users. Articulating your mission is a significant task and one that can seem overwhelming, but you can kick off a productive brainstorming session by answering a few simple questions: Why are you here? What do you want to accomplish with this site? What do you want your users to accomplish with this site? What will keep a user on your site? What will encourage a user to return?

Each question should spark a dozen more specific inquiries. Write all of the questions and answers on a white board in your workspace. Encourage your team (or even a group of helpful friends) to connect ideas ("foster a productive skate community") with specific actions ("create a community message board"). When answers involve designing another page, working with a new technology, or adding any content to your Web site, place that action into one of three categories: must have, would like, and can sacrifice. Later, these priorities will be necessary if limited resources or time constraints force compromises.

Links to check out:

Goal Setting:

[Create a road map for business growth and success with these goal-setting and planning strategies.](#)

Defining your Mission

[How to write your mission statement](#)

Audience

Clearly define your target audience. Are they between the ages of 15 – 25 or much older? Female? Males? Both? Is there a specific cultural, political or spiritual public they belong to? etc. You want a big site with a broad audience, right? Not necessarily. A too-general focus can alienate rather than attract users. Narrowing your target audience creates a sense of confidence and trust with users, improving their overall experience.

Objective

What is the specific goal of your web site? Do you want to increase membership, sell products and services, advertise events, build a community, challenge the rest, or all of the above? Define it clearly in one or two sentences.

Domain Name

More important than a lot of people realizes. A unique and easy to remember domain name can help you stand out among the crowd. The name should also be appropriate to your audience, consistent with your objective and maybe even politically-correct.

A great domain name can make all the difference to your success. Consider the following: What would these URL's tell you: http://www.geocities.com/meri2_99/ and www.goveg.com ?

The first web site address tells me, cheap, old fashioned Internet, and nothing more. I do not have a clue that this is actually the web address for Mary's good cooking recipes. The second address, however, tells me right away – professional, reputable and a place to get some great vege recipes.

It will normally cost you \$35 for 1 year of registration with Network Solutions; however, there are some cheaper registration services available if you look.

Links to check out:

Domain Name Ideas:

- [Expired Domains Search Engine](#)
- [8 Mistakes to Avoid When Naming Your New Business](#)

Domain Name Lookup and Registration

Search for and register a domain name for as low as \$8/year at www.houddini.com

Domain Name Tools

[Find out information on any domain name](#)

Concept

What is the overall concept of the site? Is it ecommerce-orientated or just an electronic brochure trumpeting your organization's greatness? In other words is your site a business arm of your organization, a means to grow membership or a tool for informing your existing community?

Design

Based on the above answers you should design your site accordingly. The best bet is to carefully research what others in your market are doing. See what is working and see what is not. Take note of colors used, User interface and friendliness, quality and type of content, site-orientation (concept), web site alliances (partners and links), customer service, interactivity, products and services, etc. Only after you have extensively researched your market you discuss design options.

One thing to keep in mind is that increase in bandwidth speeds has enabled more graphically intensive sites, however, you should not fall into the trap of over doing a page. In most cases, less is more. Clean and light is right. If you have the skills, using Macromedia flash can add professional and artistic zing to your site without hogging too much bandwidth. The flash plug is now standard in all later version browsers and so users will not need to download to see your work of art.

Another point to keep in mind is that the 90's 3D, beveled and drop shadow look is on the out. Professional designers are favoring a more light and clean look with just a touch of drop shadow.

Finally, as you design keep in mind your target audience. What will appeal to them? See the site through their eyes. Better yet, ask for feedback from your audience and tweak the design accordingly.

Links to check out:

Design & Development

- [Design Guidelines from Usability.gov](#)
- [10 Design Mistakes to Avoid](#)

Tools for building

Some popular HTML editors and layout programs include: Front Page, Dreamweaver, Net Objects Fusion, or Adobe GoLive.

[Get a Custom Built Site from Houddini Design Studio](#)

Marketing

Once you've built your site the next thing is to tell everyone about it. Well, at least your target audience. The problem is that there is a lot of noise out there from other web sites all competing for the same eyeballs. In fact there are more than 50 million web sites? So how do you get recognized? Make marketing an integral part of the design process. Don't leave it the end. How do you do that?

Very simple, as you define your target audience, you should simultaneously be defining the key messages/words that will best market your product or service to those people. You should then confirm your choice of key words and messages whilst you are researching your competitors. You do this by "viewing the source" on their web pages and looking at their META tags. META tags describe the sites content to the search engine robots that index your page and add them to their database. There is a lot hype about META tags that they are the most important part of a site construction for guaranteeing high ranking in the search engines. This is simply not true.

If you want to know what is the most important information on a web page for the search engines, it is the pages <TITLE> tag, the domain name and the actual name of the page (eg. vegetarian.html) The META tags play their part but it is important to understand that each search engine has their own unique ranking criteria in some cases META tags are

not even considered. There are volumes of information on the art of search engine ranking on the web (please see links), however the best bit of advice is to think hard about the actual title of the page (the information inside the <TITLE></TITLE> tags), the domain name and the page name. Make them relevant to your audience and your site's objectives.

Links to check out:

- [Web Advertising](#)
- [Spam Free email marketing](#)
- [Search Engine Marketing](#)
- [ENewsletter marketing](#)
- [Meta Tags & Page code optimization](#)
- [Shopping Cart](#)

Measure of Success

How will you measure the success of your site? There has to be some criteria established to make sure you're getting the results you want. Set clearly defined goals with dates and then measure your site's impact against them.

Hosting

You have to host the site in order for the world to see your creation. There are many options. Some are free, however, those free services like Geocities will not allow you to have a top-level domain (e.g. mydomain.com). And this is a big disadvantage. So my first advice is to purchase a domain name and get some top-level domain name hosting. Prices range from \$9 to \$29/ month for a small full-featured web hosting solution. If you only have a 20mb site and a few forms there is no need to pay any more. For these prices you can even get 300mb of space, more than enough for growth.

Links to check out:

Houddini Hosting Services

Hosting specials: from \$3.99/month

Web Applications, Resources and Services

There are too many great and free web applications, resources and services available to list. Here are just a few:

www.egroups.com

www.freemerchant.com

[Webmaster Tools](#)

For more information:

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