Setting Up Your Website For Success

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INTRODUCTION

This e-book is designed to show you how business ventures have taken off over the web, and how you can share a taste of the success.

We've all seen the clever sales pitches quoting instant get-rich schemes. But in a market shrouded by scepticism that profit can actually be made, it's no surprise that many are reluctant to commit to a web business project. Is there genuine reason to be hesitant? Of course there is.

Never place your trust in an online program which guarantees instant cash for minimum work. Coming to think of it, the same logic should be applied to your offline activities. If there were genuine shortcuts to success, we'd all be using them. This book would never have seen the light of day and we'd be off making a fast buck from the luxury of our tropical island hammocks.

It is, however, unwise to deny the potential of genuine business success over the web.

Many years a go, the thought of a business existing primarily through the World Wide Web would have provoked rounds of laughter. Very few realised that the Internet would become what it has. Not only does it provide such opportunities, but it has become the driving force behind some of the most culturally important businesses in the twenty first century. Now that's saying something.

Over the following chapters, we will discuss the necessary steps towards getting a business off the ground over the Web. It's not always a glamorous process so please bear with us. But the most common mistake for any

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would-be web wizard comes from the idea that dumping a webpage on a server is enough to attract the crowds. It doesn't.

There are many, MANY considerations to be addressed before you even think about unveiling a web page to the digital world. It can be intimidating, yes. If you're new to this web developing malarkey, there's a good chance that the contents to this book will leave you staring somewhat blankly at your screen.

Do I really have to bother with all that garbage?

Yes, if you wish to maximise your business performance – absolutely yes. While we have tried to cut down on some of the less significant topics, the following chapters will prepare you for the obstacles that you can expect to face in your short or prosperous web career.

We'll take you from the pre-design phase. Have you ever wondered where these ideas for brilliantly popular new websites come from? We can't guarantee that this e-book will plant the seeds of inspiration in your mind, but we can advise you how others have nurtured it. There's generally a method behind the madness, and we'll look at those methods carefully.

We will also run through the design process itself. What is the best software to build a website? What theme should you look at for a successful business? How can a few subtle tweaks transform your entire web image?

And of course, we'll cover arguably the most important phase to your project; the marketing and advertising.

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WHY SET UP A WEB BUSINESS?

So many people choose to denounce the field of web business as a weaker part of the commercial market. It's often seen as the platform for businessmen with big hopes and low expectations. You could have a principle idea that seems fantastic on paper, and a guaranteed hit, but the second you mention using the web - things begin to get a little complicated.

Why is there such a stigma around the trials and tribulations of web business? We've seen it work. The Internet is one gigantic network of endorsement screaming "This Works!" But for some reason, there's still reluctance for businessmen and women to truly believe that the big bucks can be made online. Maybe this is to do with where the Internet came from. If it is, we should take a closer look.

The current generations of twenty first century millionaires were well in to the implementation of their successful strategies by the time the Internet had taken off. We've grown up in a world where business is a 9 to 5 job with a long train journey every morning. Generations have followed before us, and it seems a little optimistic to suggest that change could be on the way.

But over the last several years, change is most certainly what we have seen. The Internet has rocketed onwards to become the global platform for young entrepreneurs. The only difference is, people are beginning to question the theory of localized business.

Why pitch your product towards a local community when the World Wide Web is capable of delivering MILLIONS to your shop window?

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Web business has taken off in a way that nobody could ever have anticipated. We're going to look at what it takes to join the world's largest marketplace.

E-COMMERCE: A BRIEF LOOK

E-Commerce is one of the newest forms of business. Its focus involves primarily the use of the Internet to carry out electronic transactions, in the same fashion that a standard business would operate.

Considering its rapid growth and growing significance, it seems somewhat surreal to think that such communications were unavailable as little as forty years a go.

E-Commerce arrived after the sealing of the Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) in the 1960s. Of course, in that day and age, only government and military groups had reason to be using the Internet. But since the mid 90's, E-Commerce has slowly but surely begun to realize its true potential.

We now live in a world where electronic transactions are an everyday affair. For example, an increasing number of people will make bill payments and shopping purchasing online.

This would have been a worry for your high street retailer chains at some point, but most of them have jumped ship. It's rare to find a mainstream business which doesn't have a website offering some kind of additional service.

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What's more, it's not at all uncommon to find vast businesses who use the web as their ONLY contact with customers.

E-Commerce has become a key contributor to the global economy, and the nature of its business means that anybody can take advantage. If you can supply to somebody's demand, today might just be your lucky day!

THE GLOBAL APPEAL

Some business heads will be perfectly happy to target their local market and direct customers to a website for further information. The idea that the Internet is a vast expansive field of global connections doesn't have to ring true. It can be used for small-time marketing too.

If you lack the aspirations to deal with a chap in Hong Kong, or another in Peru - you don't have to. Using the Internet doesn't mean that you suddenly have to open your horizons and double the postage stamps on outgoing orders.

There can be no doubting, however, that the global appeal of the Internet can be a very enticing proposition to some. Particularly those who don't have to worry about working with physical stock.

For example, if you're making your money selling computer software online, what sense does it make to only advertise to local regions? Digital technology is demanded across the world and it shouldn't take a rocket science diploma to understand that this can be a very profitable business.

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Alternatively, if you're running a service for say, local swimming pool construction, advertising globally is unlikely to leave you with many useful leads. Unless, of course, you have extreme discounts on air travel.

The important point to remember is that the Internet is a platform. Nothing more and nothing less. It won't make your business on its own accord, and it probably won't break it either. But if you have a good grasp of your target market, we believe that the following chapters will set you well on your way to web business riches.

CAN I REALLY GET RICH FROM HOME?

This is the golden question for many would-be entrepreneurs. Can I *really* earn a living from home? How about a fortune?

The answers to those questions are yes and yes. But we're not going to sell you the injustice of believing it's that easy.

You'll find a growing number of people making a living over the Internet. An accurate number is hard to come by, given the ambiguous nature of the industry. But yes, it's possible to sit down at your bedroom desk and make a profit from home.

Don't get too carried away though. The same rules of business apply. Just because it's possible, doesn't mean it's going to happen! How would you respond if we asked you "Is it possible to make money offline?"

You'd return a resounding "YES!", but the fact is, life isn't as simple as that. We wish it was, but it isn't.

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There's a very significant difference between making money online, making ENOUGH money online, and getting pig ugly rich.

Before you step in to web business, you should be aware that you're going it alone. It's now your responsibility to produce the money. Somebody's got to fund dinner on a Sunday afternoon, right? So think carefully.

- Can I afford a few months of minimal profit?
- Am I going to wish that I was back at my office desk with the responsibilities of executive decisions off my back?
- Am I patient enough to persevere when the going gets tough?

Yes, there are plenty of possibilities to consider.

If you're looking for inspiration, take a deep breath and recite to yourself that many have made a fortune with the Internet's aid.

If you're nodding viciously and waiting for the next chapter, slow down and whisper to yourself that many have failed too.

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GETTING STARTED

FINDING THE INSPIRATION

It's all very well to hand your coat at the door and usher yourself in to the world of e-commerce. But as is the case through much of life, actually getting somewhere in your trade is a different skill altogether.

Much of successful web business comes down to one raw factor; inspiration. Yes, you can have the technical skills of a computer science graduate, or your middle name can be Determination, but inspired vision is a rare and priceless commodity.

What separates the rich from the poor in the online world? Is it powerful servers? Adsense vouchers? Marketing know-how? While those attributes certainly help, the real thing to have is hidden in your brain. Behind every brilliant invention is a brilliant creator, as they say.

You don't have to be distantly related to Einstein to follow the e-commerce trail (although it surely helps), you simply need a clear vision of a product or service that people will want to have. It really is as simple as that.

The question is, where do we find that inspiration? It can feel like everything has already been done. And that's the first mistake. We shouldn't be interested in what's just passed us by – we should be looking to tomorrow. What's the next big thing? How can a service be improved? What's the missing link between two popular products?

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If you've ever felt as if these entrepreneurs have some hidden website that they visit for inspiration, well, you're probably not too far from the truth. The reality is that inspiration is all around us.

The next big consumer must-have could be staring you in the face from your laptop. Take a look at MySpace for example. Here's a web business which took the successful elements of three other websites – Blogger, MP3 and Craig's List – before moulding a brand of its own.

The several hundred million registered MySpace users is testament to the vision of its creators.

You don't have to have a gigantic budget to enjoy success. Take a look around the web and see what's popular. Read those geeky IT magazines. As baffling as they can seem, they often provide valuable insight in to where e-commerce is heading.

Most great websites have been extensions of other great websites. You don't need to invent a new concept gadget. You don't have to discover the hidden secrets of gravity. You simply need to keep your eyes peeled for the direction in which consumers are throwing their money. And when you feel that you can predict their next move? Get in there first!

MONEY MAKERS AND TIME WASTERS

So you've been tossing and turning in bed all night. The spouse is in a foul mood. But you can't help but believe that you've stumbled upon a genius new product.

Even better, nobody else has thought of it!

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Now it's time to follow a few valuable tips of the trade. First of all, if you have that moment of clarity – don't let it drift away in your sleep! By the time you wake up, you may have forgotten the finer details of what you had planned. While that doesn't particularly say much for the idea in the first place, you'd be surprised how many heads have been banged against walls in bitter regret that somebody else has later gone on to make a fortune on the same premise.

Have a notepad by your side if you ever feel yourself drifting in to "deep professional strategy" mode. Jot down the ideas as they enter your mind. Even if they sound silly and you later dismiss them, these notes can strike chords weeks later and be recycled for a new project.

Once you've written the idea out on paper - forget about it.

Yes, that probably sounds unnecessary. And after months of businessman's blank, you'll hate us for saying it. But without leaving the idea for a reasonable period of time, it's possible to plunge ahead in to a doomed enterprise.

Many failed businesses are born from the same situation. A moment of supposed wisdom on a long Tuesday night, and suddenly breakfast is eaten with a smile pasted across your face. Before lunch, the company's already been launched. Yet by dinner time, indecision has struck and you're not quite sure whether it was such a good move in the first place.

Such rash decisions are a timeless tradition in all forms of business. You can avoid wasting your valuable time by writing the ideas down, letting them brew and coming back to them when you're in a distinctly level headed mood.

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Another common mistake for inexperienced business people stems from, for lack of a better term, blunt arrogance.

"Yes, of course I can compete with Coca Cola and Pepsi on my shoestring budget! This is MY Company!"

Well, your company or not. Take a good look at the opposition before you plunge in to the market. Can you compete with the alternatives? Does your brand have any significant advantages over its rivals?

If not, what are you expecting from the venture?

Are you looking to exploit mindless consumers? Or are you out to con a few fat cats in to dispersing with juicy cheques before boarding up shop and jetting to the Bahamas?

It's good to be realistic. Trusted and respected brand names are typically the ones which stick around in the long term. If your project involves too much black hat short term exploitation, the alarm bells should be ringing. It's hardly a wise choice for a reliable pay cheque, is it?

WHAT IS A NICHE MARKET?

A niche what?

Hold your horses. We're not getting that technical.

You've probably heard the term "niche market" thrown around sporadically. But you might not be fully aware of what it actually is. Well, to put it simply,

a niche market is an area of business which takes a very special approach to conquer.

If you're offering a service in an industry where such a thing has rarely been tried before, you're appealing to a niche market. That is, one which doesn't hold much mainstream appeal, but generally requires a great deal of expertise.

Take a look around at your fellow consumers and what do you see? Most people are content with what's available to them. You'll rarely find a disgruntled mother sauntering home from Tesco complaining about a product which hasn't been invented yet.

But a niche market is heavily weighted towards this sort of theory.

If you can offer something which benefits a consumer – or even better, another business – and it hasn't been exploited before, this is appealing to a niche. It's a small yet vocal demand that you can build a reputation around.

So why are people interested in this line of marketing? It goes along the line that if a consumer views a product as advantageous, they'll pay money on a regular basis to have it.

Therefore, if you can corner that market and prove yourself as the "go to" business, you've established a brand that can survive the long term.

PLANNING YOUR BUSINESS VENTURE

If you've decided on a direction for your business venture, you're probably bursting at the thought of translating it to money in the bank.

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As we've already discussed, making a rash decision can prove costly and a great waste of time. A good idea isn't likely to lose momentum on a short term basis, and you should plan your venture as effectively as possible before committing to dotted lines.

Reading this book is a good start. By the final chapter, you'll have a thorough understanding of the areas in which you'll be required to work.

But your project will require much more thought than that. First and foremost, you should work out the details of your financial budget. Don't spend more money than you can afford to invest. Yes, a new business can be exciting territory but if it all goes wrong, you don't want to end up in a worse situation than you started.

Decide what you can afford to spend on a monthly basis and draw up a list of items required to launch the business. It could be web hosting, domain registrations, software licenses or even a physical commodity such as the materials for what you're going to be selling.

Produce a rough estimate of what you'll need to make a return for your investments. Be honest with yourself. There's no point in low-balling yourself. If you're only likely to make 75% of what you need to get by, step back and think again.

Most businesses will need a few months of heavy investment for little return. Can you afford to commit to this? Do you have the capital to get the business off the ground?

Before giving the green light to the business plan, derive some long term expectations and require that you stick to them. Do whatever it takes. Get the wife to throttle you with the frying pan until you pull the plug if need be. Just don't fool yourself in to fighting a lost cause on pride alone.

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And of course, use the people around you. Do you have friends or acquaintances with experience in the field? Maybe you should try and search out some advice. Post on forum message boards and gather a portfolio of opinions. It's possible to improve your business plan by interacting in this manner, and you never have to give away your mystery project's details.

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WHAT DO I NEED?

Okay. So we've discussed the pros and cons of starting a web business. You've remained politely patient through all of those warnings and it's time to get down to the nitty gritty. What will you actually need to get your business off the ground?

A store manager needs an operational shop before he can open the front door and welcome his customers.

Most forms of web business – we're going to presume that you're starting from scratch for now – are operational once a website has been unveiled to the public. It's the equivalent of lifting the shutters and turning the sign to "Open".

But as you can probably imagine, websites never appear on the web by magic. You have to have a few essential ingredients. Here we'll take a look at what's required.

FINDING THE RIGHT WEB HOST

Sharing a web host is like renting a house. You dump your bags in the front door and part with some cash so that they're not kicked back on to the street. With web hosts, you pay a third party company to host your web content on the principle that;

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A. They'll keep the files safe and provide good security.
B. You won't abuse their services.

Yes, pay close attention to amendment B. If you break the rules of a web host, you could find yourself kicked out on to the cyber street. And there's no guarantee that they'll be so nice to return those sweat stained files of month's graft.

So what variations of web host do we have? And what actually is it?

Most web hosts will have a large data centre with rows and rows of machines linked to separate servers. In theory, these machines aren't that different to the ones that you and I go about our standard computing needs. Except web servers are geared towards the World Wide Web.

When you load a URL on the Internet, a request is sent to the server which hosts the page. The server will then return the content to your browser through gateways and all kinds of other lovely routers which we won't get bogged down in. A few thousand miles of electronic communication has taken place in a matter of seconds, and providing the server is performing, we'll be presented with what we wanted to see.

That is, of course, to presume that the website is running on a good web host. Turn things around and now it's you with the responsibility of finding a good host. Pick a bodged company and you'll spend no end of time explaining to your customers why "we're waiting for our superiors to fix technical problems".

This can spell disaster if you're running a large scale organization. Can you imagine if eBay crashed for an hour? Think of the outrage from aggrieved sellers across the land! Thankfully for eBay, that particular website is run straight off a secure web server at specs the rest of us could only dream of.

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Most web hosting packages will come with a cleverly worded sales pitch to make it seem like more than it really is. As such, choosing a good host can be a business in itself. We've spent many months trawling through providers and separating the good from the bad, but there are several key factors to look out for. So here they are.

- Bandwidth and Disk Space
- Server Speed
- File Access (FTP or Web based)
- Supported Technologies

We will take a detailed look at the many advanced technologies in the later section of this chapter, but let's look at the other points.

Bandwidth and disk space are the most heavily promoted items of most web packages. But they're rarely the most revealing.

Bandwidth is the expression for the traffic going in and out of your website. If you have a large bandwidth cap (in the hundreds of gigabytes region), you can afford the luxury of having lots of activity on your site. This is somewhat misleading without the knowledge of server speeds though.

Disk space is as you'd expect. It's the amount of space allocated to your account. Providing you're not hosting a whole bunch of media files, disk space shouldn't be an issue.

As we mentioned, server speeds are critical for the reliability of your host. What good is excessive bandwidth if multiple requests grind your server in to the ground?

Have you ever used a machine which lags and stutters and does everything in its capability to frustrate the living daylights out of you? Yes, we have too.

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It's not an enjoyable experience and it's even less enthralling for your customers as they navigate the website.

Next up, we have file access. We will touch on this in greater detail, but for now, you only need to worry about the practicalities of updating your website and maintaining it remotely.

WHEN SHOULD I OPT FOR A DEDICATED SERVER?

A dedicated server is usually necessary once a business reaches a stage where shared web hosting is draining resources and performance is faltering.

On the surface, a dedicate server can look somewhat below the cut as far as specs go. Why would anybody want to pay multiple times the monthly fee for potentially less bandwidth and disk space?

Put it this way. You can attach expansive hard drives to many computers and you'll end up with more space. But while space is of no real use on its own, you're likely to pay kidneys and livers to upgrade your CPU and motherboard.

The main advantage of a dedicated server is staring at you in the title. It's dedicated to you! You won't be sharing resources with other web users and you won't be battling for attention with millions of other requests.

As a result, careful consideration should be leant to an upgrade – particularly if performance outweighs the advantage of additional bandwidth.

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Many websites will automatically require an upgrade if they grow to a particularly size. Can you really imagine Amazon parked on a $150 a month shared web host? Say a prayer for the poor webmasters it'd be sharing with! No, Amazon, like most large web businesses, has made the investment in dedicated servers which are dedicated to its cause.

Don't make the plunge straight away. You can expect to pay hefty prices to rent a server, and it's not required during the infancy of your business.

But if you ever reach the point where a dedicated provider is needed, congratulations! You've definitely made it!

ADVANCED TECHNOLOGIES

After a little schmoozing around the market of web hosting, you'll undoubtedly notice a wide array of technical terms. To fully comprehend the technologies, we could cover a whole separate book.

Obviously, away from those depths, let's look at a few of the key terms you may stumble across.

- **SQL Databases** – These are used to store structured data in a structured format. They are very useful and come in many varieties. You'll find mySQL, MS Access and Postgres to name a few. mySQL is generally seen as the leading standard, given its large fan base on the open source scene. MS Access databases are typically for use with Windows servers.

- **PHP** – This is a programming language favoured by the open source community. It's relatively easy to learn and can support many

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advanced scripts. You can distinguish a PHP website by its (.php) extension in the URL bar.

- **ASP** – Another advanced programming language commonly used on Windows platforms. It links closely with ASP.Net and supports database connecting well.

- **ColdFusion** (CFM) – ColdFusion is a popular programming language which simplifies many scripts in to easily maintainable HTML-styled tags. The language supports Mail, visual generation, database interaction and even PDF output.

- **Media Streaming** – If you plan on streaming videos or audio directly through the user agent, you will need a host which has this option enabled. It's increasingly common, but still worth checking up on.

- **SSI** – Standing for Server Side Includes, this will affect what the server is willing to process.

- **SSL** – A recognised security standard and very useful if you plan on implementing E-Commerce features. You will need some kind of Shared SSL or Private SSL to host a shopping cart.

REGISTERING A DOMAIN

Why would you want to consider purchasing a domain?

It's true that many hosting packages come with their own domains, and to the untrained eye, they can look fairly impressive. But on the professional

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market, an appended URL is unlikely to produce much in the way of a wow factor.

Which sounds more serious?

mywebbusiness.freehosts.com - OR - **mywebbusiness.com**

Unless you buy your own domain, you're likely to end up with one of these appended URLs where your host shares part of the address.

So, it goes without saying that a dip in to the wallet is in order.

There are many, MANY domains on the market, and there are just as many companies willing to provide them. The best offers will typically come in at around $8 for an annual registration. If you're paying more than this, keep looking, you can find better.

Once you've decided on a domain, process the relevant details and you should receive email confirmation of the purchase. You'll be able to log in to your account and adjust several settings.

It's important to adjust the NAMESERVER information so that it points to your current host. This is vital. If you fail to enter the correct nameserver details, the domain won't point to your website.

It's a good idea to contact your host beforehand. They'll be able to provide the relevant information and within 24 to 48 hours, your domain should be up and running.

It might not say much for your business, but it's a nice new shop window!

To find cheap domain names and great service go to
http://www.DomainAbbey.com

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HOW CAN I ACCESS MY WEBSITE FILES?

Many novice webmasters will spend hours star gazing at their newly setup account wondering just how they're supposed to access the files. It can be a little tricky on some web hosts.

Most providers will offer a web based utility for file uploads. This will allow you to transfer files from a local computer to the web host. The good point is that it doesn't require any additional software. On the downside, it can be slow and unresponsive. You'll even find some web upload scripts where each file needs to be manually inserted. Quite a chore when you have thousands of files to get through!

In instances such as this, we tend to favour FTP software as a means of bulk uploading and adjusting specific directory settings.

An FTP (File Transfer Protocol) client allows you to connect remotely to the server. You will need your username and password at hand, and also the host's FTP address.

Once the details have been entered, click Connect and you'll see a window pop up. The web files will appear in one pane, and you'll normally see your local system in the other.

There are many FTP products on the market – some free and some paid. Smart FTP and Cute FTP are worth looking in to with trial versions available over a limited time period. If this won't do, consider one of the free open source clients.

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THE DESIGN STAGE

Once you've found somewhere to host and publish your files, you're ready to move on to the design stage. Creating your website can be one of the most enjoyable parts of the project since it's the stage where your visual ideas come to fruition.

If you've spent many long nights imagining how your web business would look, the design stage is where we put these plans through the mixer and produce an interface.

There are two aspects to the design stage; web designing and web developing.

No, contrary to what you might have believed, they're not the same thing. A web designer's job is generally much different to that of a developer. You don't have to take on either, but it can save a lot of time and a lot of money if you have a grasp of at least one of the skills.

Primarily in this chapter, we'll be looking at the tasks faced by a web designer.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD WEB LAYOUT?

Planning a good web layout has as much to do with knowing what's going to go on it as it does with knowing how to use Photoshop.

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Many young designers are drawn in to their craft to the point where they overlook the practicality of web design in search of creative touches. For some websites, the layout may need to be particularly appealing on the eye.

But don't let that cloud your own vision. The fact is that the majority of successful web businesses operate on bare minimal templates. Have a look around the Web. Look at MySpace, BBC, Amazon and eBay. Are these websites dominated by overly complicated designs?

It may seem so.

But don't mistake content with the components that are actually built in to the web template. Most sensible businesses use basic interfaces with subtle colour schemes and the occasional flash of content imagery to make things seem more visual than they really are.

Yet young designers (and some old) will overlook this idea. They'll worry if their design doesn't look exciting enough. Many will throw in ridiculous shapes and stock images to cover for empty spaces.

We'll look at some bad design practices later in this chapter, but let's focus on how to follow GOOD design.

DON'T GO IN WITHOUT A PLAN

Increasingly sophisticated programs such as Adobe Photoshop and Macromedia Fireworks allow a huge array of tools for web designers. If you whip open your copy of CS3 and try to summon a design from a blank screen, do you have any idea what'll happen? Not much as far as profitable web designing is concerned.

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Most spontaneous design is plighted by indecision. You could spend an hour altering the blending options on a single layer, only to delete it and move on to something that looks slightly better. You'll spend another hour here before minimizing and reopening your template at a later date – and what do you know? It doesn't look as good as it did when you were fiddling around in Photoshop at the time!

This, ladies and gentlemen, is why the professional web designer works to a careful plan. If you're going to design a template from scratch, have enough respect for your own time to produce a hand drawn illustration of wht you WANT and NEED the interface to look like.

This does two things. Firstly, if gives us something concrete to work towards when we open our graphics utility. Secondly, it channels your business mind in to implementing the features that you need – rather than the features that look nice when you work randomly towards a workable design.

AVOID UNNECESSARILY COMPLICATED DESIGN

Unless you have plans to run a business by irritating the bleeding daylights out of your customers, stick to the basics.

What's with all these crazy innovative designers drawing up wacky concept websites for us to scratch our heads at?

Remember, remember, remember. You're not trying to win a cyber beauty contest. You're trying to sell a product. So keep your web template relative to what everyday web users are going to be used to. This means placing the navigation where the navigation usually goes, dumping slow loading videos and choosing efficiency over experimentation.

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If a design concept catches on, brilliant. But that field is to be pushed by the experts who make a living from it. We're interested in using the technology of the present to appeal to as many customers as possible.

USE EYE FRIENDLY COLOURS

Pink, green and scarlet red may look somewhat eye-catching at first glance. But is it what a customer wants to see when browsing a commercial website? Themes aside, the answer is a resounding "No!".

Stick to the tried and trusted colours of E-Commerce. If you haven't heard of such a colour set, draw up an image in your mind of shades that wouldn't be deemed offensive to the naked eye. You've got em. Silvers, light blues, delicates greens and good old fashioned white. They might leave you feeling creatively uninspired but they serve the best interests of the customer. That is, they don't draw attention to extravagant colour schemes over rich content.

FREE, PREMIUM AND CUSTOM TEMPLATES

If the thought of designing your own web template is enough to bring on premonitions of a great dark failure, sit back and relax. You're not doomed yet.

There are thousands and thousands of pre-designed web templates lurking on the Internet. Some are free, some will set you back a few dollars, and others will deal a hammer blow to your monthly wages.

Free web templates are a rather charitable donation on the behalf of designers with seemingly too much time on their hands. But we're not

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complaining. If you can find a good free web template that you like the look of, consider the following issues.

- How many people might I be sharing the same design with?
- Is a PSD included for full editing access?
- Will I have to link back to the creator's website?

If you're satisfied with the answers to those three questions, plunge ahead, slap the download button and you've just saved yourself a potentially frustrating ordeal.

Premium templates are like free templates with one significant difference, you get to pay for them.

Don't sulk off just yet. Although premiums can cost a fair sum, they generally appear much sleeker than their free counterparts. Remember, these aren't freebies and somebody has designed them with the intention of making a profit. You can expect a better quality and full rights to the package.

The only issue comes from "unique" purchases. When you browse a template purchasing website, you'll notice one premium price and one vastly more expensive unique price. This means that if you pay the bloated fee, it's ours and yours only. After purchasing, it'll be removed from the website (and wherever else the vendor is selling it).

For a slightly different take on the unique template idea, it's also possible to request custom templates – either from organized businesses or from freelance designers at a number of outsourcing websites.

The benefit of custom templates is that you can draw out your illustrated design, hand it to a professional and get top quality work delivered to the

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specifications that you choose. Brilliant for the cause, but somewhat expensive as you can probably imagine.

Freelancer designers are known to charge up the wall for their time. If you really want to explore the custom template option, register at a freelancing website, post the project with a maximum budget and take your pick from the bidders.

AVOIDING BAD DESIGN TECHNIQUES

It should be noted that designing your own template isn't an easy task. Believe it or not, many people find that their visions are best represented when they allow somebody to work from some guidelines. Doing the job will take a great deal of perseverance on your behalf. Here we'll consider some of the bad design techniques that are well worth giving a miss.

STYLE OVER SUBSTANCE

We realise that style is a great thing to have as a web designer. But if you're still new to the game, it can be extremely difficult to master the art of blending an interface in to the background – while still looking visually appealing.

The biggest mistake is made when a designer goes out of his or her way to rush a project with additional graphics that there's no need for. This can happen for a number of reasons. Maybe the design looks plain without content?

Take a look at MANY major websites without content and they'll look pretty mundane too. That's not the point. A good design doesn't automatically

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appeal at first glance. A good design simply compliments the purpose of the content that the webmaster wishes to add.

You may feel the endless need to do something rash in order for your website to stand out. Resist this urge like the Plague. Just because many other businesses have utilized the same basic strategy, there's no need to abandon ship and paint your background pink. Now, that's just silly.

It's been proven that the most welcoming interfaces for E-Commerce purposes are generally light, with plenty of blank space and clean easy-to-read text. Let this be the only guideline you need. Don't fall in to the trap of over-decorating your page.

Three column layouts are very popular in the current designing world. This may slowly fade to be replaced with the Flash all-in-one look, but for the foreseeable future, we'd consider a three column design a safe bet.

DON'T HIDE YOUR NAVIGATION!

How could anybody be so foolish to place their navigation links at the BOTTOM of the page? The customer's eyes will instinctively look to the top of the page for links to follow, and if they don't find one, they'll very frequently nail the trust Back button.

What's more, placing your navigation at the bottom of the page is an accident waiting to happen if your page scrolls. Where'd it go, eh?

HTML AND CSS

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Two of the most important technologies to web developers across the land, and two that you'd do well to drum in to your head rather quickly, yes, we're talking about HTML and CSS.

These are absolutely fundamental to your developing aspirations. If you don't know CSS, you can just about get by with pages upon pages of unnecessary code.

Without a grasp of HTML, you might as well shut up shop and call in the professionals.

The good news, however, is that their status in the industry is largely dictated by their simplicity. Both HTML and CSS are extremely easy to learn.

HTML makes up the standard code for most of the pages on the Web. You may remember we spoke of advanced technologies earlier (PHP, ASP…ring a bell?), well these are generally languages that dictate what HTML content will be output in to a browser.

Take note that they rarely, if ever, replace HTML as the served language.

We could spend hours on end discussing the ins and outs of how to code in HTML, but if you're keen, you should consider using Google as your starting block. All you need to know is that everything you see on your screen has been loaded from a source file. Most source files are written in HTML and saved with a (.HTML) extension.

HTML enables you to modify everything from the background colour, to the font of your text, to the images on display. Most importantly, it allows you to declare elements.

It's becoming increasingly common for web businesses to do away with standard HTML written source files. This is too rigid, they say.

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What happens if you need to make a change to the layout on every page? You could have 7,000 files to go through! As a result, CSS has become the standard module for formatting and presenting content.

What does CSS allow us to achieve?

Well, an awful lot if we're being open minded. By using CSS, we can cut down on the file sizes, loading speeds, and mass changes for our websites.

For example, a CSS file may state that all of the text on a website within a paragraph tag (<p>), be outputted as Times New Roman, Size 11. It doesn't sound like much, but when you weigh up the alternative of ploughing through EVERY page and setting the HTML tags to the same effect, the benefit is clear.

CSS and HTML are thus used in tandem to structure content, and to apply styles. They work together, despite the fact that they can both do each other's job, to produce a more efficient website.

Don't feel as if you have to master these languages before you set foot on your web business venture. You rarely need to master ANY programming language. It's simply wise to investigate the most efficient ways of reaching a goal.

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WEB STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

Blessed with being tossed aside as one of the most insignificant considerations for a web entrepreneur, this chapter is designed to enlighten the masses on just why web standards and guidelines are beneficial, and why they're a matter of *law*.

Did you know that your web business is breaking the law if it fails to offer reasonable accessibility to disabled users?

Flabbergasted? You shouldn't be. It's a highly unpublicised fact, and we'd like to know why it's not on more minds than it is.

Let's take a look at what web usability and web accessibility are all about.

WHY IS USER ACCESSIBILITY IMPORTANT?

The term user accessibility refers to the many ways in which a user may interact with a website.

Most of us are happy to use a mouse for navigation, and a keyboard for typing. But consider the following situations.

- A web user doesn't have access to a mouse.

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- A web user is colour blind or partially sighted.
- A web user has trouble reading small text.
- A web user has a different browser installed.
- A web user has a slow Internet connection.

These are all instances where a webmaster has to consider how his or her website performs to such specifications.

Does a website run effectively across different platforms? Does it load quickly enough for users with slow connections?

You're probably shaking your head and muttering "It's my website. I should be able to choose how it works."

While this is a perfectly understandable predicament, you should realise that web standards are in place to be followed – particularly in the field of E-Commerce.

Were you aware that several web businesses have been pulled from the web for discriminating against users with impaired vision? It's true! You are expected to provide accessibility levels which satisfy the demand of a diverse audience – and many situations that you probably wouldn't have thought about until now!

But let's forget about the downside to this obligation. It's unlikely that many webmasters will be persuaded in to action by warnings alone.

The best nudge in the direction of user accessibility abidance comes in the form of the increased sales and improved performance that you can expect.

Don't mistakenly presume that there are scarce few web users who you're turning away. Other web businesses have re-structured their websites with

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better accessibility for the end user and what have they seen? Up to 30% increases in sales!

That should be more than enough reason to evaluate your own website. Where are you losing potential customers? What could be done to maximise your possible sales?

THE W3 CONSORTIUM

Formed as a way of controlling standards and regulations across the web, the w3 Consortium is widely respected as the rule book wielders of web developing. Every change to languages such as HTML and CSS must be passed through the w3 before they can become commonplace.

From time to time, the Consortium will release new specifications which web businesses are expected to abide by. It may sound like a bit of a chore, but meeting these guidelines is generally a wise decision since they're in place for your own benefit.

The w3 acts on behalf of different users to round up lists of guidelines which will ensure full accessibility for disabled users and users with limited mobility. It also considers the implications of websites performing different across separate browser.

Internet Explorer, Firefox and Netscape may be famous for their individual qualities, but did you know that there are several basic functions which must be approved by the w3 for a browser to be released publicly? The guidelines allow software developers to plan ahead with details for how they can cater to the current market.

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It's well worth visiting the w3 Consortium website over at w3.com. You'll find an expansive list of guidelines or various technologies – including back-dated versions. On top of that, the website is brilliant as a general resource for web developing. It might not be the easiest on the eye, but you'll find hundreds of useful articles to aid your project.

CHECKING FOR ERRORS

Professional web businesses have a standard process before a website can be unveiled publicly. One of the key phases involves error checking and the running of test scripts.

Why do we need to run test scripts, you ask?

The simple reality is that a website can work one way on one system, and not at all on another.

IS MY BROWSER COMPATIBLE?

One of the most frequently tested variables; different browsers can dramatically alter the way a website is interpreted on a screen. This is an even greater factor if we start to work in the possibility of older browsers being used.

Consider the idea of your business being accessed across the world. If you've designed a website in such a way that it's only accessible on the latest version of Microsoft Internet Explorer, you could find that over 50% of your potential customers are being turned away at the door!

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Always download different browsers on to your local machine. Test the website thoroughly on each browser and if you notice any worrying issues, it's time to get back on the w3 Consortium website and look at your usability failings.

JAVASCRIPT DISABLED?

It's a terrible idea to design a website with decisive JavaScript controlling the basic functionality of how it works. Some browsers still automatically disable the use of JavaScript. A larger percentage of users manually disable it to get rid of pop-ups and advertisements.

If your web business is relying on JavaScript to operate, ask yourself WHY?

You don't have to do away with the language once and for all. But you DO have to provide an alternative. A simple code snippet will allow the browser to detect whether JavaScript is installed, and process the relevant content accordingly.

WHAT GOOD WITHOUT A MOUSE?

In a world where the Internet can be accessed from new, weird and wonderful gadgets – are you assuming too heavily n the ideal that everybody who visits your website will have a mouse?

A poorly constructed website can be a nightmare to navigate with any other input device. Have you tried browsing the Net on a keyboard? It's not pretty, but it's an increasingly common pastime for many with mobile phones and remote devices.

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Indeed, for a blind web user, audio tools are necessary to dictate how a website is being accessed. But this is rarely practical when a webmaster has flooded a page with images and miss-mash navigation.

IS MY TEXT TOO SMALL?

Some people aren't blessed with the greatest of vision, and they're likely to have difficulty viewing your website if you code it in such a way that the text is chained to Times New Roman, size Tiny.

Always use a CSS expression with accepted size properties (xx-small, x-small, and etc). This way, the text can be manually changed in the user agent by adjusting a global text size option.

IS MY WEBSITE TURNING AWAY CUSTOMERS?

If you've thrown the ideals of user accessibility out of the window, yes, there's a significant chance that your website is turning away customers and even more worryingly – potential sales.

It's a good idea to get several other people to test your website. They don't have to be friends. In fact, for our purpose, it's better if they're downright Simon Cowell nasty. Ask them to access your website and explore the main features. See what they think and get them to report back with any technical functions that they dislike.

It's easy to get lost in a developer's mindset where we're so actively aware of our own creation that we forget how a new user would take to it.

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Use other people's opinions to gain a greater knowledge of how your website is being used. This is great advice for EVERY stage of your project. It's always a wise idea to know what other people are thinking.

The second and more ambiguous way of judging how many people are being turned away is by analyzing your web statistics. Purchase a good add-on application – or use what comes with your host – as a way of looking at your web traffic and searching out trends. Are a large number of your visitors exiting the website on a certain page? Why is this? Is there a dead link? Does the page not display properly on a specific browser?

Weigh up the options, investigate, and make specific targets to improve your web performance. And of course, don't forget that the problem may be more obvious than an accessibility problem. It could simply be that your sales pitch isn't effective enough.

Whatever the case, it pays to know where your customers are being won and lost.

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6

SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION

When Search Engines first began to spider the World Wide Web in the 1990's, a new generation of web developers were presented with the opportunity to market their creations towards a much larger audience. As sites like Google and Yahoo came along, catalogues of websites were logged and indexed by increasingly intelligent search bots.

Web designers spent more and longer hours customizing their sites to gain exposure on the major search engines. The resulting technique of Search Engine Optimization would become one of the most important factors for a website's development, and often the difference between success and failure in cyber terms.

Since the early years of SEO, crawlers like the famous Google Bot have become incredibly well adept at differentiating between the shrewd web developers who play fairly, and the deliberate spammers who abuse the system. Optimizing a website for greater search engine dividends remains an important stage of web marketing. Here we'll look at some of the best ways to implement White Hat SEO - the good kind - and improve the traffic being channeled towards a website.

WHITE HAT OR BLACK HAT?

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Just like in any form of business, web developers are faced with the decision between working the right way, or cutting corners and threatening the reputation of their product. In SEO terms, this can be broken down to two segments of development; White Hat methods and Black Hat methods.

White Hat methods are, generally, what Google, Yahoo and any other search engine would want us to use. They're the tried and trusted methods of improving search engine visibility - without reverting to the sort of tactics that are likely to be interpreted as fooling the search bots.

Officially, SEO is described as altering (and hopefully improving) the *natural* search listings that will be returned for various keywords and phrases.

Black Hat SEO has the same effect, just by different means. It can be quite enticing to use one of the many Black Hat methods which have been developed over the years, but it's increasingly dangerous to do so.

Search crawlers are programmed systematically to pick up on the occasions where a web page has tried to fool it in to being given a higher ranking. Nobody knows the algorithms exactly, but if you cross the line and mark yourself down as a Black Hat SEO specialist, you'll find that your homepage and all relevant links are pulled straight out of the system.

So what are the methods to resist? It's important to know what NOT to do before you fine tune your SEO strategy. Search engines are picky about re-listing after they've found a website which abuses their algorithms. Here we outline the basic Black Hat techniques.

KEYWORD OVER USAGE

It's no secret that one of the keys to good SEO strategy rests in maintaining the right mix of relevant keywords. Search crawlers will analyze what's

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known as the keyword density to decide whether you're overstepping the mark.

It's not unknown for users to flood websites with useless leadless keywords, in the hope that a search crawler will come along and mistakenly interpret the mass of key phrases for relevancy. Sometimes this happens. But more often than not, a couple of months will pass and the website will get black listed.

There was once a time where manipulation of the <H1> tag would trick bots in to assuming that entire paragraphs of content were headline worthy. These days, padding entire pages in the boldest heading tag will serve only to look terrible and get you black listed in record time.

CLOAKING

Cloaking is a frowned upon technique whereby a different page is served to search engines, compared to what the standard user will see.

Those who cloak will typically control their HTTP header so that the IPs of various search spiders are served a different page via a basic IF statement.

It is a form of spamdexing, and regularly a doorway page technique. The doorway page technique can serve to redirect a user to a website which betrays its search listing status with irrelevant content, or a different theme altogether. It works by a META refresh.

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SUB STANDARD CONTENT

Believe it or not, you can be blacklisted for simply targeting your website content for search engines rather than the human eye. To detract from the visual simplicity of a website, in favour of a method that improves SEO, is considered a Black Hat method. In other words, SEO is fair game, until it's implementation is seen as a distraction for the end user, when it becomes Black Hat.

It may seem far fetched, but some websites have already been penalised for such tricks. Most notably, BMW Germany in early 2006.

GOOD SEO FROM THE GROUND UP

It's true that Search Engine Optimization starts from the very earliest stage of web design. Just like poor design can deter real people from visiting your site, so it can turn away the search crawlers.

It can be hard to get the right mix between appealing to a designer's own eye, and complying with industry standard accessibility and usability guidelines. Here we'll look at some of the most significant SEO techniques as you set about designing a website.

Most importantly, you should prepare an Information Architecture sheet before plunging in to HTML coding. It's important to know where every page is to be located in the context of a site map. There's nothing worse, SEO or otherwise, than a site with a bunch of dead links and mystery meat navigation.

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The interface of your website should be clean, intuitive and easy to understand. All hyperlinks should be presented as plain text, without the use of image buttons.

It's true that the ALT tag can be used to render descriptions of an image for search crawlers, but generally, text linking is the way to go.

Another bad, and highly publicized, design practice involves the use of frames on a web page. Firstly, yes, it's true that frames can cause problems with several search bots. Be aware that crawlers are simply scanning the HTML content of a file rather than reading from a monitor. They have no sense of human perspective over the output.

But frames are not entirely useless. It's quite possible to use them and add a special NO-FRAMES tag which informs the search crawler, and any ridiculously outdated browser that happens to have landed there, what it's missing out on exactly.

Once again though, frames are hardly the savior of many web developers across the land. They still spring up the occasional usability problem and should be avoided where possible.

The next issue is multimedia; videos and embedded content. You'll find that many How-To guides advise strongly against the use of videos in a webpage.

But if that's the case, what of websites like YouTube? Multimedia certainly didn't derail that train, and for the obvious reason that the site was geared towards media in the first place. The issue stems from design overkill.

It can be tempting to work a Flash video in to a webpage as a marker, or a certificate of the designer's ability. But if it's not necessary, you shouldn't be thinking about it. As nice as a Flash intro can look when it loads up on your

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visitors' monitors, it isn't going to impress the search bots. A crawler can index your content, but it can't watch videos and it can't listen to audio files.

Some developers have resorted to wrapping their multimedia in advanced detection code. If the browser or user agent can't play the file, alternative code is served up instead. This goes some way to fix the problem, but it can be a great inconvenience.

Good design is one of the fundamental basics behind a successful website. It's all very well to plan the features that will be required. But it's a completely different story when it comes to ensuring that those features merge together without turning away the search bots.

Of course, you can have the sleekest looking website in the world, but the challenge doesn't stop there. The next step is to fill it with rich targeted content.

BUILDING ON A DESIGN: THE CONTENT CREATION

In the past, SEO was geared heavily towards the use of META keywords and META descriptions. The search crawlers were less sophisticated and the algorithms were easier to crack. They certainly aren't now though. Close guarded secrets like the Google algorithm are worth millions to the industry, and SEO specialists will spend hours upon hours tweaking a website in a bid to boost their rankings.

Much of the tireless work involves the use of copy, the single biggest asset of a website.

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Rich targeted content is a guaranteed way of improving your search visibility. A little look across the Internet and you'll find thousands of experts who've seen their traffic rocket through the roof after focusing on the relevance of the actual content on their pages.

SEO has evolved to the point where we've gone beyond simply marking up what a page is and feeding it to a search engine. The search bots have learned to look past the annotation and read in to the content itself.

There are several parts of a standard HTML page which should be addressed in SEO. First and foremost, we have the title of the page.

It's amazing how many people neglect the most important tag on the page in optimization terms. Your <TITLE> tag is the text that will be returned in the search listings. If you have a Mystery Meat title, it doesn't matter how high you get up the search rankings - nobody's going to click it!

Also, remember that if a user wishes to bookmark your website, the bookmark will follow the same title as the page itself. Under those circumstances, "My Page" is going to be forgotten in a hurry and never returned to again.

The more obsessive SEO specialists have pointed out that short titles are generally better than long ones. A common tweak involves the use of one primary keyword in the title, and as little else as possible. This is simply narrowing the scope that the search engine has to look at, and increasingly the chances of a targeted submission.

META tags have declined in influence over the last five years, but they remain a valuable tool for a developer. Every page should have a set of keywords and a description which states an overview of the content.

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There is an ongoing debate over whether the major search engines pay much attention to the META tags anymore, but it's better to take advantage of every possibility than pass up something so apparently obvious.

Moving on to the most important phase of content related SEO, we have the content itself. Copywriting is a profitable business for professionals, and for good reason, it's extremely influential.

Obviously, when you first set out to write the content for a page, your immediate thoughts probably aren't going to involve keyword density or prolific search phrases. To be fair, focusing too dearly on SEO terms can have a negative effect. Your first intention should always be to serve the end user the best content possible. After all, nothing works better than a satisfied user who comes back time and time again.

But with careful planning, it's possible to provide excellent content which is optimized for search bots.

Remember that less than 20% of the visitors that land on your website will be entering via the homepage. Most users will land on a content sub-page. It's good practice to treat every page as a possible entry point for the end user.

Your Information Architecture should be proving its worth by now, because every page should have a clear objective. If the website is geared towards sales, you need to be marketing your product just as prolifically on the sub-pages as you do on your grand homepage splash. Anything less and you'd be flying over the heads of most of your visitors.

Most SEO guides will stress that its important to repeat a certain keyword throughout the copy. This is true, but don't go overboard. Never repeat a keyword more than once per 100 words. If you're absolutely set on optimizing to the hilt, choose a lower tier of secondary keywords and use

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these instead. Not only will it save you from the search engine black lists, but it'll read much better in the process.

Another useful tip; search crawlers give precedence to the first and last paragraph of every page. Remember this. Your first paragraph should be preceded by a clear H1 header. The same rules apply as those for the title of the page. One keyword, and as little fluff as possible. The first paragraph is a great chance to get your main search phrase included, along with any second tier keywords that don't look out of place.

The last paragraph should have an overview theme to it, rounding up the basic concepts discussed and once again mentioning the keywords of interest. In between, any sub-headings should be marked up with H2 tags. These will also be picked up and analyzed by the search bots when they scan the page.

Most good SEO-aware websites will provide at least 200 to 250 words of copy per page.

When you have a website which is well designed and full of relevant content, you should have a hit on your hands. Providing, of course, the theme isn't something so obscure that nobody cares to search for it. But the work doesn't stop there.

SEO remains important long after you've launched your website. Networking is the next step.

THE NEW BIG THING IN SEO

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Well, it isn't new. Websites have been capitalizing on the network effect for years, but only recently have developers begun to realize the true influence that external linking has on the enigma of major search engine algorithms.

What separates one low-ranking website of static content, from another with the same content yet a swarming mass of Google driven traffic to boot? The answer is most probably the number of other websites linking to it.

You've probably landed in a few circle networks while browsing the Net before. There are some sites which seem so devoid of unique content that you wonder how they could ever receive the hits that they do, but as long as other websites - of the same topic - are linking to it, they will continue to prosper.

Remember that search bots are on the loose everywhere. They plough through millions of websites and follow every link. You can have some of the most creative and inspiring content going, but if the search crawler isn't referred to your website by other sources, it's going to assume that you're not as deserving of a top ten listing as some other bland website which every Joe and his dog is linking to.

That doesn't mean that you have to affiliate relentlessly. Many websites will join link exchange networks, or trade banners, but the opportunity to channel traffic is everywhere.

To truly optimize your website for higher search rankings, you have to be prepared to do what it takes to direct traffic from other sources. The more incoming links that you can generate, the more times a search crawler will return to your page. Inevitably, this means that you'll be ranked higher.

Whether it is through commenting on related blogs, forum posting, or simply submitting a website to one of the many directories on the Net - exposure is important.

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Affiliation can be a good thing too, especially if you're lucky enough to affiliate above your own level. But be aware. Links that follow to your site from irrelevant content will do more harm than good. There is no good in having a Sports website advertised on a Politics forum, even if the search bot returns to your website over and over again. It will actually confuse the search bot, and subsequently, you could end up being spidered for content that has nothing to do with your actual website theme.

On the other hand, if you're a web design agency, and you manage to channel the search crawler back to your page from other related URLs, you'll soon find that SEO can reward generously.

As a mark of this, it's worth noting that websites which include a relevant keyword in the actual domain have an easier job from the get-go. When somebody posts a link to the site, not only is it recognized by the search spider, but the domain keyword is logged too - and given precedence due to the simple fact that its in the URL (only a fool chooses a misrepresentative URL to con the search engines).

To take things further, if you're going to affiliate, make sure that your partner posts an SEO friendly link. "My Friend's Site" simply isn't going to cut it. Return the favor by using a link that sums up their website nicely. Interestingly enough, the best affiliation links tend to be the ones which explain what a website is, rather than the name of the company. It goes back to the issue of relevance and keywords.

The final step towards understanding SEO rests in knowing that a static website is living on borrowed time. Search bots will return to your website, perhaps more often than you think. If they note that the content is the same, they'll put you to the back of the book and search out new alternatives. This isn't always the case, providing you can continue to channel traffic from

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external sources. In that scenario, the search crawler will treat a new link as a new referral and a new acknowledgment of popularity.

It's always a good move to ensure that your website has content added to it on a regular basis. You don't have to go crazy, but keeping things fresh will keep the search spider active. Definitely a good thing for your search engine rankings.

Search Engine Optimization is a revolving field and it will remain so for as long as search engines continue to tweak and fine-tune their algorithms. It can be a daunting task to strip a website to its bare bones, and rebuild it for SEO. So is it worth it?

When you look at the alternatives of paid advertising or a website that nobody knows about, the answer should be obvious.

Above all else though, if you're going to use SEO, make sure that you use the right kind. Black Hat methods may appeal with tempting offers of traffic explosions and sky high page ranks, but they rarely survive the long term. And if it goes wrong, you'll do well to convince Google Bot that you've cleaned up your ways.

Search Engine Marketing is a complicated business, but giving a second thought to the search bots is the first step towards building a website that performs better now and tomorrow. Don't lose patience and give your creation time to catch on, carefully planned SEO will take care of the rest.

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ADVERTISING A PRODUCT

We've been through just about every avenue of web development that you'll need to cover in your project. It's time to branch out and look at the areas where money can be reaped at a serious rate. We're going to address the issues of advertising a product or service on the World Wide Web.

What good is a website without any visitors? Not very, we say.

By the same token, how many people are going to purchase a product which is advertised weakly and targeted poorly?

There are many factors to consider when advertising your new product. By the end of this chapter, you should have an acute awareness of how to go about the job.

THE SALES PITCH

The sales pitch is your one critical opportunity to prove to a potential customer that your product deserves their cash.

It can be the making or breaking of a successful business venture. Many persuasive sales copies have lead to rich streams of profit and snap decision buys. This is where you need to GRAB the reader and demand that they read to the very last letter. Draw them in successfully and you'll be rolling in

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riches. Bore them with uninspiring sales talk and they'll exit as fast as they came.

So what makes a good sales pitch?

Well, more to the point, what actually is it? A sales pitch is where you argue the positive points of your product, explaining why the consumer should want it, and ultimately pushing them towards a purchase.

You've probably seen hundreds of them in your time on the web. How many times have you landed on a "one-page-website" with those endless paragraphs of heavily formatted superlatives?

Whether such exaggeration is really necessary should be open to debate, but the basics are usually illustrated in these sorts of web pages.

Good sales pitches will leave you in no doubt that the product you're investing in is:

A. Brilliant value for money.
B. Better than it its competitors.
C. Liked by existing customers.

And occasionally, you'll find a particularly persuasive pitch attempting to draw you in with talk of bonus products that you'll receive as part of the deal. This is a good tactic because it makes the customer feel as if their payment is less of a one-shot deal. If they have any doubts about the original product, don't be hesitating, here's a bonus pack that we'll give you for free! It's almost too nice to turn down, isn't it?

The idea that you have to use booming bold text to get a sales message across is a myth. In fact, it can work as a distraction for a seasoned web

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shopper. Some hardened folk develop a dislike to being fed explicitly formatted sales talk, but it has to be said, others will be convinced by it.

You don't have to use striking red text to highlight the key points of your pitch, but don't be afraid to draw subtle attention to the key points.

Don't use bulky paragraphs with chunks of copy. This is unlikely to be read on a busy page.

We'll assume that most of you have a firm grasp of the English language, but it goes without saying that accurate grammar and spelling is a must. Nothing says unprofessional like several cyber acres of "txt speak".

The use of testimonials is great for promoting a positive brand. Customers love the security of buying in to something that has already been proven. Nobody wants to buy an unknown quantity, especially if you're dealing in a delicate industry. One can only imagine the reluctance of buying a new medical drug, for example, if there's little in the way of evidence that it works.

GEARING A WEBSITE TO SELL

Many web businesses make the mistake of structuring their websites from the homepage downwards.

We've already seen in the SEO chapter that it's only a small percentage of people that access a website through the homepage. Most enter the site on a content sub-page.

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This can have a pretty radical effect on your advertising strategy if you've been working under the assumption that the heaviest sales talk belongs on the homepage.

Every page on your site should be geared towards pushing the customer towards either a sale, or a customer enquiry. Don't be unrealistic. It's not possible to force a purchase down the throat of somebody who's seeking advice – so offer them support instead.

Take a look at EVERY page and ask yourself:

    A. What is its purpose?
    B. Where do I want the user to go from here?

And when you have your answers to those two questions, make an active effort to mould the content in such a way that it points them where you want them to go.

Remember; there's a fair balance between useful information and advertisement speak that you need to retain for the good of your public image. Overstep the advertising mark and you'll be seen as a money grabber looking to make a fast buck and hit the road. Provide too much information and you're likely to turn the customer away.

These people don't want to read essays of background information. Stick to bullet point lists and keep your copy concise.

If you're determined to offer both extensive resources and sales pitching, follow what many of the top companies do and break the website in to two simple categories; "Products" and "Information"

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This isn't ambiguous, and it doesn't leave any questions in the user's head. The worst thing you can do is to plug your website with endless Mystery Meat Navigation. **Use informative links!**

PAID ADVERTISING: TARGET MARKETING

Depending on whether you have an impressive budget to work with, you may decide to dabble a few pounds in to the field of target marketing and paid advertisements.

We will analyze marketing heavily in the next chapter, but there are many cross-over topics which demand attention.

By paying to have your website advertised, you're effectively paying a fixed sum to have guaranteed traffic delivered to your website. This is the case in systems where your money is detracted for every click-through on an advert.

Other generally less reputable websites will offer you banner space on their own pages. This allows you to steal some of the traffic, and it can work to boost your own business's performance. That is, of course, presuming that you're targeting a website which is appealing to the same market. There's no point in placing an ad for your sporting goods on a website about literature. This is what we mean by targeting the market with our paid advertisements.

Have a scout around at similar websites to your own. Are they offering advertising space? Or maybe you can uncover an unrelated website which actually has a rather close link to your own line of sales. Whatever the case, you should focus any paid advertising methods on websites which you KNOW are receiving traffic that would cross over desirably to your own.

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Information sites are generally a bad choice for this reason. Most people who browse resource databases are unlikely to commit to a purchase. Try and fetch advertisements on places where there's likely to be a lot of potential buyers.

One of our favorite choices is thus the community forum. If you can find a forum which offers buying advice and discussion amongst a large member base, you know for sure that you stand a good chance of drawing hits. To add to that, the hits you receive are likely to be from an audience which has expressed interest in buying your range of products.

Forum owners are generally a charitable bunch and are unlikely to charge inflated advertising fees. What's more, they're rarely touched by other web businesses and provide a great opportunity to get your brand name out there.

Of course, if you're considering a business venture with a colossal budget – the sky may be the limit. MySpace can be hired for advertisements at the trim cost of a few thousand dollars. A bit of a rough ride for those of us scraping around on pennies, but there has to be SOMEBODY willing to buy the ads or they wouldn't be there!

Other media outlets will offer pop-up advertising campaigns. This poses a slight moral dilemma since advertising through pop-ups can have the effect of irritating rather than dazzling. It also comes with the hazard of having no real way to track the performance of the adverts. Once they've loaded, there's not much else you can do to judge how they're performing. If users are closing the window straight away, the only indication of poor performance will be a high homepage load rate – and little hits for the rest of the pages. This is hardly an attractive proposition if you're looking for efficiency in your advertising scheme.

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AFFILIATION PROGRAMS

The subject of affiliate programs never fails to divide opinion across the E-Commerce spectrum.

It refers to the advertising strategy where other people commit the time of promoting your product and in return, they take commissions from the sales that they generate.

Tracking software is used to store a referral variable and when a customer makes a purchase, the affiliate details will be logged in to a database.

The plus side to this strategy is quite obvious. The only scenario in which you pay money is in the event that somebody hands you a new customer. It can be nice to have other qualified professionals molding marketing plans to optimize the chances of somebody using your business.

As you can probably imagine, the downside rests in the actual commission that you'll be paying out. Very few affiliates will operate at anything less than 20% of the sale value. Others will demand up to 50%.

If your working margin is touch and go, that 50% can appear dangerously high, and so it should.

The fact remains that websites such as ClickBank have taken off with their affiliation network regimes. This particular website advertises hundreds of businesses that you can promote and take commissions from. It's a profitable game for those lucky enough to be in a position where they can offer referrals, but do you want to be giving away such high cuts of your sales?

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Your answer will depend largely on the sales that you're already drawing outside of an affiliate program.

If, however, you're experiencing a dry run of business – or if you're sure you have a winning product but the website isn't delivering – it's a smart move to sign up at a website like ClickBank and generate some sales.

Regardless, affiliate programs don't have to be professional affairs with money being exchanged. Far from it. They can be as simple as two similar websites joining forces and trading links to boost activity on each. This is a win-win situation since it's costing you no money whatsoever, it'll raise your chances of making a sale AND it'll boost your search rankings.

Don't take the foolhardy stance that business is business and that it's best done on its own. If you have friends or acquaintances working in a similar environment, use them! Affiliation is one of the most cost efficient ways (although as we've seen, it can swing to the opposite end of the pendulum) of drawing additional sales for your product.

Whether there's much of a market for relevant affiliates in your business is going to be determined largely by what you're actually selling. If you can use the help of the people around you, however, you're making things much easier for yourself.

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THE EVOLUTION OF MARKETING ON THE WEB

It's only natural that in keeping with how the Internet has grown in such a rapid manner, so has the development of marketing techniques on the web.

Marketing campaigns are becoming increasingly sophisticated as a counter-measure to a smarter consumer audience. There's no denying the obvious shift towards mainstream companies advertising on the web. Not only is the audience global, but it's guaranteed to deliver the hits that the advertiser is looking for.

When you set off on your way to creating your own web business, you'll be relying on marketing prowess to draw in the customers that you're looking for.

We will take an extensive look at the subject of web marketing, why it's so important and how it's changing the face of advertising in the twenty first century.

A VIRAL BUZZ

You've probably heard the term thrown around before, but what does "Viral Buzz" actually mean? Why is it relevant to your web project?

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Marketing gurus have realized that it's no longer possible to create the same product interest from advertisements alone. They need something a little different, something a little more convincing.

A viral buzz simply means a subject of public interest and discussion. It doesn't have to be positive or negative – a buzz merely implies that people are talking about the item.

This is the new way for marketing, both on the web and away from it. If a business can ignite talk around their brand from the everyday public, such exposure is likely to have far more sway on a consumer' mind than a fifteen second televised advert. Yes, we've become skeptical as consumers. We no longer trust everything we see in the media eye.

But what do we remain trustworthy of? The people around us, of course!

If your close friends are crooning positive stories about so-and-so's new phone gadget, that particular company has succeeded in creating a viral buzz. It's not always that they've tried to create it. Sometimes it simply happens. But the buzz is there and now that people are talking about the product, it's likely to enjoy a period of success.

We will be looking at the MySpace success story later in this chapter, but what better example to prove the point of an advantageous viral buzz?

A little known band by the name of the Arctic Monkeys grabbed a multi million pound record deal and worldwide fame after viral buzz from impressed fans on the social networking site. It wasn't that they already had the record deal or exposure, but they managed to get people talking about them. This goes a long way in the entertainment business and within months, they'd been snapped up.

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Viral buzz won't make your business, but if you already have a solid infrastructure, it can be the catalyst of a popularity boom hat takes your company to new heights. Of course, you can't afford to slack off.

There are many ways to create a viral buzz, but the most obvious is to get out there and TELL people about your business. It doesn't matter who! It doesn't matter at all. If nobody knows about your business venture, you can expect little in the way of discussion about it.

At the same time, if you spread word of the business to as many different people as possible, there's a good chance that the name of your company will become casual "talk of the moment".

"Here, Jerry, did you hear about that new business that so-and-so is launching?"

It's hardly going to get you on the front page of the tabloids. But stories spread like viruses and sooner or later, somebody is likely to make a purchase. If they like what they receive, the customer satisfaction is likely to float back round in the same circle! Sooner or later, people that you don't even recognize know your name and want to do business with you!

The same logic can be applied to marketing on the web. In fact, it's even easier to spread a viral buzz over the Internet since you can reach out to millions in a matter of seconds.

Let's take a look at some of the possible vehicles for your viral buzz campaign…

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HOW A BLOG CAN HELP A BUSINESS

Did you know that by the year 2021, it's predicted over half of the world's news will be reported by citizen journalists?

Blogging has enjoyed an Internet rebirth in ways that not many of us could ever have dreamed. And yes, it's changing the world of reported news.

In as little as fifteen years time, the majority of the news we read will be coming from the pens of…well, you and me! It seems that nearly everybody has a blog these days! Some are downright greedy with several of the things!

By reporting on their daily lives, or local news, bloggers have introduced a new form of media which is free to publish and free to access across the world. No longer do broadcasters hold the right to force what they want us to know – we can go on the web and find what WE want to know.

So how does this affect a business?

It affects a business quite considerably if you're lucky enough to own a popular blog on a subject closely related to your industry. What does this mean? It means that the people reading your blog are automatic targets for the clutches of the business.

Blogs are famous for being linked to and from by an incredible number of web users. You can find your entry receiving traffic from a multitude of outside sources and the great news is – most of the traffic is TARGETED to your needs!

Search engines absolutely love to hand the highest rankings to websites with active blogs receiving lots of external links. It shows that the site is popular and regularly updated – two of the most crucial factors to those algorithms.

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If you're an expert in your line of work, don't let that knowledge go to waste! Use it to your advantage and produce an interesting blog which helps other people. Even if you don't draw instant sales, the trust factor and improved reputation is sure to fix your brand name in their memories for future reference.

Another useful purpose for a blog is to keep web users informed about the status of your upcoming products and services.

If you're planning on releasing a new software bundle which has taken months of hard graft, don't sit on the project only to mention it two days prior to release! That's like Microsoft announcing Vista the morning before it hits the shelves. Use a blog to update people on the product development. Show how much time has gone in to it.

As an even greater incentive, you can use the response and public feedback to fine tune your ideas and release a product that the customers actually want to have.

The blogging bandwagon shows no sign of slowing down. While it may be a little late to declare yourself an innovator of the movement, you can still enjoy the benefits that a popular blog has to offer.

FORUMS AND COMMUNITIES

There are two ways that you can take advantages of forums for your marketing campaign. The first method is to spread yourself across the web and post on them; the alternative is to build a forum of your own.

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Now that may sound like a project in itself, and you're right. But consider the possibilities of having a forum running on the back of your business name. People like to join public communities and interact with other members. If you're selling a product in a popular market, you can make some serious return on an investment by drawing from your own community.

Forums tend to run themselves over the long term, providing you install a small staff team to take care of any minor issues. No worries there, members generally feel honored to be installed as moderators – even if they're working for free on your behalf! It's a social hierarchy thing.

But for example, if you're running a business which is selling football shirts online – imagine the benefits of a forum where football fans can come to discuss the sport on a general basis. You might need to re-structure your marketing plan with a separate URL for the forum, but this is a brilliant way of gathering useful web traffic. What better place to generate a viral buzz than amongst the very people who are most likely to purchase your goods?

The other method of marketing with forums is a little more engaging on a personal level. It will require you registering at relevant community sites and making posts to get your name out there.

While many forums frown (quite rightfully) upon explicit advertising, most will allow you to place a text link in your signature. This means that every post you make will be suffixed with the URL to your business. Many forum browsers pay attention to these links – and we know the search engines do – so after a little while of offering good contributions to the forum, you can expect a few intrigued hits.

This, however, is a slow process and comes with the restraint of requiring a lot of input on your behalf. If you lose interest in posting, you're not likely to generate fresh traffic.

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Having your own forum, on the other hand, you can sit back and channel advertisements through the community itself.

STUDYING EBAY

eBay has enjoyed several years of domination in the online auction field. It's a globally recognizable brand and sits proudly as one of the most visited websites on the Net.

It's also home to some of the most profitable small businesses on the web.

eBay offers a system where anybody is capable of registering a shop on its site and gaining free exposure to the millions who browse eBay on a regular basis. As you can imagine, this is just the opportunity that many are looking for if they have a brilliant product and little time to promote it.

Over the course of this e-book, we have generally covered the steps that you'd take to launch a business on its own two feet. But it's only reasonable that we address the possibilities of using a ship like eBay to make your money – others have certainly succeeded, and many more will in the future.

You've probably seen how eBay works. A seller posts an item in a category and eBayers will place bids up and until the deadline has expired. At this point, the highest bidder will be declared the auction winner and will have to pay for the product.

There is also a "Buy Now" feature which acts pretty much how you'd expect. It lets users buy a product for a fixed price and pay straight away.

So what are the good and bad points of running your web business through eBay?

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The leading advantage is, of course, the incredible traffic that eBay generates. You could be selling a wet sock with a split end and there's a fair chance that somebody would buy it.

One particular constraint involves listing fees and the danger of selling large quantities.

eBay operates on the principle that the customers are getting bargains that they wouldn't receive elsewhere. It's simply not practical to list 100 of the same item at a fixed retail price and expect them to sell. If the customers were looking for the sort of deal that they'd find in a shop…you guessed it, they wouldn't be schmoozing on eBay.

There are also those listing fees. If you list 100 items and only sell 5, you're going to lose the majority of your profit in listing fees for the items that you didn't sell. Hardly an attractive proposition, we think you'll agree.

Alternatively, if you use the auction format on eBay, you could end up selling your stock at a fraction of the price that you were wanting to. Is that such a wise business decision?

We would only recommend using eBay if you have a "product of the moment". And even in this scenario, the best strategy is to list a small quantity (say 4 or 5), and then leave a link in the auction to your website where the rest can be purchased at retail value.

STUDYING MYSPACE

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One could argue that we're living in the MySpace age right now. The social networking culture has barnstormed the media ideals and taken freedom of speech to new levels altogether.

A brief look over the website and you'll find all kinds of businesses trying to capitalize on the friendly environment to make some quick cash. Bands have been surfing the waves of MySpace popularity to become household names. Since its birth, MySpace has gone from strength to strength and currently ranks as one of the most desirable web brands on the Internet. Not bad for a small project between two college buddies!

If ever you need inspiration for the potential of web business, just look at this Californian based brand. A simple idea has been turned in to a few hundred million dollars worth of real assets. The web DOES work!

But why is MySpace so appealing to young businesses? You don't see too many established brands selling their products on the website, but that is to be accepted. If you already have brand recognition, you probably don't need to linger on this particular website.

That said, if U2 can find a purpose for MySpace, so can you!

The real benefit of using the website stems from its unique community functions. You can gain access to the exact people that you're looking for and target your product accordingly.

Imagine trying to do the same on a street. Many street salesmen are faced with the task of picking out potential customers from a sea of anonymous faces. But a face isn't always illustrative of that person's likes or dislikes.

However, when you use MySpace, it's possible to search people by their location, their age and most importantly – their interests. There are other

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categories too, but it's the "interests" field which should set the marketing pulse racing.

Once you've searched out the people most likely to be interested in your product, you can go ahead and contact them! Not stopping there, you can add them to a friends' list and build up an effective "mailing list" of key contacts. This is brilliant for marketing purposes and with some necessary guile, your sales could skyrocket!

MySpace isn't faultless though. It has several issues with spam, and your ability to customize a profile to give an accurate interpretation of a business is somewhat limited.

Of course, for some web companies, MySpace simply doesn't fit the bill. If you're offering a specialized service which requires a very specific marketing strategy, gung-ho MySpace friend adding isn't going to pay its dividends.

We appreciate the effect that MySpace has had in opening he market to aspiring businesses. Whether you can find a use for it will depend on your personal project. But we'd give it due consideration if the situation arises.

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THE NEXT STEP

So we've come a long way since discussing the merits and drawbacks of web businesses. We've been through the pre-implementation stages, the design phase and even the murky waters of SEO. Advertising and marketing on the web has been discussed, and you're probably just about ready to throw your hat in the ring of E-Commerce. We don't blame you. There's been a lot of information to digest.

Where do we take things next?

This final chapter is devoted to covering the less discussed issues that can lay forgotten after your business is up and running.

Maybe you've already launched your business. Is it going well? Are you rolling in riches? We hope so. But there's always room for improvement and we'd like to talk about how you can ensure your long term success. That is, after all, the goal of most businesses.

You should always have one eye on the future.

MARKETING OFFLINE

It seems strange to mention planning for the future and then move on to a subject like this, but marketing offline has a place in ALL forms of business.

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Don't assume that just because you're running a business over the web, your only source of advertising must remain within those limits. In fact, the very best promotion campaigns are the ones which cross-over and appeal on many different platforms.

We don't know the ins and outs of your business venture, so it's very hard for us to judge the outlets that you should be looking at. But the fact remains, customers are customers – whether you obtain them over the Internet or through a very real walk of life, it doesn't matter.

Your first line of advertising should be made offline to friends, family and Friday night clubbing acquaintances. Hand out some business cards with your website URL, email address and business phone number (never hand out a personal phone number, the spouse will have your head off).

You can even pay a small fee to have business cards delivered by an agency to relevant addresses. This is a good move since local businesses will remain reasonably loyal to each other.

Once again, don't expect instant responses. The point is, you're expanding your contacts and raising the chances of business in the future.

This works as a good starting point while your online marketing efforts take effect. Sooner or later, you should begin to generate a steady stream of clients. And it's at this point that marketing begins to take care of itself – a lovely thought indeed.

<u>THE FUTURE OF E-COMMERCE</u>

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None of us can say for sure where the future of e-commerce lies. But we can do our best to make a calculated estimate given the recent trends.

Web businesses have the unenviable attribute of being more unpredictable than any other. A niche market can take off or innovative software can render others obsolete in a matter of hours. It's hard to say where the next break is coming from.

Looking at the current industry, it seems safe to assume that websites such as MySpace and eBay will continue to provide satisfying solutions for young entrepreneurs. So if you're considering those options, it's unlikely that they'll let you down.

The tidbit fact about the world's reported news is enough to set our ears twitching too. If the statisticians are right that by 2021, half of the world's news is to be reported by casual journalists, we can suspect that paid subscriptions to news feeds will rise. The demand for information is likely to become greater given that the focus is shifting away from national broadcasters.

This trend is also illustrated by the rise of media websites such as YouTube. Ten years ago, the idea of a single website housing such an incredible array of media would have been laughed at. In our current business climate, websites such as YouTube have found a solid home, and the public is demanding more of the same.

The examples above are very much centered on the resale of information and media. It doesn't have to be this way though. There will always be a place for the creation of new products. If you're selling individually designed t-shirts, or your very own software, there's always going to be a demand from consumers – providing you offer something that's useful to their cause.

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So in many ways, molding business for the future isn't so much about pioneering a technology or springing an invention, it's about following what other people are interested in. As long as we cover those areas, we'll always have something to sell.

STATIC BUSINESS ON BORROWED TIME

It doesn't matter what kind of web business you're running, one of the most important factors in your long term success will stay the same. Every business has to move with the times and reinvent its brand to meet new consumer demands.

Likewise, if you're selling a single product, there's only so long you can continue to promote that one item before the sales talk falls flat.

If you're genuine about providing a long term business solution, you have to be constantly evolving your products and services. Competition is intense, no matter what arena you're operating in. Even if you do product the idea of the century, it won't be long before competition is ripping you off with an improved version. For this very reason, a static business is a business living on borrowed time.

Can you imagine if Microsoft had released a single version of Windows back in the early 90's and called it a day? Their business would have effectively prospered for the time that it took another company to produce something better. The only reason Microsoft has clung on so desperately to its market dominance, is illustrated by the company's constant cycles of production.

We're not saying that you have to be constantly pushing the boundaries. That's not the point. The point is, if you're running a static business which

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never changes its shelves, people aren't going to bother to check back in the future.

For some businesses, remaining active is easier than others. If you're running an online fashion retailer, for example, it doesn't take much to add a new T-shirt every couple of weeks. This works to expand your brand and if you have satisfied customers, they're likely to return to see what you've been developing.

If you're ever in doubt though, there's a simple way of analyzing where your business can be tweaked. All you have to do is look at your most popular item, and ask yourself how it could be improved. Being honest with yourself in this way is likely to lead you on to your next big idea.

Business expansion is another consideration for some. If you're in the enviable position of having enjoyed several months of good takings, maybe you have some spare cash to burn. If this is the case, why not mould your company in to other related fields?

This is the tactic that most professionals use to slowly develop a brand. It isn't achieved overnight, and it can actually take many months or even years to establish a genuine brand – but if people recognize you by your name, you hold an instant competitive advantage.

Look at what your business could offer to compliment what it already provides. Maybe it's the combination of a product and a service? This is another common scenario. Only you know where your options lie, but think wisely and plan for your future. As long as you don't try to force growth at an early stage, you should enjoy success.

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THE TOOLS OF THE TRADE

When setting up your new eCommerce website you are going to need a few tools of the trade to help get you started! These are the services that I highly recommend to help save you loads of your time.

While, it is possible you may find less expensive solutions than these listed below. I assure you that the aggravation and frustration that you will save by going with these tried-and-true services will be something you'll seriously appreciate later.

FINDING A SHOPPING CART

One of the most important parts of your new Web business is going to be the selection of your shopping cart system. While there are many shopping cart systems available on the Internet, some expensive some very inexpensive. You are going to want to make your selection wisely as this is a very important part of your future business profits.

Not only will your shopping cart process all of your payments. It will likely also manage a large portion if not all of your affiliate program.

The two shopping cart systems that we recommend are located at
http://www.1Shoppingcart.com

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1 Shoppingcart has been around for many years and is developed a great reputation on the Internet. They do tend to be one of a higher price shopping carts out there, but they are well worth the price.

YOUR AUTORESPONDER SYSTEM

When choosing an autoresponder you need to be very careful as there are many many systems available on the Internet and the very large portion of them are not worth beans.

The problem with autoresponders is you're relying on them to deliver all of your e-mail to your future prospects. Any e-mail that does not get through is a sale that you cannot make.

Therefore, when considering auto responder systems please be very careful in your selection.

Here are the only three are responder systems, I recommend.

http://www.Aweber.com
Aweber is a great system and has been around for long time. However, they will limit you to a database of 10,000 people on your autoresponder. Once you go over 10,000 the price will start going up quickly. And this is a monthly charge not a one-time charge.

http://www.Automatic-Responder.com is another great resource for you to check out as it is one of the first autoresponders on the net, and a great easy solution for your needs.

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OUTSOURCING YOUR HEADACHES

Save got more work and you in your team can handle. Why not consider outsourcing it. You can outsource your support desk work. Your newsletter, development of new software and tools, ghost writing for e-books, if you can think of it can be outsourced.

A few of the places that we recommend for outsourcing projects that you just are too busy to handle are as follows.

http://www.Elance.com

http://www.Freelancer.com

http://www.vWorker.com

CONCLUSION

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So we've reached the end of this guide to web businesses. Hopefully you've learned enough to feel confident in your future business ventures, and we hope that you'll enjoy a great deal of success in your field.

We've covered a lot of topics and you've done well to take on such a wide range of information.

As you've seen, achieving success with a web business is not as simple as uploading a web page and waiting for the millions to roll in. Unfortunately, this impression has been encouraged by sensationalist media reporters who chase up the slightest tale of entrepreneurial success online.

We hope that above all else, you've rejected the "Get Rich Now" schemes as true representations of what web business is all about. Those cases draw a lot of negative press which is somewhat hard on the rest of the companies who make a genuine living providing products and services to thousands around the world. You can be a part of the good bunch.

And if you decide to try your luck, you now know what problems you can expect to face along the way. From the pre-implementation troubles, to the actual design stages where you'll see your website come together.

We've looked at Search Engine Optimization and how you can customize your content to achieve higher rankings on Google and Yahoo.

As we've seen, a successful business has to be known to draw customers to its services. Through our advertising and marketing chapters we've looked at the wide array of tactics that other people use to help themselves along the way.

We believe that you have what it takes to generate the money that you need from a web business. Just as we believe that everybody else does. We all have brains and we all have vision for ideas in our heads.

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Running a successful business requires a great deal of faith and trust in your own ability to spot a consumer's needs though. And it's this confidence that leads us to believe only a very small number will actually go on to recreate their visions in the form of money making e-commerce.

We've discussed many technical ideas and we've spent an age looking at how things work on the Internet. But it doesn't really make a difference, does it?

We go back to what we originally said. It's YOUR inspiration that will prove the decisive factor between success and failure. If you have a money spinning idea, we've shown you the way to draw from it. If you don't have the inspiration, we're sorry, but there's not much we can do.

So in a sense, we've traveled a full circle. We've seen how it's possible to enjoy success on the web. But we've also established that you'll need a good business brain in the first place. They key for you is to unlock your ideas and make something of them.

Good luck as you set off on your own business venture! We hope that this e-book has been of use to you and will guide you along the way.