You’ve determined that your business needs an online presence to generate awareness, sales or to serve as a contact point. But, how do you get started creating a Web site for your business?

There are three basic steps to getting online.
1. Register your domain.
2. Rent server space.
3. Upload your created files to the server.

First, you need an official address. Registering a domain name gets you an official address for your Web site on the World Wide Web. With this official address, the rest of the Web can find you.

Like your business address is unique in the real world, addresses on the Internet are also unique. It will cost a few bucks for each year you want to own the domain name you purchase. The cost of registering a domain name ranges from less than $10 to about $30 per year. You can register a domain from one to ten years. The reason for the cost is to update the central book of all the world’s domain names.

Most businesses use their exact business name, followed by .com or .net. Non profit organizations often use .org and cooperatives now have the option of .coop. Practically speaking there is really no difference these days. Search engines don’t discriminate between a .com address and a .net address. The one thing you might consider is that people tend to type in .com automatically since it was the first publicly known domain extension. A .com address is not the same domain name of the same name with a different extension. As such, each of the addresses can be registered separately.

The next step is to rent server space to host your Web site. Renting space on a server is often called hosting. Companies that provide this service are often called host or hosting companies.

After you’ve registered your domain, you need to contact a hosting company and tell them your domain name. They will be able to guide you through the process of uploading your files to their server space and you should be live on the Web in no time.

After your domain name is registered and your server space secure, the next step is to upload the Web site onto the server. You can transfer your Web site to the server using an FTP program.

An FTP program is a type of software used to move files from one computer to another over the Internet. FTP is the acronym for: File Transfer Protocol; basically a method of moving files. There are several free FTP programs you can use to move your files and many HTML editors and Web design programs like Dreamweaver have FTP capabilities built in.

One option you probably have to FTP your files to the server is Internet Explorer. Internet Explorer 5 and up have an FTP program built right in. You can use it by typing in the FTP address of the server in the address bar preceded by the keyword: FTP.

But, before you can FTP your Web site, you need to create a Web site. There are three ways you can build a Web page.

1. Use a pre-made template.
Web site design templates are pre-made Web designs, which can be customized to reflect your company’s branding. Web site design templates can be found in various formats, but often Photoshop or HTML (hypertext markup language). Most of the time these templates are compatible with HTML editors like GoLive, Frontpage and Dreamweaver.
Web site templates are very useful; they can be used by designers to quickly create a Web site. They are a good way for people to put out great looking Web sites quickly with little or no knowledge of HTML and Web design.

2. Use an HTML editor like Microsoft FrontPage or Macromedia Dreamweaver.
HTML editors make building Web pages feel like (to a certain extent) creating a document in Microsoft Word ... it’s made pretty easy. The downside is that you lose a certain amount of control over what you’re doing and may become dependent on the program.

3. Hand-code your HTML in a text editor like Notepad.
That means you type in the HTML code yourself and is the approach someone with extensive code experience would use. This approach gives you the most control over what you’re doing, but is not for an inexperienced person.

What exactly is my Web Site?
A Web site is a bunch of Web pages connected together with a link. The files (pages, images, etc.) that make up your Web site are organized in folders just like any other files that you store on your home computer. Your server host will give you a space/directory on their server for you to place all your Web site files.

This space assigned to you will be the root of your Web site. Anything (html files, images, other folders, etc) in this folder is then accessible by your domain name. So, on the root level of your Web site, you have these HTML files: Index.html and Contact.html

And in a folder called products, you place additional pages. You should put all your product HTML pages into a products folder to keep the Web site more organized. Do this for all pages you can group together in folders.

Site Summary
Now, let’s expand the three main aspects into ten basic steps to build and bring a Web site live on the World Wide Web.

1. Define the purpose of Web site.
When starting a Web site project, determine the goals of the Web site. Your goals will impact your Web site design choices, and contribute to its success or failure.

If the goal is to create an e-commerce Web site that sells products, then you need to consider the following:
• Do you need credit card processing capabilities?
• Are you going to need a shopping cart system to take orders?
• How many items will be sold on the Web site?

2. Diagram the structure of the Web site.
A simple diagram will help you visualize the Web site. It doesn’t need to be fancy – just simple series of boxes representing each page in the site with lines connecting them showing the linking strategy. A pyramid scheme is usually used to show the hierarchy of a Web site from the home page down.

3. Write out the text for the Web site.
Before you, or whoever you hire, start writing any HTML, you should (in your favorite word processor) write out all the text that you need to include in the Web site.

4. Choose a basic layout that will be used on all pages.
Armed with your Web site diagram and your Web sites’ text, you can now choose a basic layout for your pages. You should use standard layouts that people are familiar with:
• Left side navigation
• Top navigation
• Right side navigation
5. Choose the basic color scheme, background images and fonts for the site.

Your next task is to start considering the basic colors and fonts that you’re going to use. You want to choose a style that fits the subject of the Web site. Pink may not work well for a serious business. Use only one or two colors for text. The point to take away is to establish the style of the Web site before you start creating pages, and keep the visitor in mind when doing so. Create a look and feel that conveys the professional business and image you are trying to project to others. Remember that images and flashy graphics take time to load in a browser; these will slow your site speed depending on the number you include. This can alienate customers or clients in rural dial-up settings. Again, think of the visitor to your site when designing your site.

6. Build out the Web site.

With the above completed, you’re ready to actually start creating your web pages.
- Take the structure you developed in steps 1 - 5 to create your Web pages.
- Link the Web pages together.

7. Register a domain name.

Once your Web site is built, you will need to get it on the Web and have your domain name pull up the site you created.

Your choice of a domain name can impact how many people find it, so choose carefully! Here are some points to remember when considering your choice of a domain name:
- Domain names that tell you something about the Web site are food for search engines and they clue people in too. If for example you were building a Web site for an organic store, a domain name like ‘wholesomeorganicfood.com’ tells you everything about the Web site immediately. If you called it ‘biggrocer.com’ instead, you can argue that we are not giving such a clear message of what the Web site is about.
- Search engines like Google will look at several elements of your Web site to try and determine what your Web site is about. One of those key elements is the domain name; Google will look for keywords in the domain name that helps the ‘Google bot’ (Google’s automated snooper software) categorize your Web site.

Your domain name does not have to have the same name as the business it represents. As in the example given above, it may be advantageous not to. However, if you have built a reputation and a brand identity through your business name, it is wise to register that name as your Web site for those customers to simply type in your name and find your site without searching.

8. Register your domain name.

This can be trickier than you think, since your domain name of choice may be taken.

Today you have many more options for domains; in the past, businesses could only register a .com because .net and .org domains where reserved for special types of organizations. Those old restrictions are now gone, and there are a wide variety of extensions you can choose from: .com, .net, .org, .tv, .biz, .coop and several others, including country codes like .ca (Canada), .us (USA), .co.uk (United Kingdom) etc.

In terms of the search engines, it makes no difference which ending (extension) you use.

How do you know if a domain is already taken? The quickest way to figure this out is to type in the domain name in your browser and see if it takes you anywhere. However, this is not the most accurate and not a final test; many domains have been bought but have no Web site!

That means the best way to figure this out is to go to your registrar. Every registrar will have a form where you can check to see if domains names are available just by typing it in.
The best thing about going to the registrar is that when you type in a domain name your interested in, their systems will tell you if the .com is available, and all the other variations - a big time saver.

Today, hosting Web sites cost much less than what it did just a few years ago, and that’s a good thing. Costs will range from zero cost hosting, to very pricey solutions, depending on your Web sites needs.

What can affect the cost of hosting a website?
Extra features/services will cost more. You may need to use a database (for e-commerce) or need many e-mail accounts, extra disk space to store all your Web sites files. Each host will have a list of plans that you can choose from depending on your needs.

In the end you have to choose the hosting company and hosting plan that is best suited for your Web site. Cheaper is not always best, but it may be good enough for you.

10. Upload your Web site to the hosting company’s servers.
Once you created your Web site, paid for your domain name, and picked your hosting company, you are ready to upload the Web site onto your host server for the world to see.

Typically you would use something called FTP to do this; your host company will be able to help you with the details when setting up your account.

Site Development Tips
Finally, here are some quick tips to remember
• Keep Web pages small - under 60k.
• Keep content headers clear and to the point.
• Keep paragraphs short.
• Keep contact information (e-mail and phone) easy to found and in the same place on all pages.
• Keep the look and structure of the Web pages consistent on all pages.
• Provide a Home button to take the user back to the home page of the Web site.
• Make sure links in the text are always underlined.
• The company logo should appear on every page in the same spot and it should always be a link back to the home page.

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