

StrayBeyond

Novice Guide

Whilst most of us now are fully aware of how to use the internet and understand its potential, the prospect of sourcing a website solution for your business can still be a daunting task. This guide has been designed for those people involved in sourcing their website for the first time, or perhaps still don't feel comfortable with it.

Regardless of if you intend to order your website through Stray Beyond Design or not, we hope you will find this online document a useful guide when sourcing your site.

1 Introduction

It is true to say that many people are put off the commissioning of a website for their business (especially if not an office based business) because of the belief there will need to be an investment in computers and various other gismos and gadgets...and perhaps more significant that they will also need to learn how to use them! So the first myth to dispel is perhaps the one that says you will need a computer in your place of work if you want to have a website...simply not true! You could actually get away with no involvement in the technology of the internet at all but still have a website, though the more knowledge and the more interaction with your customers via the internet the better.

It is the case that many people will now have a look at a company's website prior to visiting their premises or making an order from that business. Ask the person who answers your telephones if they were ever asked..."I was wondering what your website address was?" This might have been a person wishing to compare your services to that of another company, and by not having even a simple brochure site you weren't even in the running. So the real decision to be made by businesses these days is not do I need a website but what do I need from a website? What type of site would help my customers and potential customers gain a better understanding of what we do? Then of course you need to choose a designer or design company that you feel can deliver this for you, and bring your existing corporate identity to the internet.

2 (Just) What You Need

2.1 Hardware (PCs)

Most websites are stored on a computer run by an ISP (Internet Service Provider). The website once designed can be uploaded by your website designer and therefore you don't even need a PC (personal computer). The only restriction here is that by not having a PC your customers cannot be offered the option of e-mailing you, however this is by no means a pre-requisite of having a website.

Email is an excellent tool both for customers to get in touch, and for marketing to your client base. If you do want to use e-mail then you will need a PC or regular access to one. Most people who send an e-mail do anticipate a quick response and so you really need to be checking your e-mails (at least) every business day. Though a PC in your place of work is recommended some people do make use of their home PC to receive and reply to inward enquiries.

2.2 Internet Systems

The two basic requirements to have an effective website really are a domain name and web space.

2.2.1 Domain Names

The domain name (sometimes called a URL short for Uniform Resource Locator) is the name by which your website can be found and is as unique as your telephone number, for example Stray Beyond Design can be found at straybeyond.com. Unlike a telephone number the choice of domain name can be important from a marketing point of view.

To own a domain name you need to register it. Most domain names are registered for a two-year period, and at the end of this period it is up to you the owner to ensure it is renewed. The cost of registering a domain name is relatively inexpensive. Typically a domain name ending .com can be registered for around £30 for two years, and a domain name ending .co.uk for even less.

It is well worth waiting for advice from your web design team before choosing a domain name as there can be many issues surrounding this, including which company you register it through. Transferring a domain name can cause hassles you don't need and so it is best avoided from the outset.

Once you have registered your domain name this is the address to which your website traffic and e-mails will be directed.

2.2.2 Web space

Web space is the storage space on the server at your ISP allocated to you for hosting your website. A nice brochure style website for your business may take up less than 1Mb (Megabyte) of space and with space rental starting at around 20Mb with this you will have plenty to develop a very nice and expandable website.

The cost of web space varies but approximately £10 + VAT per month should be allowed for website hosting of a brochure website. If your web design company is building you a first site on a tight budget they may be able to arrange basic hosting at a lower cost as a range of packages are usually available.

Again your chosen web design company should be able to help you decide which is the best option and help you order and set-up the web space.

2.3 Website Design

It is true to say that many experienced PC users can produce a website if they are prepared to invest time to learn the basics and understanding uploading procedures, and this can be achieved at a minimal cost however this is unlikely to give a professional feel and may involve using standard graphics. It would best perhaps be likened to using clip-art in word to design your company literature rather than having a brochure designed and printed professionally. If you are thinking of building the site yourself the decision to be made is how much is your time worth to your business, and whether for a few hundred pounds it is worth your business having a professional looking site, resulting in a different perception of your businesses being gained by visitors.

To give an idea of the cost of a professionally built website is very difficult as rates from designer to designer vary, and it is also dependent on many factors in the design of the site. If you want a website which is very interactive with the user and which has databases etc then this may cost many thousands of pounds, however as a guide it is more than possible to secure a professional looking brochure style website for your business from around £800.

3 Choosing A Web Design Company

In choosing a web design company you are entrusting the way your business will be perceived by many of your clients and potential clients, and also the actual effectiveness of taking your company online. As such appointing your web design company really needs to be viewed as the most important decision within the whole process of having a website built.

Some businesses have used 'amateur' friends, friends of friends or indeed students to design their websites with mixed outcomes, but some have achieved satisfactory results this way. One thought to keep in mind though if choosing this option to reduce costs has to be; does the designer have a true understanding of corporate identity issues and a grasp and understanding of the intended users of your website? Also what is the long-term availability of the designer/design company for updating the site in the future? A professionally designed website may only cost a little more than what you end up paying using other sources, but the ideal situation is to appoint a design company by merit, and that will act as your internet partner dealing with issues as they arise in the future.

In terms of comparing costs proposed by different designers this can be difficult. Some web designers will charge a rate per page and also a rate for unique graphics used, others will charge an hourly rate and some may charge per project. The latter is perhaps the best as it will allow you to keep control of the costs, and give you some scope to make adjustments along the way if there are aspects to the site with which you are not happy such as the photography.

Finally, once you have identified a web designer/web design company then prior to making your final decision it is important to have a good look at their portfolio, and also read any client testimonials as you can gain a good feel for the company from what other people have said about their experiences in dealing with them.