

Website Design



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There are many steps involved in creating a Web site. I have designed and published a few and can assure you that you should always plan out the site before you develop it.

One of the first things to consider before designing a Web site is if you have what you need. Setting up your workstation is an important first step. Your workstation consists of a computer, a modem, an Internet Service Provider, and software applications needed to complete different parts of the site development. The computer you use can be either MAC or Windows based. However, once your site is developed, it is a good idea to view it on both types of computers. Web pages sometimes tend to look and act different on different platforms. You'll also need a modem to connect to the Internet. Most computers come with a dial-up phone modem, but depending on what type of connection you obtain, you may need a different type. There are several available options for connecting your computer to the Internet. A dial-up connection requires a standard telephone line and is much slower in speed than broadband connections. Cable, satellite, and DSL are the three types of broadband connections available today. Broadband connections allow for much faster uploading and downloading of files. Although a dial-up connection can be used, a broadband connection is the better choice for Web site designers. Choosing an Internet Service Provider is very important in terms of speed, availability, and cost.

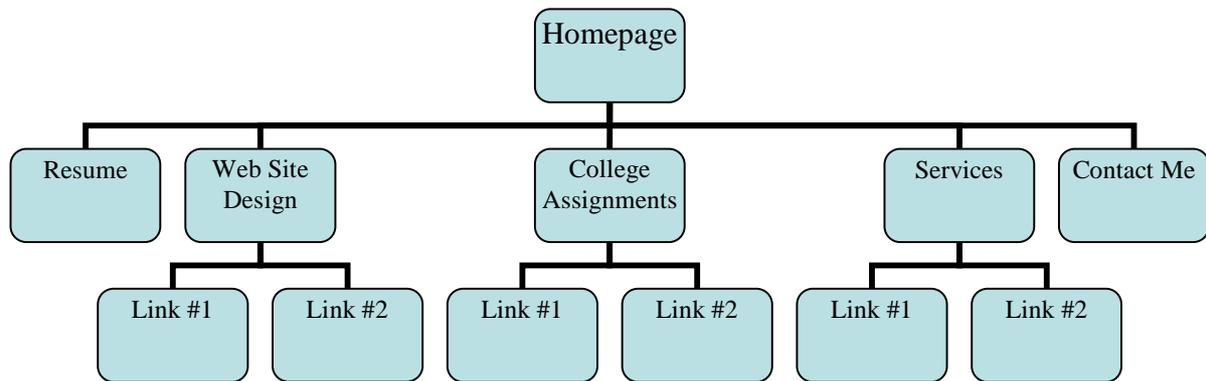
The next step is to make sure you have whatever software application you need to develop your Web pages. While it is good to have a working knowledge of HTML, there are Web-authoring programs available that will allow you to design your pages as you see them and the program writes the HTML code for you. These type of programs are referred to as

“WYSIWYG” (what you see is what you get) programs. A good example of a “wysiwyg” program, and one that I use frequently, is Macromedia DreamWeaver. DreamWeaver not only writes the code for you, it allows you to manipulate it. If you don’t plan on writing the HTML code yourself, it is best to research the available web-authoring programs and choose what is best for you.

Now that your workstation is all set up and ready to go, it is time to plan out your Web site. First, you need to develop a strategy. What are your site’s goals? In other words, what type of site are you developing? Will it be an educational site, e-commerce site, informational site, etc? Who will your audience be? This is an important aspect to consider when designing a Web site. If your site will target only a certain group of people, say for instance technology people, then a highly graphical site would probably be okay because most likely they will be up to date in terms of hardware and software, which would make your site completely accessible to them. If you are targeting a variety of users, then you should probably use content that is accessible from older browsers as well as up-to-date browsers.

The next step in planning your site is deciding on the content and structure. It is best to make an outline and/or an organizational chart for the structure of your site. This will give you a guide to follow when designing your pages. It also helps to plan ahead how your pages are linked to and from each other and what elements each page will consist of. I will use my online portfolio for an example. There are five main pages to my online portfolio. The homepage is the first page you see. On the homepage there are links to four other pages and a link to download my resume. The four pages linked from my homepage are titled “Web site Design”, “College Assignments”, “Services”, and “Contact Me”. These pages, in turn, have links to other pages and downloadable files within my site. So, before I designed my site, I drew up an outline and

an organizational chart showing the order of the pages and what content each page would consist of. Below is an example of an organizational chart which structures my site. However there is a lot more to my site than what is listed here.



Now that you have decided how many pages your site will include along with their content, it is time to think about what your domain name will be and who will host your site. The best thing to do is to start out by checking the availability of the domain name you want for your site's URL address. Once you have chosen your domain name and checked that it is not already used by another site, your URL address will be something like, www.yoursitename.com, www.yoursitename.net, www.yoursitename.org, etc. Don't wait to purchase your domain name. If you find that it is available and have your sights set on that name in particular, you should get it now before someone else does even if you have not yet finished designing your site.

There are many companies to choose from when it comes to hosting. One in particular is GoDaddy, which offers an economy hosting plan for as low as \$3.99 a month. The monthly price is less than that if you sign up and pay for the whole year all at once. GoDaddy's economy plan includes 5GB of disk space, 250 GB of monthly data transfer, 500 e-mail accounts, 50 e-mail forwarding accounts, and more. This is not a bad deal since it would take a lot of information to fill up 5GB of disk space. However, if your site is huge to begin with and will

continue to grow before the year is up, your best bet is to get a deluxe or premium plan. Above all, research your options before you buy!

Now we can get back to designing those pages. You should have already decided on a color scheme and elements for each page back when you made your site's outline. Solid colors are best for backgrounds. Keep in mind that visitors may not be able to make out the text on the page if the background is textured. This is something you will have to play around with. You can also use an image for the background of your pages but if they are smaller in size than the browser window they will tile across the background of your page in a repeat fashion. Rollover images and flash buttons are both forms of JavaScript and make great additions to Web pages. Images should be either jpeg or gif format and only 72 dpi. When using a web-authoring program such as DreamWeaver, you can place larger images on the page and downsize them using the stretch method. Doing this only changes the viewable size. It does not change the file size, therefore, making the page longer to load for viewers. This may be fine for viewers who have a broadband connection, but it wouldn't be for viewers who have a dial-up connection. If your Web site includes photo galleries of photos, you should list links or photo thumbnails to click on to view the large version of each photo. This way the viewer doesn't have to wait for the page to load because of so many large formatted photos. They can chose to view what they want. The Thompson Park Web site includes many photo galleries and is a good example in terms of thumbnails. There are so many things you can add to your Web pages that a Web-authoring program can help you with without having to write the code yourself. If you are designing a site for a business, you can add forms that the user can fill out and once they click the submit button it will be emailed to the address you specify. The list of ideas goes on and on.

While designing your pages, make sure your files are organized properly. To each his own, but you should have a folder just for images. Some Web site designers will make a folder for each Web page. That folder will hold all the files that make up that particular page. In other words, each page would have its own folder of files. This is a great idea for pages that will be updated and changed quite frequently because all the files for that page are in one place. Others will make three folders; one for pages, one for images, and another for other media like sound files, pdf files, etc. Organize the sites files in a way that is best for you. Especially if you are the one maintaining the site updates once it is published to the Web. Before you upload your site files to the Web you should test them in your browser to make sure all the links work and the pages look right. This is a good time to view your pages in other browsers as well.

The final step is publishing your site files to the Web. This is done by using a FTP (file transfer protocol). Internet Explorer has FTP built in to it. Instead of typing your Web site's address (<http://www.yoursitename.com>) into the address bar of Internet Explorer, you would type <ftp://www.yoursitename.com>. Once you click the enter button a dialog box will pop up asking for your username and password, which should have been given to you when you purchased your hosting plan and domain name. After clicking the OK button you are at the place where you will store your site files. This page actually looks like an empty folder on your computer. It is an empty folder, but it is not on your computer. It is on the Internet. You can now open the folder on your computer where your site files are located. With both folders open you can now drag and drop your files from your computer to the folder on the Internet. There are other ways to publish your files to the Internet in the same fashion, but with a program other than using the built in ftp of Internet Explorer. A very popular program used is Secure Shell. This program also uses drag and drop. Now you are finished! Voila! Your Web site has been

published! Go back to the address bar in your browser and type in the URL of your web site (www.yoursitename.com). You now have a presence on the World Wide Web! Pass it on!

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