

Help and Advice from JSD

Setting up a Website

Author: Philip Johnson
Johnson Software Design Limited
Email: philip_johnson@johnsonsoftwaredesign.co.uk

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Document Overview

This document explains the steps required to create a successful website.

It is aimed at small businesses and those who have not set up a website before, with the aim of covering the basics in easy to understand language, so that the reader can understand common pitfalls and prevent common mistakes.

It may also be useful to anyone who would like to understand more about the basics or serve as a refresher if the website has not been thought about for a few months or years.

Why Do I need a Website?

It is very important that the purpose or reason for the website is thought about. This will define the intended audience and help define the pages and content for the site.

Some sites contain just brief information about the company and contact information; others will be a goldmine of useful information; other sites might contain a product catalogue and e-commerce (the ability to purchase online); others might allow users to register and login, in order to receive a personalised experience.

Other sites might contain a combination of the above, e.g. Ebay offers a personalised experience to allow buyers and sellers to communicate and e-commerce.

For businesses, how the site is to be used within the business is important.

- Do you want it to be a resource for existing customers?
- To try to attract new customers?
- What information is going to be put online in order to get the intended audience to bookmark your site?
- Is it essential that the site is visible on the search engines? If so, how is this going to be achieved?

Component Parts

In order for a website to work, the following are needed:-

1. Domain Name
2. Web Server or Web Hosting
3. The Website Itself
4. Optionally, Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)

N.B. It is usually possible to change any one aspect of a website without changing the others, e.g. if a new colour scheme is required, or new hosting, or different content.

Domain Name

The domain name is the “address” of your website. This tells the user’s computer how to find the website using the Domain Name System (DNS).

For example, www.johnsonsoftwaredesign.co.uk is the address of the authors website. The DNS system tells the users computer that this domain name relates to the IP address 87.106.166.81. It will also state how emails are handled, for example where the mailbox for philip_johnson@johnsonsoftwaredesign.co.uk is on the internet – this may or may not be the same IP address as the website.

There are providers for each type of domain name (for example www.nominet.org.uk is the internet registry for .uk domain names). These companies keep track of who owns what. It is not usual to deal with the registrar directly, but with an authorised registrar.

For the UK we recommend www.123-reg.co.uk to our customers. A domain can be registered for a period of time and 123-reg will provide a control panel to administer the domain and also send renewal emails when renewal is due.

We recommend buying a domain for at least two years, and not to allow the renewal to lapse, otherwise it can be a lot more expensive to renew after the renewal date.

Web Hosting

The web hosting, or web server, is simply a PC with a good connection to the internet – a lot better than broadband – so that many people can access the websites on the server at once. Because this connection will be expensive (many thousands per month) it makes sense to house many PC's in a data centre so they can share this expensive connection. Also the PC's are never turned off, so the website will be available 24/7.

Web hosting can be a shared hosting account (which means other companies websites are on the web server, or you can lease a whole server. With some suppliers you can provide your own server that you own, in the suppliers data centre.

It is usually not a problem to share hosting with other companies websites, unless you have special requirements.

The server PC's hosting the websites need to run an operating system, such as Windows or Linux, and also a Web Server such as Microsoft IIS or Apache. This does not usually matter for the website owner unless advanced features are required in the website. Johnson Software Design specialise in Microsoft's ASP.NET which means that we usually go for Windows servers. We currently lease servers for our customers from One and One (www.1and1.co.uk) in order to provide quality shared hosting for our customers.

Please contact us for any help and specific advice you may require on the last two paragraphs.

How eMail Works

The domain name system will specify where the mail server is on the internet, e.g. mail.1and1.co.uk. When an email is sent, with the help of DNS and the email system the email ends up in the mailbox on the recipient's mail server.

When the recipient turns on their PC and opens the mail program, this will check the mail server and download any incoming mail messages.

When you purchase a domain name and suitable hosting, the capability exists both to host a website, e.g. www.johnsonsoftwaredesign.co.uk and also email, e.g. philip_johnson@johnsonsoftwaredesign.co.uk. In some cases webmail is also available which allows the user to read incoming email with any web browser.

Website

The website itself consists of a number of files that go in a folder on the webserver, in a format that the web server can understand. The webserver's job as previously related is to present these files (pages) to the end user.

A website usually is made up of the following components:

1. A site map – consisting of a list of pages
2. A method of navigation, e.g. menu bar, links or buttons.
3. Layout – e.g. is the width fixed or stretchy, how many columns?
4. Content on each page, images, text, etc.
5. Special features, such as news pages, banner adverts, submit forms, login buttons etc.

We usually ask the customer to think about their requirements and reason for the website, and the kind of information they would like to appear on it, and then guide the customer through these more detailed parts to create a easy to use, nice looking website that fills the requirements, at the best value possible.

Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)

To inform existing customers, usually the website owner will put the web address on all stationary and business cards, and use an email from the site, to help publicise the site to existing customers.

When a website is first published, Google (www.google.co.uk) will not be aware of it.

After a short while, particularly if a site map has been submitted to Google (something that we do for our customers), the company name, or at least the website name should be searchable. For example, putting in Johnson Software Design in the search box should bring our website up at the top. Putting in “web designers Lancashire” might not do, which is what SEO is all about.

SEO can be split into two parts:

- Internal SEO – i.e. making amendments to the website to present it better to Google so that Google understands the content and can start relating this to sensible searches.
- External SEO – this is making alterations to external sites to help improve the ranking of the website in question.

A good supplier will monitor this monthly, ideally send a monthly or quarterly report, and also provide access to traffic data via Google Analytics or similar – this allows the business owner to log into a webpage and obtain information on traffic on a daily or monthly basis including where it came from (e.g. referring site or country).

It is important when considering making a site really visible to the search engines that the customer and the supplier work closely together. There is no one button to press, no million pounds that you can spend, to get your site to the top of Google, it requires work on both sides.

There are other forms of electronic promotion, such as Google Adwords, that we intend to cover in a future Help and Advice document.

Choosing a Supplier

What to look for

- Reliability
- Quality
- Value for Money
- Strong Service
- Clear Communication
- Financial Security
- A Partnership Approach
- Examples of Similar work
- Copyright of website is yours, domains are registered in your name, copy of website on CD, username and passwords for domains are provided.
- Local so you can have face to face meetings (this is not strictly essential, we have customers all over the UK for example, but for some types of project this can be a useful point).
- Do you know anyone who can recommend them? Will they let you talk to their customers?

You should decide which of the above are the most important to you and shortlist suppliers.

Despite the internet age, Yellow pages and www.yell.com are useful sources of new leads for us as is word of mouth and Google. Certainly a search on Yell.com should provide useful leads.

Shortlisting

You should ask each supplier in your shortlist for a written quotation, and if possible be prepared to meet up so the supplier can better understand your requirements. Often being able to get on with the supplier can decide between two fairly similar bids.

When it comes to price, it's not the daily rate, but what they can do with that day that matters. While this is important on the face of it, e.g. comparing a supplier that has been in business for one year with one that's been around for 20 years, its especially important with computer software and websites because of the wide variety of techniques used and the youth of the industry, compared to say engineering. Also many suppliers can offer fixed price once the full job is understood.

Before accepting any quote ensure that the following are in writing:-

- o Copyright of website is yours
- o Domains are registered in your name
- o A copy of website will be provided on CD
- o Username and passwords for domains are provided.

Further Steps

Once your new website is up and running, you may consider additional features or approaching the same, or a different supplier for Search Engine Optimisation (SEO), e-Commerce, Live Chat, or other features for your website.

It is usually possible to mix and match different things in this way provided you have access to your source code, and usually a friendly supplier such as ourselves, will help in any way they can to provide you with what you want at the best possible price.

We wish you luck with your new website and if you would like to short list us for your project we would only be too happy to help.

Summary

We hope this document has been helpful.

We welcome all feedback and aim to give our best advice at all times. Please email enquiries@johnsonsoftwaredesign.co.uk with any suggestions, comments, or further questions you may have.

Also, would you like to see other documents helping explain other subjects to you? If so, please contact us and we will consider adding these documents to our website.