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www.imservicecenter.com

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Vol.2

Guide to Setting up Your First Business Website

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Guide to Setting up Your First Business Website

Section One: How to Determine What You Want to Sell

No matter what anyone tells you, the first step you need to take if you want to set up your business's website is to first determine the goal for what you want to use your website for.

If you already have a brick and mortar business and you are planning on expanding its reach to the internet, then you are off to a good start. On the other hand, if you are starting from scratch, and a business website is going to be your sole moneymaker, then you have a lot of work ahead of you.

Because there are more steps involved for those who are looking to make an online business from scratch, we will start at the beginning. Your first step when creating a business website is to brainstorm what it is exactly that you want your business to provide.

A sales or retail website will look different than a marketing website which will look different than an informational website, and they will all look different than a web application. Your primary concern should be to first determine a genre for your business's website. Everything else will fall into place once you have the basic ideas laid out for your site.

Each type of business site has its own pros and cons. For example, a sales or retail website will have a lot of pictures, sporadic text that is mostly used to describe each product you are selling in a sentence or two, and a shopping cart.

These sites feature easy navigation and are very user friendly, but they are more difficult to get recognized by search engines and normally do not take advantage of advertising. Affiliate programs can be used, however, for extra traffic.

On the other hand, a marketing website is designed to sell one product and one product only. You've probably seen a number of marketing websites attempting to sell you get rich quick schemes, web content, and handy Photoshop plug-ins to make web design easier.

These sites are the easiest to design and build, feature mostly text with a few images interspersed, and contain a simple "Buy Now" button. They are designed around one product and one product only, making them optimized for search engines and perfectly positioned to make money through advertising and affiliate programs.

The informational business website is next. These are sites designed to inform about a business, but not necessarily sell anything directly. Think of some of the biggest companies in the world: Sony, Motorola, Canon, Toyota, Chevrolet, etc. While you can buy items on some of their corporate websites, they are primarily designed to inform the consumer.

By informing the consumer about your brand or store, you can help get the word out about your products and increase your sales dramatically. These websites, while they can work for anyone who has a well-defined product to sell, are better for companies and small businesses that have a nationwide presence.

In other words, it is not a good idea to make an informational website for your local business when you will only get a few site visitors a month - if that. Do not confuse these informational websites with AdSense Sites. The two are distinct.

Finally, if you really want to make a name for yourself on the Internet, you can consider taking a route that few dare to tread. You could create a web-based application that functions like a traditional program, but is located on the internet. These programs can often give you a channel to make a significant amount of money, provided that people find the applications you create useful.

However, they do require a lot of perseverance, a very original idea, and a good team of programmers who want the product to succeed. While a web application based business is a fantastic way to make a lot of money, it is not recommended for those who are new to the business arena.

Now that you know the four basic types of business websites, it is up to you to choose the one that will most work for your goals. You do not, and should not, decide right now which type of site is the best for you.

Take your time, do some research, and make sure that you talk everything through with your business partners and/or your immediate family members who may be counting on you to make the right decision. When you have a general idea of which type of business website you want to construct, and what product(s) you want to sell, you can move on to step two.

Section Two: Do You Really Need Your Own Business Website?

If you want to sell items using the internet, you may not even need your own business website. There are a number of places where you can go if you want your products to reach the masses - but you do not want to deal with the time and money expenditures that building a business website will entail.

These different options could save you ample time in getting your business up and running quickly. Then, if you decide that your business has become profitable enough, you can take your sales to your own website and retain all of the profits.

The most common third party company to use when peddling your wares is eBay. By using the online auction powerhouse, many people have found it fantastically easy to make quite a bit of money. However, selling items on eBay does not come cheap, as the company does charge quite a bit of money for each completed transaction. Do not despair, as you can still find it incredibly easy to set up your business and sell your products using an eBay store.

Setting up your eBay storefront is no more difficult than simply creating an account with the online marketplace. Although it is not good practice, you will have to also give some financial

information to eBay when you sign up, so it is a good idea to dedicate a bank account, a credit card, or a Paypal account to eBay. Treat your eBay store like a business and it will be easier to keep track of all of your transactions.

You can start selling immediately with eBay. Just choose an item you want to list and place it on eBay. Aside from the tools that eBay gives you just for being a member, there are a number of fancy listing tools available for low prices for all operating systems. Some of them are even free. No matter the cost, if you want your eBay store to look professional, you will want to invest in one of these third party selling tools.

We recommend: [Your Free Business Website](#)

While eBay is easy to use and a very effective way of getting your products to a marketplace of millions from around the world, there are a few drawbacks. eBay takes its cut on every sale you make. You will have to pay listing fees and selling fees as well as Paypal fees on purchases people make through the financial service. This can add up over time, so while eBay is a great place to get your business started, it is not recommended that you stick with eBay as your sole source of income for longer than a year or two.

If eBay does not sound like it would be the proper marketplace for your products, you may want to consider teaming up with retail giant Amazon.com. There are two ways to use Amazon to your advantage - selling your used items in an eBay style manner or creating your own WebStore on Amazon. You should decide which method to use based on your predicted sales volume as well as how much of a reputation you want to establish for yourself.

Selling one product at a time on Amazon can make you some money, but it is not exactly an online business website. If you want to go full bore and make as much profit as you can, then the Amazon WebStore is what you should focus your attention towards. The Amazon WebStore affiliation will allow you to sell your products right alongside of Amazon's products, allowing you to sell your goods to over sixty million potential customers.

Just like setting up a store with eBay, an Amazon WebStore is a cakewalk compared to designing your own business website. But there are monetary drawbacks involved as well--drawbacks that may deter you from engaging in a financial partnership with the retail giant.

While you can build your own Amazon WebStore using Amazon's easy to use storefront designer, it will cost you sixty dollars per month in hosting fees plus seven percent of each sale goes into Amazon's pocket.

All in all, if you think you can move enough merchandise on Amazon's site, this is really the business alternative that you should consider. It offers roughly the same exposure as eBay and slaps you with far less fees so that you can make more profit.

Finally, if you are considering marketing or publishing as an online business, you may want to take a look at what Lulu.com has to offer. As the leader in online self publishing and all things print, Lulu is the place to go if you are attempting to make your fortune with art or the written word.

From calendars to books to music, if it is artsy, it's on Lulu. All you have to do is come up with a creative idea, get Lulu to produce it, and then you get some profits based on what sells on their

site. You can even take your published works to an Amazon or eBay store for even more exposure.

While the market at Lulu is limited, it is the best place to get discovered if you are willing to put in the time and effort to write a book, create some art, or even record a song. Even if you are not into making one of these activities into a full on business, Lulu provides you with a great way to make some money on your hobbies.

Like photography? Make a calendar. Have an opinion on the presidential candidates? Write a short book and have Lulu publish it. Play in a garage band? Record your songs and Lulu will sell your CD for you.

Although there are plenty of other programs that you can enroll in if you are looking to establish an online business without making your website right away, the above listed companies offer three of the largest resources for you to start selling right away. Their fees are affordable, their web traffic is huge.

They can offer you everything you want about an online store except for your own domain name and full control over your profits. If you want to be completely in charge of your business, you need to create your own business website.

Section Three: Designing Your Business Website

At this point, you should have an idea of what you want your website to be and what you will be selling on your website. Most of you will have chosen to make a sales, retail, or marketing website, so the rest of this article will be dedicated to those who decided to go in that direction.

The rest of you, consider investing in a high quality web designer and an even higher quality web developer - you will need all of the help you can get in making your own web application or informational business website.

We recommend: [Webdesign](#)

Designing a website is actually a very simple process, even if you have never done such a project in the past. You really have two choices at this point, as far as the website design is concerned. Build the site yourself or hire someone else to do the heavy lifting for you.

Obviously, building the site from scratch by yourself is going to be the more cost effective solution, but if you have no prior experience or you need your website up as soon as possible, hiring a professional may be your better option. No matter which route you take, there are a few tips that you need to consider if you want to make sure that your website looks exactly as you want it to.

Whether you are building your business website yourself or if you have hired someone to do it, you need to make a rough template for how you want your site to look. If design is not your

thing, there are plenty of resources out there that can help you get started. Take a look at websites like CSS Beauty, Design Snack, and Smashing Magazine for all of the inspiration that you could ever possibly need. These sites highlight some of the best in web design and are perfect for anyone who is having a difficult time coming up with some ideas.

When you have settled on a basic web design for your business website, you need to come up with a color scheme that would work well with what you're trying to accomplish. A sales website, for example, will make use of a lot of whitespace and only a basic palette of three or four colors so as not to be too hard on the viewer's eyes.

On the other hand, a marketing website will use big blocks of text with highlighted words here and there, often making use of brilliant colors like reds, blues, and yellows to attract the reader's eye to important points. If you are having trouble coming up with colors, check out sites like ColorBlender and colordb to help you choose the perfect palette for your site.

Once the basic template and the color scheme have been decided on, you need to make the decision to build your site yourself or hire someone else to do it. If you hire someone, all you have to do is pay them the appropriate amount and submit your early designs and color choices.

The web designers will do the rest and you'll pay them the full amount on completion of the project. Go ahead and skip to Step Three if you are planning to take the web designer route. Those of you, who want to go it alone, keep reading.

Section Four – Part II: Designing Your Own Website

Although designing your own website is not the most difficult thing you will ever do, it is fairly time consuming. However, when you have finished with the design, you will have a great feeling about yourself - that you actually created something yourself, something that you can be proud of, something that will hopefully make you a lot of money in the long term.

Since you already have your template sketched out and your color palette chosen, the only prep work that you need before you get started on your site's design is to download the necessary tools that will help you along the way.

We recommend: [Webdesign](#)

You will need an image editor for creating the pictures for the site, a "What You See Is What You Get" site editor to design the website, and a text editor to modify the code as you see fit. If you've got the money, purchase a copy of the Adobe CS3 Web Design package which contains Photoshop, Dreamweaver and a bunch of other useful program.

Otherwise, for image editing, consider using the GIMP or Paint.NET on Linux or Windows, respectively, or Pixelmator on Mac OS X. Use KompoZer as a free WYSIWYG editor on Linux

or Windows. Finally, consider using a text editor like Notepad ++ for

Windows or TextMate for Mac OS X. Also, download an FTP client like FileZilla so that you can easily upload your site to a server when everything is completed.

Even though the tools will help you quite a bit on your quest to code your own business website, they will not be able to do all of the work for you. You still have to put in quite a bit of input, and it helps if you have some kind of reference material to guide you.

So, your best bet is to look up as much information online as you possibly can. Read tutorials and guides that can help you learn XHTML for coding the site's framework, CSS for giving the site some style, PHP for some of the site's functions, and JavaScript for the site's inner workings and other various functions.

It may take a week, it may take a month, but when your website is finally finished, you should use your FTP client to upload it to a server and make sure that it works perfectly well.

Also, at this time, it is of the utmost importance that you check your website in a variety of web browsers, including Firefox, Internet Explorer (6 and 7), and Safari. All web browsers display pages differently, so you want to be sure that your site looks just as good in IE as it does in Firefox and Safari.

Section Five: How to Take Advantage of Advertising to Find Traffic and Make Extra Money

Advertising is a great way to make money online. It does have its drawbacks, however. The main problem with advertising, especially if your internet business is merchandise related, is that you end up cheapening your store, making it look untrustworthy and making you look as though you are more interested in making money than selling high quality goods that your customers would want to purchase.

For this reason and this reason alone, it is a good idea to not use ads on retail, sales, or marketing website where you are trying to gain a potential customer's trust so that they will stay with you long enough to make a purchase. After all, if you have a successful store, you will be able to make more than enough money and advertisements on your site will not be of any real value to you.

However, there is one way that you can take advantage of advertising and turn advertisements to your advantage. Instead of placing ads on your site, you should instead contact advertising sites, blogs, and other informational websites in your chosen niche.

We recommend: [Free Advertising](#)

By contacting advertising sites like Google Adwords, for example, you can arrange to have your

advertisements displayed on websites around the globe. It can add up to be costly, but it is a very effective way of getting your name out. And any one click could be a sale.

Alternatively, if you contact blogs or other informational websites, you can see if they offer advertising space. Buying advertising space on a site in your chosen niche can bring in a lot of traffic, but it can also be costly depending on who you do business with. For example, an ad on a big name blog may cost thousands of dollars a month while an ad on a smaller, less developed site may only be a few dollars a week.

The best way to take advantage of advertising on other sites to increase your traffic is to set aside a particular budget each month for how much you want to spend for advertising. Keep this budget at a set amount for several months and see how far you can make your money go. If you are not seeing any results with your advertisements, then move on to another advertiser or up the amount you are spending.

The important things to look for are high click through and conversion rates. Are people clicking on your ads? Are those ads converting to sales? Just because thousands of people see your ads does not mean that you are making any money. Find your weakest advertisers and move on to something that will give you more bang for your buck.

If you find that you are uncomfortable in dealing with blog and website owners, you should consider finding advertising space with the big corporations. Google, MSN, Yahoo!, and a variety of other big name companies all offer advertising in some way or another. You pay their fees in either a pay per click or a pay per impression manner and your ads are hosted on websites across the globe. Advertising with one of these big companies is sure to net you a good amount of traffic, but the conversion rate may be somewhat low at first. Try upping your budget if you're not noticing any big sales from AdWords, et al, visitors and try as hard as you can to get the best keywords for your niche. Don't cheap out and you won't lose out on customers.

But what if you want to design a business website without actually selling anything? There are millions of people doing just that: selling advertising space instead of any real product. Just look at sites like LifeHacker, TechCrunch, and ICanHasCheezburger. These are sites that are making a fortune on advertising revenue alone. They're not selling any products, just web space that is viewed by thousands of people every day.

All it takes is a great idea, the desire to work hard to build your advertising site from scratch, and quite a bit of persistence. This is not an overnight type of deal, you really have to work to make a lot of money through advertising, so be sure that you know exactly what you are getting into before you begin the process of making your own ad funded website.

When you are sure that this is the direction that you want your business to go, you need to decide what kind of ad based website you want to make. Blogs, while the most popular, are not the only way to make money through advertising. You could run a news website or some kind of site that provides a service to your users. Those are just two of the hundreds of different options available for someone who is looking to make it rich through advertising.

Making it big through advertisements is not based on just a good idea, though; you have to execute it properly as well. You need a good, easy to read web design. You need to make sure that your ads blend seamlessly with the overall design of your website.

You need to have good server space that will not go down on you during even the slightest load. You need to be dedicated to your project. Eat while working on it, drink while working on it, and dream about it when you sleep. Only then can you hope to play with the big boys and really get your name out there in the advertising world.

To make your site profitable, you will have to bring in tens of thousands of people each day. A daunting task, but if you dedicate yourself to your goal and you work towards it every day, it will eventually happen for you.

Section Six: How to Optimize Your Site for Search Engine Traffic

Search engine optimization is a booming field, and it is easy to see why. As an online business, the bulk of your customers will come from search engines. Therefore, you want your business website to be optimized for search engine traffic.

While most people would suggest that you hire a professional for a task that seems to be rather difficult at first glance, in actuality there is nothing to search engine optimization, or SEO, that you cannot do yourself. It is much easier than designing your own website.

Far easier than finding resources to send traffic your way. And certainly easier than getting each and every person who visits your site to buy one of your products.

The easiest way to achieve search engine optimization is to make sure that you have some kind of informational keywords on every page of your site. From your home page to a product buried deep within your site that very few people outside of search engine spiders will ever view - everything needs to advertise your site to search engines.

We recommend: [Search Engine Optimization](#)

Sounds like a daunting task? Well, it is time consuming, but with a little practice, you will be well on your way to achieving a search engine optimized site.

Nobody, except for the original designers, really knows how each and every search engine works, so don't let anyone tell you otherwise. There are a few key aspects of search engine optimization, however, those are well documented and can help you get a higher rank in each and every search provider, from Google to Ask to Yahoo! The first step you need to take is to eliminate any duplicate content that you may have on your website.

This means that if you have two products that are exactly the same but differs in color or some other minute characteristic, and then put them on the same page. If you want a search engine optimized site, make sure that there is no duplicate content out there on your site. Having such content appear multiple times on a search engine is a great way to get your page rank lowered and lose quite a bit of natural search engine traffic.

The other search engine optimization technique that will yield you a much higher page rank is to

make sure that everything on your site is maximized for your keyword selection. You should take full advantage of using Meta tags in your HTML such as the keyword tag and the description tag on every one of your pages. You can add in a huge amount of keywords, so make sure that you get every last one that corresponds to your business website.

Also, take advantage of the description and other tags associated with the images on your website; they are valuable places to introduce your keywords. And simply because you are focusing on the underlying aspects of your website that are only seen by search engines, don't forget to place keywords inside of as much viewable text as you can. Doing so will really boost your search engine placement.

Finally, to rank higher in search engines, you need a variety of backlinks to your website. These are other sites that are linking to your website. Google and other search engines use this information to help determine the significance of a particular website, so go out there and see if you can entice some people to add a link to your site somewhere on their own. Keeping with this suggestion for search engine optimization, keep reading onto step five.

Section Seven: Finding Traffic in Unlikely Places

So you've now learned how to dig up traffic by advertising and through search engine optimization - but there are still two other ways which you can use to bring more people to your website. While they are a bit more unorthodox, they do work and can help you gain popularity in your chosen niche.

No matter what product you are selling, what program you are marketing, or how you are planning on making your money in the long term, these two methods can easily be used to drum up the traffic and the conversion rates that your website needs to survive.

The first way to find traffic in unlikely places is to contact webmasters of other sites and see if they are interested in sharing links with you. This will help you gain credibility with the search engines and acts as a "free" advertisement. Now, before you go off and ask really well known websites if they will trade links with you, you need to learn a few rules which are mostly common courtesy.

Firstly, do not even bother asking a site that is far more popular than yours to trade links with you. They won't do it, so don't even ask. If you are unsure of whether or not a site is more popular than yours, simply check the Alexa data for all websites or the Technorati data if you are exchanging links with a blog.

Secondly, mind your manners when you are asking to trade links with another webmaster. Think of this as a business deal and act accordingly. Do not use slang in your email to him or her, and use proper etiquette.

Also, explain what you are selling, why you want to exchange links with the webmaster you are

corresponding with, and how you think it could benefit both of your sites. A clear and concise letter is often what can help seal the deal in a partnership such as this.

Another great, and mostly unused, way to drive traffic to your site is to offer an affiliate program. Affiliate programs are perfect for those of you with sales, retail, or marketing websites. You should fully take advantage of creating an affiliate program if your business website warrants it.

We recommend: [Affiliate Pro](#)

For those of you who are unaware, an affiliate program is simply a program that you run as a webmaster which allows other websites to link back to products on your website. If a person purchases a product from your website by using an affiliate's link, the affiliate gets a small percentage of the purchase.

This type of program makes you happy because you got the money from the sale. It makes your affiliate happy because he or she got money for doing practically nothing aside from placing a link on his site. And it makes the customers happy because they ended up with the item they wanted.

While these are just two different ways to drive traffic to your business website, there are many more techniques which you should consider using. A quick search on your favorite search engine can turn up countless resources for information for those of you looking to establish your own online business.

Furthermore, it may be in your interest to check out some books relating to online businesses, search engine optimization, and some of the other topics discussed in this article. Good luck with your business.

We recommend: [Your Free Business Website](#)

We recommend: [Webdesign](#)

We recommend: [Free Advertising](#)

We recommend: [Search Engine Optimization](#)

We recommend: [Affiliate Pro](#)