

Website Development

Process Stages

The development of a website involves a number of stages and considerations. As a marketing tool a website should be designed to target a specific group of people and be created to do that in the most effective way. Content, design and freshness are the 3 main considerations in designing and maintaining a website. Web developers work with a large cross section of industry types and the more information and ideas that you have for your site, the quicker it is for your developer to create a site that is highly suited to your business marketing strategy.

The development process involves deciding upon a domain name, arranging a web host, developing the actual site and maintaining it over time.

Domain Name

Domain names should represent your business in a short but unambiguous way. It should roll off the tongue easily and be easy to remember and also be suitable for printing. Avoid hyphens and other characters if possible as they are hard to describe when you are trying to tell someone what your domain name is over the phone.

Registration of the domain name is done through an internet registry company (registrar) and is lodged in an international register. An annual fee applies to reserve and retain the chosen name and direct internet browsers to the address of the web server that hosts the actual website.

A domain name points to a specific location on the internet where a website's files are located. Only the registered owners of a domain name are allowed to use it to advertise their website and there are rules that protect against unfair competition by registering "copy cat" names.

Domain Hosting

Website domain hosting involves an annual fee to host a website on a powerful computer called a 'web server' so that it is accessible from the internet; this fee is charged by the providing company and varies according to the level of services provided. Selection of a suitable hosting company and hosting package depends on the services that are required by the finished website. Your web developer will know exactly what technologies are required and can usually advise you as to the best solution and who to use as a provider. Most web developers will arrange this for you as part of the development of the site.

Site Development

Site development involves the actual creation of the website itself and comprises the bulk of the overall costs, but is a once of fee.

The creation of a website itself is divided into 4 main stages;

Design

During this stage information is gathered to develop the concept or 'feel' and 'look' of the site. This includes marketing purpose, content, intent, graphic presentation and themes, site navigation and visitor interactivity.

Development

Site development involves the building of the completed files to be uploaded to the web server. Graphics and photos are created, content is added and other user interactive functions are developed and finalised including any eCommerce.

Deployment

After a website is created, tested and approved it is uploaded to the web server that hosts the domain name and the site is made active. After a few days it becomes accessible to the World Wide Web and is available globally.

Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)

Optimising a site for good search engine ranking aims at getting into the "top 10". Most people do not want to search further than the first page of results returned by a search engine. If a site does not initially rank well, then changes to content and design may need to be considered to improve the results. Since the internet is so large, it takes a number of weeks for most search engines to "crawl" the web and assess each website. The time between each of these crawls may be as long as 3 months so the optimisation process may take some time before the best results are achieved.

Site Administration

Changes and updates to websites after deployment can be performed by the owner of the site if they have the required equipment and knowledge, or by another party such as a web developer. If external administration is required then the original developer of the site would be the best person to act as administrator due to their familiarity with the programming code. Costs are usually charged on a per use basis unless an administration contract for a set period exists.

"Content Management" involves the creation of an admin section to the website where anyone can log in and make selected changes to the site online. The changes are stored in an online database and are used to create the web pages "dynamically" when requested. Using content management eliminates the costs of involving a web designer to make the changes however does mean a higher initial development cost for the site. Content management is highly suited to businesses that frequently need to make changes such as the content and pricing of online retail catalogues. Most businesses however do not make changes very often and in this case it may be more cost effective to avoid the initial cost of creating a content management system and instead paying a developer to make the changes when needed.