

Build your own website – get your work on show

Today, many companies and individuals have websites, it's an effective and ever more common way of marketing and showcasing work and interacting with clients. Employers and potential employers increasingly expect to be able to look you up online.

With the development of technology and increase in website demand, the good news is that these days it's fairly straightforward and cost-effective to set up an impressive website.

If you're going to do it yourself, keep the following Top Ten Tips in mind:

1. Plan your website

Plan your website carefully on paper first, organise your content into sections and draw a site map – this will be your blueprint to work from. Check out your competition, research other websites and make a note of those you would like to emulate. Don't steal any copyrighted material such as design, photography or text, but look at how, in broad terms, they are achieving the results you admire.

2. Keep it simple

Keep it simple and easy for your visitors to use. They may not stay long on your site so make your 'calls to action' clear and distinctive and put them on your home page. Make sure no content is more than three clicks away from any other page on your site. Prepare your initial content: keep it short and sweet as people tend to 'scan' text on websites and are always looking for something interesting to click. Choose and register an easy-to-remember domain name or web address.

3. Use open source software and pre-designed themes

If you are not a web designer or developer, you will achieve quicker and more professional results by using free, open-source software and pre-designed themes. You can usually customise them by adding your own colour scheme and logo to make them unique.

WordPress is a good example of free-to-use software that should provide all you need to get started. For easy-to-set up, but less flexible websites, sign-up at Wordpress.com. Many bloggers have created and maintain blogs hosted by Wordpress.



Or, if you're feeling adventurous, download and install WordPress from Wordpress.org – but you will also need a hosting account with PHP and MySQL enabled to install it.

Some hosting companies offer 'One-click' installation of WordPress in to your web space.

4. Optimise your photos and graphics

Ensure your photographs, illustrations and graphics are optimised for the web and saved at the correct size. A common mistake is to upload large images and resize them on the page. This results in slow-to-load pages – a big no-no, even with broadband users.

Web browsers only 'see' JPG and GIF image formats – more modern browsers also read the PNG image format. Photoshop offers good tools for exporting well-optimised images.

JARGON BUSTER

PHP, or Hypertext Preprocessor, is a technology that enables server executable scripts within web pages. Generally used by Unix, Linux and Solaris platforms.

MySQL is open source database software commonly used to provide ecommerce, transaction processing and dynamic data transfers.

To find out more about common web technologies, go to:

- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HTML>
- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CSS>
- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FTP>
- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SMTP>
- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/POP3>
- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MySQL>
- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PHP>

5. Use Web conventions

For example, use underlined text for links and make your logo link back to your homepage. Visitors have expectations, shaped by their experiences of other websites. You should understand what these are and make use of them in your pages and templates.

6. Treat your visitors

People like something for nothing on the web so give something away – perhaps in return for their email address. For instance, if you are a musician, an exclusive download will encourage sign-ups to a mailing list. Make your content relevant and each link clickable, in every sense – don't take your visitors for granted and don't expect them to work hard to navigate your website.

7. Learn a little Hypertext Markup Language (HTML)

You can't avoid it for long when running your own site so learn the basics of HTML. W3schools (www.w3schools.com) is a great resource and offers online, bite-size training in all web technologies. View the source code of websites and gradually learn to pick out the HTML from the content – like any new language, understanding takes practise and patience.



8. Use the Internet

If you come across a problem you need to solve (and you will, almost every day when working on your site) start with a search on Google. There are a huge number of forums, commentaries and blogs about web design offering good advice, techniques, tips and free code. But be careful: read around the subject and listen to other user's feedback to avoid bad advice.

9. Check your links

Copy Universal Resource Locators (URLs) from your browser's location bar on websites you want to link to, and then check them on your pages to make sure they work.

A URL is the web address. For example, this website's URL is <http://www.feustraining.org>

A common mistake is to reference a graphic on a page that only exists locally on your PC. Always check to make sure your links are not broken.

10. Validate your pages

Valid HTML is good for:

- Your users – who will have less errors on your site
- Accessibility – valid code is usually more accessible to the visually impaired and other disabled visitors
- Search engines – the same techniques that help accessibility are good for search engines.
- Use the validation services at W3C <http://validator.w3.org/> to check over your pages. It will report any errors in your site and help you to de-bug issues.

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