

Options for Creating a Website

When someone “visits” your website they are connecting their computer to the server computer that has your website’s files on it. The web page files are transferred to their computer and their web browser shows them the web page that you created. When your website files are stored and served from a server computer, your website is said to be hosted by that service. Usually, server computers each host many websites.

When you register a domain name you gain a way to put a unique address onto your website, email, or other web service. A domain name is not the same as a website. A domain name is something like BobsSnackShack.com.

Website hosting companies can usually register a domain for you or you can use a separate domain registration service. If you register the domain yourself you’ll need to configure it to work with the website, email, or other website services you have.

Full-service hosting companies will host your website and email and can give you access to configure the services yourself. A Small Orange (www.asmallorange.com) is one such hosting service.

Some companies will host your website for free; these usually have limited options and may place advertising directly onto your web pages. Low-cost or free websites may also limit you to a set number of “templates” or designs to use to create your website. If you move your website hosting to a different service your website address will change unless you use your own domain registration.

You can set up a single Google document so that it has its own web address if you just want to put a single page on the web.

It may be useful to consider using a Facebook page for your organization or business instead of a normal website, if that seems

appropriate. Facebook pages for organizations or businesses can be set up so that even people without a Facebook login can view them.

You can set up a free blog with many services, which would offer you a blog-style way of communicating with your website visitors. Some blogs can be configured to work as small normal-looking websites (Wordpress, for example).

Many websites are set up with static html files and are hosted on a server with FTP access. This allows you to update your files to change your web pages.

Web design programs like NVu or Dreamweaver allow you to edit your web pages the way you would use a word-processing program and translate your design into HTML code files you then upload to the server. You can also write web pages yourself directly in code if you like that sort of thing.

Content-management system (CMS) websites are pretty standard now, and allow you to update your website directly from within your web browser. These can be very simple with few options or very complicated with many professional options. Cost ranges from free to several hundred dollars a year for licensing and hosting.

Wordpress (www.wordpress.com or www.wordpress.org), Weebly (www.weebly.com), and SquareSpace (www.squarespace.com) are typical web hosting services using the CMS model. Google Sites is a free service that comes with a Gmail account to easily create a website, and is a CMS service.

E-commerce sites require special security options to keep personal information from website visitors secure. You may also need to set up special credit card processing systems, and to arrange for a merchant account to process the credit card transactions.

Website designers that you hire will design and code your website for you, and may also be available to regularly update the website pages. Website pages that are out of date are of no benefit to you or

to your website visitors. Find a designer by asking around, finding out who designed websites you like, or by checking with the local chamber or business group.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is the process of setting up your website so that you gain high rankings in search engines like Google and Bing

SEO Caveats: Google does not offer “priority submissions” or special service to SEO companies. No one can guarantee a #1 ranking in Google. Ask how the SEO company to explain clearly what they will do to get you a good ranking in Google. You shouldn’t have to link to the SEO company from any of your pages. You shouldn’t have to place links to any other sites on your pages either, unless they are important for your business or organization. A paid advertisement in Google isn’t the same as a high search engine ranking

To place your site well in search engines like Google, Bing, and Yahoo, use unique, accurate page titles; use the “description” metatag; use descriptive URLs (with real words, like www.bobssnackshack.com/menu); use site navigation that makes sense; good site hierarchy; text-based site navigation links and “Breadcrumb” navigation.

Keep content up to date and well-written and use relevant language on your pages. Use alt-text for images for accessibility. Get links to your website included on other related sites.

Download Google’s free SEO guide:

<http://www.google.com/webmasters/docs/search-engine-optimization-starter-guide.pdf>

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