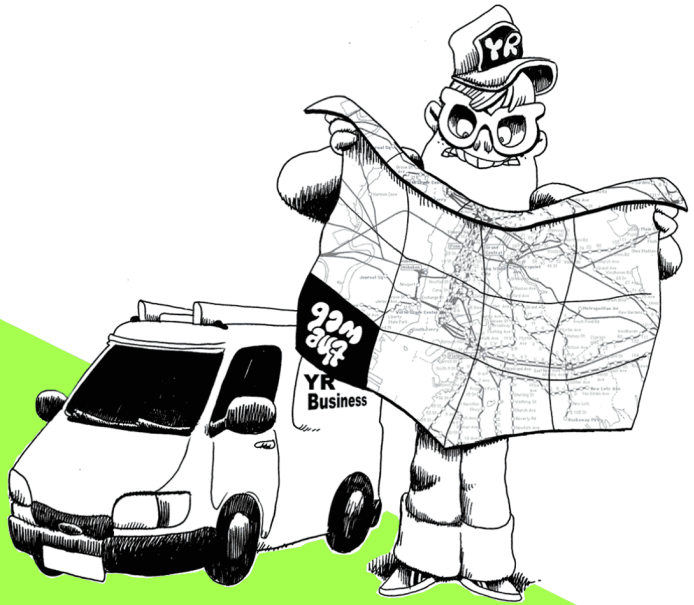


A little
Guide
to the **Web**
for **Businesspeople**



This booklet is intended to provide some basic information and advice for anyone in business who needs a simple straightforward introduction to the web.

As far as possible we've tried to avoid using technical language, but a modest degree of familiarity with computers and the Internet is assumed.

It is organised in the form of a series of questions and answers. Towards the back there is a glossary which explains in more detail some of the jargon terms that are sadly necessary when talking about technology.

I hope you find it useful!

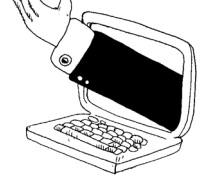
Alfred Armstrong
Likemind Web Services

(A big thank you to Elliot Elam (www.elliottcartoons.com) for the excellent illustrations).

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http://



Does my company need a website?

Not every company needs a website, but you should consider some potential advantages of having one:

- People can find out about you more easily.
- You can give customers and other visitors to your site much more information than would be otherwise practical.
- You can provide new services to your customers.
- You can do business in new ways.

Example: plumbers Staunch and Flow (www.staunchandflow.co.uk) supply tips about plumbing problems on their site. Not only does this help more people than they could deal with directly, it enhances their reputation by showing them to be open and knowledgeable about their area of business.

How do I get a website?

There are lots of companies that will create a website for you, most of them to be found under the heading **web design** in directories. In choosing a company to create your website, you should consider:

- **Location.** The Internet makes it possible to work with companies anywhere in the world, so you are by no means limited to local firms. However, remember that working at a distance often requires greater trust and better communication skills than when you can have regular face-to-face meetings.
- **Professionalism and business sense.** Your designer's proposal should include an accurate summary of the nature of your business and what you want from the web, as well as a description of the proposed site and timescales for its creation.

- **Design skills for the web.** Design for the web is different to that for print and other media, so look carefully at other sites your designer has done (including their own, of course) to ensure they are easy to use and communicate well.
- **Technical expertise.** Websites typically employ a range of computer technologies, and the technical side of things can be bewildering. A good web designer should be able to explain the technical choices they've made in language you can understand, and justify them by how they relate to your needs.

The rest of this booklet contains answers to specific questions which will give you more idea about how websites work. The more you know about the subject, the better equipped you'll be to get the best from your web designer.

What is hosting?

Your website will live on one or more computers on the premises of a **Hosting Services Provider**, who will manage them on your behalf. Hosting is the provision of all the things your site needs to work: disk space, software, connection to the internet, and so on. Your web design company will generally offer hosting as part of their site building package, but bear in mind that in all likelihood they are simply reselling someone else's services. Make sure you know what you are getting for your money, and feel free to shop around for an alternative.

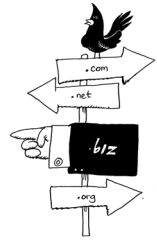


Hosting Services Providers generally offer a range of products from low cost offerings suitable for private individuals and modest businesses to very expensive ones aimed at high traffic internet retailers. You'll pay primarily for **capacity** (the ability to handle a certain level of traffic) and reliability.

Especially if your business is going to be conducted on the web, look for a provider who can offer greater capacity when you need it. It can be disastrous to your business if your success as a trader leads to your website becoming unresponsive or unavailable.

What's a domain name?

A domain name is used to identify a piece of the internet. It appears in email addresses, after the @-sign, and in website addresses (URLs). Well-known domain names include **amazon.com**, **bbc.co.uk**, **wikipedia.org**. Some website addresses require the prefix “**www.**” attached, but this is not always strictly necessary.



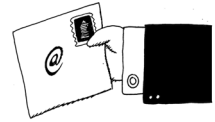
To acquire a domain name suitable for your business, you either need to **register** it or, if it is already registered, acquire it from the current registrant. Registration typically costs only a few pounds, whereas buying a name that is already registered may cost tens of thousands or more, depending on the perceived value of the name.

When you register a domain you don't **own** it. You hold it on a temporary basis and it must be renewed every year or two, depending on the country in which it is registered. It is a form of rental arrangement.

Your web designer should be able to help you choose a suitable domain name for your business. Typically they'll register the name directly through your hosting provider. Make sure they register the name to **your** name and address, otherwise there may be problems in the event of a dispute and you might lose the right to the name.

When registering a domain name through a hosting provider, check in advance whether your new web address will work with and without the “**www.**” prefix.

What about email?



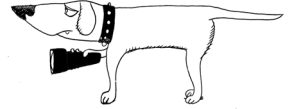
Once you have a domain name for your business, you'll probably want to receive emails addressed to it. Most hosting providers will offer various email services and you should discuss them with your web designer to ensure you get the right setup for your business.

Common email services include:

- **Mailboxes.** With a mailbox, incoming mails are stored at the host and have to be **downloaded** to be read. Typically, you'll set up a mail program either on your own computer or another in your office to pick up your mail and deliver it to you. Depending on your requirements, you may choose to have all your mail put into one mailbox and sorted later in your office, or to have a separate mailbox for each of your company's email addresses.
- **Forwarding.** With forwarding, mails addressed to one address are automatically sent to another. For example, the address sales@mycompany.co.uk might be listed on your website as the one for sales enquiries. You can choose to forward it to the personal email address of one sales rep or another without having to change what appears on the site.
- **Spam filtering.** Spam, or unsolicited email, is an increasing problem, especially for business. However, filtering services should be used with care, since sometimes important business mails get incorrectly labelled as spam and rejected. You should ensure that any filtering service you use includes a **whitelist**, to which you can add the addresses of your legitimate correspondents so their mails bypass the filtering process.

For greater control and flexibility, you might prefer to perform your own filtering rather than rely on a service at your hosting provider: there are many filtering programs on the market, some of them free.

How do search engines work?



The most commonly used search engines (**Google, Yahoo, MSN**) use **page indexes** which record the words used on web pages. When you request a search the words you have entered are looked up in the indexes and the web pages which best match are listed.

The page indexes are constructed by software **crawlers** which follow links from one page to another and one website to another, to discover as many web pages as possible. So when you create a new website it will not be found by the crawler if it is not linked from anywhere else. To overcome this problem most search engines allow you to add your site **directly** to their index.

Search engines take more or less note of words in a web page depending on various factors (whether they appear in the page title, how far down the page, how many times they occur and so on). Similarly entire pages and sites may be regarded as of greater or lesser significance depending on how many other sites link to them.

By applying an understanding of how search engines work to the design of your site it is possible to get a higher **ranking** (how near your site appears to the top of the list) than your competitors for particular search words or phrases. This process is called **search engine optimization** (SEO). Be careful, though, since the ways that search engines work out rankings change from time to time, SEO is not something that can be done just once and forgotten about. Worse, some techniques sometimes used for SEO purposes may actually come to have a **negative** effect on the ranking of your site.

Example: every page on Amazon.co.uk can be found through search engines such as Google. Some other shopping sites cannot be crawled by search engines and consequently lose potential sales.

How do I keep my website up to date?



The way your site is built will determine how it is updated, so your requirements for updating will need to be established at the earliest stages of the design process.

Typical scenarios include:

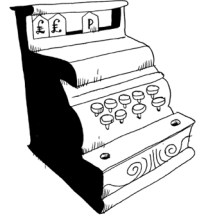
- A **static** site. Your pages will be created as simple text files, possibly using an authoring tool such as Macromedia Dreamweaver. Your designer, or you yourself after some suitable training, will maintain the pages **offline** and **upload** them to the site.
- A **database**-based site. The database will contain information about, say, your products, prices, customers, orders and so on. Each page is generated by taking data from the database and merging it with a template that has been created by your designer. The designer has to create a template for each type of page required by your site. You keep the site up-to-date by maintaining the database either on a secure, private, part of the website, or **offline**, followed by an **upload**. Online shop software commonly works in this way.
- A **Content Management System** (CMS) site. A special kind of database-based system designed to help site owners add articles and information to their site in a controlled fashion. A CMS is particularly useful where many people will be adding different content. There are a great many CMS products available, many of them free. Maintenance is generally performed in a secure part of the website. CMS products often include collaboration tools such as **discussion forums** and **blogs** (online journals).

Note that your website can be built using a combination of these as required. To combine a CMS with an online shop is very common.

Example: shavers.co.uk encourages customers to add reports about the products they buy. This independent, experience-based, information about the products helps users to make a choice and hence to buy.

How do I set up an online shop?

Today it's easier than ever to start an online shop: there are lots of good products available which take much of the pain out of the process. Your web designer should be able to help you choose one which suits your business requirements.



Some points to consider when selecting a solution:

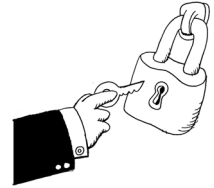
- The size of your **catalogue**, and how often it changes. How easy is it to add and remove items from the online catalogue?
- **Payment processing** options. Credit card processing facilities have various fee scales based on turnover, level of security and processing costs. In general, the higher your turnover the less you'll pay per transaction, but you may have to shop around to get the best rates. Also, having a fully automated interface between your system and theirs may reduce costs.
- Your **internal processes**. If your shop and prices are attractive, you may suddenly have to deal with an unexpectedly high volume of transactions. Are your processes up to the job? (Consider, if possible, putting realistic lead times or actual stock levels online, to avoid disappointing customers.)
- **Navigation**. Are you able to organise the online catalogue in ways your customers will understand? Can you, for example, put items in more than one category to make them easier to find? Can you make more popular items more prominent? Is the search facility able to cope with misspelled or almost-right words? (If you sell t-shirts amongst other items and someone enters “shert” - or even “shirts”, correctly spelled, but plural - into the search box will they see “no items found”?)

If appropriate, you might also consider alternatives to setting up a standalone shop, such as selling through an existing service such as eBay or Amazon.

Example: CafePress.com sells custom-printed t-shirts, coffee mugs and other goods in a unique way. Customers upload their own designs which they can then sell to others through CafePress's online shop. Nothing is printed until it is ordered and paid for so there is never any wastage.

Do I need to worry about security?

Everyone with an Internet connection should be concerned about security, and if your business depends on the web you should be especially vigilant. You should ensure that whoever sets up your website and the associated computer systems takes security concerns fully into account. If in doubt, consult an independent expert.



For the protection of your customers, all pages on which sensitive data is entered or displayed must be secure. On secure pages all information is encrypted for privacy when it is sent to or from your browser. Most browsers display a padlock icon at the bottom right hand corner of the screen: on secure pages the padlock is shown as locked.

Although people often think that security is mainly about protecting your systems from malicious hackers, it is much more comprehensive than that. Security involves guarding against all kinds of threat, whether due to malicious intent, human error or “acts of God”. Simple precautions such as taking regular data backups should not be forgotten.

You may be able to get insurance against certain risks to your website and associated services. Your insurance broker will be able to give you more information.

What is accessibility and why does it matter?



Many people – the proportion has been estimated as high as 1 in 4 – have some form of disability which may impede their use of the web. Website owners have a duty of care to ensure that disabled users are not discriminated against, and may be liable to a fine under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) if a someone makes a justifiable complaint against them which they fail to put right.

What constitutes discrimination?

Under the DDA, if you provide a service you must make “reasonable adjustments” to ensure nothing you do makes it impossible or unreasonably difficult for a disabled person to make use of it. Services that are covered include the provision of information and “the services of any profession or trade”.

Examples of some discriminatory practices on websites include:

- **Requiring the use of a mouse to navigate.** Many forms of motor disability make using a mouse difficult or impossible.
- **Poor presentation of text.** Green text on a yellow background may be hard for some colour-blind people to read. Tiny text can be hard to read for anyone with less than perfect sight, and most over-50-year-olds have some form of sight impairment.
- **Other obstructive practices.** Sites that only work when Javascript is turned on, for example, prevent blind people using screen-reading browsers from making use of them.

Watchfire WebXACT (<http://webxact.watchfire.com/>) is a free online tool which you can use to perform a basic accessibility test of a web page.

The benefits of accessibility

Apart from legal considerations, ensuring your website is accessible is good sense: the steps you need to take are far from onerous, especially when a site is first built. An accessible site also benefits more users than those who are obviously disabled, because accessibility is, in short, about making sure your site works for **everyone**, no matter how they are choosing to browse the web.

Because search engines are effectively blind (and deaf) they also favour accessible sites.

Example: after www.legalandgeneral.com was redesigned for accessibility, the Legal and General reported a **90% increase** in online life insurance sales.

Glossary



This glossary, like the rest of this booklet, is written for a non-technical audience. Consequently some simplifications have had to be made and some finer points have had to be omitted or glossed over. As far as we know there's nothing here that's incorrect, but we are happy to have any errors pointed out to us. We also appreciate suggestions for areas to cover in future editions of the booklet.

Blog

Short for “web log”, a blog is an online journal. While most blogs are the work of private individuals, the corporate blog, about company and industry matters, is an increasingly common phenomenon. Whatever your interest, there is likely to be a blog about it.

Many blogs encourage comments by readers, which makes them a form of **collaboration** software.

Browser

A web browser is a program used to access websites. While Microsoft Internet Explorer is currently the most commonly-used browser, there are many other browser programs. Websites should ideally be **cross-browser compatible**. Currently available browsers include:

- Internet Explorer (www.microsoft.com/windows/ie/)
- Mozilla (www.mozilla.org/products/mozilla1.x/)
- Firefox (www.mozilla.com/firefox/)
- Opera (www.opera.com/)
- Safari (www.apple.com/support/downloads/safari.html)
- Konqueror (www.konqueror.org/)
- Lynx (lynx.isc.org/release/)

Collaboration

Collaboration software aids communication amongst a group of people. On the web this takes many forms including **blogs** and **discussion forums**.

Crawler

(Also robot, bot, spider). A crawler is a software program which follows **links** from one web page to another. Crawlers have a number of purposes (some malicious), but the commonest use is for the production of search engine page indexes.

Cross-browser compatibility

A website is said to be cross-browser compatible when it can be used successfully across a wide range of browsers. Web designers often also have the aim of making their sites **look** the same across browsers but this is not entirely practical, since different browsers and the computer systems they run on have differing settings and capabilities.

Database

A database is a collection of data records held on a computer. A number of computer programs are commonly used for the purpose of working with databases, including Microsoft SQL Server, MySQL and Oracle.

Discussion forum

A discussion forum is an area of a website where individual users can exchange ideas on matters of interest to them. Typically a forum will be dedicated to discussions on a particular range of subjects.

Many company websites include forums for the discussion of the use of their products.

DNS

Domain Name Services (DNS) is a global index which says which **domain name** is associated with which **IP Address**. By using DNS, browsers and other programs can find the internet computer they need to connect to.

Domain name

A domain name identifies a part of the **Internet**. Domain names are made up of a series of parts separated by full stops, eg: amazon.com, bbc.co.uk, www.ebay.de.

The last part of a domain name is called the Top Level Domain, and it either indicates which country the name was registered in (eg .uk for the United Kingdom, .fr for France) or the purpose of the domain (eg. .com for a company, .org for a non-commercial organization).

You don't necessarily have to be located in a country to register a domain there, so the tiny island of Tuvalu, which owns the .tv domain, has become wealthy from television companies wanting memorable names for their sites.

Download

To copy a file from a remote computer to your own. See also **upload**.

Email client

A program which is used to read, compose and manage emails. Most email clients **download** emails from mailboxes using **POP3** and send them using **SMTP**.

Forum

See **Discussion forum**.

FTP

File Transfer Protocol (FTP) is a mechanism used to **download** or **upload** files from one computer to another. To use FTP you'll need an FTP client program such as the popular (and free) Filezilla (filezilla.sourceforge.net/).

Hosting

Hosting is the provision of the computer and network resources needed for a computer system such as a website. In practice this typically takes place in a secure, air-conditioned, building filled with racks of computers all cabled up and connected to the Internet. Most users never actually see the computer which holds their website as they only ever use it remotely.

HTML

HyperText Markup Language (HTML) is the language of the web. Hypertext means that web pages can point to one another through **hyperlinks (links** for short). Markup is the special code used to indicate the structure of a web page, including the presence of links, images, headers, paragraphs, lists, tables and so on.

HTTP

HyperText Transfer Protocol (HTTP) is the protocol used to communicate with web servers. It is used for the **download** and **upload** of all kinds of files, not just web pages, including images, movies and audio recordings.

Hyperlink

Hyperlinks, (or **links** for short) are the way by which one page refers to something else on the web, most commonly another page. Links play a key role in making your site interesting and useful to visitors, by helping them to find what they want.

Internet

The Internet is a global network of computers. Sometimes people ask where the Internet is, but it isn't located in just one single place. There isn't even a centre of control. Rather there are thousands of computers cooperating to make the whole thing work.

IP Address

Each IP (Internet Protocol) address provides a unique identifier for a connection point, such as a computer, on the Internet. IP addresses are commonly written as four numbers separated by dots, eg. “64.233.167.99”. **Domain names** provide an easier-to-remember way to represent an IP address. (“64.233.167.99” belongs to google.com).

Javascript

Javascript is a simple computer language. Its most common use is in webpages where it can provide facilities that are beyond what can be done with **HTML** on its own, such as to show a popup calendar window for selecting a date interactively.

Javascript can greatly enhance the usability of webpages, but sometimes designers make the mistake of creating sites that don't work without it. Since not everyone has Javascript turned on in their browser, this makes these functions inaccessible to those people.

POP3

Post Office Protocol version 3 (POP3) is the most popular **protocol** for use with email mailboxes. It is used for retrieving emails from remote **servers**.

Protocol

A protocol defines a set of rules by which two computers talk to each other. Commonly-used protocols include **HTTP**, **FTP**, **POP3** and **SMTP**.

Ranking

Your website's ranking is how far down the list it appears in the results of a web search. The higher up the list it appears, the better for you. To really count, though, the search has to be for relevant keywords relating to your area of business.

SMTP

Simple Mail Transfer Protocol (SMTP) is used to send mails from your computer to your hosting provider's email server. Note that emails don't usually go **directly** to their destination but instead pass through several intermediate computers en route, rather as traditional mail goes from one sorting office to another.

Spam

Spam is unsolicited, or “junk” email. It is one of the biggest headaches for anyone trying to operate a business with an email address these days. Most spam is either of no value or fraudulent.

Take care when sending out emails not to be perceived as a spammer. Never send unsolicited emails in bulk.

Upload

To upload a file is to copy it from your computer to a remote one.

URL

Uniform Resource Locator (URL) is the correct term for what is popularly called a “web address”. Everything on the web has its own URL.

Website

A website is a collection of web pages which share a common theme or purpose, usually belonging to the same **domain name**.

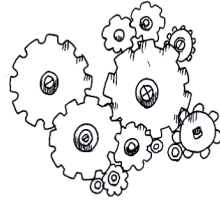
Web server

A web server is a computer which provides access to one or more **websites** through **HTTP**.

Whitelist

A whitelist is a list of email addresses referred to by a **spam** filter. Emails from addresses on the list are automatically treated as not being spam.

Any other questions?



Please ask us!

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Likemind Web Services do web design and consultancy.

We create new sites, makeover old ones, and provide all kinds of help and advice about making the best use of the web for business purposes.

Whether you already have a website or not, talk to us about making **your** business work on the web.

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