

# Do You Have a Website?

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These days, it's impossible to attend any sort of networking or business social function without being asked for a business card (which every professional should have) and, increasingly, especially for an independent entrepreneur, the website URL for his or her company. Not having one can put even a solo practitioner at a definite disadvantage. Moreover, there is very little excuse NOT to have a website, especially for an independent consultant.

Of course, as a consultant or entrepreneur you have (or should have) established a professional sounding email address for business related correspondence, whether it is related to your own name or the name of your company. Even for those consultants who don't actually "sell" anything more than their expertise, a web presence is simply one more piece of a professional image. The following are some suggestions you might wish to keep in mind as you are constructing a website for your company or consulting practice.

- 1) Have an idea in mind of the purpose the website is supposed to serve.  
If it's just to establish an Internet presence, fine. Make sure potential clients learn about what you or your company can do for them and how to get in touch with you. If you have a specialty, describe it. The idea is to inspire a phone call, an email message or a letter of inquiry.
- 2) Remember the KISS principle: Keep It Simple Sarah (or Samuel).  
Sure, flaming logos and streaming video are cool. If they pertain to what you do for a living, definitely, have samples of your work on your website. Otherwise, such features can be a distraction, and too much can make your website look junky, not to mention very slow to load.
- 3) On the other hand, provide visual stimulation to keep visitors' attention.  
There is nothing more boring than blocks and blocks of dense, solid text on a website. Even if you are a brilliant writer, potential clients won't wade through endless online text. Of course, there are exceptions. If you're posting an e-book, ignore this suggestion. Blogs will also require fairly substantial text blocks. But let the website visitor know this upfront.
- 4) Make sure that included extra features are relevant to the website.  
For instance, the Knowledge Empowerment website includes stock art, a newsfeed of headlines pertaining to international social issues, a weekly blog, a weather banner, streaming video of short news clips and downloadable PDF documents. Looking at the list, it seems like a lot of busy elements. However, all these elements are designed to highlight and enhance the website theme of focusing on social issues and emphasizing an international perspective. Even the weather banner includes links to check domestic and international destination weather and potential flight delays.

5) Update the website regularly, and let website visitors know it.

Many website building utilities will include an automatic update tool which can be included in the website which will inform visitors to the site when the content was last updated. It's an easy way to assure visitors and potential clients that your services are readily available! It's not necessary to update every day, but if months go by with no changes to the website, repeat visitors may begin to believe your company is defunct, or worse.

6) Clearly and prominently display contact information.

A personal pet peeve is wading through an entire website in a futile search for hide-and-seek contact information. Although Knowledge Empowerment features a separate contact page, this really isn't necessary, as long as the contact information is clearly displayed. A <mailto:> link is a nice feature, and again, is often included as one of the tools of a website building utility.

7) Watch the ads and pop-ups, and clearly label live links.

It may not be possible to entirely avoid ad content, but if it is not glaring or overbearing, website visitors and potential clients will be much more tolerant. On the Knowledge Empowerment website, the three page hit counters feature links to an online travel service coupon, an auto rental company and an online tech supply store, but the links are so inconspicuous as to be barely perceptible. Also important to note: the counter provider used for the Knowledge Empowerment site, AmazingCounter.com, is free, does not sell personal information and allows the account holder to choose sponsors which are as relevant to the website as possible.

8) Obtain a personal or business domain name for your website.

Services like GoDaddy.com will check the availability of a domain name and provide the domain for a very reasonable price. Once you have completed the construction of your web page, you can migrate the content over to the domain so that potential clients or visitors will enter your easy to remember domain name, rather than the lengthy and often unwieldy actual URL assigned by the hosting site. This process sounds much more complicated than it actually is, and there will probably be step by step instructions provided along with your domain name.

9) Last but certainly not least, include a copyright notice on each page of the website.

You don't want to find yourself as the subject of a plagiarism claim. Even if you provide free downloadable content, it should also include a copyright notice. Sad but true, someone, somewhere may have the bright idea to claim YOUR original content as his or her own. Worse, you may be sued for it. A copyright notice is not foolproof, but it does provide some measure of legal protection. Even if you include non original content such as stock art on your website, the compilation does constitute an original work, and can certainly (and should) bear a copyright notice.

None of this is hard and fast, or even definitive, but simply (hopefully useful) wisdom gained through the first hand experience of mounting a website. Feel free to adapt any or all of these suggestions to suit the your own needs and purposes.

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