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.uk Special Edition

Getting Your Business Online

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Learn:

- Why having an online presence is essential to keep up with your competition
- How to select and buy a domain name
- How to create and build a website that will boost your business



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by Faithe Wempen

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Getting Your Business Online For Dummies®, .uk Special Edition

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Introduction



These days, it seems like every business out there has a website, from car washes to plumbers, antiques dealers to electricians – and for good reason. The Internet is where customers are looking when they need to find a business like yours. If you aren't there, they'll find your competitor instead.

Maybe you've thought about creating a website, but the process seemed intimidating. *Is it expensive? Is it difficult? I don't know where to start!*

I can help with those questions. *Getting Your Business Online For Dummies*, .uk Special Edition, explains what you need to know to get started. This book walks you through the entire process: planning your online presence, choosing and registering a domain name, signing up for hosting, creating a website, and making it easier for your customers to find.

Foolish Assumptions

I start with a few assumptions about you in this book:

- ✔ **You have a small business.** It can be any kind of business, selling any goods or services. By *small*, I mean it's not a big corporation. Maybe you have a single retail store or a few locations; maybe you're a sole proprietor or have a small staff.
- ✔ **Your business is located in the UK.** A lot of the advice in this book is UK-centric.
- ✔ **You don't already have a website.** The advice provided here is all about setting up a website from scratch. If you already have one, you can skip the first few chapters.
- ✔ **You have Internet access.** You'll want to check out other websites and compare pricing on various services, like domain registration and hosting.

Icons Used in This Book

These icons that appear in the book's margins can help you navigate your way through the book. Here is what they mean.



This icon calls out suggestions that help you work more effectively and save time.



Keep these useful pointers in mind as you produce your website. Generally, you'll regularly encounter these things as you're working.



These icons point out moments that can get you pulling out your hair in frustration if you get caught in one.

Where to Go from Here

Are you ready to find out about getting your business online? Just turn the page and start reading. This book won't take long to read. In just an hour or two, you will have the answers to many of your questions.

After completing this book, the next steps depend on your level of technical expertise and the direction you want to go with your website. You may want to

- ✓ Meet with your employees to discuss online possibilities
- ✓ Do more online research to compare prices and services for domain registration and hosting
- ✓ Check out books and articles on small-business websites
- ✓ Contact a professional web developer or consultant

Chapter 1

Why Your Business Needs to Be Online

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In This Chapter

- ▶ Heading online where your customers are
 - ▶ Keeping up with the competition
 - ▶ Publicising your business
 - ▶ Assembling your online presence
 - ▶ Developing brand recognition
 - ▶ Growing revenue with web sales
-

Maybe you have thought about creating an online presence for your business, but the prospect seemed intimidating, the start-up costs seemed steep, or you have more important things to worry about. But have you thought about the costs you are incurring by *not* being online?

Every day, every hour that you aren't actively marketing your business online, your business is falling behind. You're losing customers to another company that is *just like yours* except it has an online presence. Every day and night, customers are searching the web for products and services, finding your competitors' attractive and easy-to-navigate websites, and choosing them over you. Even during the time it takes you to read this guide, you'll have probably lost a potential customer.

Because money is swirling down the drain here, allow me to get right to the point. You need to be online, and the sooner the better. In this chapter, I lay out the benefits of putting a small business online and point out some of the many ways that you can not only recoup your initial investment, but even make a tidy profit.

Creating an Online Presence: Going Where the Customers Are

Advertising is successful when it places itself in the path of the target audience, wherever that may be. And right now, your potential customers are sitting in front of computer screens and searching the web on their smartphones and tablets. So the key question is, how do you insert your business into the customer's line of sight?



An *online presence* in the form of a website can make your business more convenient to customers who are busy with their own lives during your normal business hours. Most small businesses aren't open all the time – nor should they be. An online presence does what the business itself can't always do: be instantly available, all day, every day. Even when your business is closed, people can get information around the clock about it at their convenience. Without an online presence, you miss out on sales opportunities that present themselves when you're not open, whether that's in the middle of the night, on the weekends, or on bank holidays.

A website can list your organisation's locations and hours, describe what you do, show photos of past work, and include a form that people can use to send you email enquiries. If you sell products, it can also allow customers to search your inventory, so they can see what's in stock before they make a trip in-person during business hours. If your website is set up to sell items directly, customers can even purchase items online and have them shipped to their homes. Chapter 6 explains how online selling works and how to create a user-friendly and secure online store.

Some small business owners are initially not sure whether being online is right for them. Their reasoning goes something like this: 'I just sell {fill-in-the-blank}. My business doesn't have anything to do with computers or the Internet'. That argument may have been good 20 years ago, but it doesn't fly today. True enough, the Internet was originally a specialised playground for computer geeks, but not anymore. Now it's a huge international community that almost all of your potential customers participate in.

You would never say, ‘My business doesn’t have anything to do with transportation, so why should I advertise in the Underground?’ The location of the ad has no bearing on what kinds of businesses successfully advertise there. Advertising in the Underground works because the ads appear where lots of people can see them. If people started flying around in jet packs, you can bet that smart advertisers would find a way to place ads in the clouds.

It’s the same with the Internet. The Internet is like a public transport centre, and your online presence is like an ad there. The fact that it’s online is irrelevant. *It’s where the customers are.*

Are you still sceptical? Consider these statistics. Recent surveys have found that 9 out of 10 people search online at least weekly, and 8 out of 10 make online purchases at least monthly. £68.2 billion was spent online in 2014, accounting for 1 in 4 UK purchases. Even if your business is operating mainly offline, recent research shows that 40 per cent of consumers will research a shop online before they visit it, and 80 per cent search for local businesses online. Getting your digital strategy wrong could mean being ignored and losing new business.

Pause a moment to let that sink in. Eighty per cent of your potential customers are looking online before they enter a store, and a lot of them will never actually enter a store, but will end up buying online. Will they find you there, or will they only find your competitors?

Staying Ahead of the Competition

When potential customers search the web for the product or service you sell – and they will – whose name do you want to come up? Yours, of course, preferably before your competitor. However, 58 per cent of UK businesses and 55 per cent of small businesses have zero or very basic digital engagement. That means that you can still steal an advantage on some of your competitors who haven’t made the move to the online world yet – and you can catch up to those who have.

As you begin thinking about creating your online presence, try this experiment: go to www.google.co.uk and type two or three keywords that the average consumer would think of when looking for your product or service. For example, if you own a dry cleaning business, you may try *dry cleaning laundering stains clothing* plus the name of your town or area. See which of your competitors comes up. Then visit each of their websites to see what they have to offer. Think to yourself, 'I can improve on that!' and jot down a few ideas for how yours will be better.

Promoting Your Business a Better Way

Companies that stick to the old methods of advertising like phone books, newspapers, and magazines are finding that they are getting fewer and fewer customers per pound spent these days. That's because customers simply aren't turning to those publications anymore to get information. Instead they are doing web searches using search engines like Google, Bing, and Yahoo!, and finding the companies that have websites. If your business doesn't show up in those results, would-be customers have no idea you even exist.



When examining search results, many consumers start at the top of the list and work downward, so you want your business to appear as close to the top of the list as possible. In Chapter 7, I explain how to use search engine optimisation, or SEO, to help make that happen.

Advertising on the Internet also happens to be a tremendous bargain compared to print and TV advertising. A small business can maintain a simple but effective website, available to the public 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, for just a few hundred pounds a year. Compare that to the hundreds of pounds you'd spend on an advertisement in a single issue of a magazine or daily newspaper, and you can see what good value a website can be.

Putting Together the Right Parts

At a minimum, a business's online presence should consist of the following components. I explain these more in later chapters.



- ✓ **A website with its own domain name:** For example, Smith Dry Cleaning might have `smithcleaning.uk`, which gives a much more professional image than an address that is clearly hosted on someone else's server, like `stores.ebay.co.uk/smithcleaning`.

If your business caters mainly to UK-based consumers, a .uk domain name can help increase consumer confidence. Research shows that 80 per cent of UK Internet users would be more likely to click on a .uk website when browsing a page of search results, and people trust websites far more when they're clearly based in their own country. When consumers see a .uk domain name, they know they can expect currency to be shown in pounds (£), shipping to be calculated on a UK address, and the business to be regulated by UK laws.

- ✓ **Email addresses that use that same domain name:** Customers pay attention not only to the address of your website, but also to your email address. If enquiring about a plumbing job, wouldn't you have more confidence in writing to `owner@masterplumber.uk` than to `masterplumber5182@gmail.com`? The fact that the plumber has made the effort to register his own domain says that he is serious about his business.

Depending on your business type and the amount of time and effort you have to spend on online marketing, you may also consider these:

- ✓ **A customer email database:** If you collect email addresses for current and potential customers, you can send out announcements of specials, promotional offers, and new products. Such email marketing campaigns not only drive more traffic to your website, but also keep your company's name on people's minds, reinforcing brand recognition.

- ✓ **A social media presence:** Creating accounts on various social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest can help you reach additional customers and drive more traffic to your website. For example, say that your bakery is having a 20 per cent off sale for Valentine's Day. You could post the sale on all the social media sites, with a link to a 20 per cent off voucher printable from your website.

Building Your Brand

Getting the consumers to your website is only the first step. You also need to think about how you're going to make them want to stay (and ideally to shop and to buy). Even if a visitor doesn't buy anything, the visit is not for nothing, because every minute someone pays attention to your website (and by extension to your company) is a minute in which you're building goodwill and brand recognition.

A website is an ideal way to showcase a company's strengths and build its image. You want visitors to see your business as competent, professional, high-quality, and dependable, and all those qualities can shine through in a website much more brightly than in a tiny print advertisement. In many cases, the more helpful information you can provide to prospective customers on your website, the better.

Having an attractive, content-rich website can set you apart from your competition. Imagine two businesses of equal reputation, quality, and price. Company A has a robust, professionally designed website that is easy to navigate and contains helpful consumer information and articles about choosing a product or service. Company B has only a single-page affair that provides just its name, location, and hours. A consumer in the market for that product or service is going to spend significantly more time at the Company A site and is going to subconsciously (or consciously) view Company A as more knowledgeable and helpful. More importantly, Company A is going to be more present in the consumer's mind when he later thinks about going out to make a purchase.

Your website can also provide an ideal platform for showcasing what you do best. As a business owner, you're understandably proud of what your company does, whether it's selling

top-quality products or providing exemplary service. Your website can showcase your company's capabilities in a lavish display of pictures. For example, if you design and install custom kitchens, you can set up a photo album of beautiful cabinets and worktops from previous jobs to show potential customers what they can expect. Or, if your company hosts children's parties, you can fill your pages with colourful images of happy children enjoying pony rides, bouncy castles, magicians, and ice cream.

Your website can also be a place to display your professional certifications and awards. Does your company have a top rating with a consumer affairs agency? Has one of your technicians received master-level training to do a certain kind of repair? Let people know on your site.

Increasing Revenue with Web Sales

Your company's website can, over time, become a valuable asset that can command extra money if you were to sell your business or merge it with another. The time and expense you invest in setting up the website and uploading its content, including its inventory lists, photo galleries and relationships to other sites, has monetary value because it contributes to your business's bottom line.



Selling your products and services online can also open up a significant new revenue stream for your company. You can reach customers who otherwise wouldn't buy from you, because of geography, shop hours or any number of other inconveniences that may otherwise stand in their way.

Advertising and marketing are all about placing yourself where customers can see you and making it as easy and appealing as possible for them to do what you want them to do (that is, buy what you're selling). With an easy-to-use, 24/7 online store, and the confidence instilled by your professional website and customer testimonials, why *wouldn't* they want to order chocolates from your online sweet shop at 3 a.m.?

Chapter 2

Creating an Online Presence

In This Chapter

- ▶ Starting with your website
 - ▶ Acquiring email addresses
 - ▶ Spreading the word on social media
 - ▶ Emailing customers
 - ▶ Presenting your business on YouTube
 - ▶ Putting your business info on other sites
-

An online presence is important, so you need to think about what that presence will be. Your company can be online in many different ways and some work much better than others in promoting your business.

This chapter explains several ways of getting your business noticed online and discusses the pros, cons, costs and benefits of each one.

Beginning with Your Website

The first step in getting online is to create a home base where your customers can always find you, and from which you launch and manage your online promotions. That's your

website. Here are some reasons you need a website, if you still aren't totally convinced after reading Chapter 1:

- ✔ **It's what companies do.** Consumers expect a business to have a website, and they look for it when they're trying to get information about you, like your location, hours and inventory. If you don't have a website, you lose out on potential business.
- ✔ **It's cost effective.** Compared to buying advertising space on other sites, having your own website is inexpensive. Your only costs are your domain registration and hosting fees (which I talk about in Chapters 3 and 4).
- ✔ **Your website is under your control.** Promoting your business on other sites is great, but you have no say if someone posts a nasty remark about your business there or if your competitors post an ad right next to yours, undercutting your sale price. Your website is *your* kingdom. You make the rules. If something on your site doesn't match with what you want to display to the world, you just delete it.
- ✔ **You can post as much content as you want.** When you promote your business on other sites, you typically pay according to the amount of information you list, so you have to be brief and concise about what you say. On your own website, you can have as many pages and as much data as you like, all at no extra charge.
- ✔ **It's a home base.** If you do other online promotions, such as on social media, you need a place to refer people to for more information. You can give your telephone number, but most people aren't going to call it. Providing a website address in an easily clickable link drives customers to your site effectively.

The first thing you need to get started with a website is a domain name. Chapter 3 discusses domain names in detail, including how to choose one and how to find out if it's available. Chapter 4 explains how to purchase and register a domain name and find a hosting company. (A *hosting company* is a company that runs an Internet-connected server where your site's files can be stored.)

Sending a Message: Your Email Addresses

When you register a domain name for your website, you also get the right to create as many email addresses as you want that use that same domain name. So, for example, if your domain name is `smithdrycleaners.uk`, you can have any number of options, including `owner@smithdrycleaners.uk`, `customerservice@smithdrycleaners.uk` and so on.

You may be thinking ‘But I already have an email address. I’m already `drycleaner4u.1992@gmail.com`. Why would I want any others?’ There are several reasons.

- ✔ **Your email address should look professional.** An email address based on your website domain name is more professional than an address from someone else’s domain, like Hotmail, Gmail, or Yahoo!. It tells customers that your business is professionally run. It says that you’re Internet-savvy enough to buy a domain name and set up email addresses. You aren’t some fly-by-night start-up operating out of a garage or basement.
- ✔ **The address you want isn’t already taken.** When you sign up for an email address with one of the free big-time email providers, most of the good names are already taken. You probably won’t be able to get `drycleaner@gmail.com`, for example. You’ll end up having to settle for something longer and less memorable. But with your own domain, *all* the possible names are available. It’s a wide-open landscape.
- ✔ **You can have as many addresses as you want.** Even the very basic, no-frills hosting packages come with several email addresses at no extra charge, and you can easily buy more for a small extra fee as needed.



This service probably isn’t applicable to you now, but as your business grows, if you find yourself needing more and more email addresses for your domain, you may consider setting up your own email server. If you come to that point someday, check with your hosting company to see what options are available.



- ✓ **You can redirect.** Suppose you want customers to be able to send email to your employees based on their job function, not their names. If Jenny is your sales manager, and customers send mail to `jenny@smithdrycleaners.uk`, that's great. That is, until Jenny leaves the company or changes job. Then you may have hundreds of customers who still expect sales information from `jenny@smithdrycleaners.uk`. On the other hand, if you tell customers to write to `sales@smithdrycleaners.uk`, you're covered, no matter who is in the job.

The secret to how that works is this: you set up a redirect, so that when any mail is received for `sales@smithdrycleaners.uk`, it automatically redirects to the person in that job. Jenny may hold the job now, but if Mike takes over the role next week, you can make one simple change in the website hosting configuration and all that email will automatically go to Mike.

- ✓ **You can cut down on spam.** Receiving a lot of unwanted commercial email (called *spam*) can waste a significant amount of time. Your inbox clogs up with messages from total strangers trying to sell you things or trick you into revealing personal data that they can exploit. When you put an email address out there to the public, such as on your website, you open up that email address to be harvested (by unscrupulous individuals who make a living visiting websites and copying down email addresses) and sold to marketing companies.

When you control your own email addresses on your own domain, you can cut down on the impact of spam by using different email addresses for different activities. For example, you can have one email address that you use only when filling out forms on other websites (a prime way that an email address gets harvested by marketers). You can have another one that you use to correspond with customers and another that you use to correspond with vendors. If an address starts getting a lot of spam, retire that one and create another.



Another strategy for cutting down on spam from having your email address on your website is to create a contact form on one of your web pages and direct customers to use it to contact you. Customers fill out the form to send you a message to whatever email address you specify. The address doesn't appear on the form, so it makes it a lot harder for your email address to be harvested.

When you sign up for your domain hosting, you can create and configure email addresses as needed. The exact process for doing so depends on your hosting company and its online interface, but it's usually pretty self-explanatory and simple.

Gaining Attention with Social Media

Social media includes sites and services like Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram and so on. Each in its own way is a kind of online playground (or nightclub, if you'd rather think of it in more adult terms) where people congregate to talk to each other. Each service has its own website, although people can also access its content in other ways (such as mobile apps).

A social media presence is optional, but it can be very useful if you have the time for it, and if you want to aggressively work at drumming up new business and staying present in the minds of your existing customers. It basically comes back to the principle in Chapter 1: you need to be where your customers are. The more often they see your name and are reminded of what you offer, the more they remember you when they need your product or service.

Each service also has its own particular flavour and a certain demographic of people among whom it's popular. It pays to understand the demographic of each service, so you can focus your efforts on the ones where the people you want to target are congregated.

If you decide to use social channels for your business here are the main social media sites to use:

- ✓ **Facebook** is by far the most popular and versatile social media site. If you only have time for one social media site, this is the one. On Facebook your business can have its own pages where you post status updates, articles, and pictures and schedule and invite people to events. It's a feature-rich service. Be careful, though, because Facebook also can suck up a lot of time to adequately maintain an active presence there.

- ✓ **Twitter** isn't so much a site as a messaging system, although you can use `Twitter.com` to read messages. You can post updates of up to 140 characters at a time, and those updates are broadcast out to anyone who has subscribed to your feed. The key to Twitter is getting a lot of customers to sign up for your feed, which you would typically do through other social media sites or your website. Twitter doesn't work well in a vacuum.
- ✓ **Instagram** is a photo-sharing application. It's primarily a mobile app, used with smart phones that have cameras. You can take a picture with your phone and send it to Instagram with just a few clicks or taps. Instagram is less commonly used as a business-marketing tool, but if your business is visually oriented, you may consider it. For example, if your business is an art gallery, you can post photos of new pieces as they arrive.
- ✓ **Pinterest** is like a customised bulletin board, and it's mostly used to reshare existing online content. You pin items to your Pinterest board, and then friends can view your board to see what you chose to share. You can also upload your own content, such as photos and articles.
- ✓ **LinkedIn** is a business-oriented site, designed to help professionals network. You can post information about your company, and your employees also can post an individual resume or fact sheet about themselves. Many businesses use LinkedIn to demonstrate the experience and credibility of its employees. It's more about selling people than selling products and services, but generating more confidence in your people can indirectly translate into sales.

Utilising Email Lists to Contact Customers

Unlike social media, which is indirect marketing, you can market to customers directly, in a more active way, by sending them email messages. Sending emails is more likely to get attention than a passive approach, but it only works with the customers you already know about.

You can collect customer email addresses for your mailing list in a variety of ways. For example, you can offer customers a discount if they sign up for your list, or you can include email address as one of the fields customers fill out when placing an order or entering a competition.

Sending email to customers can be a tricky business, because if you overwhelm them with too many messages, they'll get frustrated with you and unsubscribe from your mailings altogether. On the other hand, if you send too few messages, you aren't making the most of the medium. Generally speaking, you should send no more than one message a week – and even that's pushing it.

Each email message you send to a customer should have some clear benefit to it – in other words, some compelling reason why the customer should open it, rather than just deleting it. Some examples of customer benefits include vouchers for discounts or free items with purchase, invitations to special VIP-only sales events, and announcements of new products (preferably offered at a discount when customers mention the email message).

The prospect of addressing an email individually to several hundred recipients may seem daunting, but rest assured that you don't have to go that manual route. Plenty of customer contact applications and services can help you automate the process. You create an initial database of customer email addresses and then you send the email to that database. Each address in the database automatically receives the message. Customers can add and remove themselves from the database as they wish.

Emailing your customers or contacts is called direct marketing and is subject to certain government rules and regulations. You must ensure that you have the permission of the people to email them and give them the option to unsubscribe from your mails. You can find more information here: www.gov.uk/marketing-advertising-law/direct-marketing.

Showing Your Videos on YouTube

Sometimes video is the ideal format for selling your product or service. For example, you can make a video that takes a tour through your art gallery or shows how you make gourmet chocolates from start to finish. YouTube (www.youtube.com) is a huge searchable repository of user-uploaded videos. Anyone can create an account and upload videos to it for free. You can store videos on your own website server, but uploading them to YouTube and then creating a link to the videos on your website is better.

Going the YouTube route has several advantages:

- ✓ Video playback may be smoother and have fewer delays because YouTube's servers are fast and well equipped to handle high volume. Your own server may vary in that regard.
- ✓ YouTube enables you to make several different versions of the clip available for different Internet connection speeds, ranging from crisp high-definition to fuzzy-but-still-basically-viewable.
- ✓ Storing your videos on YouTube may also cut down on the cost of your hosting. As I discuss in Chapter 4, some web hosting services charge more if your site's files take up a lot of space or generate a lot of traffic (called *bandwidth*). Videos are large files, so hosting them somewhere other than your main site can decrease the size and bandwidth of your site.
- ✓ People who search the YouTube site may find your videos, so you don't just have to rely on your own website and social media presence to drive people to watch your videos. If you specify appropriate keywords for your clips, people looking for those keywords may serendipitously discover you.

Listing Your Business on Other Websites

Cross-marketing is a great way of driving more traffic to your website. You can try to place links and descriptions of your site on other relevant sites, so that people who visit that site have the opportunity to find yours.

You may be surprised to find that your business is already listed in multiple online directories. Some directory sites take their information from public records, such as phone books. As the business owner, you may be able to edit your listing to add your website address for free.

Depending on your industry, you may want to pay for inclusion in specialised websites. For example, if you run a bed and breakfast, you may want your place to be included in a bed-and-breakfast directory such as bedandbreakfasts.co.uk. The fees involved in having a listing may be recouped by the extra business you get from the listing. However, don't sign up for Paid-For sites willy-nilly, and be aware of what you're getting for your fees. See if you can test the site for a short period and see what results you get.



If you pay for online advertising on other sites, ask your customers how they found you, so you'll know which sites are paying off and which ones you can drop.

Chapter 3

Grasping Domain Basics

In This Chapter

- ▶ Understanding domain names
- ▶ Comprehending a URL
- ▶ Examining top-level domains and what they inform customers about you
- ▶ Focusing on country and site type
- ▶ Choosing the right domain name
- ▶ Checking on the domain name's availability

Your website needs a domain name, like `mybusiness.uk`. You use that domain name in your advertising and marketing efforts, so you want to make sure you get a good one that represents your business well. This chapter examines what makes a domain name effective (or not), provides some tips for choosing yours and helps you find out whether your first choices are already taken.

Getting the Lowdown on Domain Names

A *domain name* is a unique identifier for a particular website, similar to a mailing address. Just as people who want to physically visit your business rely on your street address to find you, people on the Internet rely on your domain name to find you.

The Internet is a huge, global network based on a communication protocol called TCP/IP (Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol). Computers communicate with one another

using *IP addresses*, which are long strings of numbers. Computers love numbers, so this works out great for them. For people, though . . . not so much.

The trouble with IP addressing is that the numbers are nearly impossible for a human to remember, which is why domain names exist. A domain name is a text-based equivalent of an IP address. When you visit a website, you can either type its domain name or its IP address in your browser (if you happen to know it, but you probably don't, because you have no reason to). Both take you to the same website.

Domain names and IP addresses have no fixed relationship; a domain name system (DNS) server creates the relationship. A *DNS server* translates between IP addresses and domain names. There are DNS servers all over the Internet. When someone types a domain name in a browser, DNS servers are consulted to translate it into its equivalent IP address.

Looking at a URL

When people want to visit a particular page on your website, they type its address into their browser. This address is called a uniform resource locator (URL). Figure 3-1 shows two examples of URLs. Both use the .uk top level domain (TLD), but one of them has 2nd-level domain of .co between the TLD and the company name to provide more information about the company that owns it.

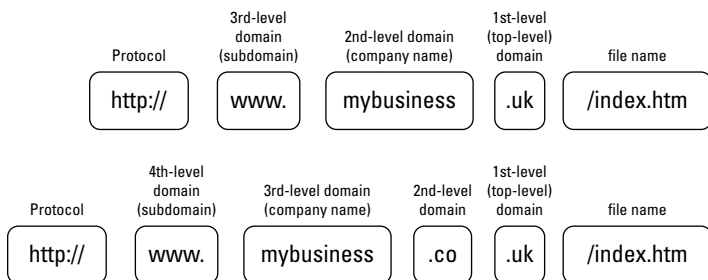


Figure 3-1: Breaking down a URL.

A URL consists of the following:

- ✓ **Protocol:** The *protocol* comes first. For a website, you'll see *http*, which is short for *hypertext transfer protocol*. Sometimes you'll see *https*, which indicates that it's a secure page, for exchanging private, sensitive information such as bank logins. A colon and two forward slashes follow the protocol, as in *http://*. If you don't type a protocol, the browser assumes *http*.
- ✓ **Domain name:** Next comes the *domain name*, which is processed from right to left. The domain name consists of the following:
 - **Top-level domain (TLD):** The rightmost part of the domain name is the TLD, also called the *1st-level domain*, like *.uk*. A TLD can refer to a specific country, to a certain type of business or both. Check out the next section for more details.
 - **2nd-level domain:** The *2nd-level domain* is usually the company name or other moniker that you decide you want to use. In some cases, the 2nd-level domain isn't the specific company name, but rather a subsection of the TLD. For example, in the case of *co.uk*, technically *co* is the 2nd-level domain, which bumps up the specific company name or other moniker to the 3rd level and the subdomain to a 4th level.
 - **3rd-level domain:** Also called the *subdomain*, the 3rd-level domain is usually *www*. If you leave it off, most browsers will fill in *www* for you. Some large companies have different subdomains for the different parts of their web presence, such as *support.mycompany.uk* and *sales.mycompany.uk*, but you probably won't want or need that.

The domain name refers generically to the whole website. To point to a specific page, you add a specific file path and name to the end of the URL. (A forward slash indicates the division between it and the domain name.) For example, a URL for a photo might end with a path like */content/graphics/photo.png*, indicating that the file is stored in a folder called *graphics*, which is in a folder called *content*.



Each website has a default page that displays if the requester doesn't specify a page name; that's why a site's home page loads when you omit the file name from the URL.

Understanding TLDs and What They Say about Your Company

Part of choosing a domain name is choosing the TLD (Top Level Domain) that you want to have. The TLD can help explain to visitors who you are and what you do, so the choice of top-level domain is not a decision to be made lightly.

Generic TLDs (gTLDs) describe the general type of site. The first set of gTLDs, established back in the 1980s, were .com, .org, .net, .edu, .gov, and .mil. Each had its own specific purpose: .com was for businesses, .org for organisations, .net for Internet providers, and .edu for educational institutions. You may have noticed a lot more gTLDs than these, especially in more recent years. Such TLDs as .info and .biz joined the mix first, and many others have been added since then. Some of the gTLDs still have restrictions as to what kinds of entities can use them, such as .edu being only for schools. Others, like .com and .org, have become a free-for-all.

A business-oriented gTLD such as .com or .biz lets people know that the domain is registered to a for-profit business. Both .com and .biz are considered TLDs for business use, although .com is older and more established. If most of your business is international and you have no interest in attracting customers from your home country specifically, a .com TLD may be a good choice – if the one you want happens to be available.

Recently even more gTLDs have become available for business names, city names, sport names, and practically anything else. For the UK market, some of these new gTLDs include .london, .scot, .club, and .wales. Although it might seem interesting to have one of these trendy new gTLDs, keep in mind that they are not proven, and customers do not expect them.

Each sovereign country has its own TLD, known as a *country code TLD (ccTLD)*. Country codes are always two letters, such

as .uk, .au, .jp and .nz. Because countries generally don't come and go, this list is pretty stable, although a couple have been deleted through the years as the former Czechoslovakia and the former Zaire transitioned to become different countries.



A country-code TLD such as .uk lets people know where you're located. If you do quite a bit of business within your own country, a country-specific TLD can be effective in letting people know at a glance that you are 'one of them'. Website visitors from that same country can expect to find prices listed in their own country's currency and for shipping costs to be reasonable because it's not an international shipment.

Some country-based TLDs offer two-part TLDs where the first level is the country code and the second level is a classification that describes the type of site. For example, if you register a domain name with .uk as the TLD, you have four choices:

- ✓ .uk: The standard TLD for sites based in the UK, regardless of type.
- ✓ .co.uk: A specialised TLD for for-profit businesses based in the UK.
- ✓ org.uk: A specialised TLD for charitable or not-for-profit organizations in the UK.
- ✓ .me.uk: A specialised TLD for personal websites based in the UK.

Four other .uk choices are available, but they have restrictions as to who may register them: .sch.uk for schools, .ltd.uk for private limited companies, .plc.uk for public limited companies and .net.uk for UK-based Internet providers.

Also newer to the game are internationalised TLDs, which are top-level domains that use other alphabets such as Arabic, Russian, or Cyrillic, or characters such as Chinese. That's a major step forward from earlier restrictions that limited domain names to letters, digits and hyphens.

Having a hard time deciding? Consider registering multiple domain names. Doing so isn't expensive (about \$5 to get started and then less than \$10 a year after that), so you can register the .co.uk, the .uk and the .com versions if you want. Make one of them your primary domain name and set up the

other ones to redirect to it. With two domain names (or more) you can advertise whichever one makes the most sense for the market segment you're targeting. Brochure designed to attract international customers? Include the .com version. Business cards to be handed out to local customers? Use the .uk one.



Register several domain name variants, including .uk and .co.uk. By doing so, you get maximum exposure and flexibility, plus the peace of mind that nobody is going to come along with a competing site and snap up the ones you didn't take, redirecting them to their own website and confusing your customers. (This actually does happen, and with some regularity, as unscrupulous as it might sound.)

Selecting the Right Domain Name

Once you have chosen your TLD you can think about the rest of your domain name.



Don't delay in registering your domain name(s). A .uk domain name is registered every 20 seconds, on a first-come, first-served basis. Someone may be signing up for your first-choice name even as you're reading this.

Your domain should represent what you're trying to do with your website. As a result, make sure that it's memorable and reflects what you want to do – whether you're selling sweets or wanting to show off your portfolio.



Domain name registrations are inexpensive (usually no more than £5-10 per year), so think out of the box when considering multiple domain names. You may want to register some catchy and memorable domain names that don't necessarily include your company name in them, for use with specific marketing campaigns or target populations. For example, if your chocolate shop specializes in toffees, you may register `toffeebreak.uk` and redirect it to your main site.



Keep it short and sweet. A domain name with a maximum of two or three words makes it more likely that people will spell it correctly, remember it and most importantly pass it on.

When putting together your domain name, remember:

- ✓ You can only use letters, numbers and hyphens.
- ✓ You can't use spaces and symbols.
- ✓ Domain names aren't case-sensitive; they appear in lowercase in browsers.

Even though you're free to publicise a domain name with certain letters capitalised, you can't count on it appearing that way everywhere. Imagine the embarrassment of being the owner of the company that unthinkingly registered `BritScrapMetal.uk`, `ExpertsExchange.org`, `PowergenItalia.it` or `LaDrape.uk`.

Verifying Domain Availability

After you have brainstormed a list of possible domain names you might use, you need to check to ensure that they're available.

Many registrar websites allow you to look up domain names to see if they're available. For .uk domain names, you can start at `www.agreatplacetobe.uk/our-domains/get-a-domain`.

At whatever site you use to search, enter your preferred domain name and press Enter. The search results will show you whether your choice is taken and may also show some alternatives, such as the same 2nd-level domain with different top-level domains. Figure 3-2 shows an example.

If the name you want is taken, you have these options:

- ✓ Shrug it off and pick another name.
- ✓ Pick a variant of that name, such as with a different TLD. If .uk is taken, see if .co.uk is available, and vice versa.
- ✓ Try to contact the current owner and see if he or she may be willing to sell you the name.

The screenshot shows a domain search interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links: OUR DOMAINS, ADVICE, BLOG, PAGES, and EVENTS. On the right of the navigation bar is a button labeled 'FIND A DOMAIN NAME'. Below the navigation bar, the main heading is 'Find your domain name'. Underneath this heading is a prompt: 'Type a domain name to see if it is available. (No spaces and excluding domain extension e.g. .uk)'. A search bar contains the text 'toffeebreak'. Below the search bar is a 'SEARCH' button. The search results are displayed in a list with four entries, each marked with a green checkmark on the left and a 'GET THIS DOMAIN NOW' button with a plus icon on the right:

- toffeebreak.uk
- toffeebreak.co.uk
- toffeebreak.org.uk
- toffeebreak.me.uk

Figure 3-2: Check to see if your choice is available.

For example, say that you're keen on a particular name that's already taken. Pull up the website by entering that domain name in your browser. Is there a website there? Does it appear to be an active site that has been recently updated? Does it look professionally designed? If so, you're probably out of luck; someone is actively using that domain name and probably won't want to sell it.

If the site is there but amateurish or outdated, someone may have bought it and set it up with good intentions but lost interest. Here is someone who may be willing to sell you that domain name for a small fee. After all, it's not making him any money just sitting there.

If you see a Page Not Found error or if a generic page appears for a hosting company, no website exists for that domain anymore. Perhaps the owner stopped paying his hosting fees or never got around to setting up a site.

To contact the owner of a domain for a site that is already running, look for an email or Contact Us link on the site.

To find out who owns a domain for which there is no website or a site with no contact links, you must be a bit more resourceful.

On the site that told you the name was taken, look for a link that takes you to the registrant's contact information. For example, in Figure 3-3 shows who owns `www.nominet.uk`.

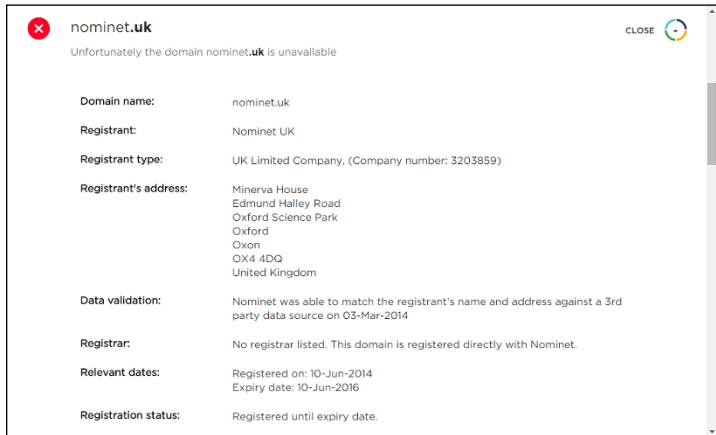


Figure 3-3: Look for the registrant's contact information.

If there's no easy link to follow in the search results, you may need to go to a different site to consult the WHOIS registration database. The WHOIS database shows the contact information of almost every registered domain name (with a few exceptions for special private registrations).

Many sites provide a search function for WHOIS. You can check out the .uk WHOIS at `www.nominet.uk/whois/` or you can visit one of these sites or do your own web search for WHOIS to find others:

✓ `www.whois.net`

✓ `www.whois.com/whois/`

Armed with the WHOIS data, you can make contact with a domain owner to enquire about purchasing the rights to it.

Chapter 4

Buying a Domain Name

In This Chapter

- ▶ Recognising the cast of characters
- ▶ Understanding what happens during the process
- ▶ What a web development company can do for you
- ▶ Looking for a registrar and hosting provider
- ▶ Selecting a hosting package
- ▶ Buying add-ons and options
- ▶ Taking the steps to buy a domain name

Are you ready to start creating your company's web presence? You can go about doing it in several ways, each with its own pros and cons. Will you register your domain(s) and buy hosting from the same company or from different ones? Will you pay for professional web design or have someone in your company set up your site? And how do you know you're getting a good deal? This chapter helps you find the answers to all these questions and more.

Naming the Major Players

When you start looking into setting up a website, you may find all the terms a bit confusing. Here's a quick rundown of the players involved in the process:

- ✓ **Registry:** The organisation that maintains the database of registration data for all domain names of a certain top-level domain. For example, Nominet is that organisation for all .uk domains. The consumer (that's you) doesn't usually need to interact directly with the registry.



- ✓ **Registrar:** An online retailer where you can buy your domain and other online services. A registrar works with the registry organisation on your behalf to register your domain(s).

In this book I casually refer to registering a domain as ‘owning’ it, but you don’t really own it – you rent. When you register a domain, you’re paying for exclusive privileges to use that domain for a period of time. If you don’t renew when the registration period expires, you lose that right and someone else can register it.

- ✓ **Registrant:** The person or organisation registering a domain (that’s you). A domain may be registered to a company, although a specific individual must be listed as an administrative contact.
- ✓ **Hosting company:** The company that hosts your web site – that is, the company that owns and administers the server on which your website files are located. Most hosting companies are also registrars, so those two may be the same company.
- ✓ **Web developer:** The individual or company who creates the website by programming in a coding language called Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) or other related programming languages.
- ✓ **Web builder:** Applications for you to build your own website using templates and widgets. You don’t need to be a programming expert to use these.
- ✓ **Webmaster (or site administrator):** The person responsible for the routine maintenance and upkeep of your website. It doesn’t require as much technical knowledge as the web developer job, so a tech-savvy employee in your company could handle it.



You can combine some of these roles by working with a single service that handles everything. For example, you can find a company that registers your domain, hosts your website, and creates your website for a single fee. You possibly can save money this way, although if you’re a knowledgeable shopper, you may actually be able to buy each component separately and cheaper, depending on the deals you can find.

An Overview of the Process

Here are the steps involved in establishing a domain and setting up a website and the players involved in each step:

- 1. You decide on the domain name and confirm that it's available, as discussed in Chapter 3.**
- 2. You decide how much of the process you want to manage yourself and how much you want to outsource.**
- 3. You find a registrar that enables you to register your domain name(s) at a reasonable price.**
- 4. You find a hosting company that will host your website and provide the extra services you may need at a reasonable price.**
- 5. You shop for a web developer who will create your site, or you decide to create the site using a web builder.**
- 6. After comparison-shopping all the deals, you make your final decisions, pay the fees and off you go.**

These steps provide a basic road map, but you can combine some of the steps by working with a company that offers multiple services. For example, you can combine Steps 3 and 4, and maybe even add Step 5.

Eyeing the Pros and Cons of Web Development Companies

Many web development companies offer a full range of web services, including registering a domain, creating a website, hosting the site and maintaining the site. The easiest way to go, and the one that requires the least technical knowledge, is to buy one of these complete full-service packages.

The pros to using a web development company are that it's easy and removes the worry. You don't have to wonder whether you've configured the settings correctly or uploaded all the right files. If someone calls and says 'your website is down', you have someone you can call who will troubleshoot

the problem. Meanwhile, the cons to using a web development company are that full service can be more expensive, and the quality of website from one developer to another can vary dramatically. You have to shop around not only for price but also for quality.

Shopping for a Registrar

The actual process of registering a domain name is fairly simple. The quality of domain registration doesn't vary; registered is registered, just like married is married. One company doesn't do a more thorough job of registering than another.

Hence, choosing a hosting company first and then allowing the hosting company to complete your domain registration makes sense. Some hosting companies even offer free domain registration with hosting.

Additionally, if you register somewhere other than where you host, you have to go into the bowels of the administration program for your hosting account and manually change some settings to point the domain name to the hosting company's servers. It's not brain surgery, but it can be tricky and intimidating for someone who isn't technical. If you register and host with the same company, the company will take care of that configuration for you.

Given all that, you may wonder why a business would register a domain using a different company than where it hosted. It's primarily a numbers game; you may be able to save a few pounds. For example, you have ten domain names that you want to register, and you have them all redirect to one website. You may get one registration free with hosting, but then you have to pay for the other nine. If the company you'll be using for hosting charges £8 for each additional registration, that's £72 for ten domains. But if you find a company that will register domains for only £3 each, that's £30 for ten registrations.



If you're going to choose a registrar separately from the hosting company, here are some things to think about.



- ✓ **Cost:** Determine whether you can save a significant amount of money by using this registrar, compared with having your hosting company register your domains. If so, investigate whether the cost savings is worth the extra hassle. Don't be penny-wise and pound-foolish; factor in the value of your time.

A registrar may offer extremely low prices for initial registrations of domains, but those registrations may be good for only a year, and renewals may cost ten times or more what you initially paid. You'll have a choice at renewal time: pay the higher rates or go to the trouble of moving your registration to another registrar. When price-shopping for registrations, make sure to ask what the renewal rate will be.

- ✓ **Reliability:** Examine whether this registrar is a reputable company with no consumer complaints against it. If there are problems with the registration, make sure that you can contact the company and get help straightening out the problems. Some registrars actually do the registration; others are resellers who get discounts from larger registrars and pass their registrations through.
- ✓ **Ease of management:** The registrar provides an online system that you log into to manage your domain registration. You probably won't use it except to renew your registration, but when you do have to use it, it can be a painless or painful experience, depending on the interface provided. If the registrar's website isn't professional and easy to navigate as you're shopping, it probably won't be easy to use when managing your registrations later.

Shopping for a Hosting Provider

Your choice of hosting company is important because you'll have an ongoing relationship with them. As you browse the websites of various hosting providers, consider these points:

- ✓ **Reputation:** As with the registrar, make sure that the company is reputable. Search for online reviews of the hosting companies that you're considering to find out what other people's experiences have been.

- ✓ **Affordable prices:** Price is an important consideration; one hosting company may charge much more than another for the same level of service. However, other factors may be even more important. You don't want to go with an unreliable company with constant server problems, even if the company is £10 a month cheaper.
- ✓ **Reliability:** Check to see how often the company's servers experience problems that would result in your website being unavailable. The measurement of such reliability is known as *uptime*. Look for a hosting provider that advertises its uptime percentage. Don't just examine the marketing materials; peruse online reviews for patterns of excessive downtime.
- ✓ **Flexibility and options:** You may sign up for a basic web-hosting package at first and then realize you need more capabilities. Ensure that this company allows you to upgrade your hosting without any penalties or change fees. Check to see the available expansion options and what their prices are.
- ✓ **Responsive tech support:** If you experience problems or need technical help, make sure the hosting company you choose can provide it 24/7. You also should have your choice of contacting support via live online chat, telephone or email.
- ✓ **Online management interface:** The online interface you'll use to manage your hosting account should be easy to understand and easy to navigate. You shouldn't have to hunt high and low for the tools and features you need. Read online reviews at unbiased websites to see how satisfied other customers are with the provider's interface.
- ✓ **Web builder:** Many hosting companies offer easy do-it-yourself tools for creating simple websites with templates. If you want to avoid paying a professional website builder and your site needs are simple, these tools may be worthwhile. However, make sure that if you change hosting companies, you can move your site with you; some site design tools create proprietary-format content that can't be moved to other hosting companies.
- ✓ **Professional site design:** Some hosting companies either have their own website designers or they have trusted contractors they can recommend to help you build your site.

Choosing a Hosting Package

Each hosting provider offers an assortment of different hosting packages from which to choose. As you're looking at providers, you should also be investigating packages and thinking about how they can meet your needs. Figure 4-1 shows an example of a variety of hosting packages offered by the same hosting company.

Linux Business Basic £4.00 /Month <small>(inc VAT)</small> or Ideal package to get you started £40.00 /Year <small>(inc VAT)</small> Perfect for most standard brochure sites including Wordpress, Joomla and many more. 400MB of Disk Space 20GB Monthly Bandwidth 2 Domains Order Now »	Linux Business Standard £7.00 /Month <small>(inc VAT)</small> or Get more space & more domains £80.00 /Year <small>(inc VAT)</small> Whether you have a static site, a CMS or an e-commerce site which uses a bit more space this package is for you. 1GB of Disk Space 60GB Monthly Bandwidth 5 Domains Order Now »
Linux Business Advanced £12.00 /Month <small>(inc VAT)</small> or Lots of Domains & Space £120.00 /Year <small>(inc VAT)</small> With 2GB of disk space this package is aimed at e-commerce or other sites with lots of pictures or other large files. 2GB of Disk Space 150GB Monthly Bandwidth 100 Domains Order Now »	Linux Business 5GB £14.00 /Month <small>(inc VAT)</small> or 5GB of Space £150.00 /Year <small>(inc VAT)</small> With 5GB of disk space this is our biggest standard package, but you can add disk space as and when you like really easily. 5GB of Disk Space 400GB Monthly Bandwidth 100 Domains Order Now »

Figure 4-1: A hosting company offers different packages and prices.

Here are the key factors in a hosting package:

- Linux or Windows:** This choice refers to the operating system on the server on which the site is hosted. Linux hosting is sometimes a little bit less expensive than Windows hosting. If you already know who will be creating and managing your website, ask that company or person which would be better for your site. If he doesn't have a recommendation, go with Linux unless you plan on running Microsoft-specific web features such as MySQL databases (which isn't likely).

- ✓ **Server space:** Your website will be allocated up to a certain amount of disk space for storing your content. Even the economy packages probably include more than enough disk space, such as 100GB.
- ✓ **Bandwidth:** *Bandwidth* refers to the amount of web traffic to and from your website. If you have an extremely successful website (you hope) with thousands of people constantly downloading large files from your site, your bandwidth will be high. Some hosting packages have a bandwidth limit per month and charge extra if you exceed it. A package with unlimited bandwidth is nice, but for most small websites bandwidth isn't an issue because there just won't be that much traffic.
- ✓ **Email addresses:** A hosting package comes with a certain number of free email addresses that use that domain name. The cheapest hosting packages usually provide at least 50 or 100 nowadays, and you can usually purchase an add-on that allows for more if needed.
- ✓ **Number of domains:** Some economy packages may include just one or two domain names in the price. If you want to use more, you should be able to add them separately.

Purchasing Add-Ons and Options

Besides the basics in a hosting package, you may be able to add on more features and capabilities. Here are some examples:

- ✓ **Site backup and restore:** For an additional fee, your website can be securely backed up at certain intervals, so that if you make a mistake editing the site (for example, if you accidentally delete all your files on the server), you can get them back.



This type of extra-charge backup is to save you from your *own* errors, not problems caused by the hosting company. The hosting company backs up each entire server regularly, and in the event that the whole server goes dead, it can put a new server in place and restore from its own full-server backup quickly, without you even knowing about it in most cases.

- ✓ **Dedicated IP:** The IP address is the numeric equivalent for your domain name, as I discuss in Chapter 3. If you have a dynamic IP address (the default), your hosting company may change your IP address at some point. This process will be invisible to you and your customers; the change is made at a technical level. If you need an IP address that will never change for some reason (your web developer can tell you if you do, but you probably don't), you can pay extra for a dedicated (static) IP address.
- ✓ **Extra email addresses:** As I note in the previous section, you can buy the right to have extra email addresses if needed.
- ✓ **SSL certificate:** If you plan to sell things on your website and process the payments online, you need some security. An *SSL certificate* allows your website developer to set up a secure system for customer ordering. Refer to Chapter 6 for more about selling online.

Executing Your Plan: Three Easy Steps

When you have made all the pertinent decisions and you're happy with your plan, it's time to execute! Follow these easy steps:

1. Register your domain name(s).

If you're going with a separate registrar and hosting company, do the registrar portion first and then wait until that part goes through before you take the next step. You'll get an email confirmation when your domain name has been successfully registered, along with some technical information (like DNS server addresses) that you'll need when setting up your hosting.



You'll be asked to create an account with the registrar and the hosting company; make sure you make a note of your username and password and keep them somewhere safe.

2. Sign up for hosting.

If you're registering the domain at the same time as setting up hosting, this is easy: just fill in the blanks in the forms provided, and you'll receive email confirmation when it's ready to go. If your registration is separate from the hosting, check the hosting company's Help system or talk with its tech support staff to find out what to do to link the domain to the hosting account. (If you already have an IT person or web developer lined up, pass this job to him or her.)

3. Create your website.

When your domain is successfully hosted, you're ready to start creating your website. Refer to Chapter 5 for more information.

Chapter 5

Building a Website

In This Chapter

- ▶ Understanding the site-building process
- ▶ Preparing what you want on your site
- ▶ Designing the site
- ▶ Developing the site
- ▶ Making the site live

Your website can be as simple or as fancy as you want – it's completely up to you. As with most things in life, the old saying applies: *fast, cheap, and good: pick any two*. As you make decisions regarding your web presence, you'll have to make trade-offs in timing, budget and quality. A professional-quality, full-featured website is going to be costly and/or take awhile to develop; a single static page is quick and cheap, but customers won't be impressed.

In this chapter, I invite you to think about the features, budget and timing of your website, and who will be involved in making the magic happen.

Detailing the Process When Building a Site

Whether you work with web development professionals or do all the work yourself, you'll go through the same process, which I outline in these steps:

1. State the goal.

Decide who your audience is and what goals you can reasonably hope to accomplish by having a website. Refer to Chapters 1 and 2.

2. Plan the content.

Make a list of all the content you want to include and then prioritise it and see what you can fit into your budget and schedule. See the next section for more details.

3. Design the site.

You (or your designer) create a prototype of the web-site that demonstrates the layout, style and navigation.

4. Develop the site.

You (or your designer) do the work required to build the site, optimise it and test it.

5. Launch the site.

The site goes live at your domain address.

6. Maintain the site.

You (or your team) monitor and edit it as needed, including optimising the site to be more easily found by search engines and changing the design and layout to incorporate user feedback.

Planning Your Site

Figure out what you want to have on your site. That might sound basic, but you should put a lot of thinking into the answer.

The following sections look more closely at determining what content to include, how much money to budget, establishing a schedule, putting together a team and building a map of your site.

Figuring out what to include

Set your expectations as to the size and quality of the site. Determine whether having an elaborate, designed website with 100 pages and your entire product catalogue online is good value for your company. Not everyone needs a big site

with all the bells and whistles. You can easily get carried away when planning an elaborate site with loads of content.

When figuring out which content and features to include, follow these steps:

1. Ask yourself whether the content or feature will help your business enough to compensate for the expense in implementing it.

In other words, determine what the return on investment (ROI) is. Don't fret if you don't have enough information to know yet. A clearer picture will emerge as you go.

2. Examine each proposed feature carefully and ask yourself whether it will:

- Increase brand awareness or drive traffic to your website?
- Improve credibility/reputation?
- Bring customers into the store(s)?
- Increase sales?
- Decrease operating costs?

3. Balance the cost of implementing a particular feature with its benefits.

For example, if you're hiring a web designer, get quotes for a site with or without certain features you're not sure about to find out the initial costs. If you're planning to do the web design work yourself, estimate the worth of your own time.

4. Visit other sites for ideas.

Keep in mind that the nature of the business dictates the need for the different types of content. For example, you may see a consulting company's website with pictures and bios of many of the top-level specialists and technicians. Including this type of information is smart for that company because it's selling the expertise of its employees. But if you run a party supply store, your customers don't care if you have experienced employees; they're more interested in your price on helium balloons.

Establishing a budget

Part of the planning process includes creating a budget for your website. Having a budget keeps you from spending more on the website than you intend.

Your budget will vary, depending on whether you create your own site or you hire a developer:

- ✓ If you plan to create the website yourself, perhaps with a free drag-and-drop web builder tool, then you can plan for your cost to be nothing but your time. Your time, however, can be a significant hidden expense if you're pulled away from your daily duties.
- ✓ Using a web developer isn't cheap, because skilled professionals require many hours of work to complete your site. You can count on spending a minimum of £600 to get a small business website up and running, from the planning stages through implementation. If you want something more complex, such as databases or online sales, the costs rise. Some large businesses pay as much as £60,000 for their sites, plus thousands per month in maintenance.

Check out this article that can help you in estimating costs for various types of websites: www.webdesign.expertmarket.co.uk/how-much-does-website-cost.

Setting a schedule

When planning your website, determining a timetable for the completion of different tasks can help everyone involved in the project stay focused on reaching the end goal – a live website that your customers can use. Go through the six steps at the beginning of this chapter and estimate the amount of time needed for each step.

If you are developing the site yourself, think about how many hours per week you can afford to dedicate to working on this project. If you are going to work with a professional, keep in mind that rush jobs usually cost more.



Your schedule should include not only time for the developer to design the site, but also for you to test the site. After you offer feedback for revisions, the designer will need to edit the work before finalising the project. Aggressive schedules for design and development are going to come at greater expense or quality is going to suffer.

Assembling your team

You also need to figure out who will do the work, including who will plan and develop the website, and who will maintain it on a daily basis.

You may be fortunate enough to already have an employee or two who knows something about web design, or maybe you do yourself. If your site needs are simple, you may be able to manage getting a site up and running without outside help.

However, calculate whether hiring someone else to design your site would be more cost effective. Even if you (or an employee) *can* do the site, it doesn't necessarily follow that you (or that employee) are the best choice. You and your employee may be more valuable doing company business than spending hours fussing over your website's layout.

Web development isn't a licensed profession. Anyone can call himself or herself a web designer with no qualifications whatsoever. And anyone who has ever received a payment for developing a website is technically a professional, even the 14-year-old boy who built a one-page website for his uncle's football team. That's sobering but important knowledge to have when you're hunting for a web developer for your business's site.

If you don't know where to start, check with your hosting company. Many hosting companies have their own teams of experienced and professional web designers, and their prices may be competitive with freelance developers. (Do shop around, though.) Many well-known and reputable companies specialise in affordable small business websites.

If you want to do it on the cheap and hire locally, you can look for candidates for your design job in classified ads, at employment agencies, on referral websites and by asking friends and fellow business owners for recommendations. When you find a likely candidate, be sure to meet with him or her (in person if possible but at least via video chat) and ask to see live examples of his or her work on other sites. Then contact the owners of those sites and ask for a reference.

You also need to think about who will maintain the site after it's up and running. Someone must be responsible for the following:

- ✓ Answering email messages from visitors
- ✓ Making sure the site is working
- ✓ Marketing the site on social media
- ✓ Ensuring the site is optimised to be found by search engines
- ✓ Monitoring message boards if the site has them
- ✓ Processing payments, and picking, packing and shipping the items, if the site has online sales

You can assign many of these duties to existing employees, if they have time. You probably have some people on your staff already who have the basic web savvy needed for these routine maintenance chores. However, just because they *can* do them doesn't necessarily mean it's the best use of their time. If you're a one-person shop, you'll have to determine how much time you have for these duties. Having an outside company or individual maintain your site is also an option.

Creating a site map

The last part of the planning phase is to create a *site map*, which is a list of all the pages you want on the site and their approximate hierarchy. You can create a site map as a graphic, as in Figure 5-1, or as a plain text list with indents to show the hierarchies.

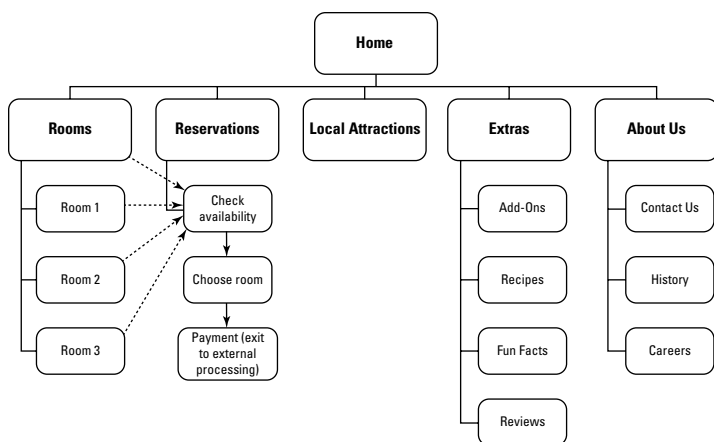


Figure 5-1: A site map for a small bed and breakfast.

Focusing on the Site's Design

Next, you'll need a prototype page that all the pages in the site will be based upon. This prototype is the *design*. It serves as a guide for your developer(s) as he or she digs into the work of creating each page.



Changing a site's design later isn't that difficult; modern web development methods enable you to make a change once and have it flow down to every page in the site automatically. However, you should at least have a basic idea of the design before the development phase begins.

No matter what information you include, the overall impression that visitors get when they visit your website is crucial in their decision to stay and browse or click away. Here are just a few of the many design decisions to think about. You (or your developer) need to be consistent with the following:

- ✓ What overall impression should a visitor get from the design? List a few adjectives to describe it.
- ✓ What is the colour scheme?
- ✓ Is there a graphic in the masthead area across the top of the each page? How tall is it?
- ✓ What fonts are used for headings? For body text?

- ✓ Where is the main navigation bar: at the top or at the left? Or, are there two main navigation bars?
- ✓ Will there be a navigation bar at the bottom of each page?
- ✓ Do any of the navigation bars open submenus when you click or hover over a button on them?
- ✓ How will your website look on a mobile device such as a smart phone or tablet?

Figure 5-2 shows a sample prototype for the site map shown in Figure 5-1.


Sycamore B & B	Rooms	Reservations	Local Attractions	Extras	About Us
 <div style="display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;"> Sycamore B & B – Address – Phone # </div>					
Rooms <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Room 1 – Room 2 – Room 3 Reservations Local Attractions Extras <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Add-ons – Recipes – Fun Facts – Reviews About Us <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Contact Us – History – Careers 	<div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 5px; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px; text-align: center;">Welcome</div> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 5px; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px; text-align: center;">Why we're different</div> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>			<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> SPECIALS <hr/><hr/><hr/><hr/><hr/><hr/> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; text-align: center; margin-top: 20px;"> B & B Association Logo </div>	

Figure 5-2: Sketch out a prototype layout for your site.

Visit other websites for businesses in the same industry as yours and see how their owners answered the preceding questions. Make notes about what you like and dislike about their sites.

You can make all the design decisions yourself, constructing your own prototype page layout, but it is easier (and you will get better results) if you take your notes from the earlier questions and work with a web design professional to create your prototype.

Entering the Development Stage

In this stage, each page of the site is built, and then the pages are linked together to form a cohesive website.

If you use a simple web builder tool from your hosting company, developing the site can be pretty simple. You drag and drop various sections and components onto pages and type your own text (or copy text from word processing documents). It can be labour intensive, especially for someone who doesn't design websites for a living, but it's doable.

If it's large and complex site with user interactivity, development requires a much larger skillset. The developer needs to be able to use programming languages and technologies such as HTML, JavaScript, and VBScript, and to work with server extensions and utilities. This type of development is usually best left to professionals, or at the very least experienced amateurs.

After development has concluded, you will want different people to test the site and give you their impressions, both for style and for usability. Look for broken links, typos, and other errors and make sure the testers can find the key information on your site, such as your contact details, catalogue or price list.

Launching the Site

Launching the site means uploading it to the hosting server, so that when people type your domain into a web browser, your home page appears. Have a little launch party. Serve cake. Invite your customers.

The first few days afterward, sit back and breathe a sigh of relief. But then you'll probably start getting curious about how well the site is doing. How many visitors is it getting per day? Does it show up in search engines yet? How could you make the site easier to find? Chapter 7 can help answer those questions.

Chapter 6

Selling Online

In This Chapter

- ▶ Determining what you can sell online
- ▶ Considering how to sell online
- ▶ Looking at your payment options
- ▶ Keeping your customers safe

In addition to being a marketing and information tool, your website can also make money. Big businesses all know this. If you check out the website of any large retail business, like Marks & Spencer or WHSmith, you'll find an online store. In many cases, the online store even has more merchandise than a physical store and perhaps lower prices.

You have to determine whether e-commerce is right for your small business. It can involve significant upfront time and expense, and not every type of business can benefit enough from online sales to make that effort worthwhile. This chapter helps you weigh the options.

Focusing on What You Can Sell

An important question that you must consider is what you're going to sell online. Think out of the box on this question. Of course, you can sell products from your retail store, but here are some other ideas:

- ✓ **Products related to your service:** For example, if you own a hair salon, you can sell hair-care products.
- ✓ **Products that you don't normally stock in your showroom:** For example, because you don't have enough space.

- ✓ **Discontinued or overstock items:** Rather than letting them languish in your store, put them on clearance online and watch them move.
- ✓ **Services you can deliver online:** They can include coaching or therapy sessions via email or video chat.
- ✓ **Service contracts or extended warranties:** You can offer existing customers a chance to extend their warranties on products you have already sold them, or even products that they might have purchased somewhere else.

Understanding Your Online Selling Options

Not everyone with something to sell online needs a full-out website with e-commerce capabilities. Here are a couple of ways to sell online.

Using an online store service

One basic option is to set up an online store with a site that specialises in helping individuals and small businesses sell online. Here are a few examples:

- ✓ **Etsy** (www.etsy.com) enables individuals to sell hand-made items.
- ✓ **Amazon Marketplace** (www.amazon.co.uk) allows you to offer almost any item for sale that Amazon also sells.
- ✓ **Cafe Press** (www.cafepress.co.uk) makes it easy to create custom-printed shirts, hats and other items.

The start-up cost for this kind of selling is minimal. You don't have to have your own website. If you already do, it doesn't have to have security and e-commerce features, so that greatly simplifies its design and development.

However, this kind of selling is designed for low-volume sales; it can quickly become poor value as your sales increase because you have to pay a commission on each sale.

Furthermore, some customers may not look at such services as serious e-commerce sites and so may be skeptical about buying from you.

Using an auction site

If you're selling items that have an uncertain worth, such as antiques or collectibles, you may have good results using an auction site such as eBay. Suppose you have a shop full of vintage china teapots and cups. You may be able to get \$50 for a set in your shop, but you may have to wait years for the customer who wants it to stroll into your store.

At an auction site you may have to settle for \$25 for a set, but it sells within a week to a customer in another country who would never have come to your shop. Auction sites work on a combination of flat fees and commissions. You may pay a small fee to list an item and then a percentage of the selling price when it sells.

Selling from your own website

Selling directly from your company's website not only looks more professional, but it also can cost less in the long run. Customers can browse products on your site and click a button to add them to a shopping cart. A shopping cart icon appears at the top of each page as they shop. Then when they check out, they're prompted for a payment method and shipping information, all without leaving your site. If a customer has to leave your site to make a purchase, you run the risk that he or she will get distracted and you will lose the sale.

Getting Started with E-commerce

With e-commerce, as with website development itself, you face a trade-off between full-service packages (easy but expensive) and do-it-yourself solutions (cheaper but more complicated). Unless you have a web developer on staff (or an eager

student who is happy to work inexpensively), you may find it cheaper in the long run to go with a full-service e-commerce solution than to pay to have your website modified for sales.

At a minimum, you need the following:

- ✓ A database containing the products or services you're selling and an application that creates catalogue pages out of its entries
- ✓ A way for customers to select products and add them to a shopping cart
- ✓ A way to accept and process customer payments
- ✓ Security measures to safeguard customer payment data

Depending on the solution you choose, all of those things may be rolled together in a single package you purchase (or subscribe to), or you may need to set up each separately (or have your web developer do it for you).

If you purchase a full-service *e-commerce package*, you'll be walked through the process of setting up all those things and connecting them to your website. That's by far the easiest option.

You may think an e-commerce package is the most expensive option, because these services charge monthly fees as well as sales commissions in most cases. However, when you balance those costs against the costs of hiring a web developer to manually turn your website into a secure shopping area, you may find that a pre-made turnkey solution is actually the better way to go.



Businesses with low online sales volumes may find that a turnkey solution is the most economical because setup costs are lower. Businesses with high volume sales can quickly make up the start-up costs involved with do-it-yourself methods.

If you want a bit more control over the look and operation of your online store, or you want to save some money, you might consider using a more bare-bones *shopping cart app* instead of a full-service e-commerce package. A shopping cart app integrates with your existing website, enabling you to

sell items and take payments, without creating an entire sales ecosystem. If you are working with a web developer, he or she will probably have a suggestion as to which shopping cart app to use and what level of service to purchase.

More experienced web developers can save even more money by signing up for an online merchant account that doesn't necessarily include a shopping cart service. They then manually set up the website with their own shopping cart programming that interfaces with the online merchant payment processing account as needed.

Most merchant accounts enable you to accept several different credit cards, including VISA and MasterCard. You may also want to consider accepting PayPal or other online payment types (like Google Wallet and Apple Pay) and including those options on your checkout screen.

Considering Payment Security

Depending on the e-commerce, shopping cart or merchant services account you set up, payment security may already be included. If so, then you have one less thing to worry about.

If payment security isn't included, though, you'll need a way of making your website secure, so that bad guys can't snoop your customers' transactions or steal their credit card numbers. To do this, you'll need to purchase an *SSL (secure sockets layer) certificate*, which you can do via your registrar or hosting provider.

An SSL certificate provides two levels of security:

- ✓ *SSL encryption* allows data to be transmitted securely, so customers can enter credit card information with confidence.
- ✓ *SSL validation* enables customers to verify that your website is legitimate and not a fake version of your site designed to trick customers into revealing their credit card information.



When people are shopping on your online store, the address of your website will begin with `https://` rather than `http://` to indicate that the site is secure. Users may also see a padlock symbol in the address bar, further indicating your site's safety.

Most site owners don't need to understand the details of how SSL works at a technical level. Your web designer, or the technical support staff at the company that built your website, can help you choose the right type of certificate and set it up on your site.

Chapter 7

Seven Ways to Increase Site Traffic

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In This Chapter

- ▶ Creating a mobile version of your site
 - ▶ Relying on usability feedback
 - ▶ Using social media
-

After investing significant thought, time and resources getting your business's website going, you may be disappointed when the world doesn't beat an electronic path to your door on the first day. *Why aren't they coming?*

Well, think about when you first started your business. It took some time to get going, right? Web presence is also like that. It takes awhile for customers to find you. You can speed up that process in some specific ways, though, which I explain in this final chapter.

Getting Usability Feedback

If you ask people why they don't return to a website that they've visited once, many will answer, 'It was annoying' or 'It was difficult to find what I wanted' or 'The text was hard to read'.

As the site owner, you get so familiar with your site that you can't imagine how anyone would have problems using it or finding a certain piece of information on it. You can't assume, however, that other people see it the same way.



To solve this problem, rely on usability testing. Start with your friends and neighbours. Expand to your regular customers. Offer them coupons and specials to get their feedback on your website. Ask questions such as:

- ✓ Is the site attractive? Rate it from 1 to 5. What would make it more attractive?
- ✓ Do you like where the navigation bars are and how they work?
- ✓ Are you able to find everything you want on the site?
- ✓ Is there something you wish were on the site, but you don't see it there?
- ✓ If you were considering buying something from the business, would the website affect your decision? How so?

Having Your Site Indexed in Search Engines

When a new website comes online, search engines don't immediately and automatically find it and index it so that it appears in search results. On Day 1, if someone were to do a search for your business, it probably wouldn't come up.

You can get your site into search engine results databases in two ways:

- ✓ Request that a particular search engine index the site. To do this, you go to that search engine's website, wade through its administrative options until you find the request page and fill out the form there. You do this individually for each search engine.

To submit a site to Google for indexing, go to www.google.com/webmasters/tools/submit-url?continue=/addurl.

✓ Wait until a bot (short for *robot*) visits your site to automatically index it. Bots, also called *spiders*, are applications that continuously crawl the web, going from link to link, looking for new and changed web pages and sending the data back to the search engine database. A bot will automatically index your site within a few weeks of it going live. The process of a bot indexing a site is called *crawling*.

Many things can improve a site's listing in a search engine's database. For example, you can place nondisplaying keywords in the HTML code for a page. Humans don't see these keywords, but the bots do, and they use them to get an idea of the topic(s) on the page.

Because bots automatically create the entries, a person doing effective *search engine optimisation (SEO)* must understand how the bots work, what they look for and what triggers them to mark a particular site with particular keywords. They can then tweak the site to create those optimal conditions.



You can do a certain amount of SEO yourself with basic web development skills, but you may choose instead to hire SEO specialists with an intimate knowledge of the various search engines. An SEO specialist can recommend exactly what to do for optimal placement in search engine results.

Paying for Placement

When someone enters relevant keywords in a search, you want your site to appear within the first few entries in the results. You get a *lot* more traffic that way, because most people start at the top of the results list and work their way down.

SEO can help put you near the top of the list in many cases, but if you aren't getting the placement you want, you may consider *Pay Per Click (PPC)* advertising.

Here's how it works: you sign up for an account with a service like Google AdWords and agree to pay a certain amount for priority placement in search results. For example, you may pay a few pennies every time your site's listing appears in a premium spot in results listings *and* the person viewing the results clicks on your link from that premium spot. You can set limits to avoid going over your budget.

Creating Buzz on Social Media

You can utilise social media as one of the tools in creating your online presence. Social sites like Facebook and Twitter can't substitute for a real website, but they can be effective supplemental tools in driving more traffic to your website.

For example, you can create a Facebook account for your business and entice your customers to "Like" it (by clicking the Like button, which means they're following your activity) by offering them some special or promotion. You can then post your ongoing specials and promotions on your Facebook page (essentially free ads), and those ads will show up in the Facebook feed of whoever has liked your page.



The key to successful social media is to truly engage with your followers, not just throw ads at them. Here are some ideas:

- ✓ Ask people for their feedback on new products or services. Get them to talk back to you.
- ✓ Give customers a promotion that is available only through social media, such as an extra 10 per cent off if they say they saw it online, or if they forward the coupon to others.
- ✓ Create events on Facebook for special promotions or open houses you're doing at your store.
- ✓ Start a contest on social media. For example, you may give a gift certificate or a free item to the person who first correctly answers trivia questions via Twitter.

Chapter 2 contains more information about social media.

Having a Mailing List

Another way to communicate with customers is to send email to them periodically with special deals, coupons and other promotions. Because this is *push advertising* (that is, you pushed into their inboxes; they don't go looking for it), you have to be careful about not annoying or overloading people.

People sign up for your mailing list voluntarily, and they can leave at any time.



To entice people to sign up for your mailing list, give them a discount or free item for doing so. Cross-reference your mailing list, your social media accounts and your website with one another for maximum opportunities.

You can do your own customer mailings by keeping a list of customer email addresses in your email program and sending mail to that list. Doing so is a labour-intensive way to go, because you have to manually manage the mailing list. If someone asks to be added or removed, you have to go into your email program's list and make that change, which can quickly become burdensome.

You can also contract with an email marketing service to handle your email campaigns. These services vary in the level of service and price you pay, but all include some type of automatic subscribe/unsubscribe feature, where customers can manage their own participation without your intervention.



People are often concerned about giving out their email addresses because some websites sell harvested email addresses to third-party marketing companies, who then use them to send unwanted messages. When you ask for an email address, make it clear that you won't share it with anyone.

Improving Accessibility

Many people have some sort of disability that affects the way they use the Internet. Make sure that your site is as accessible as possible to all, so you don't inadvertently exclude potential customers with disabilities.

For example, when people with blindness or visual impairment use a web browser, they often use a narration program that reads what appears on the screen, and they use keyboard shortcuts rather than mouse clicks. The special screen-reading software works much better on some websites than others, and it mostly depends on whether the developer has followed accessibility guidelines when creating the site's layout.

For a basic explanation of web accessibility, including suggestions for design modifications that can make your site more accessible, check out www.w3.org/WAI/intro/accessibility.php.

Could a visually impaired person use your site easily? To find out, use an accessibility checker. Here are a few to try out:

- ✓ <http://validator.w3.org/>
- ✓ <http://wave.webaim.org/>
- ✓ <http://achecker.ca/checker/index.php>
- ✓ www.evaluera.co.uk/

Checking Your Progress

Analytics are analysis tools and statistics that let you know how well your website is performing. You can find out how many visitors come to your site each day, which pages they viewed and in some cases even where the visitors came from.

Some web hosting companies offer analytics as part of the hosting subscription. To access the available analytics, log into your hosting account and poke around in the settings for your account to find the tools. This data may be basic and only provide the *aggregate bandwidth* (that is, the amount of data transferred from the server to requesters).

If you're really serious about analysing your site's performance, you may choose to sign up for a paid analytics service, such as Google Site Analytics. With such services, you place a small JavaScript program on your website, and that program funnels data to the website of the service. You can then log into the service to collect the data whenever you want.

I've got my



“The internet is a huge place, having a **.uk** really helps you stand out from the crowd. It lets people focus in more on your brand name.”

Bianca Miller

 Brand Ambassador and Apprentice 2014 runner up



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Build an online presence for your business that will attract customers and drive sales

Getting Your Business Online For Dummies, .uk Special Edition, explains in plain English the importance of having a professional online presence with a website, email addresses, social media and more to help customers find what they need to know about your organisation. This guide walks you through the steps to get your business online and maximise the opportunities this brings.

- ***The name says it all*** — choose a URL that uniquely identifies your website and explains to visitors who your organisation is and what you do
- ***Your domain name shopping list*** — know your options and what to look for when purchasing a registrar, hosting provider, hosting package, and any add-ons
- ***Put together the pieces*** — plan your website by determining what to include, establishing a budget, setting a schedule, assembling your team, and creating your site map

Faith Wempen, MA, is the author of more than 150 books on computing topics, including *Microsoft Office eLearning Kit For Dummies* and *The PowerPoint 2013 Bible*. She teaches computer and information technology at Purdue University, and her online technology courses have educated more than a quarter of a million students for corporate clients, including CNET and Sony.



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