

Web Design - a short guide

Most companies appreciate the benefits of having a presence on the “world wide web” but do not have the time or understanding to carry out the work to achieve it themselves. However, it can be useful to be familiar with the issues and concepts involved if for no other reason than it makes talking to a web design company more productive.

Domain Names and Hosting

A website is generated from computer code which resides on a host computer connected to the Internet. Visitors to your website find it by entering the address into their web browser (Microsoft Internet Explorer, for example). This is made much simpler by using a logical text-based address such as “www.barclays.co.uk” rather than having to type the “ip address” which would be a long series of numbers. The managing system for the Internet holds (very large!) tables which convert between the text address (this is known as the *domain name*) and the numerical address. This directs the user to the particular host computer where your website is stored.

A domain name can be purchased through Internet-based agencies and would normally take the form of “your company name” (or equally significant name) followed by “.co.uk” or “.com” This is leased to you on a renewable basis and costs about £5 per year for .co.uk or £18 per year for .com. When an application is made, the system checks out whether your choice has already been taken, in which case you will need to think of an alternative as each domain name has to be unique.

After registering your choice of domain name, the next task is to arrange for hosting. Costs vary significantly between providers and are also dependent on the amount of space required and the volume of traffic that the site will generate. I would expect a suitable hosting arrangement to cost about £35 per year. The hosting company will then arrange for your domain name to be “pointed” to your space on the host computer.

Designing the Website

Programming the website is relatively straightforward and can be done either by directly writing the code in an appropriate language or through software packages such as Microsoft FrontPage or Adobe Dreamweaver. Most of the effort is taken up in deciding the content of the website and the artistic element of the design. This is very much a joint effort between client and web designer because there is a limit to how much the web designer can create on his own. Each step requires approval from the client and an active input at the design stage means that the final result is more likely to meet the client’s ideals. How well this two-way process works has a major influence on the time taken at this stage and therefore the cost of the project.

Once the design is completed and the photographs, diagrams and so on are added, the finished website is uploaded to the host computer and at that point it should be accessible by the public.

Search Engines

It is all well and good having your website up and running but potential customers need to know it’s there and be able to find it. Most Internet users make use of search engines, such as Google, to find what they are looking for. If this is going to be successful the search

engines need to “know” about your website and so have to be informed. Equally important, your website needs to be near the top of the list as most surfers won’t bother to research much beyond page 1 or 2 in the search results. Steps can be taken to raise your site’s profile so that search engines regard your site as more important than your competitors’. This however is not an exact science!

An alternative way to raising the profile of your website is to use Google Adwords. This is an inexpensive campaign which displays your advert on the right of the search listings whenever the appropriate search words are entered. If, as an example, you are selling widgets over the counter in Kent, then you could arrange that every time someone enters the search string “widget sales in Kent” into Google your ad will appear. Clicking on your ad takes the potential customer to your website and also incurs your charge to Google. However, there is no charge for your ad appearing but only when “clicked”. This makes Adwords an inexpensive campaign which can be carefully targeted to reach only the most appropriate customers.

Email

Once you have organised your domain name and web hosting you will also be able to set up emails based on the domain name. How much more professional is an email address of sales@jsmith.co.uk than sales.jsmith@btinternet.com!

Web Statistics

Most hosting companies will provide a control panel through which you can access your web statistics. This will tell you how many visitors you have had both daily and monthly and provide a wealth of other statistics.

Updating your Website

Don’t forget that as your business circumstances change, information in your website will become out of date and may need changing.

What to look for when finding a website designer

Does the company put a mark up on domain name registration and hosting fees? (Kingshillweb pass these costs on without adding a mark up).

Do you own your domain name? (Kingshillweb ensures the domain name is registered to you).

Does the web designer offer a free-form design or only a template? (Kingshillweb does not use pre-designed patterns which are intended to improve web designers’ profit margins but mean that your site is identical to many others. Kingshillweb’s design is created specifically for you).

Does the web designer understand your business? (Kingshillweb’s designer has worked in industry and commerce for 35 years).

Will the web designer carry out as much or as little as you require? (Kingshillweb will take on the complete project – including setting up an Adword campaign – or manage only a small element. It’s up to you – you’re the customer!).

Does the web designer offer a “satisfaction guarantee”? (If you don’t like the way the web design is progressing, Kingshillweb will let you opt out of the web design fee).