

## Design Tips



Suppose you already have a website that you've created for a hobby or subject of interest. Now you want to take the next step and start up a small online business. In this tutorial, we'll provide information, guidelines, and useful tips to help you set up a commercial website.

Topics discussed include the following:

- Creating a Web identity
- Identifying your target market
- Defining goals and business needs
- Registering domain names
- Choosing a Web host provider
- Using multiple email accounts
- Optimizing for search engines

## Design Tips

Today, it's very rare to find a business that doesn't have some kind of Web presence. Whether your company is small or large, whether you intend to sell your products or services over the Web or just promote them, a website allows you to reach a much wider audience than is possible using more traditional methods.

Over recent years, setting up a website has become a much less complicated process. Since the first release of WebPlus, the Serif Development team has worked hard to make the program easy to use and accessible to even the novice user. In addition, Web hosting providers offer a wide range of low cost packages to help you get up and running.

However, creating an effective commercial Web presence requires more than just creating, registering, and hosting your site—it involves careful planning. In particular, you need to give some thought to your Web 'identity,' audience, goals, and business needs. We'll take a look at these areas first, and then move on to discuss domain names, Web host providers, and other commercial website considerations.

### Creating a Web identity

Your **Web identity** refers to the way in which your business presents itself, and delivers its message, in printed and online media. The main elements of Web identity include:

- Your logo
- The mood, look, and feel of your site (for example, colour, font style, and layout)
- Any other elements that make up your corporate image (brochures, catalogues, flyers, and so on)
- The way in which you present text and graphical content (do you want to convey a formal, business-like approach or a more casual one?)

While there are no set rules for developing a Web identity, the most successful ones are **simple** and **recognizable, homogenous**—aim for a consistent message throughout your site, and have **staying power** (it is desirable to be modern and current, but not so much so that your Web identity may quickly go out of fashion).

The following WebPlus templates present very different Web identities.

## Example 1

A clean and simple, no-frills layout with a clear message. We immediately know what this website is selling, and how we can buy it.

The 'more info' links keep the page content to a minimum, but make it easy for visitors to find additional information if required.



## Example 2

A fun, modern, trendy, site that offers a wide range of products, services, links, and interactive content.

Websites like this one can be confusing so it's important to have a structured layout. Here, the columnar layout and simple colour scheme give order and consistency to an otherwise busy site.



You can purchase additional themed packs of templates. For details, see the Serif website.

## Getting the message across

Your website should help people understand what product or service you provide, and why they should buy it. Put yourself in the position of a first-time visitor to the site and ask yourself the following questions:

- Who is the company or person behind the site?
- What are they trying to promote or sell?
- Are they offering me something that their competitors aren't?
- Is the subject of each Web page clear?
- If applicable, is it easy to buy the product or service?
- Is it easy to navigate the pages of the site?
- Is it clear where I should go to find more information?

## Using colour and special effects

The rule of thumb is 'keep it simple.'

Pick a simple colour scheme and use it consistently throughout your site. If you don't know where to start, take a look at other websites to get a feel for what works and what doesn't.

For a detailed discussion of colour schemes, see the "Getting Started: Colour Schemes" tutorial.

Avoid adding too many special effects as they can distract viewers from the content of the site. (Note also that files containing spinning or flashing effects tend to be very large and can take a while to download, which can be irritating for visitors.)



WebPlus provides a range of predesigned colour schemes, which you can apply to your site.

### To select a colour scheme:

- 1 Click the **Swatches** tab.  
At the bottom of the tab, the five main colours in the current scheme appear as numbered samples, from 1 to 5. You'll also see additional samples labelled **H** (Hyperlink), **F** (Followed hyperlink), **A** (Active hyperlink), **R** (Rollover hyperlink), **B** (Background colour), and **O** (On-page colour), which apply to hyperlink, background, and page colours.
  - 2 On the Page context toolbar, click the **Colour Scheme Designer** button to open the **Colour Scheme Designer**.
  - 3 Click the **Colour Schemes** tab.
  - 4 Select a different colour scheme from the list, click **Load** and then click **OK**. Any regions in the site that have been assigned one of the colour scheme numbers are updated with the corresponding colour from the new scheme.
- For more information, see online Help.

## Identifying your target market

If you have an established business, you should already be very familiar with your customer base and target market.

If you're just starting out, you'll need to establish not only who your potential customers are, but why they should choose your product rather than your competitors' (for example, you may be offering a unique feature, a personalized service, or free delivery).

The more you know about your customers and their needs, the more successfully you'll be able to market your product to them.

Similarly, you should have a thorough knowledge of your competitors and the products and services they are offering. You can use this information to help you market, develop, and improve your product, and ensure you continue to respond quickly to market needs and trends.

## Defining goals and business needs

If you've put together a solid business plan, you should have realistic strategies and objectives for business development and growth. You'll also be aware of your business requirements.

Your business requirements may comprise staffing, premises, IT, and so on, but should also include website requirements such as Web space and transfer bandwidth requirements, security, E-Commerce shopping cart provider, payment options, email accounts, and so on.

With this information to hand, you'll be better equipped to design and implement your site, and also choose the most suitable Web host provider (we'll discuss this later).



The UK government's Business Link website at

<http://www.businesslink.gov.uk> is a great resource—both for those who already have their online business up and running, and for those who are just starting out.

You'll find a wealth of information and advice, including topics such as customer needs assessment; business plan preparation; sales and marketing strategies; tax considerations; IT and E-Commerce; as well as links to local trade associations, market research reports, and case studies.

## Registering domain names

Simply put, your domain name serves as the unique identifier or ‘address’ of your website on the Internet.

For example, in Serif’s website address **http://www.serif.com/store/index.asp** the domain name is **serif.com**.

It’s very easy and inexpensive to register a domain name, and there are numerous **domain name registrars** that offer this service.

In most cases, a domain name registrar will charge a registry fee for one year. This means that you ‘own’ your domain name for one year, and must renew your subscription annually to maintain ownership. At the end of this period, you can choose to renew your registration with the same domain name registrar, transfer the domain name to a different registrar, or cancel the registration—if you choose the latter then your domain name becomes available for others to adopt.

To prevent other businesses from registering the same domain name with a different extension, consider registering multiple domain name extensions—for example, mySite.com, mySite.net, and so on. Don’t worry, you don’t have to have a different website for each extension, you can simply have them all mapped to the same address (if you don’t believe us, try typing “http://www.serif.co.uk” into your Web browser!). Most domain name registrars offer this service (called **DNS mapping**) for a small cost.

## Choosing a Web host provider

Simply put, Web host providers allow you to lease space on their **Web server(s)**—complex computers that require specialist server software and technical expertise, and are connected to the Internet 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The Web server stores all of the files necessary to display the pages of your website.

While it’s relatively easy to find inexpensive Web hosting, each provider will offer a variety of different packages, and each package will differ in the quality of features and technical support offered. Choosing the best package for your site can be a daunting task; however, if you’ve



All domain name registrations are stored in a central domain name registry, which is also known as the Network Information Centre (NIC).

When you register a domain name, the domain name registrar first checks the availability of the name by conducting a search of the NIC.

determined your business needs, you'll have a good idea of the features you're looking for and the level of support you require.

One of the main decisions you need to make is whether you want **shared** (also called **virtual**), **dedicated**, or **managed** hosting.

- In **shared hosting**, you share the services of the Web host with other websites. If you're working with a limited budget, shared hosting is the best option.

There are some risks and limitations to shared hosting (described below), however, and you need to decide whether or not these are important to you.

- In **dedicated hosting**, the Web server, related software, and Internet connection are reserved for your website only. In addition, you control the configuration and day-to-day management of the server and software. Dedicated hosting is generally preferred by companies who anticipate a high volume of Web traffic, and who require total control. For obvious reasons, this option is more expensive than shared hosting.
- **Managed hosting** offers a dedicated Web server and Internet connection along with some of the services included in the shared-host packages. Consider this solution if you need an exclusive Web server, but don't want to get involved in server/software configuration, administration, security, and so on. Managed Web host providers usually offer a range of features, which you can mix and match to suit your needs. This type of Web hosting is the most expensive option, but can be cost-effective if you anticipate high-volume Web traffic and are looking for a customized solution with good customer service and support.



If you already have an Internet Service Provider, you will probably have free space allocated for a personal website.

If your website is a relatively small one, and you don't need a lot of transfer bandwidth, you can choose to direct your domain name to this free Web space. However, if you are concerned about space and bandwidth restrictions, then it's probably a good idea to pay for the services of a Web host provider.

For information about accessing your free Web space, see the "Getting Started: Accessing Your Free Web Space" tutorial.

Each of these solutions meets different business needs and provides varying levels of control and service. The difference in cost can be considerable, however, so it might take you a while to find the right balance between what you need and how much you are willing to pay.

When choosing a Web host provider for your site, the key features to consider include the following:

- Disk space
- Connection speed and transfer bandwidth
- Stability and security
- Flexibility
- Uptime
- Customer service and support

### Disk space

Many Web host providers charge a flat rate for a fixed amount of **disk space** (also known as **Web space**). You can then purchase additional space if you require it.



Verify which features are included in the 'standard' Web space assigned to you. Some providers charge extra for email accounts, for example.

If your site is fairly small with limited graphics and video content, you'll probably find that 50 megabytes (MB) of disk space is more than sufficient (and in this case, your free Web space may well be sufficient). If your site is particularly rich in graphics and video content, or contains a lot of file downloads, then you'll need more space—consider 100 to 300 MB.

### To determine the total size of your website

- In Windows Explorer, right click on the folder containing your website and click **Properties**.

The **Properties** dialog displays the total size of the site, and also how many files and folders it comprises.

### Connection speed and transfer bandwidth

These terms can be confusing, especially to the novice website designer, but they all relate to your customers' experience as they interact with the pages of your website.

- The term **connection speed** is generally used to refer to the amount of data your viewers can access on your site, in a given time period. The faster the connection speed, the faster your viewers will be able to

click through pages, view images and video clips, download files, and so on.

If you choose shared hosting, your customers will be competing with customers of the co-hosted sites for access to the Web server. During peak periods, this may result in slower response times, or even “Web Site Not Responding” messages.

- **Transfer bandwidth** refers to the amount of data that your viewers can download over a certain time period—this amount may be fixed and limited, as specified in the contract between you and your Web host provider. Thus, the transfer bandwidth you will need is directly related to the number of visitors you anticipate, and the size and content of your website.

If your site is mainly comprised of text and is light on graphics, you'll need less transfer bandwidth. Graphics, video, and other multimedia files use up more transfer bandwidth, and some providers may limit downloads for these file

types. For example, they may restrict image and video file downloads to 50% of your site's allotted transfer bandwidth.

You can usually exceed your transfer bandwidth limit, but your provider will charge you for this.

As a rule, dedicated and managed Web host packages have higher transfer bandwidth allowances—worth keeping in mind if you have a particularly large or dynamic website, or anticipate extremely high volumes of traffic.

### To calculate your transfer bandwidth requirements

- Use the following formula to calculate an approximate transfer bandwidth for your site:

*Average page size (including graphics and multimedia files) x number of page views x 30 days*



The average website requires between 100 and 1500 MB of transfer bandwidth.

Most Web host provider packages include tools to help you monitor your website's transfer bandwidth usage.

In WebPlus, the **Resource Manager** includes tools to help you determine the size of your Web pages, and track down items that might make them too large.

For example, suppose you have an average page size of 12 KB, plus 50 KB of graphics, and you anticipate that every day, 20 people will visit your site and will view an average of 5 pages per visit. Your formula would look like this:

$$(12 + 50) \times (20 \times 5) \times 30$$

$62 \times 100 \times 30 = 186,000$  kilobytes (or 186 MB of transfer bandwidth each month)

## Stability and security

It's important that you research the Web hosts you are interested in.

Ask friends and colleagues for recommendations, read reviews in magazines and online. You should be confident that the provider you choose is successful and not likely to go out of business. Check that they have been in operation for at least a few years—you can usually find this information on the 'About' page of the provider's website.

A reliable Web host provider with a good track record will also be committed to maintaining and upgrading the hardware and software required to run their operation successfully. They should also be able to answer questions about how they secure their Web servers, and how often they upgrade firewall and security software.

## Flexibility

Your website may initially be small, but what if your product line expands, your customer base grows, and business explodes? If you started off with a 'beginner' hosting package, it's likely that this no longer meet your needs.

Your provider's services should be flexible and scalable so that they can change and expand along with your business. Most shared providers allow you try a variety of features, without forcing you to commit for a long period. You can then adjust and upgrade as required.

## Uptime

The term **uptime** refers to the percentage of time that a website is 'available' for visitors to access. Ideally, we'd all like our websites to be accessible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, but from time to time, all Web host providers will need to take their Web servers offline to conduct routine maintenance and upgrades. Many providers boast 99% uptime, but good ones will back this up with uptime records, and will include an uptime guarantee in your contract (they may also offer a refund or price reduction if this is not met).

## Customer service and technical support

When you sign up with a Web host provider, you're buying more than just space and bandwidth for your website, you're buying a service. You want to be sure that if you need help, you can get it quickly and easily, for a reasonable cost.

Generally, the more support you require, the higher the price. Most shared and managed providers offer round-the-clock support. Some hosts advertise free customer support, but what exactly does this mean? Ask about hours of operation and the type of support that is provided. For example, is it via email only or telephone? If by telephone, at what rate? What's the average waiting time?

## Setting up email accounts

Most Web host provider packages will provide a certain number of mailboxes and email 'aliases' for your website. For example, most companies use different email addresses for their sales, customer service, and technical support departments.

Even if you are a very small company, we suggest you do the same as multiple email addresses will add credibility to your business.

## Optimizing for search engines

You've spent time and money developing an enticing website, but that doesn't necessarily mean that you'll attract visitors.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) refers to the process of increasing the volume of traffic to a website by improving its ranking in browser search engine results.

This is an important subject, and we've devoted an entire tutorial to it! See "Optimizing Your Site for Search Engines" for tips on a wide range of SEO strategies including meta tags, keywords, page properties, ALT text and TITLE tags, search engine submissions, and more.

In this document, we've highlighted the main steps involved in setting up a website for commercial use. We hope you've found it useful and informative, and are now feeling better equipped to get your own business up and running on the Web.