

The internet and your new business

The essentials in using the internet and website successfully in any business, written from the perspective of a new business, and formation of a “work-flow” thought process and checklist for ensuring you maximise your chances.

What this document covers?

Setting up your company

- Domain names
- PC hardware
- PC software
- Internet connections
- Email setup / hosting
- Other devices
- Security / antivirus / backup
- Accounting
- IT Issues / streamlining and timesaving

Planning the website project

- Your aims and mission
- Your competitors
- Knowing your audience
- Website requirements (sales, information, staff resources)
- E-commerce considerations (payment gateways / banks)
- Finances / conversion ratios

Expansion considerations

- Growing into the future / scalability
- Using staff to maintain the website

The website

- What do you need / briefing document
- Who will design/build it (DIY, Professional or hybrid)
- Website and associated costs
- Website design stage
- Philosophy and culture of design
- User testing
- Monitoring usage statistics
- Feedback form

Advertising / promotion / marketing

- Email marketing
- Google AdWords and other search engines
- Off-line advertising
- Buying and selling on eBay

Setting up your company

Domain names

If you are setting up a new company and plan to have a website, you will need to make sure that it's available as a domain name. A .co.uk is fine for a primarily UK based business. A .com is slightly more expensive, but is suitable for international brands, however most of the good names have gone!

PC hardware

A PC will allow you to receive and send email, browse websites, write and print letters, keep records of your accounts, keep a calendar, contacts database and to-do list amongst many other work and leisure related activities. It's not as expensive as you might think to get a really good system!

PC software

Software can actually be a more costly area - depending on what you want to do. Some Higher-end photo editing and Desktop Publishing software is very expensive. E-Commerce software can also be pricey as is the Professional version of Microsoft Office.

Internet connections (ISP's)

A Broadband connection to the Internet is now only slightly costlier than slow dial-up (if you include telephone costs of dial-up), so if you can get it in your area, it's highly advisable. There are certain issues that arise from using Broadband, which are described below, but the benefits far outweigh the extra security setup required with speeds up to 50 times faster or more.

Broadband is connected all the time, and you pay a flat rate for the month regardless of how much you use it (unless you are a very heavy user) which makes it ideal for internet sharing. To do this you can purchase a router, which will allow several users to connect at the

Top tips for this section

- For searching / buying domain names
www.123reg.co.uk
www.freeparking.co.uk
- For PC hardware
Any PC World, Staples or Waitrose store for emergencies, but cheaper are:
www.novatech.co.uk
www.dabs.com
www.acernotebooks.co.uk
www.dell.co.uk
www.hp.com
- For PC Software
www.download.com (free and trial versions)
www.amazon.co.uk
www.inmac.co.uk
- Internet connections
www.broadbandchecker.co.uk
www.ispreview.co.uk
www.adslguide.org.uk/isps/compare.asp

DesignerMark

42 York Road Salisbury Wiltshire SP2 7AT

01722 410060 or 07810 534640

mark@designermark.biz

same time from different PC's on the same network. The network can be cabled or wireless. Most laptops now have wireless technology built. A card to convert a desktop PC to have wireless capability is also very cheap.

Broadband usually requires no physical box being put into your house as it works over a normal BT line. You can check whether you can get Broadband on your phone number using the www.broadbandchecker.co.uk service.

There are many hundreds of Internet Service Providers (ISP's) to choose from, so I have given just a very brief selection of what I consider to be reliable services at the time of writing.

Email setup / hosting

You will need to have your website "hosted". This is the process of storing your web pages on a machine that is permanently connected to the back-bone of the internet. This service ranges from free basic hosting (which usually has the drawback of having the hosting companies advertising on your screens!) through to shared hosting (around £150 per year) and all the way up to dedicated hosting which can cost several thousand pounds a year.

Hosting will usually include unlimited email addresses for you to use.

Other devices

Once you have a PC there is no end to the amount of things you can do with it! For instance you can plan routes throughout the entire world (or just to your next meeting!) using Microsoft AutoRoute. You can print full colour photographs from a digital camera. Use a Personal Digital Assistant (PDA) so that you have always got your contact, calendar, email and important documents wherever you go. Scan documents and covert the text so that you can edit it (OCR - Optical Character Recognition). Do some video editing and create DVD's or music CD's.

Security / anti-virus

If you have broadband (even if you don't!) you will need certain software and/or hardware to protect your network and your private data. The 2 most important things are a Firewall and Anti-virus software. There are many variants of each, ranging from free software through more robust software that you need to pay for right up to a dual layer system whereby you have a "hardware firewall" (many Broadband Routers have this built-in) and anti-virus software installed locally AND an on-line anti-virus package which your hosting company should be able to provide.

The anti-virus software needs to be kept up to date and this is usually automatic (particularly if you have Broadband -s as it will update in the back ground).

Accounting

An essential part to get right as soon as possible in running your business is an accounting system. There are many software packages available and you are probably best off talking to your accountant before deciding on one to buy. I have given a few links for examples.

IT Issues / streamlining and timesaving

There is a lot to know when your IT needs start getting more complex. It's often not really worth trying to learn EVERYTHING yourself, therefore good to get a certain knowledge then learn from a expert when things go wrong. See what you can take on board and learn slowly.

Top tips for this section

- Internet Service Providers
www.nildram.net
www.tiscali.co.uk
www.ntlworld.com
www.blueyonder.co.uk
www.pipex.com
www.demon.co.uk
www.waitrose.com
www.onetel.com
www.zen.co.uk
www.zetnet.co.uk
- Hosting
www.cwcs.co.uk
top quality

www.easyspace.com
free but not very good!

www.rackspace.co.uk
dedicated servers
- Other devices
www.tomshardware.com
<http://reviews-zdnet.com> (reviews)
www.pocketgpsworld.com
www.pdahut.com
www.globalpositioningsystems.co.uk
www.pixmania.com
- Security / antivirus
www.symantec.com
www.avg.com
<http://nod32.softwaresecuritysolution.com/>
- Accounting
www.quickbooks.com
www.sage.com
- IT Issues
www.it-sense.net

DesignerMark

42 York Road Salisbury Wiltshire SP2 7AT
01722 410060 or 07810 534640

mark@designermark.biz

Planning the website project

Your aims and mission

Be clear about what you want to do on your website. Have a very clear **focussed message** and “**call to action**”. There are so many sites out there now that your Unique Selling Point has to clearly stand out.

Your competitors

Run searches on **Google**, **Yahoo** and in your local area for similar offerings to yours. Learn from their mistakes!

Use the **Google Toolbar** to see how popular your competitors' sites are, the toolbar will give you a rank rating if you set it up with the advanced options turned on. You can download this from Google.

Knowing your audience

Who are you aiming at? How do you expect them to be using the web? How experienced will they be, what sort of computer systems are they likely to be using (i.e. big screens, internet café)? What sort of ‘**atmosphere**’ will work best on the site?

This last question is, on balance, the most important to get right, because if the site does not work for your visitors, then everything else is a waste of time.

Website requirements (sales, information, staff resources relief)

What features do you need to incorporate on your site, both for you and your visitors. Do you need to **track users' activities**? Do they need to be able to **send you information**? Do they need to be able to ask for **information** or **download** it straight away? Do people need to be able to **purchase online** (securely)? Do you want to be able to send **periodic emails** to interested visitors? Do you want to be able to **edit** your own site (add pages, change text/pictures etc)? Do you need a **search facility** because of the amount or type of information available to you?

E-commerce considerations (payment gateways / banks)

If you need to sell products, services or information to your visitors (or a subscription/members area) then you need to consider how you will take those payments. The best way is to have a secure service handle the card transactions for you live on request, although obviously there are associated costs to you. You need an **Internet Merchant Account** with a bank and a **Payment Gateway** configured to your website. Some examples of Payment Gateway's are given to the right, but you are best off starting by talking to your bank to see which services they work with.

The simplest billing system (and cheapest option for the average site) is www.protx.com. They charge £20 per month for up to 1000 transactions per quarter. If you go over 1000 transactions per month they are 10p each.

There are cheaper alternatives but they are comparatively unprofessional looking.

Finances / conversion ratios

Of course, to go down the e-commerce route you will need to work out if it's financially viable. Generally these days you have to pay for links in to your site. These will cost varying amounts of money on average and you will have other forms of advertising and promotion working for you too. A “good” national average Conversion Ratio (visitors : sales) is 2%. Amazon are exceptional (having the model e-commerce site with every feature imaginable!) gets around 12-20% - well short of high-street shops which get around 40-60%. A bad site however will easily stay at 0% forever!!

Top tips for this section

- Useful search engines
www.google.co.uk
www.yahoo.co.uk (use the directory)
www.google.co.uk/toolbar
- Payment gateway calculator
http://www.erolonline.co.uk/support/payment_calculator.asp
- Payment gateways
www.protx.com
www.worldpay.com
www.secpay.com
www.2checkout.com
www.paypal.com

DesignerMark

42 York Road Salisbury Wiltshire SP2 7AT

01722 410060 or 07810 534640

mark@designermark.biz

Expansion considerations

Growing into the future / scalability

It is very important that whatever setup you choose (PC's / website etc) is ready to cater for unforeseen future needs. The website in particular should change with you, and be a help, not a hindrance.

Using staff to maintain the website

Depending on your business, and how central a part you expect the website to be, you may consider having full time staff working on maintaining the sites content and search engine presence, handling email communication and researching the competition.

The website

What do you need

The planning stage should have provided enough information to form a requirement brief for the website. This will allow you to make decisions according to what you need, not just what would be nice.

The most important thing for your website is that it works well in various browsers and performs well in search engines.

Who will design/build it (DIY, Pro or hybrid)

Depending on you requirements, the best solution may well be to have a site designed to allow you to edit the contents. There is very good software available for this such as:-

Macromedia Contribute

A very easy to use and affordable package giving you total power over editing text, images, links and creating or deleting pages. If you can use Word, then this will come naturally to you.

EROL

E-commerce software allowing you to maintain a powerful on-line store very easily.

Both of these packages are very affordable and flexible and easy to deploy because they require no back-end setup.

All websites are basically HTML language files. There are many new and advanced technologies which are variants of this. You need to make sure that whoever develops the site understands your needs and how you are going to carry on with the site. It's also essential to know that you could, if the need arises, move your website away from the developers to another host and company with no technical problems, as often there is special back-end software that is so customised that it would be very costly to move.

Website and associated costs

This topic very much depends upon what level of detail you need and how much you want to do in the future. Time can be saved through good planning and a well explained brief. For e-commerce sites a considerable amount of time can be saved if you were prepared to enter the majority of products in yourself.

Website design stage

This stage is not essential (based upon a structured brief again!) but can be important dependent on your subject matter or current branding.

Philosophy and culture of design

Top tips for this section

- Content management software
www.macromedia.com/contribute
www.erol.co.uk (E-commerce)
www.mals-e.com (free e-commerce)
- Hosting
www.cwcs.co.uk
www.easyspace.com (free but not very good!)
www.rackspace.co.uk
- Other devices
www.tomshardware.com
<http://reviews-zdnet.com> (reviews)
www.pocketgpsworld.com
www.pdahut.com
www.globalpositioningsystems.co.uk
www.pixmania.com
- Security / antivirus
www.symantec.com
www.avg.com
<http://nod32.softwaresecuritysolutions.com/>
- Accounting
www.quickbooks.com
www.sage.com
- IT Issues
www.it-sense.net

DesignerMark

42 York Road Salisbury Wiltshire SP2 7AT

01722 410060 or 07810 534640

mark@designermark.biz

The way people are using the internet is always changing, both because of the technology and general experience levels going up and attention levels coming down. Your website should be geared to working best for the type of information you have and the type of customers/visitors you are expecting.

A recent trend is toward very minimal; and simple sites. A good side effect of this is that they often load quicker (if built correctly!) and are easy to navigate due to less clutter.

User testing

It is important to know how your site is being used. This can be perhaps **THE** most important step in the entire process but is very hard to arrange effectively. To explain this statement, the ultimate approach would be to organise a “**focus group**” in which a select cross-section of your target group of visitors is collected into a room (one-by-one) and asked to interact with your site to find some information or buy a certain product that would appeal to them, whilst you silently watch what they do. Get them to write down or voice their frustrations throughout each task. This exercise will reveal the most astonishing things you had ever expected. If you correct or change the site according to all the feedback you get, then you will have a hugely more effective site FOREVER!

There are other systems (below) that can be used to gain similar information, but it will never be as obvious what the problems are.

Monitoring usage statistics

If you have your website hosted on anything but the free hosting packages, you will have access to the **Activity Statistics**. These are **.LOG files** which the server generates based upon what pages are being asked for. There is a minefield of information which is analysed by “**log analysis**” software. This will give useful information about the number of pages viewed, most popular pages, total visitors, the words or phrases used to find your site etc.

There are even more advanced services you can use such as **ClickTracks**, which actually visually shows you amounts of time people have clicked on individual links within your pages!

Feedback forms

Forms can be useful to direct information in a more logical way. You can route different types of enquiry to different email addresses or ask for certain fields to be filled in before the form is allowed to be sent.

The down side of forms usually is that there is no record of what has been sent for the visitor. There are nice ways of avoiding this situation such as to send an HTML formatted email to the email address entered in the form. This allows you to customise a thank you/confirmation message in your own branding.

Top tips for this section

- **Log file analysis**
www.hotfiles.com
(search for “log file analysis” or “web stats”)

A free one is **Web Log Expert Lite**

- **ClickTrack**
www.clicktracks.com

Subscription service that integrates with your website pages to deeply analyse users movements.

DesignerMark

42 York Road Salisbury Wiltshire SP2 7AT

01722 410060 or 07810 534640

mark@designermark.biz

Advertising / promotion / marketing

Email marketing

Email marketing is most effectively used to keep existing customers coming back and up-to-date with your activities. There are many ways of handling the process, with accordingly varying prices, but the simplest way for low numbers need not cost a great deal. There are now certain laws in place regarding **Data Protection**, culmination in the fact that people gave to be able to **opt-out** of receiving your emails if they want, and that you must not (without consent) share their email address with anyone else.

Google AdWords and other search engines

The search engine scene is a constantly moving beast. Currently **Google** is the King of the Jungle, and has many strings to its bow. There are other search engines out there but many of them now share information with each other so there are really only 3 to concentrate on...

Overture

£60 per year and they submit your site to various specific categorised search engines. Unfortunately you do not get a great deal of control over the positioning (both on-line and geographical) of your links.

Yahoo

An A-Z listing similar to Yellow Pages. You decide on the most appropriate category and are listed for a one-off payment of £200. There are strict requirements to match up to, which a professional will be able to advise more on, but in essence the site must be full functional (no "in construction" pages or broken pages etc) and the content must be different enough from other content in the Yahoo.

Google AdWords

AdWords are perhaps the most efficient way of driving traffic to your site. They are however Pay Per Click (PPC) so will cost you money for each person that clicks on it. This, of course, works out if you are selling products and have a good site to back the advert up.

You can get more information about AdWords in the accompanying document.

Off-line advertising

Easily overlooked, but every opportunity to get your domain in front of people is a good one. Business cards, Pads, Shop window, Car/van graphics, Flyers, Radio, Local press.

The more traffic your website gets, the higher it will rank in Google... a self-perpetuating process that rewards good websites.

Buying and selling on eBay (www.ebay.co.uk)

eBay is a great system. It is very safe, easy to use and you can buy or sell ANYTHING. From a commercial point of view it is good used to back-up your website sales or to 'test the market' before building your own site. Its also good for price testing outside of your website (its amazing what some people will pay!)

The down side for a professional is that you cannot easily control the look of the pages (i.e. there are always eBay buttons on screen) but you can always link to you're a special set of pages in your site for further information (not purchasing as that is against the rules)

Top tips for this section

- **Google AdWords**
www.google.co.uk/adwords

www.perrymarshall.com
Buy a guide on how to get the best out of Google.
- **Keyword research**
www.goodkeywords.com
Download a useful program for choosing keywords.

<http://inventory.overture.com/d/searchinventory/suggestion/>
Online keyword suggestion tool.

www.sematch.com

www.searchenginewatch.com
- **Search engine submission**
www.google.co.uk/addurl
www.overture.com
www.yahoo.co.uk

DesignerMark

42 York Road Salisbury Wiltshire SP2 7AT

01722 410060 or 07810 534640

mark@designermark.biz