

# Understanding Web Site Management

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Since a Web site is your window on the world, it needs to be carefully managed on a daily basis. When you develop a Web site, remember that:

- Web sites should be content- and message-driven. You want to both inform visitors of your message and deliver meaningful content in an attractive manner.
- Your Web site should be protected against hackers, viruses, and other threats to both you and your visitors.
- Unless you have a very large and sophisticated site, there are many Web site hosts who will serve your needs well and affordably.
- You should welcome feedback from visitors and make it easy for them to contact you through your site.

## What You Need to Know

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### Should an editor be Webmaster?

Depending on the size of your Web site, either have an information technology-based Webmaster or a content editor. Many organizations have both, one to design the actual site and the other to manage the content. Initially, they will work together to determine the organization's precise needs. On the other hand, if you outsource your Web site, you will not need a dedicated IT professional to manage it in house. In either case, you should have a single point of contact for all content placed on your Web site. Not only is it important for accountability, consistency, adherence to policy, and for insuring the appropriate "look and feel" of your site, but an editor is professionally qualified to make important judgments about how your site is communicating with your audience. The individual in charge of content acts very much like a managing editor of a publication and supervises the content stream to the site, communicates with users and understands the best interface between your organization and your audience.

### Are there security issues?

Yes. Internally hosted Web sites could be a doorway into your company's computer network. Managing a Web site should include the creation of appropriate firewalls between external and internal areas of your system. Security should always be monitored and maintained with the latest

protections because the consequences of a hacker attack or viruses invading your IT arena are potentially huge.

## **Is visitor feedback important?**

A Web site depends on viewer impact. That's why you have it. It isn't just a portal into your company, it is a way for you to reach customers, communicate with the public, and to learn about your market. Feedback is essential for you to keep improving the Web site so you can achieve your purposes. Web site tracking will give an indication of visitor behavior, but you also should encourage them to communicate with you. Visitor feedback will help you better meet their needs. Besides, a Web site should always evolve, always seek to make its appearance, information, and services customer-friendly.

## **Is it risky to outsource Web hosting?**

Not really. Web hosting is now a solid and relatively mature business. There are many excellent providers of hosting services. However, make sure that you deal with a stable, financially sound vendor, create a comprehensive contract with it, and be sure it will deliver quality service, security, and support.

## **What to Do**

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### **Think About Hosting**

Launching your Web site means putting it on the Internet. You can host it in-house or through an external host. For most public Web sites, it makes sense to use a third-party host. Internal hosting is often the option of choice for large companies with an extensive intranet that serves many employees some of whom login remotely. If that is your situation insure sufficient bandwidth so that staff working from home, or from hotel rooms, will be able to download pages quickly.

Many small and medium sized companies choose an external host that offers excellent, secure, state of the art service. When choosing a host, register your own domain name and ask yourself the following:

- How many visitors do I expect?
- How much space and what access speeds will I need? Is it scaleable—able to grow with our needs?
- Will I need an e-commerce option and will it be cost effective?

- Will I require unique programming? If so, who will provide it?
- How many separate e-mail accounts will I need?
- What additional support will I need?
- How much will it cost?

## Choose Your Vendor Carefully

By outsourcing you remain focused on your core business, while eliminating the need to hire your own technical staff. Remember though, the Webmaster is still one of your employees. In choosing your vendor, be sure to:

- choose a company that is financially solid. Several industry leaders are huge and stable.
- complete your outsourcing strategy *before* choosing a vendor so you will know your needs precisely and be prepared for the site to evolve..
- give yourself plenty of time to make your choice.
- draw up a letter of agreement with the vendor you choose, after you have identified all of your needs.
- require your vendor to have state of the art security practices and has backup contingencies for any interruption of service.

## Maintain Your Web Site

Web sites evolve and must therefore be upgraded accordingly. Maintain your Web site in professional manner.

- Constantly monitor the performance of the site. Check the pages you post regularly to spot any technical or formatting problems.
- Remove old content regularly, if not daily. Old content leaves a bad impression and discourages future visits.
- Check all links, forms, graphics, navigation paths, search functions, and layout regularly.
- If you're not getting useful feedback, conduct a usability test.
- Regularly check your Web site security from internal as well as external sources. Security threats can come from inside the organization, too.

## Handling Viruses

If you are connected to the Internet, computer viruses will be a danger. Every day the viruses get stronger and do more damage. You can get a computer virus when you visit a Web site or open an

e-mail—previously, you had to open the e-mail attachment. Prevention is far, far, better than the cure. To combat computer viruses:

- keep an antivirus program installed and up to date;
- perform a complete virus scan of your computer system regularly;
- check with the virus software provider for all current patches and downloads for your system;
- always get upgrades when they are available;
- immediately delete suspicious e-mails;
- download from the Internet only from highly reputable Web sites;
- always backup your data;

## **Manage Your E-mail**

E-mail is a powerful communications tool. If you are encouraging Web site visitors to communicate with you and provide either links or addresses for them to use, be sure to respond in a timely and thorough manner. Unresponsiveness to e-mails and customer contact creates a very poor impression. Don't lose interest in your site because you have lost interest in your customer!

## **What to Avoid**

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### **Your Web Site Contains Stale Information and Dead Links**

Keep your Web site fresh. If your content is old or no longer relevant you lose visitors, your reputation suffers, and your customers go somewhere else. Treat your content like vegetables in a supermarket—keep it fresh.

Broken links, forms that are missing, videos that only work on obscure players and other elements of the site that no longer work are considered inactive. It shows neglect and worse, that there isn't anyone there. Visitors may actually think the site is a zombie, still hosted but dead. Be sure your site is fresh, all elements are working and links are live.

## **You Don't Keep Security Up To Date**

Don't let hackers commandeer your site for their purposes. Be sure to regularly and frequently check for hackers actually using part of your site for their purposes. Virus protection won't detect this, so be sure you or your host can.

## **You Ignore E-mails**

Remember that responsiveness, even if you can't solve a problem is almost as important as actually solving a problem. Answer all inquiries and e-mails as soon as possible.

## **Where to Learn More**

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### **Book:**

Duffy, Shane, *The Web Site Manager's Handbook*. LuLu.com, 2007.