



Beginners User Guide

Developing Your First Website

This guide is one of a series of "How To" Guides" produced by Enterprise Ireland to meet the needs of Irish companies, particularly our client base, the majority of whom are small to medium enterprises (SMEs) in manufacturing or internationally traded services.

They are designed for non-IT professionals charged with developing and/or implementing eBusiness/IT strategy in their companies. Hopefully they may also be of use to IT professionals.

These guides are only one of a range of eBusiness resources provided by Enterprise Ireland. Most of the other resources, can be accessed through our eBusiness webpages

www.openup.ie

Here you can access more guides and cases about eBusiness and related topics, details of solution providers, access to our free eBusiness e-zine and discussion forum, eBusiness events guide and links to interesting reports etc.

The funding for these guides was provided to Enterprise Ireland by "The Information Society Fund" which was established by Government to progress the objectives of the Government's Action Plan for the Information Society.

Introduction

This is a Beginners Guide designed to take you through the steps involved in developing your company's first website. There's so much hype about the Internet that it can be difficult to know where to begin. If you are considering putting your business on the net, then the best advice is to spend time surfing yourself so that you are comfortable with the basics of the technology and familiar with the way in which other companies are using the net. Unless you develop an understanding of how the Internet works in practice and the way in which it can benefit your business, it will be almost impossible to develop a good on-line strategy. Without this understanding it would also be difficult to talk intelligently to the people who will build your website.

The Internet has a multitude of uses - you can search for answers to almost any question you can think of, send messages and documents across the world in an instant, shop for goods and services in another continent, visit art galleries, play games, chat, download free software or even gamble. And your business can benefit hugely from the Internet - by operating more efficiently, cutting costs and ultimately competing more effectively.

Crucially, the Internet has become an invaluable business tool used to sell and market products, to deliver support services, to acquire customer feedback through inviting comment and surveys, to publish data and for everyday correspondence. Indeed, the Internet is fast becoming as integral to business as the telephone. Almost every enterprise, from the biggest to the smallest, has an email address and many now also have a website on the World Wide Web, the most successful and widely used part of the Internet.

Technology as a catalyst for change

The role of technology in developing of a successful Business Plan is of major strategic importance. An online presence is just one of the applications for IT. However even the development of your first website can radically affect your opportunities;

- Having a website will raise your visibility to potential customers and partners.

For example customers looking to buy on the Internet, or to research a purchasing decision will find the websites of your competitors and may buy direct from those sites. Companies seeking partners for collaborative projects will find information on your competitors and will contact them rather than you- unless you are online. This may well be invisible to your company until it's too late.

- Unsuitable or inadequate technology can mean that your company is without the communications systems, which it needs to compete efficiently.

For example, your company may have sales reps, delivery workers or maintenance workers who are travelling and need access to company information such as inventory lists, whilst on the road. In this case wireless access to a constantly updated inventory database will increase customer service, productivity and more than likely, sales. If you go for a basic brochure website at the outset, you may have missed an opportunity.

- The lack of an integrated, centralised customer and sales database may make it practically impossible to make plans to carry out the regular, effective, and large scale direct marketing that competitors conduct.

For example, competitors who are making personalised marketing offers to their customers and to people who have visited their sites, are increasing sales while building brand awareness and loyalty. Can your company match this strategy without suitable technology?

Steps to take to Develop Your First Website

There are a series of things you need to do in order to successfully develop a website from scratch. These include

1. Develop an eBusiness Strategy Document
2. Develop a Website Strategy Document
3. Develop a Brief for your Website
4. Get Online before your website Goes Live!
5. Manage the Development Process
6. Look to the Future

1. Develop an eBusiness Strategy Document

Given the potential impact an online presence can have, if you intend to build a website, then an essential, earlier step is the development of an eBusiness Strategy. The development of your website must fall in line with the stated objectives of this strategy. If you have one already it will help you to have a vision of what you are trying to achieve with the site in terms of the development of the overall business. If you do not have a formal eBusiness Strategy, then the first step is to develop one. This strategy must be fundamentally driven by the overall business strategy and therefore in evolving an eBusiness strategy, both the business and the IT people must be involved.

Refer to the Advanced Guide "Formulating an IT/eBusiness strategy for SMEs" as this should give you a clear focus on how to develop an eBusiness strategy.

A full eBusiness strategy, although desirable, may not be essential if you are simply planning to invest in a low budget basic website. But even in this case, you should have a clear vision as to the business benefits you expect to get from your website and from other aspects, if any, of the Internet, and how you plan to achieve those benefits.

2. Develop a Website Strategy Document

In preparing to develop a website strategy, you should consult with as many relevant people as possible - this process will unveil an enormous amount of worthwhile information and highlight options you may not have considered. Some sources of advice include; -

- Talking to web design and web development companies who want to get your business.
- Talking to business colleagues who have developed a site about their experiences, the developers they used, the benefits they obtained, if any, and the costs involved.
- Talking to your suppliers and customers about the type of information they would like on the site and the extent to which they are willing to use a website to get information about your company and its products.
- Finding out whether your staff is spending a lot of time answering queries which could be answered by posting the information on the website.
- Enterprise Ireland maintains a database of eBusiness Suppliers.

The Strategy Document itself should outline the following;

- The specific objectives that you want your website to fulfil
- A detailed description of the target audience
- Whether certain areas of the site are to be available only to certain target audience groups e.g. customers/suppliers etc
- The type, quantity and depth of information to be made available on the site
- The level of interactivity required e.g. is the site a pure brochure site, will it have free downloadable documents, will it allow business to be transacted and for, example, take payments online.
- The overall timescale and total budget allowed for the initial development and an outline of future development requirements and related timescales and costs. Note that it's essential to consider future requirements as this can dictate the manner in which your site is built by the developer and the technology used.
- The Corporate Branding Guidelines will need to be included and made applicable to an online environment - often conventional guidelines cannot be simply translated online and therefore may need to be adapted and agreed in advance of the development work taking place.
- The overall Security Policies of the company and the way in which these apply for internal and external online users must be documented as part of a development of the Website Strategy
- If you are planning to use the website for anything more than simply providing basic information you may also need to consider one or more of the following: -]
 - Consider the legal implications of trading on-line
 - Identify processes that need to be re-engineered
 - Investigate systems for order fulfilment and logistics

3. Develop a Brief for your Website

A tender document or RFT (Request for Tender) sets out the objectives for the site and how these can best be achieved. Ideally this would be supplied to three website development companies so that you can accurately

estimate the cost of the development and ultimately appoint a supplier (who may not be the cheapest but must offer the best overall proposition for your business) Spending time on the brief in the short term will save time and money in the long term, as it will provide the developer with a clear understanding of the requirements.

The brief should contain:

- A summary version of your Website Strategy Document which is suitable to be seen by external suppliers.
- A description of the business sector and a short outline concerning any important issues specific to that industry.
- An outline of the internal resources that will be allocated to work with the supplier e.g.. who is the internal contact point and what are his/her skills?
- The specific objectives for the site. These should be concise and realistic.
- The specific target audience for this development
- Any requirements you may have in relation to developing content?
- How many design concepts do you want to see? Three is usual.
- Will a writer/content facility be required so that you can keep the site up-to-date internally without external support and if so, which elements of the site will this apply to?
- A detailed description of the functionality required e.g. Will the web site facilitate online transactions, reply forms, search queries, dynamically created pages with a database backend?
- Will your company require mailing lists and bulletin boards?
- How many rounds of changes will you be allowed make to the site in development within the quoted cost? Two rounds of minor changes is typical
- What are the benchmarks and the critical deadlines for site construction?
- What arrangements does the supplier propose for maintenance/technical support and what are the related costs?
- Do you want your company to own the copyright of the content/design/coding - as you must specify this and this is a crucial point Ref the Advanced How to Guide on eBusiness Legal Requirements
- Your hosting and domain name requirements
- A request for reference sites in a similar industry to the company
- A request for the supplier to provide a detailed cost submission that will indicate costs and proposed resources in terms of managing the project, designing the site, the building of the site, the technologies employed, expected training requirements if any, search engine optimisation costs, hosting costs and any other third party costs which may be incurred e.g. photography. and implementation costs as well as the ongoing maintenance and hosting costs if they are going to host your web-site

In writing your specification, do consider clearly the various options available with website developments. For most existing Irish businesses, it may be advisable not to have an online shopping facility on your first-ever website however if you do choose this route - if you sell to consumers for example - then familiarise yourself with shopping carts and online payment options as you will have to be clear on this in order to select a suitable vendor.

Online shopping

An on-line shop should reproduce the experience of shopping in a supermarket. When you buy over the counter, you go into the shop, you pick out your purchases, you place them in a shopping basket and when you've made your decision, you pay for them.

This is mimicked on a website by:

1. Going to the shopping area on the site and browsing or searching through the web catalogue.
2. Putting your choices into "the shopping cart", a piece of software which keeps a record of your purchases and,
3. Paying for your purchases, most commonly by credit card, which will involve giving your credit card details and personal information on-line.

All this information has to be protected by encryption, which prevents unauthorised people from accessing this information.

Payment Solutions:

On-line transactions allow the customer to buy directly from you over the web. The most common payment method at the moment is by credit card using the same process as telephone transactions. Of course, it is perfectly possible for a company which normally invoices its customers the end of each month, to accept online orders using the shopping cart facilities described above while continuing to bill the customers with a monthly paper invoice. This will obviate the need for installing a payment system and more importantly, will avoid having to pay the credit card commission on your sales.

To set up a credit card payment system on your website you need:

- A bank that will establish an Internet merchant account for you
- Payment processing software to transfer the credit card details between your bank and website
- A secure certificate to encrypt and protect the credit card details

Your ISP and your bank will determine which types of software you will need to carry out secure transactions. Alternatively you can use a third-party supplier who that already has this infrastructure setup and simply takes a commission on payments.

Further details on "Setting up an Online Payments System is given in Appendix I

Supplier Selection

When the suppliers revert with a written proposal, ideally you should be able to have a presentation from each one outlining their approach, costs, timescales etc. Check out the Advanced "How To" Guide on Choosing eBusiness Vendors and Software.

Ideally one person in your company should be allocated responsibility and act as the project manager to liaise with the chosen supplier

Do you have the resources in-house or will you hire an outside developer? Can certain parts of the work be done in-house and others outsourced? What budget have you allocated?

In terms of budget, remember to budget for all potential costs such as ISP (Internet Service Provider) initial and ongoing charges, website design and development, staff training. Domain name registration and ongoing maintenance, technical support and marketing of the site. You may need to purchase and install new computer equipment and software and to invest in Reporting facilities and search engine optimisation (see below)

Once you do appoint a supplier, you are now going down the online road and your business must be comfortable with using the internet...

4. Get Online before your website Goes Live!

If you are building a website then your company will have to be accessible online (e.g. through an email address at a minimum).

In order to go online for the first time you will need:

- A computer, with a network card and a modem (usually built in)
- A telecommunication connection [an analogue, i.e. ordinary phone line or an ISDN line or a DSL connection]
- A connection to the Internet provided by an Internet Service Provider (ISP)
- A Browser, typically Internet Explorer or Netscape Navigator and email software.

All of these terms are explained in our Beginners How To Guide called "The Basics of IT".

Guidance on choosing an Internet Service Provider is provided in our "Advanced How To Guide" on that topic.

The Internet Service Provider that you choose will provide you with at least one email address, if not more, as well as an connection to the internet. They may also provide hosting facilities i.e. a space on their server to store your web site. Alternatively you may decide to allow your web developer to host your site and set-up your corporate email addresses as it is likely that as a supplier, the developer will offer a certain amount of technical support after the site goes live and therefore will need access to it.

Domain Name Registry

One of the first things that you should do when developing your website is to register your domain name. A domain name identifies your website on the Internet, just as a phone number identifies your telephone to the telephone company. It is also sometimes referred to as a URL (Unique Resource Locator) or as a web address. An example is www.enterprise-ireland.com. Your domain name is a very valuable marketing tool and should be chosen with great care. When a company has gone to the expense of choosing a domain name and paying a developer to set up a web site, it should use every means available [for example on all outgoing documentation such as letters, invoices, e-mails, business cards, and so on] to continually remind customers and potential customers of the URL. Make sure you keep your registration up to date by paying the renewal fees on time and that you, and not your website developer, is the legal owner of your domain name.

5. Manage the Development Process

In order to manage a website development, you need to have clear responsibilities, clear deadlines, clear procedures and an appointed team available to put in sufficient time to manage this process.

Website Specification

Once the supplier is selected, they should develop a Website Specification based on your requirements as set out in the Request for Tender document. You should be requested to sign this off as official agreement on the expectations of the development. This is a vital step in the process and if your supplier does not provide you with a specification at the outset you must request one - otherwise there can be mis-understanding about what the website will deliver.

The specification should also benchmark deliverables and timescales and these can be used to help you manage the project and ensure that it is kept on track.

Costs

In order to manage costs, you must agree the final cost in relation to the specification that you have signed off. You must be clear that no additional or hidden costs will arise in the delivery of the agreed specification. This must form the basis of your contract to appoint the supplier.

Meetings

Regular meetings should be held with the development team and ready access and availability will be essential between the suppliers project manager and the company's project manager.

Testing

As the site nears completion begin testing the site. Many developers have extranets that allow you to view the site as it is being developed. This means that, using a password given to you by the web developer, you can view the site over the Internet, but that, until you are happy with the final product, it remains invisible to anyone without the necessary password. As the site nears the end of development get a group of testers together and get them to look at the site, particularly looking out for broken links, typos and images that are not showing. Can they find all the information on the site easily? Do they have difficulty with any part of the site?

6. Look to the Future

It is vitally important that a company does not sit back after establishing a web presence. The more progressive companies are continually striving to market and improve the web site. Efforts must be made to involve the customer in the on-going development of the web site and to assess the usefulness of the web site as a sales channel.

It is essential to keep the information on the site up to date. Out of date prices or product specifications, phone numbers of staff who have left, announcements about "forthcoming events" which have actually happened last year all need to be avoided. You do not want to find yourself in a position where you have pay your website developer each time you need to carry out such updating. Website can be built in a way that allows one of your staff members to carry out such updating. All they need is general computer literacy, Internet access, an administrator's password and some very basic training. We recommend that you insist that your developer builds the site in a way that permits such updating. You should ensure that the quote from the developer includes the cost of training at least one staff member to carry out such updating. You also need to put in place a system for ensuring that the staff member is made aware of and does update any information that has gone out of date.

It is generally desirable that your company's website features fairly close to the top of the list when a potential customer does a search of the Internet for your products or services. You can put a little effort or a lot into achieving this depending on how much you are reliant on customers finding you in this way. Do remember that, depending on which sector you are in, there may be lots of other companies trying to get to the top of the list and you cannot all be on top. This all comes under the umbrella of 'Search Engine Optimisation' which is dealt with in more detail in our "how to" guide on promoting your online presence. Unless you have internal IT expertise, your web developer should probably do the initial work on this. However, if you want to pursue search engine optimisation very actively, you might consider training up somebody in-house to do it. It is worth talking to your developers about how much time and effort should be put into this activity. A cost for this should be included in the budget.

Most website owners will also want to see how many visitors visit their site and which pages are the most popular. If you would like such information, talk to your potential web developer about providing facilities to allow a staff member obtain this information. If you are likely to need this facility, it may be a good idea to talk to your web developer about it, when they originally quote for your business.

It takes time to get used to the Internet and there is a definite learning curve. The more practice you and your business has the more you will learn about it.

Useful Reference Sites

www.openup.ie
taking your business online

<http://hotwired.lycos.com/webmonkey/e-business/>
Webmonkey is dedicated to showing people how to build better websites. The eBusiness section has good articles on finding developers, marketing techniques and how to track users.

www.netb2b.com/
Site aimed at Net Marketers. Lots of interesting content and latest info.

www.alertbox.com
Dr. Jakob Nielsen's site. Nielsen is a webpage usability expert.

www.techweb.com/encyclopedia/
Excellent reference to explain technical terms in a useful way.

Appendix 1

Setting Up an Online Payments System

If you are considering adding a payment facility onto your website, then here's some practical advice that might help smooth the process. These tips have been learnt through the practical experience of implementing an online payments system, so it's not a comprehensive list - just some pointers to help you through the process;

- In theory the process can take three weeks, in practice it's likely to take a lot longer.
- For a small site, you need to budget about €5,000 plus VAT in total for the three costs involved - site build, software and banking charges - for Year 1
- All costs are negotiable and expect to pay between 3% - 4.5% on each transaction to the bank.
- Make sure the proposed software is acceptable to your bank.
- When you apply to the bank for a Merchant Account, be sure your bank knows that you're an existing customer.
- If you do not have a good standing/credit record with the bank, you could be asked to lodge a security deposit to the tune of one month's transaction value.

The Budget

These costs are entirely indicative and will depend on the choices you make. Also prices in the marketplace are constantly changing so you'll need to do your own research when you approach this issue.

The breakdown on the total estimated budget of approx. €6,000 in Year 1 is as follows;

Software

Set-Up €300 plus min. €50 per month €900

Bank 3.5% per transaction (35 cents for laser cards)

plus €100 set-up fee

(we assumed that the 3.5% cost would be passed onto the customer in price increases)

Web Development

Initial Set-up €3,000

Updates for specific payment offers etc. €1,500 Contingency €500

The Process

The process is very simple - pick a software supplier (we chose Realex), make sure the Bank accept the supplier, apply to your bank for a merchant account and once this is set up, get your web developer to update your site.

Timing

Realistically, you need to leave about two months to implement this process. This will cover about one month to set up a merchant account and one month to liaise with the software supplier and the web developer - and to test your site before it goes live. Having said that, the process can be done a lot more quickly if you're prepared to allow a third party to collect your payments for you and if you have a speedy developer to hand.

Banking Commission

There are a couple of things to watch out for when you go to set up a merchant account. When you're negotiating the Bank's commission rate, it is possible to reduce this considerably through discussion. Typically commissions would range from 3% - 4.5%. It's worth bringing this issue up at the outset of the process and checking proposed rates from each bank - as this information can be used as a negotiation tool.

Merchant Account Security Deposits

When negotiating commission levels, it is likely that you may be asked what your estimated monthly value of transactions is. If so, consider your answer carefully - obviously the higher the value, the stronger your negotiating position with the bank on commission rates. However if the bank is not familiar with your company, you could be asked to lodge the value of one month's turnover as a security deposit. This is to cover potential failed payments etc. However many would consider it an excessive requirement. Throughout the process, ensure that the Bank is aware of the fact that you are an existing customer, where applicable. This can help to smooth the process and you may avoid the Security deposit requirement.

Remember that all of the costs involved - from the software supplier through to the web developer will be negotiable - so make the most of your skills of persuasion!

Irish Office Network

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Enterprise Ireland			
Cork	+(353 21) 800 200	+(353 21) 800 201	Rossa Avenue, Bishopstown, Cork.
Donegal	+(353 74) 69800	+(353 74) 69801	Portland House, Port Road, Letterkenny, Co. Donegal.
Dublin	+(353 1) 857 0000/808 2000	+(353 1) 808 2020	Glasnevin, Dublin 9.
	+(353 1) 857 0000/206 6000	+(353 1) 206 6400	Merrion Hall, Strand Road, Sandymount, Dublin 4.
	+(353 1) 857 0000/808 2000	+(353 1) 808 2802	Wilton Park House, Wilton Place, Dublin 2.
	+(353 1) 609 2150	+(353 1) 609 2151	35-39 Shelbourne Road, Dublin 4.
Galway	+(353 91) 735 900	+(353 91) 735 901/2	Mervue Business Park, Galway.
Kerry	+(353 64) 34133	(353 64) 34135	57 High Street, Killarney, Co. Kerry.
Louth	+(353 42) 935 4400	+(353 42) 935 4401	Finnabair Industrial Park, Dundalk, Co. Louth.
Sligo	+(353 71) 59700	+(353 71) 59701	Finisklin Industrial Estate, Sligo.
Waterford	+(353 51) 333500	+(353 51) 333501	Industrial Estate, Cork Road, Waterford.
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The programmes of Enterprise Ireland
are co-funded by the European
Regional Development fund.