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Building an internet business from the ground up.

WEBSITE BUILDER TOOLS

We have all heard the business gurus talk about how the Internet is the perfect medium through which to present a professional image of your organisation and reach a much wider audience in the process.

Regardless of your company's size, with a great website you can have a sales team working 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, right where your customers need them to be. So you've registered a domain name and got yourself an email address, but what is the next step? How do you actually build a website?

Building a website – do it yourself or outsource?

As with the majority of business requirements, those that cannot be fulfilled in-house can be outsourced to a third party. Many large companies automatically hand the entire design, development and implementation of their business website over to a web design agency, but this is not necessarily the right solution for a start-up business.

First there is the issue of cost – a basic bespoke website design being likely to run into the thousands of pounds – but also critically is the lack of direct control over the site's look, feel and content, meaning that additional charges for updates can start to mount up.

Many start-up businesses who have the technical resource internally take on the task of building their company website from scratch themselves, but this can mean that the money being saved on web development is now being lost in labour costs. So what's the alternative?

There are a lot of hosting companies out there in cyberspace who offer simple step-by-step site builder wizards helping you to build yourself a professional website in no time at all. Before jumping straight in and buying the first product you see, let's consider exactly you want your website to do.

What do you want your website to do?

A basic template-based solution is all you need if your site is going to start off purely as an information portal, with the aim of informing potential customers about your line of business and how to contact you.

“Template-based” means that the basic look and feel of the site is preset – all you have to do is choose from the hundreds of professionally made designs.

For each design you are usually given a choice of colours as well. Then you can personalise your site further by choosing the colours, fonts and sizes of your text – although we recommend a certain amount of caution here. Pink text on a bright green background is perhaps not the most professional colour scheme for a business, regardless of how much it stands out.

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Selling products with an online shop as part of your website

If you want to maximise the potential of your site by having an online shop from the outset, then your site builder will need to be more advanced. In order to publicise and sell your products online you will need to have tools that allow you to catalogue and display your product range. You will also need a shopping cart facility and an integrated payment gateway in order to complete the transactions.

Although the implementation of an online shop may sound like a daunting task, the beauty of template-based wizards is that the complicated coding is done for you. A good quality wizard will start with the basic overall design of the site, prompt you into choosing colours and help you structure your site by arranging your pages in order. Introducing copy should be as easy as typing or copying and pasting in, whilst it should be a simple task to upload images into an online gallery where, if necessary, they can be edited and re-sized.

Providing your website visitors with a good user experience

For a website to be successful the main focus should be the user's experience. Whereas the basic tools provide the overall look and feel of the site, it is the additional extras that can really enhance the user experience.

Having a contact page will help your customers to communicate with you by asking questions or providing feedback. Flash intros, company logos, "How to Find Us" maps and forums can make the site more memorable, add value and promote interactivity. The inclusion of a blog will allow you to regularly update your customers on the latest products and company news.

Template-based websites are designed to be a simple alternative to hard coding, so there may be some restrictions in what can be achieved, but they are excellent starting point on which to build your online business. With hundreds of choices of templates and room for customisation within each one, you can easily create an individual, professional website for your business.

Remember, the key to a good wizard is one that not only fits your price range and your needs, but is also easy to use and adaptable.

Easily.co.uk provides everything a business needs to establish and develop its internet presence, quickly and affordably.

The company's flagship product is the **Easily Website Creator which enables small businesses and consumers to design a professional ten page website for as little as £29.99 (exc VAT), without the need for technical knowledge.**