THE BASICS TO STARTING A WEBSITE

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Creating a professional and functional website is an essential step for individuals and businesses aiming to establish a robust online presence. This whitepaper provides a comprehensive overview of the foundational steps involved in building a website, including securing a domain name, selecting a hosting provider, and choosing the right website-building approach.

The intended audience for this paper includes anyone looking to build a website, specifically for a business or storefront. It describes the basic steps for starting a website for a business, including what each piece means, and the costs associated.

The Basics:

✔ **Domain Name[1]**

A domain name refers to the unique name of a website and is what users enter into their browser to access the site. While it forms part of the URL, a URL includes additional information beyond the domain name. Having a personalized domain name enables brand establishment online and allows for the creation of custom email addresses (e.g., janedoe@idahoecenter.org).

For a comprehensive understanding of domain names, please refer to the article What Is a Domain Name? A Guide For Beginners. This resource provides detailed insights valuable for those seeking in-depth knowledge on the topic.

✔ **Web Hosting**

Web hosting is a service that stores and maintains a website's files and applications on a server, making it accessible on the internet. The internet is a vast network of interconnected computers, linked through a global grid of submarine cables[1]. Each computer within this network has a unique IP address that facilitates communication and data exchange with other devices. Web hosting providers store the files and data necessary for a website, delivering this content to users when they visit the site via a domain name, which essentially functions as a user-friendly IP address. In addition, web hosts supply the technology and resources necessary for secure, efficient website operations[2].

✔ **Website Building**

After securing a domain name and obtaining hosting services, the next step is to create the website's content. This content encompasses the files and applications stored by the web host, which are accessed via the domain name. Content and design are typically customized to reflect the unique aspects of the brand. Common methods for building a website include using website builders, content management systems (CMS), e-commerce platforms, custom coding, and employing a professional web developer.

Purchasing a Domain Name

Purchasing a domain name is among the first essential steps when establishing an online presence. Once acquired, a domain name requires periodic renewal, typically on an annual basis, though multi-year packages are sometimes available. Registering and renewing a domain name ensures exclusive use, preventing others from claiming it[1]. Availability can be checked easily through several online services, such as GoDaddy or Name.com, where users can search to see if a desired domain is accessible.

"*If a domain is available, any Internet user can buy it—which means paying a fee for exclusive rights to that name for a period of time that can range from one year to more than a decade. After registering a domain name, it becomes the owner's public address on the Internet and the gateway to accessing the website attached to the name.*"[3] Should the desired domain name be unavailable, users might consider alternate spellings, acronyms, or similar variations. It is also advisable to consider potential misinterpretations or confusion around the domain, aligning its choice closely with the business name to maintain brand consistency. Evaluating domain name options should occur alongside selecting a business name to ensure alignment.

Domains typically cost between $10–$20 per year, though premium domains—often those containing popular keywords or previously owned—may be significantly more expensive. Discounts or bundled offers may be available when purchasing the domain from the same company hosting the website.

Choosing a Website Host

Purchasing a hosting plan involves renting space on a physical server to store and manage a website's files and data. Hosting providers are responsible for server maintenance, implementing security protocols, and ensuring that website content, such as text and images, is successfully delivered to visitors' browsers.

According to Hostinger[2], several factors are essential when selecting a web host:

- Control panel: Seek a user-friendly interface accessible to users of all skill levels.
- Uptime: A high uptime guarantee and fair terms of service indicate the provider's commitment to reliable system operation.
- Technical specifications: Ensure adequate disk space, processing power, and bandwidth.
- Online reviews
- Security features: Look for access management, malware detection, automated backups, and updates.
- Customer support
- Additional services: Consider added features like an SSL certificate, business email accounts, and a content delivery network (CDN) for enhanced performance and security.

Website hosting typically involves a monthly fee, with entry-level plans starting at an average cost of $3 per month for the initial term, which typically ranges from one to three years. Upon renewal, the cost often increases to an average of $10 per month. These introductory plans are shared hosting services, wherein multiple websites are hosted on the same server.

> "The advantage of shared hosting is the affordable pricing. The disadvantages are spotty service, no guarantee of uptime, possible security risks and limited resources making it difficult for websites to scale. This option is best for websites with low traffic, static pages and new websites." [4]

Read the rest of this article (Website Hosting Cost Guide 2024) to understand additional web hosting options and their associated costs.

Choosing a Website Builder

The cost of building and maintaining a website varies based on the tools and platforms chosen, often involving monthly subscriptions billed annually for discounted rates. Website builders, such as Wix, Squarespace, and Weebly, typically cost between $25 to $30 per month and are designed for beginners seeking simplicity and ease of use[5]. Content management systems (CMS) like WordPress, Joomla, and Drupal offer more flexibility and scalability for users with technical expertise[5]. WordPress has an average monthly cost of $20, while Joomla and Drupal are free to build but may require additional hosting or development expenses.

E-commerce platforms, including Shopify and BigCommerce, cater to online stores and average $60 per month, with entry-level plans available as low as $5 per month. For those with programming skills, custom coding using HTML, CSS, and JavaScript can be a cost-effective option, leveraging free software tools such as Notepad++, Sublime Text, or Visual Studio Code to create and upload code to a website host[6]. Alternatively, hiring a professional web developer provides a fully customized solution, with hourly rates typically ranging from $30 to $100.

Sources

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2– What Is Web Hosting – Web Hosting Explained for Beginners｜Hostinger.com

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4– Website Hosting Cost Guide 2024｜Forbes.com

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