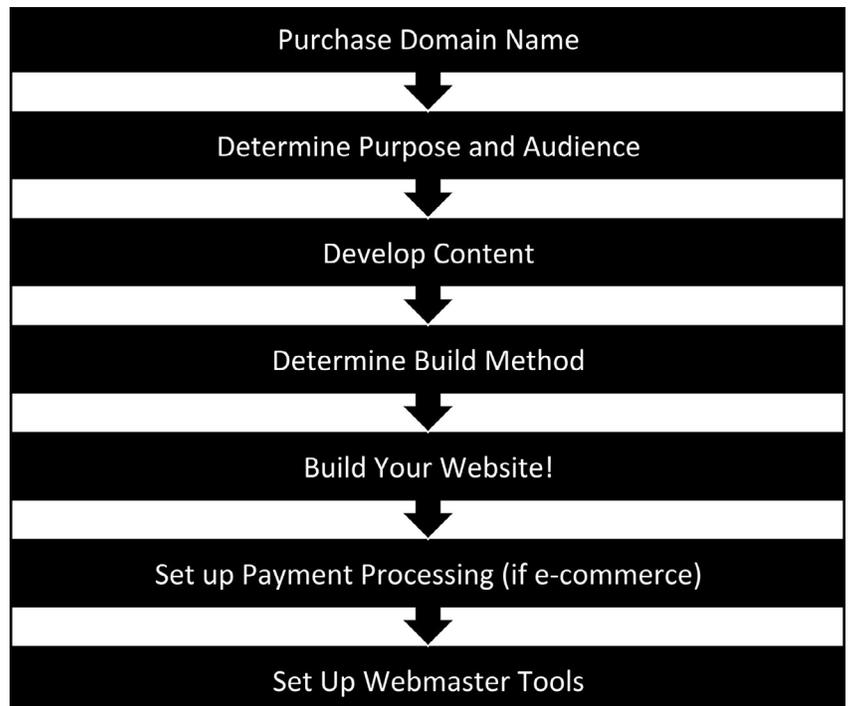


I Want to Build My Own Website *Now What?*



So you've decided to harness the vast power of the Internet to market your business or organization? Congratulations! You are increasing the visibility of your business exponentially and making it much easier for your customers to find out information about you. This publication will walk you through the steps to putting your site together easily. Please note that this publication does not discuss business formation, licensures, or certifications. These steps are general guidelines; you may or may not take them in this exact order.

1. Purchase your domain name, the address of your website. In other words, it's what people will type in to get to your website. For instance, *www.msstate.edu* or *www.amazon.com* are domain names. It's important to purchase these early, ideally as soon as you start your business, as they are sold on a first-come, first-served basis. Most domains can be purchased for \$20–60 per year, but the cost is determined by demand. It is vital that you, as the business owner, purchase the domain and have it in your name so you will always have full control of it.
2. Ask yourself these questions:
 - What is the purpose of your site? For instance, do you want to sell your products online? Or do you just want to provide basic information, such as how to locate or contact your retail location?
 - Who is your target audience? Are you targeting people in a certain area? Are you targeting men, women, or both?
 - What are some websites that you like and dislike? Why? What features do you want your website to have? What are your competitors doing?
3. Develop your website content. This includes your logo, color scheme, graphics, and written material for the site. It's much easier to do this up front and have it ready when you start developing your website, rather than going back and forth between developing content and developing your site.



- When developing a logo, or hiring someone else to do it for you, keep in mind that successful brands should be fairly simple and easy to digest and remember at a glance. It's usually best to keep it to one or two colors, and they should not be random. Head over to your favorite search engine and type in "colors in marketing" to get a feel for what colors mean. Take a look at logos of successful companies, and you will see that they typically follow these rules.
- You need to make sure that photos and other graphics are high quality. There should be no pixilation in any graphics on your website. Use a graphics-editing program to adjust them to the proper size needed. You can either take photos yourself or use applicable stock photos.
- Gather and save the text for your website in a word processor, and separate the material based on what page it will go on (home page, about us, contact us, etc.). Try to include keywords that people are likely to use to search for you on search engines while using clear and concise language.

4. Decide how you are going to build your website. You have a few options presented here in order from most difficult to least difficult.
 - Create the website yourself using a source code editor and writing your own HTML, CSS, and perhaps PHP code. To get an idea of what's involved, pull up any website, right click where there isn't an image or link, and click "view source." This view gives you a great idea of what you will have to learn and how much time it will take. Aside from the three common languages listed, there are many more needed for a more complex website. Once you've written the code, you will have to upload your files to the server that hosts you via FTP (File Transfer Protocol), SFTP (Secure File Transfer Protocol), or other similar method.
 - Use a content management system (CMS), which allows you to add your content to a template with no or minimal code usage. A CMS gives you the ultimate flexibility to be able to make point-and-click changes, as well as the ability to alter the code to make your website exactly like you want it and to use plugins or modules to add extra features. Most hosting companies offer a "one click" or "one minute" installation for popular CMSs that lets you get right to editing your website.
 - By far the easiest and the most common way to build your own website is by using a WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get) editor. As the name implies, whatever you see while you are putting it together is what you get! Each editor will start with a template and you will add in elements (pictures, text, etc.) wherever you want on the website. A WYSIWYG editor works pretty much the same way as putting together a PowerPoint presentation.
5. Get started on building! Remember that there are free trial versions for most WYSIWYG editors, and most CMS programs can be downloaded on your computer to try out. This way, you can try multiple options and use what you feel most comfortable with.
6. If you are selling your product online via credit card payments, then you also must set up your payment gateway, payment processor, and Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) certificate. These steps differ based on which company you select for the services, and many WYSIWYG editors include them with their e-commerce packages. Before signing up, make sure you know what is included. Some editors may not work with all payment processors. For processing your payments, processors typically take a percentage of each sale, and some also have monthly fees.
7. Once your site is built, set up Google Analytics, Google Webmaster Tools, and Bing Webmaster Tools. These are free services that allow you to see the statistics of visitors to your website and make sure everything is working correctly. Bing also works with Yahoo, so there is no need to set up a webmaster tools account with that company. Remember to also list your site on appropriate social-media and local-interest websites.
 - www.google.com/analytics
 - www.google.com/webmaster/tools
 - www.bing.com/toolbox/webmaster

During the process of building, remember to keep your potential consumer in mind. Most people who come to your website want to find the information they want quickly. Don't overload them with too much information on the homepage, and make it easy to find contact information and other basic details. If you get frustrated, just stop, take a deep breath, and think about how much money you are saving and how great it will be to have a web presence for your organization!

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