

What should your website cost?



With British consumers now spending more than £1 billion a month online, a website is well worth investing in.

Prices vary enormously, based on what you want your website to do and how many pages you need. The costs will also depend on whether you plan to outsource the creation and/or maintenance your website, or build and update it in-house. If you choose to build and maintain your website yourself, you should bear in mind that your main cost may be in terms of the time and human resources you commit to the project.

It is important to weigh up the advantages and benefits of certain tools and services against a realistic budget, including how much you are prepared to spend on marketing it.

The elements you will need to take into consideration when working out your budget, or getting quotes from website design companies, include: web and graphic design; hosting (where your website will exist); domain registration (registering your name); content management and maintenance; and search engine submission.

Web design

Your website is a key channel of communication, helping you to sell to and retain customers. Your web presence reinforces the image you are trying to project and should be interesting, informative and easy to navigate.

Many businesses choose to create their websites themselves; FrontPage and Dreamweaver are popular packages. Another do-it-yourself approach involves purchasing a template, which can cost anything from £50 to upwards of £500.

However, if you do not feel you have the appropriate skills, or the time or resources to invest in creating a professional-looking website, you should consider employing the services of a professional web developer or agency to design your website.

The price of web design will vary enormously, depending on your specific requirements. The more pages you need and the more complex you want your site to be, the higher the costs. For instance, a website that has full e-commerce and payments functionality will cost more than a brochure containing only static pages. Typically, a fully-designed website will cost upwards of £2,000.

If your website is to display a considerable amount of content, you may need to have a database built to contain that information. If you intend to collect information on visitors, you will also require data capture facilities. These additional features have cost implications.

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It is best to obtain quotes from at least three designers and ask to see examples of previous work. Find out whether the designer charges a flat fee, or a daily or hourly rate. A flat fee may be preferable if you know your exact requirements. However, a daily or hourly rate can provide greater flexibility.

Hosting

Your website needs a server where files will be stored and there are a number of hosting options. Your internet service provider (ISP) may offer you a certain amount of free space and free server space is also offered by a variety of other companies. However, some offer limited functionality and feature pop-up ads that could look unprofessional and may annoy your customers.

Your web designer or developer may offer a hosting service, or you can choose to use a separate web hosting company. You can typically expect to pay a flat fee of around £15 to £30 per month. Costs are usually based on the amount of web space you need, depending on how many pages your website has, graphics and whether your website uses sophisticated technology.

As prices are constantly changing, it's best to look at all the options and get a feel for the range available. Enquire about reliability guarantees on uptime and find out what support services are available.

Hosting companies also provide things like email and password configuration and usually charge a monthly fee.

Domain names

Your ISP or hosting company usually also allow you to register a domain name; your website address.

Prices vary considerably, but the usual cost is between £10 to £30 per name, per year. Top-level domain names, with endings such as .com or .net, are likely to cost more than those ending .co.uk or .gb.com.

Website maintenance and content management

Keeping your site relevant and up-to-date is vital. However, this takes a lot of planning and organisation and a degree of expertise.

Your web designer may also offer maintenance and content management, usually charging an hourly or monthly rate.

Another option is to have an authoring tool, such as a content management system, built into your website, making it easier to maintain in-house. This would allow you to update, add and delete content in a cost-effective way. This would increase the front end development costs, but save money in the long run if you think your site will need updating on a frequent basis and would like greater in-house control.

Adding e-commerce to an existing website

If you already have a website, you can get software to add e-commerce functionality.

Companies like Shopfitter.com and qhost.com offer this free in return for a cut of future transactions, typically £1 on transactions above £10.

More sophisticated packages include catalogue management, enhanced order processing, encryption for security and back-end systems integration. Companies like Actinic and EROL offer such features for around £600.

Search engine submission

There is little point in paying for a great website if no one can find it. Therefore, it is essential that your website appears on the listings of the major search engines, such as Google, Yahoo! and MSN.

To guarantee your website appears in search engine listings, you will need to pay a fee for submission. The cost is different for each search engine, ranging between £10 and £200. You are usually guaranteed entry into the search engines within a short period of time, normally between 24 hours and two weeks.

If you wait for search engine 'spiders' to find your site by picking up on keywords in your text, it will take a long time to appear in listings and you will be low down in ranking.

When you submit your details to a search engine, you will need to supply certain keywords from your website. These will be matched with the ones customers type in when searching the internet. Professional search engine submission companies will do this for you, although bear in mind this will cost extra. They may charge an hourly rate or a flat fee.

To be sure you choose the right submission company, ask them for evidence of results gained for their own website and those of their clients.

Pay per click inclusion (PPC) is offered by several search engines, displaying your website for specific chosen keywords at a cost per click. The cost per click varies and is determined by your competitors, through a bidding scheme. Prices per click can range between a few pence to over £5. You only pay when people looking for your products actually click through to your website. Paid advertisements on Google are listed under the heading Sponsored Links.

Having links appear on others' websites can help your website score highly with search engines, so form alliances with other websites. Also, make sure your website address appears on all your promotional material.

What do I need to do next?

- Decide what you want your website to achieve and what functionality you intend to include.
- Weigh up the pros and cons of the different methods for creating and maintaining your website.
- Work out a budget for creating, maintaining and marketing your website.
- Shop around for quotes from agencies or services you have decided to use to decide on the most appropriate and cost-effective course of action.
- Ensure your email requirements are satisfied; this may come as part of the web host service, but can be added separately.
- Put together a development plan that includes key milestones and costs.

Further Help

The Impartial Route to Business Advice

Business Link Wessex specialise in helping businesses across Dorset, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight to develop and grow.

We offer you easy access to a comprehensive network of business contacts, information, seminars and advice, to enable you to realise your business ambitions.

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