

Web Site Checklist

Following is a list of things to consider when planning your web store:

Location

There are various ways to place your site on the internet. You can pay to register your domain name (the name you will go by on the internet). This will cost you approximately \$35 per year and can be done at www.internic.ca or www.register.com. There are also a site, www.homestead.com, which will allow you to place your site for free. Two things to consider when using free services are:

- 1) Your site address will end up being something like homestead.com/213131/reallyfantasticwidgets. This can be a difficult site address to market
- 2) If you have managed to get people to your site and www.homestead.com goes down or out of business, your site is gone and your customers will not be able to find you.

Paying to have your domain name registered will help to legitimize your business. There are various extensions that you can register ie. [.com](http://www.com) or [.ca](http://www.ca). The [.ca](http://www.ca) extension is used for Canada. Be aware that if you want to appeal to customers outside of Canada, [.com](http://www.com) is recognized worldwide and is therefore probably the better choice.

Web Site Design

To design your site you can either hire the services of a professional or design the site yourself using a program such as Microsoft Front Page. If you want to use the site for marketing purposes, it may be fine to do it yourself. If you want to include an e-commerce factor, you may want to look at having it developed professionally. Canada Post does allow you to set up your online store for relatively little pain and virtually no cost. They can be found at www.canada-shops.com.

Following are a few design tips for you to think about:

Fast loading

Graphics are nice but they slow down the loading time of your page. Keep your design as simple as possible. This will make it so that even people with less advanced equipment ie. 14.4 modems can still see your page in a reasonable amount of time.

Keep it simple

Don't let too many choices distract the visitor. Web site research has shown that users start to feel overwhelmed when faced with 7 or more choices on a menu so try and stay within this limit.

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Use a shopping cart

Virtual shopping carts enhance the shopping experience by allowing customers to select items for purchase and continue browsing the store before placing an order. Again, www.canada-shops.com will allow you to do this for no cost.

Good navigation

Try and design your store so that customers can be at the ordering point within three clicks of entering your site. And remember that potential customers may enter your site from many directions (i.e. not just your home page) so make sure each page includes full navigation or a clear link to your home page as a minimum. If you can, try building into your site search capabilities that will let users sort by subject, item, or a category.

Get global

Remember that the first two "Ws" in "WWW" stand for world-wide and that your store will be accessible to people around the world. As a minimum you should think about how far away you can realistically make sales taking into account customs and taxation issues. If your main market is going to be another country where English is not the prominent language spoken, you will most likely need to translate your site.

Maximize ways to order and ways to pay

The name of the game is to make it easy for people to purchase from you. It is particularly important to offer secure processing of as many credit card types as possible. The banks, PayPal and Canada Post will have more information on this topic.

Establish credibility

Although internet scams and rip-offs are greatly exaggerated by the media, they do exist and unless you trade under a major brand name you will need to convince customers that you are not going to take their money and run. There are several ways of doing this, some simple and free others more complex and relatively expensive:

- Include details of your bricks-and-mortar address, telephone number and fax numbers.
- Include verifiable testimonials from previous customers
- Offer a 100% satisfaction guarantee
- Ensure customers that the personal information they provide you with will be kept confidential and not be sold to any other parties

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- Look at registering with the Better Business Bureau

Offer a personalized service

Use the personal information to create a database of information, which will allow you to look for ways to offer, personalized service. This could be done by e-mailing a particular customer when a product that they typically purchase is going on sale.

Pre sales support

Provide every possible piece of information about your product that a customer might need to reach a buying decision. Make yourself easily accessible should the customer require more information and respond promptly to e-mails (preferably within 24hrs but definitely within 48hrs).

Post sales support

Maintain a high level of service after you receive the order. Try and provide the following:

- Acknowledgement of each order with a unique reference number for tracking
- On-line tracking of orders or a dedicated e-mail address for order progressing
- Confirmation of dispatch of goods
- An area within your site for ongoing product support

Realistic pricing

Visitors to your store know that it is cheaper for you to do business over the Web than in a bricks-and-mortar store and expect to see this reflected in the price you are charging them. This will not be a major concern to you if you are selling in to a niche market, but if you are selling a commodity item you are going to have to price your products competitively.

Remember to sell

Finally, remember that many of the selling techniques that have been proven to work in the real world will work equally well in your Web store. Contests, promotional discounts, coupons and aisle-end specials have all been used successfully within Web stores. However, don't neglect the basics - surfing through the Web it is amazing how many Web stores miss out on this, by not selling the benefits of their product or service or by failing to ask for the order.

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For More Information

- Internet:** <http://strategis.ic.gc.ca> and click on "Using Electronic Commerce"
www.hotwired.lycos.com/webmonkey/
www.sellitontheweb.com
- Magazines:** Canadian Business
Profit
American Demographics
- Books:** Winning Web Sites: Plan and Design Your Own Bob Whitcroft
Looking Good on the Web Daniel Gray