

Methods of Creating a Website

Designing and publishing a website can seem like a daunting task. The Internet is such a flexible medium, even “experts” are always learning! But things are not always as difficult as they seem. This article is intended to describe the three main ways of creating a website, discuss the pros and cons of each, and provide some helpful hints to help set you on your way.

It is important to distinguish between the **two types** of websites – managed and hosted. A **managed** website is a service where another company controls the design and formatting of the website. A **hosted** website is one where a webmaster (or webmistress) creates the design and formats the content himself.

Managed Website

A **managed website** is most often achieved through companies that provide web-based templates. Once a user has signed up with a service, he is given a portal to log in and provide content from web forms. These forms allow the user to type in text, add links to files or external websites, and create new pages.

The **pros** to a managed website are:

- Very simple to use and access
- No design or programming experience needed
- No additional software needed

The **cons** to a managed website are:

- Very little control over design and layout of webpage
- Template and designs provided by services can be unattractive
- Services often have ads and unnecessary extras that appear on the webpage

Two companies whose services include template-based website design are:

My School Online

<http://www.myschoolonline.com>

Homestead

<http://www.homestead.com>

Hosted Website

A **hosted website** is one which requires a bit more time and ambition. Most hosted websites are domain based and require the purchase of a domain name. (More information on domain names to follow.) A domain name must be tied to a storage server through a web host. Once a user registers for a domain name and web hosting package, there are two main ways of creating and maintaining the website.

The first way is through **WYSIWYG** (What You See Is What You Get) web design software. The programs are template-based but provide the user with multiple templates and more customizable options. The formatting of the content, such as font styles, is completely user-defined. Files and new pages can easily be linked together.

The **pros** to a WYSIWYG website are:

- Template-based for ease of use
- More control over the design and formatting of the webpages
- No ads or unnecessary extras

The **cons** to a WYSIWYG website are:

- Requires software
- Some design and web experience helpful

One such web design software is:

Microsoft FrontPage

<http://www.microsoft.com/frontpage/>

It is important to note that FrontPage has unique web connections, and not all hosting companies are equipped to handle FrontPage websites. More discussion of web hosting companies will follow.

The second way to create a hosted website is **from scratch**. This is usually done by one who is experienced in website design. Websites are written in the language of the Internet, HTML. Experienced designers can write HTML code by hand using a simple text editor or use more sophisticated web design software. More complex software allows the creator to control the design, layout, and formatting of every element of a website.

The **pros** to a website from scratch are:

- Website design is completely customizable
- No ads or unnecessary extras

The **cons** to a website from scratch are:

- Requires software
- Requires web design and programming experience

Although this type of website creation starts with an experienced designer, it can be handed off to someone less skilled. Many of these programs' WYSIWYG editors are simple to use with a little training. Once a website has been designed to fit the organization's needs, others can be taught to update its content.

Some complex web design applications are:

Adobe GoLive

<http://www.adobe.com/products/golive/>

Macromedia Dreamweaver and Contribute

<http://macromedia.com/software/dreamweaver/>

<http://macromedia.com/software/contribute/>

An Overview of Domain Names and Website Hosts

As previously mentioned, hosted websites consist of a hosting package and, frequently, a domain name. A domain name is the first portion of a URL (website address) after the “www.” For example, “yahoo.com” is a domain name. Domain names cost an average of \$5 - \$10 per year.

In order for a domain name to show web content, it must be connected to a backend server with web space. Server space is acquired from a hosting company by purchasing a hosting package. There are, fortunately or not, hundreds of hosting companies to choose from! The most important features of a website host to look for are:

- Price and amount of web space
- Template-based website builder available? Support for FrontPage?
- Free domain name included? Domain name necessary?

Before comparing price and amount of web space, it is important to have an idea of how large the website is going to be. Most websites are less than 50 megabytes in size. However, websites with large amounts of PDF downloads and large pictures can easily balloon a website’s size to 100 or 200 megabytes. While looking at web hosts, keep in mind how big the website will be and take note of how much money per megabyte a host is charging.

It is also important to have an idea as to how the webpage will be created. Not all web hosts support using FrontPage. (More complex software, such as Adobe and Macromedia products, provide for connectivity – called FTP – with almost any host.) In addition, some web hosts are also managed hosts – they provide free software or online templates to create websites, as discussed earlier.

The third thing to consider when choosing a web hosts is their support or requirement of a domain name. Many web hosts offer free domain name registration with purchase of their hosting plans. If they do not offer one free, they will usually offer to register one for a price, but this price is often higher than purchasing a domain name separately and connecting it to the host later. (All hosts and domain name registrars provide information about this upon registration.) Some web hosting companies and managed hosts offer a third option – it could be free or cheaper to be a user or have a subdomain rather than

a unique domain name. The difference is in the website address, or URL, visitors type in to go to the website. A unique domain names would be:

www.yoursitename.com

Being a user or having a subdomain would look like:

www.youname.theircompany.com
www.theircompany.com/~yourname/

Many website hosts are strictly for unique domain name based websites and do not offer the option to be a user or subdomain. It is important to decide whether to have a domain name website or not before choosing a hosting company.

For a comparison of features offered by many popular hosts, see the chart below.

Steps for Getting Started

1. Discuss with your board members the **need** for a website. Does your organization have enough content for a website to be worthwhile? Review Nancy Mitchell's article in the November 2005 newsletter for tips on website content.
2. Discuss with your board members **who** will be in charge of the website. Who has the time and experience to devote to the creation and update process?
3. The **method** used to create your website will largely depend on who is chosen to run it. Do not expect to go much higher than the level of expertise your group is currently at, for if the process becomes too challenging, it will not get done at all. Compare your options and prices carefully.
4. The **design** of your website must match the content you have chosen to publish. Keep it simple! Use as few superfluous elements as possible. Keep your visitors focused on the content and make sure information can be found easily.
5. **Advertise** your website by publishing the address in your newsletter and e-mailing your units and councils. If they have websites as well, ask them to link back to you.
6. Keep your website **up to date!!** A website's purpose is to provide its visitors with accurate information. This cannot be achieved if the content visitors see is outdated.

Questions?

If you have any questions or comments, do not hesitate to email me at: websites@jen-m.com.

Web Host Comparison

<i>Feature</i> Company	Monthly Price (USD)	Amount of Web Space (MB)	Template Website Builder?	FrontPage support?	Domain Name included?	Domain Name Required?
MySchoolOnline.com	\$3.33	10	Yes	No	No	Not supported
Homestead.com	\$10 - \$40	25 – 300	Yes	No	Price unknown	No
Yahoo.com	\$12 - \$40	5,000 – 50,000	Yes	Yes	Free	Yes
EHostPros.com	\$3 - \$15	200 – 1,500	Yes, for \$15 / yr	Yes	Yes, for \$12 / yr	Yes
PowWeb.com	\$7.77	5,000	Yes	Yes	Free first year, then \$15 / yr	Yes
Your-site.com	\$7	50	No	Yes	Free	Yes

Note: Many companies lower their monthly price if paid yearly. Some have one-time setup fees. Prices and storage space may vary based on company promotions.

More Reliable Web Hosts:

- www.dreamhost.com
- www.hostingmatters.com
- www.hostsure.com
- www.ipowerweb.com
- www.lunarpages.com