Whirlygigs and Doohickeys - How Fancy Do You Want Your Website?

By Myriam Dyck

When you decide that your business needs a website and start making arrangements with a website designer, you will rather rapidly be faced with the questions "What do you want it to look like? What features do you want?" If you don't know what you need, you might get extra $ features you don't need, or not add features that you later figure out you need. It it best to sit down and meet with your designer to discuss your site, your business and your needs in detail and get these decisions made before getting a firm quote.

Let's go through a few of the more popular features:

1) "Flash" is a computer program for creating animated graphics. Everything from talking cartoons to movie-like files can be created in Flash. It can take a fair amount of time to create these files, as they are done on a frame-by-frame basis like a cartoon strip is drawn. Doing a simple slideshow of your products or a graphic where the pictures rotate is a simple, aesthetic and effective use of Flash.

Another common use of Flash is to do an "Intro page" for the first page, with "click to enter the site" required. (My personal opinion on Intro pages is not high - it can result in lower search engine rankings and is annoying to many people. They are there to get info, not jump through hoops!) Some websites are completely done in Flash, which has the disadvantages of not being searchable by the search engines and of being fairly slow to load for people on dial-up.

2) Shopping Carts and Merchant Accounts are required to sell online. If you are selling a few products, it may be easier for you to just get people to contact you toll-free or by email to order. If you are just setting up a business, you will need a merchant account to take credit card payments. A company that deals with online payments requires financials and possibly a deposit, due to risk of returns on certain types of website sales. So if you are just starting out, it can be hard to get an online payment solution until your business is established.

If this is the case, a solution is Paypal (www.paypal.com) which offers merchant accounts for businesses with no monthly fee, fees on transactions comparable to a bank and a full range of merchant support solutions such as shopping carts, "buy now" or subscription buttons, withdrawals from your Paypal account to your bank account and so on.

3) Site Statistics for a business site should be available to the owner via an adminstration panel, not placed on the site for all to see. Much more professional that way, and your competitors don't get to see your stats!

4) Forms are a good way of getting people to contact you from your site. Your options are either to publicly list your email address on the site, or to provide "fill in the blank" forms which submit the information to you via email. In this day of overflowing inboxes, a form which secures your email address is much less likely to result in spam.

Myriam Dyck is a local freelance website designer from Richer, MB who is providing this information as a public service for business owners to assist the community. Articles also available online at www.dyckwebsites.com