



THE TECHNOLOGY THERAPY GROUP

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Introduction

Let me introduce myself. My name is Jennifer Shaheen and I am known as the “eMarketing and Technology Therapist.” I have been providing my services to small business owners for over ten years. My company, the “Technology Therapy Group” has worked with small businesses to create and develop their company web sites. Over the years, there have been many changes and advancements in technology but the main ingredients have stayed the same. Enclosed within this booklet are 10 of the most popular questions small business owners and start-ups have asked me.

The answers to each question are general overviews to help get you started. I recommend digging deeper on many of the subjects touched upon here. A great way to advance your knowledge is to attend seminars on specific topics, and read related reference books. Hopefully my guidelines will help direct the focus of your future research.

10 Popular Questions Businesses Ask About Creating A Web Site.

1. Do I need a Web site?
2. How can a Web site help me reach my business goals?
3. Who is my audience and what are they looking for?
4. How much should I budget for my site?
5. Where do I buy my domain name?
6. How do I accept credit cards as payment online?
7. How will my web site be kept up-to-date?
8. How do I drive more traffic to my site?
9. How will I know if my site is successful?
10. Should I do this myself or hire a professional?

I. Do I need a Web site?

In this day and age where the Internet plays such an integral role in our lifestyle and economy, I still have many people who ask me this question, – “Do I need a web site?” I’d like to turn the tables for just a moment and ask you a question. **Do you need a phone and a business card to run your business??** It seems like a silly question for me to ask, doesn’t it? If you want to grow your business or communicate with customers, a phone number is pretty important. Without a phone how will anyone reach you? Without a business card how will people remember you after you have left? Today’s consumers and businesses start the process of finding companies to hire by going to the web for answers.

Therefore, my answer to the question of “Do you need a web site?” is **YES**.

I know many people will respond by saying, “but I don’t need a website because I get most of my business from referrals.” That’s great! But for many people seeing a website plays a crucial factor in their buying decisions. Referrals will only take you so far in business. If I am interested in using a company’s services and they do not have a website for me to visit, then I usually don’t call. Their website provides the answers to most of my basic questions especially if they are not around to answer questions in person. A website explains a lot about your company. Your web site tells people that you have invested in yourself and your business. It explains to people that you are open to communicating in a variety of ways with your customers. In this day and age, if you do not have a web site, you are alienating those people who feel comfortable with technology. Don’t shy away from creating a web site because of technology.

II. How can a Web site help me reach my business goals?

Before you create your web site, I recommend that you set goals for your web site.

What are your business goals? Let's look at some popular goals and see how a web site will help reach those goals. Here are a few common goals:

- I want to increase the sales of my new business product.
- I am a consultant and my goal is to get more speaking engagements.
- My business is customer service oriented and I want my customers to know that we are here to support their needs.
- I just started my business and I am trying to increase awareness of my services.

The goals mentioned above can be reached by taking the time to understand exactly who your customer is, how to reach them, and what you need to do to motivate them to act once they have reached your web site. A web site can also be a great way to offer online support to your existing customers. Support can take the form of online chat, customer resource manuals, and downloadable product demonstration videos. In addition, the extent of your online support shows potential customers your dedication to providing quality service. What ever your company goals may be, properly marketing and enhancing the functionality of your web site can help you achieve them. Once implemented, it takes minimal time and effort on the part of you and your coworkers to maintain your resources. Your team can use this time to focus on other productive tasks.

III. Who is my audience and what are they looking for?

Launching your web site is almost the same as writing a business plan. Like a business plan, you need to know your customer's demographics (i.e. age, income level) and psychographics (i.e. attitudes, lifestyles). You can find these statistics by using online resources. One of my favorite ways to gather this information is to use social networks to post questions. Discussion boards can also be a great place to find supplementary information about your audience and their needs.

One of the other key areas you will also want to research is your audience's technological skill levels. You need to understand what I refer to as "tech-know-graphics." As businesses build their web sites they forget about this area. Here are some questions you need to ask your target audience before launching your company web site:

- What is the average connection speed for these users?
- What is their comfort level on the Internet?
 - Do not assume that all users are advanced!
- What is the average monitor type?
 - Flatscreen
 - Square / Rectangle
- What is the average screen size?
 - 800 x 600
 - 1024 x 768
- What browser do they use?
 - FireFox
 - Internet Explorer
 - Netscape
 - Safari
- Where do they search for information on the web?
 - Google
 - Yahoo
- Do they use plug-ins?
Examples:
 - Flash
 - Adobe Acrobat

- Do they even know what a plug-in is?
- Why do they use the Internet?
 - Is it to research information? For entertainment? To socialize?

Remember: The Web Site is About Your Customer - NOT YOU!

The website <http://w3c.org> is a great resource. It shows you what the web standards are for many of the demographic markets you are trying to reach. [Http://searchenginewatch.com](http://searchenginewatch.com) is another great resource for understanding what search engines your audience tends to use. This information will come in handy when you plan your eMarketing budget.

IV. How much should I budget for my site?

This is always the most difficult question to answer. Web site budgets can range from \$0 - \$50,000. Let me explain. There are services that are free to use, but they do not allow you to use your own website to direct visitors to the location. Your name only appears as a subdirectory to their name. The web address usually looks something like this: <http://www.freecompany.com/yourcompanyname/>. These services are usually better suited for family photo albums not professional web sites.

Another option is using more cost effective template sites. This can be a great way to get you started because you do not have to pay a fee for the services of a designer or a developer. If you are creating an ecommerce site this may be a very favorable option because template programs usually include more than just design. They provide a way to simply upload products to process credit cards, as well as other useful functions like inventory tracking and automatic email receipt confirmations. Company's that offer these services include:

- Yahoo stores
- eBay Stores
- IBM Small Business Toolkit
- MonsterCommerce

There are more companies out there. These are a few to get you started.

Having a site custom designed will cost more money and can range depending upon what you are looking for from your web developer. What will you need? Here are a few questions you want to ask yourself:

- Do I want animation?
- Will I want a search engine friendly site?
- Do I want to edit the site myself?
- Who will be writing the copy?
- Do I have images or will I need custom photography? Or do I need to have the designer to buy stock photos?

A custom designed site will ensure that you have a unique look. Price will vary due to your needs and the functionality you desire your website to have. A good development company will be able to help you prioritize your wish list and help you create a target budget to start implementing your initial web building plans.

V. Where do I buy my domain name?

Your domain name acts similarly to your phone number. No two people can have the same number. The term “buy” however, is a bit misleading. “Lease” would be a better term because you only own the domain for as long as you are willing to pay for accessing and managing it in your chosen registrar. You can purchase your name at places like:

- Godaddy.com
- Register.com

There are many domain name registrars and service providers. I recommend choosing one that offers live support from real people. Be careful when buying your name, as often these companies will attempt to attach other services during the checkout process. These other services usually include things such as hosting, extra email accounts, website builders, certificates, and “whois” protection. While it may be tempting to get these services at such low prices, it is important to consider ahead of time what you will actually need to operate your website. Some of the extras are unnecessary and superfluous.

Generally picking a domain name is not an easy task. More often than not, the best keyword names are taken in major industries. This dilemma often forces small businesses to resort to choosing names with hyphens or buying a *.net* instead of a *.com*. Here is the best advice I can give you. Buy a *.com*. Unless you are a major corporation such as, Verizon or Cablevision you do not need every single extension. During my speaking engagements, I ask people the same question: “when you hear a company’s name, what web extension do you naturally associate with it? The answer is always the same - *.com*. The *.com* is still the king of all extensions. Now, this does not mean that web trends are not changing. The *.com* is becoming so saturated that other extensions are starting to gain more prominence. In addition, some of these other extensions are becoming more suitable to certain industries. For instance *.org* is often associated with non-profit organizations, *.us* with state services, and as of late *.tv* is being associated with rich multimedia content. But note, registering these extensions should be considered as secondary options. They can be used as an alternative if you have your mind set on having a keyword name and it is taken in the *.com*.

Now let’s switch topics slightly to naming your site and marketing. For now, when you are considering names, try to find keywords related to your business and your industry. You may want to look at the popularity of your chosen keywords and compare them to the keywords being used by your competition. Also, you may want to invest in additional domain names that would combine keywords, or a memorable phrase related to your business, and have them forward to your site. Marketing your web site is the key to ranking well in search engines.

VI. How do I accept credit cards as payment online?

To accept credit cards online you have 2 options; you can either register a merchant account for your business, or you can use a third-party processing company.

Merchant Account: You can apply for a merchant account with your bank or with a company like chargecardsystems.com. When you get your own merchant account you will be able to accept credit cards online and offline. Many merchant service companies provide you with a virtual terminal which enables you to process transactions for phone orders and access other consulting services. Merchant accounts can benefit your business in multiple ways and can be integrated into most online shopping carts.

Third-Party Processing such as PayPal, GoogleCart, YahooStores, and other similar sites provide credit card processing online only¹. The third party companies mentioned here take a % of each sale as part of the processing.

You will want to compare the options before making a decision because you may find a merchant account or third-party processor's rates will vary based on industry. Also, each will have restrictions. For example, some will not allow you to process orders over a specified amount.

VII. How will my web site be kept up-to-date?

First, I would like to make a very important point and that is: a web site should be updated with changes at least once a month. You will find that as you start looking into search engine optimization, the web sites that are not updated frequently do not rank as well on search engines. That being said, how do you keep up your web site? Think back to question 4 on the items I mentioned earlier. You should consider updating and maintaining your website yourself. If you cannot perform this function, you will need to rely on an outside company or individual to edit and update your web site.

I recommend making a calendar to schedule web updates. For example, if you're a service company, you may want to update your web site by showing recent projects you have completed or are about to undertake. If you're selling products, it is a good idea to keep your web pages fresh by rotating the products in your catalogue and the images on your homepage. This ensures maximum exposure for your items and allows for better search engine optimization. Be advised that as a business you need to evaluate the time it would take you to do something vs. hiring a professional. Do not be penny-wise and pound-foolish. "Time is money after all."

¹ PayPal has a virtual terminal service now for processing cards received via phone similar to a merchant account.

VIII. How do I drive more traffic to my site?

This question is probably one of the most important questions in this whole booklet and cannot be answered in just a few short paragraphs. This is one of the areas that I recommend you spend some time researching into with greater detail. Here are a few things to consider.

Offline: Your web site address should be on every promotional item you can think of: post cards, business cards, stationary, t-shirts and more. Driving traffic to your web site can be done through many other offline ideas.

Email Marketing: Collect email addresses from people you meet, events you attend or even on your web site through an online form. By sending out a quarterly or monthly email you can drive more people to your site.

Pay-per-click (PPC): Sign up for a pay-per-click program. This is a paid placement on search engines and you only pay when someone clicks to visit your web site. Citysearch, Google, Yahoo, MSN are just a few examples. They offer the ability to create an account where you can set up and customize ad groups with certain keywords. Most services allow you to setup a daily and monthly budget to help you control your spending.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO): This is also known as organic search placement. SEO allows your web site to be found on search engines like Google and Yahoo when a visitor types a keyword in to the search browser. This provides you with relevant traffic without having to pay for a ppc ad group. Properly optimizing your site for search engine placement requires a lot of time and effort marketing your website. Examples of SEO actions include; providing keyword metatags, exchanging links with other sites, and submitting your site to directories among others. You can do this yourself with enough trial and error and research. However, many businesses end up paying an SEO expert to reach this goal for them as it is a meticulous and time consuming task.

Other ways of driving traffic to your website include:

- Blogs / blogging
- Podcasting
- Social Networks
- Affiliate programs
- Link exchanges

IX. How will I know if my site is successful?

Before you start any marketing, one of the first things you should do is add Web Analytics to your web site. Analytics will allow you to see how many visitors you have on your web site, how long they spent browsing your site and where they came from. This report will show you how successful link exchanges are and which search engines have provided you with the most traffic. You should run monthly reports to see if your web site is growing. It is important to log this and keep track of trends in your web browsers.

Another way to evaluate the success of your web site is to set marketing goals for your site. For example, use a different phone number on your web site and keep track of how many calls come in from that line or provide visitors with an online contact form and keep track of how often it is filled out.

X. Should I do this myself or hire a professional?

This is probably one of the most popular questions I hear from new business owners and the answer is not a simple one. Designing for the web is not the same as designing for other mediums like print. You may be a talented designer in your own right, but you may not be used to computer based graphic design. If this is your first time, and you are considering designing your website yourself, I recommend investing in a consultant to review and evaluate your site. They can also help support you during the implementation phase.

However, if you are using a template program like a Yahoo or eBay store you should be able to launch this site yourself. Template services often times offer support resources like helpfiles, email support, and live chatlines. A word of caution here, if you struggle with attaching files in emails and other computer issues you may need to seek out some support of your own.

My personal opinion: a web site whether it be an online brochure or a robust eCommerce site requires an understanding of 4 key elements: design, marketing, technical function and usability. If you are not using a template provider you will need help in one or two of these areas. I see so many web sites go up that are aesthetically pleasing but they fail to generate business because the individual missed some key marketing or usability elements. Make sure you do your research and seek out professionals who are looking to support your growth, not control your web site.