



Content + Design + Usability = Because your business needs more than “design”

DIY website: so you want to try it at home?

You are an adventurous business owner who wants to try your hand at do-it-yourself (DIY) website design. It can be fun and a little scary (okay, a lot scary!). So if you are giving the idea serious consideration, then I'd like to offer some suggestions for your journey.

Remember, this is where you eat. If possible, don't start on your business website. Maybe you've been meaning to do one for your family or an organization that you volunteer for. Your business is your bread-and-butter so take care when stepping outside your area of expertise.

Read. Play. Read some more. Read every book you can get your hands on. Read them until you feel that you could write one of your own. Take some classes. Download an HTML editor and play. Find online sources (e.g., blogs) and keep reading. There are so many aspects to creating and maintaining an effective website. Learning how can be a lot of hard work, but it can be a lot of fun too.

Analyze, but don't copy. Look at other websites, both your competitors' and familiar sites that your customers probably visit regularly. Get a feel for why they work well and what's not working. Think about what you like and don't like when visiting other websites.

Storyboarding isn't just for Hollywood. If you think about your website as an online brochure, you'll be missing the 3D aspect of it. When planning your website, you need to think about functionality. Start with rough sketches that allow you to try different ways of grouping the elements of your website. Consider how customers might want to move around. This will help you refine the flow, content,

linking, and structure of your website. Chances are your finished product won't look exactly like what you had in mind when you got started and your website will be better for it.

You and your URL. You want your URL to be memorable and easy to remember. Shorter is better and you might also want to consider using keywords as part of your URL to be search-engine friendly. If you're not already a "brand" then it may be more important to get keywords into your URL than your company name.

Choosing a web host. Ask friends for recommendations. Read the reviews. Ask yourself what you really need (e.g., tons of space, high bandwidth, e-commerce tools). Reliability and service are key. There are a multitude of web hosts, each offering a variety of packages. And there are an equal number of websites offering reviews and information to help you decide. So let the research begin!

Know when to call in reinforcements. Okay, so you tried it on your own. You built a website that actually doesn't look bad. But is it the face of your business that you want to put out in the world? If the answer is yes, great! So launch that puppy and get back to your business, your kids, daylight, etc. But if the answer is NOT a resounding yes, all is not lost. And don't think if you don't publish the site you created then you've wasted your time. Quite the contrary! You are now better equipped to choose a designer and work effectively with him/her. You also no doubt understand your role as owner of the website much better and will be far more prepared to maintain, promote, and utilize your website as an important part of your marketing strategy.

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Notes on ... DIY websites

Do your own usability testing

Let's face it, if you design it then you know where everything is. Ask a friend who isn't familiar with your site to test it out. Watch him/her try to move around the site. Ask for feedback. And remember, they'll probably be more polite than will be helpful so ask them to be brutal. Do-it-yourself usability testing can help you uncover weaknesses in your design.

Look at the newspaper for ideas

There's nothing new about usability and design. Newspapers have been doing it for years. Notice the hierarchy of a newspaper. Some stories have bigger headlines. The most important stories are higher on the page. There are teasers that draw you further inside. Your website isn't a newspaper, but you can still learn some new tricks from the old dogs.

Headlines that rock

Good headlines grab your attention and great headlines make you want to keep reading. Be clear and concise. Use "active" voice and eliminate unnecessary words (e.g., is, the). Learn what it takes to make great headlines and you stand a better chance of getting your message out.

Great advice for writing well

Strunk & White's "The Elements of Style" is a must-read for anyone who writes anything. At just over 100 pages, this classic is full of great tips that will help improve your writing. Apply these principles to anything you write from articles to e-mails.

Nothing beats content, service

You can build a beautiful website and market your heart out. But in reality, if people don't come back then what have you gained? Give people great content and great service and they'll be back for more.

For information on how **CDUdotcom** can help you plan, create, refresh, or optimize your website, [contact us](mailto:contact@cdudotcom.com) for a free consultation.

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