The Perils & Pitfalls of
WEB DESIGN

The most common (and easily avoidable) mistakes, pitfalls, and errors you may have the opportunity to make (or miss) when designing your web page

Domains

- Ownership
  - Some designers/hosts will offer to register
  - Some won't register in your name
  - If a domain isn't in your name, you may not be able to take it with you if you want to leave
  - Make sure a domain is registered to YOU
  - Easiest way to accomplish that is to do it yourself.

Domains - Registrars

There are lots of places to register a domain out there. Some of them are shady, some of them are cheap, some are overly expensive, and some of them try to add on so many services that by the time you're finished, you don't even know what you're paying for!

So...things you should watch out for when selecting a registrar:

Domain - Registrars

1. **Check the costs first**. Many registrars have different pricing depending on the type of domain you're buying, and for what you want to do with it.

2. **Location, location, location** - Internic (http://internic.net) has a listing of where domain registrars are located. I strongly recommend using one that's here in the US.

3. **Business practices** - If you're looking at a high-profile registrar, look at reviews, at their advertising, news stories about their business practices, etc. See if the company you're looking at is really as reputable as they seem.

Domain - Registration

- Check to see if the domain you want is available, <u>but don't do it while at a registrar's site</u>. The reason for this is that some registrars will buy a domain name that people search for if isn't bought right away. Then you have to pay more to actually get it. Instead, check via a safe interface, like here at SWCP:

  http://www.swcp.com/check-domain-availibility/

Domains - Name

- Watch your language!
  - It's easy to run the words in your company name together when selecting a domain...but remember that there may be more than one way to read it. Here are some examples of what can happen if you're not careful:
  - Business Name: Pen Island
- Domain: penisland.com
  - Business Name: Experts Exchange
- Domain: expertsexchange.com
  - Business Name: Therapist Finder
- Domain: therapistfinder.com

Domains - Name

- Business Name: First Cumming Methodist Church
- Domain: cummingfirst.com
- Business Name: Go Tahoe
- Domain: gotahoe.com
- Business Name: Speed of Art
- Domain: speedofart.com
- Business Name: Who Represents
- Domain: whorepresents.com
- Business Name: Mole * Station Native Nursery
- Domain: molestationnursery.com
- Business Name: Power-Gen, Italy
- Domain: powergenitalia.com
- I also recommend just searching the entire domain name (without the .com, .net, etc) to see what other connotations your choice may have, even in other languages. You can also check names at places like the Urban Dictionary.

Hosting

- When you're looking for a host, you usually end up balancing two things – cost and customer service. And usually in the back of your head are little things like
  - Uptime/reliability
  - Security
  - Redundancy, and all that.
- But for a lot of people, it just comes down to price.

- There are a LOT of hosts out there.
- Reviews won't help.
- Customer Service & Support are IMPORTANT.
- Having a dependable host is something that can make or break your site, so it is certainly worth paying a few extra dollars to make sure that you're getting what you need, both in terms of service, and what type(s) of hosting you need.

- The last, and one of the most important things to check on before you sign up with a host, is their terms of service. Make sure that there isn't anything in there that indicates that they can, in any way, take or appropriate ownership of your site, your content, or anything else that you put up. Many free or very cheap hosts will do things like that, and you can end up losing control of your content with no recourse if you sign up with them.

Content

- Make sure you own or have the rights to <u>ALL</u> of your content.

  - Creating your own content is the easiest way to insure you have copyright

  - If you hire a copywriter, photographer, or even a web designer, MAKE SURE that part of the contract is that you have the rights to use their work as yours.

  - If you want to use images from the web, obtain them from a site like istockphoto.com, which will give you the rights to use the image on your site.

  - The one thing you DON'T EVER want to do is to copy a picture, or an article from someone else's site without permission.

Custom Programming

- Custom programming - Usually used for special functions, like a form, or a newsletter, or even a shopping cart.

- Before you think about having programming custom done, take a look at what options already exist.

- Last and most importantly…if you have custom programming work done (especially in Flash or other animation) make sure that in addition to the final copy files, you also get the SOURCE files.

- If you work with a custom programmer, again, make sure that you have the rights to use what they are writing for you!

Search Engine Optimization

- BASIC Search Engine Optimization, or SEO, is not terribly difficult.
- There are lots of FREE resources out there like Google's Webmaster tools
- That being said, there are a lot of more complex things you can do with SEO to increase your rankings and visibility on Google, etc.
- And of course, there are LOTS of companies out there who are HAPPY to take your money.
  - Don't pay them a tremendous amount of money, especially for a "quick" result. NO ONE, no matter how much you pay them, can guarantee results for increasing rankings.
  - Don't try to compete for every possible search term that applies to your site/product/group, etc. Pick a few that are most important to you.
  - Avoid any company that wants to copyright your SEO or metadata information. This is not really useful for them, as they can't resell something so specific. But it can be used to strong-arm you into purchasing more services, or getting locked into a contract you don't need.
  - Last, but certainly not least, don't accept any unsolicited offers to improve your page ranking/SEO score. Some of those offers can ever turn into threat or extortion campaigns that try to SCARE you into paying them for their service.
- One of the things that contributes to good search engine rankings is TIME. The amount of time that you've had your domain, the amount of time you've had your website up.

Design

- PRINT design is NOT the same as WEB design.
  - This is especially true of fonts.
- Basic design conventions are also important.
  - Of these conventions, navigation is the one to focus on.
- Make the content and information that you have on your sight the most important and visible things on the page.
  - Auto-playing sounds, flashing text, brightly colored banners are all actually more likely to be ignored, or force people away from your site. Things like "selective attention" & "banner blindness" are examples of how web users have trained themselves to ignore those elements, because they aren't usually of benefit to the user.
- When you put your content up on the web, don't write as if it were a book.
  - Use smaller blocks of text, headings, bullet points, subheadings, anything that will make it easier to scan. Large blocks of text are both intimidating, and not very usable when searching for a particular topic, item, or information on a screen.

Types of Websites (Platforms)

- Static (HTML, PHP)
  - Simplest site, but difficult to maintain without knowing the language it's written in.(This is the one most likely to be done by your nephew, with that copy of Dreamweaver he's learning to use)
- Animated (Flash/HTML5)
  - Special software/knowledge required in order to create, and may need source files in order to change easily
  - Flash is not at all Search Engine friendly
- CMS (Content Management System)
  - Wordpress – easiest CMS to use for a beginner, very powerful, with a robust community for expansion of capability and appearance
  - Joomla – Slightly more complicated to use and maintain, but also has a robust community for expansion and appearance
  - Drupal – More scalable and robust than the other two CMS's listed, but considerably more difficult to use, maintain, and update

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