

Website Development and Design: Real World Experience Debra Bryant

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I pledge I have acted honorably.....Debra Bryant

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What was once an elite group of Internet technology (IT) professionals has now become a playground for many entrepreneurs and novices without IT degrees or certifications that call themselves “Web Designers.” The IT professionals are still alive and well making thousands of dollars for developing and designing state of the art web sites, however, due to the demand of small businesses and the popularity of a digital presence, opportunities abound for creative and tech savvy individuals to offer web development and design services at affordable prices.

A more amazing fact is that an average person with a little perseverance can virtually build their own website sometimes for free or at minimal cost. This report will capture this phenomenon as well as the changes and the advances made in web development and design.

Early Beginnings

The early beginnings of the internet began thirty years ago, and involved scientists, educators and the military in the development and management of content (Arandilla, 2011). In the 1980s Tim Berners-Lee, a computer scientist, created the hypertext coding language we know as HTML today. By the 1990s the Internet connected the world through telephone lines with documents viewed in HTML1 , which is

referred to as *first generation* web sites. These first sites were created for functional communication not entertainment. The dial-up modem telephone lines that carried the Internet connections were relatively slow, which made it impractical to load graphics or a linear layout (Arandilla, 2011).

During this time early web designers' could only create simple layouts, text, tables, and links with little or no graphics (Arandilla, 2011). Developers in the 1990s worked on making sites more visually appealing. A Web Consortium was created in the 1990s to prevent large companies from monopolizing web design code, and is still responsible today for governing the coding techniques, rules and guidelines.

HTML 2 (hypertext messaging language) was born between 1992 -1994 with complicated code that allowed graphics, and a faster Internet known as the *second-generation* web site protocol. In 1995, HTML 3 was born, which gave designers options to use enhanced tables and style sheets (Arandilla, 2011). During the HTML 2 and 3 development, Microsoft launched their browser, Internet Explorer, and Mosaic launched their new browser, Netscape. Web designers now had more freedom to customize and improve their web design with colorful backgrounds, add animated images, and flash. These improvements changed web design from a static landscape to a dynamic one as these developments became known as *third*

generation website design (Arandilla, 2011).

An Expanding Playground

Today's web sites are classified as *fourth generation* web sites offering rich and interactive web site experiences that include additional coding tools besides HTML such as XML, CSS, JavaScript, and Flash (Arandilla, 2011). HTML 5 is the newest version of code and is compatible with various web browsers. HTML 5 allows easier addition of multimedia content without confusing plug-ins or added software.

Technological advances added mobile applications to the digital world of web design. Mobile web design has brought about efforts to simplify overall web design so web sites could be viewed on a smaller screen. As a result of these advances in technology web designers can offer a wide variety of options including video, graphics, images, animation and games. The Internet has evolved from an information source to an interactive, fun entertainment playground. From reading books to planning travel, watching movies, taking college classes, banking, connecting with friends, finding a job - the list of things we do on the internet is limitless, and a strong indication that its importance will only continue to increase.

Real World Experience

In the real world ten or twenty years ago your business card was your introduction to connect your business with potential and current

clients. Today, a business card is still an important part of marketing your business, but not as important as the Internet. The Internet has become the social and professional network for millions of businesses. A business without a website has little chance for success in an era where everything is communicated digitally.

A business name is important so this is where a domain name is an important part of building a website. The domain name appears like this www.domainname.com, which identifies you on the web, and is your web address and identity. To obtain one you must do a domain name search and register and pay for it through one of many domain name providers on the web.

Think about when you hand a business card to a potential client. You may have a few seconds to one minute to promote your business, but when you have a web site listed on your business card it changes the landscape of your relationship with your client. He or she can visit your web site and learn more about you and your products and services. A consumer or client can spend as much or as little time browsing your site, checking out your Facebook, or LinkedIn account, or send you an email for additional information.

A web site is an important asset for a business; however, many self-employed and/or small businesses are unable to afford thousands

of dollars for a web site. The question, “How much should a web site cost?” is one of the most frequently asked questions in the web design world. WebPageFX.com will tell you, “there is not a magic formula for calculating the cost of designing or redesigning a website because the answer is complicated” (WebPageFX, 2012).

The cost associated with design and developing a web site has changed over the years. Based on one study completed by WebPageFX.com a small business (under 25 employees) located in a small city that want a professional web site with a total of fifteen pages, web hosting, email, and one domain name could expect to pay today (2010-2012) \$2,500 to \$8,500. This cost has not changed since 2000, but prior to 2000 the cost would have been from \$6,000 to \$12,000 (WebPageFX, 2012).

What is a small business with a small budget to do? Freelance web designers’ charge as little as \$500 to thousands of dollars, or you could try your hand at web design. Too overwhelming you may say. If you are computer and software savvy you have a good chance at successfully building a web site (if you have the time and patience).

Many online companies such as *Go Daddy.com* offer domain names and hosting in addition to web design templates that are easy to use and have support based service. For under \$200 a year, a domain name can be registered, and a web site built and maintained (GoDaddy.com, 2012). Once you have a domain name, simply pick out

a template and start adding content and pictures, and then publish. It is not rocket science, and building your own website and maintaining it will give you great satisfaction and save you tons of money.

What about pictures and images? In most cases it is not necessary to use *Adobe Photoshop* or *Illustrator* as long as pictures are downloaded in a jpg or gif file, and then upload pictures to a web site template. *Goggle Images* is a great resource for finding free pictures that are high quality and in most instances not copyrighted (GoogleImages.com).

Another option for web site creation is watching a *YouTube* video on “Building a Website” for free or a *Wordpress* web site for \$25.00 (not including monthly hosting). Another option is to watch a promotional video on *Wix.com*. A website that helps you to build your own website for free. Many opportunities are out there to help a novice create a web presence that connects individuals and businesses not only to clients, but also to social media platforms such as facebook, pinterest, instagram and more.

Another great instructional video will take you step by step to build a website using *Wordpress*. This website shows you how to build a website in an hour for \$25.00 (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Jv47_VIBOQ) (YouTube, 2012). Keep in mind that content and pictures must be available and ready to upload.

Regardless of what venue is used to build a website, saving

money and obtaining a web presence is essential to business success. Now that you have a website how do you get people to visit it? One very important option is SEO. Search Engine Optimization is simply keywords that are entered on your web site's pages and in account set up of your site that will point searches for those words to your website listed on your browser's search results list.

Many business pay a lot of money to web designers for SEO, but here again it just takes some research to find a creative way to ensure potential and current clients will find you. Google Analytics is a free service offered by Google to help sites find out how many customers a site is attracting by providing standard reports about what visitors view on a sight.

Have money to spend on advertising? Google Ads will help advertise a business, or if making money from your site is appealing Google Ads will show ads that relate to the content on your site. Adsense ads will pay per click on an ad appearing on a site.

What is so great about this "real world experience" of web design is that a business or individual can keep reinventing its message by recreating, updating and maintaining its web site. Instead of making calls to a web designer who charges by the hour an individual can get as creative and make changes as much as possible. Add a blog or shopping cart to a web site. View a tutorial on *YouTube* and you are on your way to success in the digital design world.

As advancements are made it will become easier to cross the digital divide into designing web pages. As more template-based software becomes available to the public, with easy drag and drop features, a larger audience will engage in web site design.

The future of web design professionals will still be a lucrative one due to the amount of fortune 500 companies and large corporations who rely on static interactive web sites. In house web design teams are becoming popular with many companies that still require knowledge and training to work with software such as Dreamweaver, Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator.

No End in Sight

A web site no longer stands alone, but is the gateway to unending possibilities. When visiting a web site for information and/or entertainment it is expected widgets will be there to take you to another level of information and social interaction. This social media list keeps growing. Here is an example of what options are popular today: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, RSS feeds, Instagram, Pinterest, YouTube, Flickr, GooglePlus and iTunes.

So wrapping up this tour of tools necessary to create and maintain a web presence that will live on and thrive in a rapidly, changing digital world, one thing is essential to remember – Mobile. Mobile devices are the future of the Internet because it enables individuals who are unable to afford a laptop or desktop computer to

engage in this gateway to all things social and professional. More importantly it allows flexibility and reliance on connections important to daily life.

To be successful at digitizing your life one must organize e-mail, learn to tell stories with data and multi-media platforms, make social and professional connections, track your audience, understand search engines, grow an audience with content and links, write effective web headlines, and target specific channels (Briggs, 2010).

The power of the Internet comes from the interactivity and links that connect one source of information to another. This concept is a primary building block of the digital age. Another building block is the comment or contribution an audience makes to any page of information or news (Briggs, 2010). Contributions audiences make no longer just include written comments, but also photos, video, blog posts, and in the case of *Wikipedia* edits. This contribution allows collaborations with a web community, however, it is important to keep conversations accurate and ethical by setting guidelines for participants.

It is important to monitor comments audiences make on a web site for offensive postings. Filtering content is just as important as the accuracy of content on a web site. It is suggested to use conversational language in a direct, unique manner that will hold the

attention of your audience (Briggs, 2010).

A good public speaker knows his or her audience. The same rule applies to publishing a web site. Learn how to track web site visitors by measuring the content published by the audience that consumes it. Through this process discover the context and stories that are working.

In a “real world” once a web site is published it is important to take the time to measure, analyze, and adapt a web site’s message and reach, which will be critical to its success.

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