

## Build or Refurbish Your Web Site With Purpose and Without Pain



Susanna Opper

A successful Web site works because it meets its objective. To reach perfection, it must do so within limits of time, money and energy. Creating a new Web site – or refurbishing an existing one – is a big project. Like developing a business plan or building a house, it's an endeavor that can eat your life. Yet, many accomplished businesspeople believe their Web site is their crowning achievement.

To get a site that makes you proud without costing your sanity, follow these 10 steps.

**1. Establish Clear Goals.** Of course, every major project begins this way. But with a Web site, it's critical to get goal-setting right. A Web site can serve as a simple online brochure or change lives – and do everything in between. Decide what you want your Web site to do for you now. The beauty of a Web site is that it can – and should – be constantly changing. Today you may simply present your company on the Web. Next year, go for an e-commerce site that sells your product.

**2. Secure Your Domain Name.** Domain names are the Wild West of the Web. Why? Because there are nearly 4.3 billion Web sites today and 50,000 are added weekly. For the last decade, Internet bounty hunters have been buying and holding domain names. Getting your desired name is a crapshoot. If available, it will cost a mere \$15. But when a group in Hong Kong owns your name, they could ask for thousands.

One cardinal rule: Your company name and your URL must match. Calling your business OnTimeDeliveries but using www.OnTymeDeliveries.com doesn't work. Change your business name to match the URL. If you can't get the desired .com or make a corporate name adjustment, then cautiously consider one of the newer extensions like .biz.

**3. Set Your Budget.** How much does a Web site cost? That's like asking how much a car costs – a 13-year-old coupe you'll drive to the station

or a Rolls Royce. Do-it-yourself sites may cost a few hundred dollars; major online retailers invest millions. If you're a startup business, an entrepreneur or professional service provider, set a budget of between \$7,000 and \$10,000 at the low end. For something more intricate, plan on \$20,000 to \$30,000. Remember, you can start small and grow as your needs expand and your cash flows.

**4. Pick Your Team.** Doing this step right is key both for a good experience and for staying on budget. No matter how simple or complex your Web site, someone will have to write its content, design it and build it. The more experienced and professional the team, the better your site and the fewer your headaches. You can outsource to an agency, or, usually for less money, you can use a Web site producer. Just as a movie producer assembles a team to make a successful film, your Web site producer will bring together the players to suit your market and budget. The producer will manage the team – and help you get your part done with minimal effort.

**5. Select Your Navigation.** Whole books have been written on this subject alone, and for good reason. Like the backbone of a vertebrate, navigation not only provides structure, it also makes the entity work effectively. For some sites, the navigation is straightforward. But if your organization steps out of the mold, you can invest a lot of creative energy finding the ideal navigational logic.

**6. Choose a Look and Feel.** You only have a few seconds to make a first impression on the Web. The design is the heart of your site and a dramatic purveyor of your brand.

**7. Write Brilliantly.** The Web has spawned a whole new vocabulary and changed readers' expectations. Web words are pithy, direct, arresting and inviting. When successful, they lure the reader deeper and deeper into the site. Stories and testimonials are compelling, but it takes skill to distill the essence of the message into a carefully crafted tale that will both entertain and inform. If your topic is esoteric, your process complex or your service unusual, you have an

incentive to include a professional writer on your team. Likewise, if everyone in your field does what you do, you need a skilled writer to tease out your distinction. If you sell real estate, you literally have the same product as all your competitors. Your Web site needs to communicate what's different and special about you so prospects will contact you.

**8. Pick Compelling Visuals.** Words alone won't do it. No matter what your purpose, the Web is a visual medium and you need to get your message across in pictures. Go for something unique about your message and use that in the graphics.

**9. Stay on Track.** Here's where your team manager earns her keep. You've got a business to run, clients to support and a family to manage. Without knowing the Web creation process, you can't know what needs to be done next. The inevitable result? Your Web site project falls to the bottom of the pile where it lingers for weeks, or months – even years.

Your professional project manager stays on top of the process, guiding you gently to the next step while skillfully managing the writer, designer and developer to keep everything moving toward the launch date.

**10. Promote Your Site.** The final step to perfection is promoting your site so it has lots of visitors. People often overlook the obvious. Send an e-mail to everyone you know – business and personal contacts alike.

Perfection may be a goal rather than an actual destination for your Web site, but you should be able to measure results in concrete terms – more qualified leads, lower costs, increased efficiency. When your Web site goes live, rest on your laurels for a while. Then take the next step. Keeping your Web site up-to-date and vibrant means prospective customers and search engine spiders both will visit often.

*Susanna Opper heads Shawenon Communications in Alford, Mass. She serves organizations as a Web site producer and by writing Web content and other marketing materials. Visit [www.Shawenon.com](http://www.Shawenon.com)*