Janeson Keeley

Dan Smith

netFRONT

The DIY Web site >

Executive Summary:
Increasing the effectiveness of your Web site is a task you can keep in-house if you follow a few instructions.

By Janeson Keeley

As purse strings tighten and Web site development tools become easier to use, many business owners are choosing to build their own Web sites. Roanoke MeetUp 2.0 members have agreed to give some tips for creating effective sites that will help increase your business.

Here they are:

Start in the right place. Digital media consultant Ira Kaufman emphasizes the importance of identifying your "value proposition"—the benefits that you offer your customers and clients. Then define your target audience. "Everything on your Web site should be geared toward attracting the right people to your site who will communicate your message to others," advises Kaufman.

Use DIY tools. Blogger Heather St. Clair recommends registering your domain name and getting hosting through a company that provides one-click Wordpress installation. St. Clair notes that "you can customize templates and get plugins that provide functionality that you used to have to code yourself." Sites likes www.webhostingchoice.com can help you compare domain registration and hosting packages.

Be conscious of the image you project. Select a template that conveys professionalism, use good quality graphics, and make sure that your spelling and punctuation are correct. Check for consistent formatting in both appearance and writing. "Even something as small as inconsistent formats for times—"9:00 a.m." in some places and "9 AM" in others—will detract from the impression that your site leaves with visitors—much as it does in engraving," warns Eric

Danielson, owner of All Star Impressions.

Develop quality content. Judy Mick of JJM Marketing found that writing content was difficult, so she took the 30 Day Blog Challenge (www.jeanettecates.com/30days). "The only way to get better is to practice," she says. She also recommends using syndicated content from sites such as www.ezinearticles.com.

Schedule time to update your site. Developing a Web site isn't a one-time event. Make sure that you add new content on a regular basis. Having a blog, news, or monthly specials section can make this easier.

Learn about search engine optimization and submission. "Having a Web site is great, but it has to be able to work for you, and it can't do that if no one can find it," observes Kimberly Christian of Venco Business Solutions. There are numerous reputable online resources; www.sitepronews.com is a good place to start.

Learn how to promote your site using social media. "Look into online resources, webinars, and groups like MeetUp 2.0, where people will happily share what they have learned with 'newbies'," suggests John Lusher, marketing director for Consolidated Construction Services. Visit the MeetUp 2.0 page on Facebook to learn more about this local group.

Is DIY right for you? As sophisticated as Web site development tools have become, the do-it-yourself route is not everyone. If you have time to devote to it, are relatively comfortable with technology, and enjoy learning new things, developing your own Web site can be both fun and productive. If you're short on either time or technical aptitude, hiring a professional Web site developer may be a better choice.