

How much will my first web site cost?

This is a question that I get all of the time. My usual answer is “How long is a piece of string?” followed by some explanations. As there’s no real answer to the first question, and as the usual sub-text is: “How little can I pay and still get a decent site?” what I’ll try to address today is what *you* can do to keep costs to a minimum:

Do your own domain name search and registration. This can be quite time consuming and therefore expensive. It’s also a good idea to put dibs on your preferred domain name before someone else snaps it up. To start, do an internet search on “domain registration”. Almost every company will have a simple method of entering a prospective domain name and letting you know whether it is available. When you find one that you like and is available, it is simple to register online. Doing this also has the advantage that you know the name is registered to you personally, and under your control. Typically this will cost less than \$25/year for a .ca, and can be a lot cheaper for .com — if you can find one!

Get an idea of web hosting costs. While it’s probably better to take the web designer’s recommendation for your first web hosting service, you can get an idea of costs for a basic site from the same outfits you found looking for registration. \$8-\$12 a month is a starting point for an uncomplicated site.

Know what you want before you call. You don’t want to pay someone to help you decide what you want! Look at your competitors’ sites and get an idea of what you want to say, and create a simple document (no formatting). As long as it does the job and makes sense, keep the number of pages to a minimum. Typically, you’ll have a home page which introduces the site and has links to other pages; a Contact us page with addresses, maps, phone numbers and the subject pages for each major topic.

Determine the “Look and Feel” for your site. Creating this can be a major time commitment for a designer. Having examples can help, but even better, you can provide your designer an actual template! Search on “web site templates” and you’ll find thousands of mostly free designs that a web designer can use and modify. If a small contribution is requested, pay up, it’s a real deal! A typical design will set the fonts, colours and patterns for a website, so that every page looks like it’s a part of the whole. Point your designer to a favourite template to work from, or let them use it as a starting point.

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He is semi-retired but accepts contracts to help finance his expensive hobbies. David retired from a 33-year career in corporate IT and now specialises in developing database applications for Windows platforms, web-sites, and generally in improving business processes by simplifying, clarifying and beautifying all kinds of business documents.

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At the very least, if you do these things you will have given the designer a very good idea of what you want and allow him to give you a pretty exact estimate.

While you're at it, think ahead to making changes. Are you going to go back to the designer and pay him to make basic textual changes, or will you do it yourself? Decide which pages you want to make frequent changes to and ask the designer to create it in such a way that the words can be easily edited by a non-expert, without special software, and uploaded without help.

Life isn't all one sided, and while saving costs is important to you, creating a good relationship with an IT or graphics expert is also important. You'll want to work well with the professionals who can help you on your way to becoming rich and successful, so explain where you are coming from in a cooperative, not confrontational, mode and the good guys will understand. If one declines your business on these terms, listen to his reasons and make your decision accordingly.