

# Computer Business

## Nine Questions Your Developer Should Ask You

By Angela Render

**B**uilding a Web site is like building a house. Changes are easy to make before you've broken ground, but time consuming and costly if you change something in the middle or at the end of the build—not impossible, just expensive and time consuming.

As tempting as it may be to hand over your Web site to a designer or developer and say, "Handle it," any Web professional needs to know few things before they open their programs.

### 1) What is the purpose of the site?

It's vital that both you and your developer have a firm grasp of what your site is supposed to accomplish. Are you a freelance journalist selling your skills? Are you a novelist promoting your first book? Do you have a dozen books you want to promote? Do some of these books have their own established sites, and do you need a portal linking them to each other and to you? Do you have tips to share with other writers? Do you have supplemental information for your novel? Are you trying to create an interactive environment for your fans? Should the site be collecting client contact information to build an e-newsletter list? Maybe your site is supposed to do all of those things or something completely different.

While none of these functions is mutually exclusive, all of them dictate requirements for the infrastructure of your site. This information will also determine how complicated your site will be and thus how expensive it will be to have it built.

If the answer to Number 1 included more than one of the options, then: What is the *primary* function of the site?

Like a story without a clear plot line, your Web site simply won't perform well if its goals aren't organized in a clear hierarchy. Unfocused sites are also difficult to

navigate and can cause a viewer to give up before your message is seen.

### 2) Who is the intended audience?

If your target audience is over fifty, you do not want to program it with tiny fonts and flashing ads. Even the color scheme is important. The target audience should be considered also in terms of what sort of keywords will be used to find what you have to offer. Yes, I said *keywords*—and you should be thinking about those now. Keywords and phrases are the terms people might enter into a search engine in order to find information.

### 3) What sort of content is the site to contain?

Content is anything displayed on your site, from text to images. This is also not necessarily covered in the purpose of the site. Will there be news articles? Press releases? Podcasts? Do you need a blog, message board, guest book, or other feedback method? Which feedback method do you really need? I'll go into that in more detail when I discuss what pages your site should contain. Will you have book reviews? Tear sheets? Links to articles or other resources?

### 4) Who will maintain the site after it's launched?

If you intend to make updates to your site yourself and don't know a thing about HTML, then you need your developer to create a Web interface in order for you to do that. That needs to be discussed up front. If you don't want to maintain it yourself, then you need to plan on having someone do it for you. While you're thinking about this, also consider how often you are going to update your content. Stale sites don't attract traffic, and you need eyeballs scanning your pages for your site to be effective. Once a week or once a month is a manageable frequency.

### 5) Where will the site be hosted?

In other words, where will it live? Your developer may or may not provide hosting services. A number of

hosts out there can provide different levels of service for varying prices. If you hire a Web developer to do this for you, make certain that you are listed as the billing contact and that your credit card is used instead of relying on the developer's. Also, make sure you have the username and password for your site, even if you never use it yourself. If someone else is paying for it and is the only contact, then *that person* owns your domain and all of your business interests on the Web—not you. I know I mentioned this in the last article, but it bears mentioning again.

#### 6) Do you need a domain name?

If you don't already own a relevant URL (universal resource locator or Web address), then you probably need one. The address [www.JohnSmith.com](http://www.JohnSmith.com) reads better than [www.someoneelse'sdomain.com/~yourbusinesshere](http://www.someoneelse'sdomain.com/~yourbusinesshere). Domains are inexpensive and give you legitimacy. It's also easier for a fan who met you at a conference to guess your URL. The same thing applies here as with the hosting account with regard to billing and contact information.

#### 7) Will you need e-mail addresses with your new domain name?

Will your host provide these? If not, you need to find someone who will. Who is going to set them up? You, your host, or your Web developer? Make sure you have the username and password for this account as well.

#### 8) How will you monitor your site's effectiveness?

A ton of free software exists out there to track your traffic. Many hosts include tracking software with the hosting package. Will you do this or will you hire someone else?

#### 9) Have you looked at any of your competitors' sites?

What do you like about them? What don't you like? What keywords are they using? Are their sites performing well for them?

Once you know the answers to these questions, you'll have a more detailed picture of what your Web site will be like. Now you're ready to begin developing it.

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that. A link to the video is a good solution.) Include the link to your trailer on your signature line. Put it on your business cards and your brochures. Advertise it everywhere!

OK, I've done the best I could. You are on your own now. Remember, above all else, don't make your marketing be work; make it fun! It will be obvious to other people, and it is contagious!

Until next time, Happy Sales to You!

*Janet Elaine Smith is the author of fourteen novels, many of which have been best sellers and won awards. She also writes for many magazines, both in print and online. She was recently wooed (and won) by Star Publish, LLC, where she has been named marketing director. Web site: [www.janetelainessmith.com](http://www.janetelainessmith.com); e-mail: [janetelainessmith@yahoo.com](mailto:janetelainessmith@yahoo.com).*



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