

# Computer Business

## Building Your Web Presence

By Angela Render

**I**f you're reading this, I don't need to convince you that you need a Web site. You've attended the self-promotion seminars and read the articles and already know how a Web site can help you promote your work. The question you face now is whether to do it yourself or call in a professional. Both options have a cost to them, either in time or in money.

### Can You Do It Yourself?

Of course you can. As a Web developer with over a decade of experience, I'm telling you that there are tools out there for you to do it yourself. The requirements are that you have the willingness to learn how and the time to devote to doing it well. You need only five things for a Web site:

- 1 Content
- 2 A domain name
- 3 A host
- 4 A design program or Web template
- 5 Time.

Happily, the number one requirement, content, is a piece of cake for you. You're a writer, right? Whether you do it yourself or hire a pro, you will still be responsible for providing the content of your site. Even the best professional can't make something from nothing.

Next, you need a domain name. A domain name is a Web site ad-

dress (example: [www.yoursite.com](http://www.yoursite.com)). For a writer, this should be fairly straightforward.

You're going to use the site to promote yourself and your work, so your domain should at the very least be your name or some variation thereof ([www>YourName.com](http://www>YourName.com), or [www>YourNameWriter.com](http://www>YourNameWriter.com)). Another good option would be the title of your book or the topic of your book, though if you have more than one title in print, it may become restrictive. You might consider having a site with your name and a separate site for each of your titles, but that can happen later.

Third, you need a place for your site to live: a host. Any number of places will host your site for a monthly fee. Network Solutions, GoDaddy, Yahoo, and EarthLink are some of the places where you can host your domain. Most places offer more e-mail addresses than you could ever hope to use, plenty of data storage,

- artful design
- careful craftsmanship
- helpful service

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and enough data transfer to last for years. Some will even throw in the domain name for free if you host with them. When you look at their introductory packages, you see a lot of numbers and they can be confusing. For the most part, all hosting companies offer basically the same thing. What you need to look for is service. Call them and talk to them. If you're comfortable talking to them, then you'll be able to follow their instructions when they walk you through your set-up process. If you can't find a phone number, they may not offer the kind of service you need.

Fourth, you need a way to put your content up on your site in a manner that's presentable. To do that, you need either a design program or a Web template that functions in place of one. Many hosting companies have free Web templates to use for your site. Your content can be dropped into these templates through a Web browser. Web templates can be customized to some degree, but they can be limiting when it comes to the layout—or even the color—of your site. Design programs like Dreamweaver or FrontPage are powerful tools that don't require you to know any fancy programming languages. They're more complicated than using Web templates, but they offer a far greater degree of customization for the look of your site.

The last requirement is time. Compiling the content and learning how to do the other things takes time. How much time do you have to devote to this project? Would that time be better spent writing?

### **Should You Hire a Professional?**

The real question isn't "Can you do it yourself?" It's "Should you do it yourself?" Let's take a little test:

- ❶ HTML (Hyper Text Markup Language)—the literature Web browsers read. It defines everything about the site, including layout, color, fonts, images, and things that can be clicked.
- ❷ Web host—the physical location of your Web site data.
- ❸ Graphics editor—a program that is used to create or alter images.
- ❹ Server—a computer that is a repository for data and divulges that data to other computers upon request.
- ❺ DNS (Domain Name Service)—a directory listing that servers on the Web use to find your Web site. This system matches common names (www.yoursite.com) to the computer identification number (IP Address) that is associated with that common name. Computers speak numbers. We speak English. The DNS translates.
- ❻ Web site architecture—the way the information on a Web site is organized.

Look carefully at those terms and find out which ones make you feel nervous. If any of them give you anxiety,

you should consider hiring help for at least that portion of the project. Yes, "that portion." If graphics was the only word that gave you the willies, then hire a Web professional for that and take on the rest yourself.

The Web host you choose can help you with registering your domain. Most domain name registry services also provide hosting in one handy package. It's their job to worry about how the DNS and other technical things happen, but it's good to have an idea of what they're talking about when they drop some technical jargon on you.


Mechanics aside, where most people need help is in the design and graphics areas of their site. This isn't some homepage we're talking about here. It's a professional representation of you and your work. It needs to look professional.

Web site professionals come in many forms. Some people offer a full line of services, including design, programming, hosting, and even editing. Those professionals usually call themselves Web Developers. Web Designers are more heavily into the graphics portion of the project, though some do the programming themselves. The good news is that these people usually don't mind working together. Large companies will have all types of professionals on staff and may assign more than one to your project.

Web professionals will sometimes take on registering your domain name and setting up your hosting account for you. They might even host it themselves. The one key point with this sort of service is to make absolutely certain that you are the primary contact on your domain registration and on your hosting account and that it is your credit card that gets billed for these two services. If your Web professional is going to be managing your site, then they should be listed as the technical contact.

Make sure you have the username and password for these accounts, too, even if you never use it yourself. The power of the purse reigns supreme here. Whoever is paying for the domain and holds the username and password owns the domain and controls the content. If it's not you, then the door is open for all sorts of nasty things to happen. Don't risk it.

In subsequent articles, I'll go over the mechanics of building a Web site. In my next installment, "Nine Questions Your Designer Should Ask You," I'll give you a checklist of things you need to think about before you start. This list is handy both for you do-it-yourselfers and for those of you who plan to hire help.

*Angela Render is an author who has been editing and developing Web sites for over a decade. For more on Angela, visit her Web site at [www.AngelaRender.com](http://www.AngelaRender.com). *