

WEBSITE CONCEPTS



Let Property Line guide you through the Website process, from conceptual questions to search engine optimization.



WEBSITE CONCEPTS



Before You Begin

Know your goal, get the right product

Think about how you want to serve your customers

- If your clients generally know what they need, then consider an emphasis on the listings with **specific** information.
- If your clients are generally do not know what they need, then consider an emphasis on the listings with **general** information.

Explore the options that best suite your needs

- A **Brochure** site explaining your company including phone and email contact information
- An **Informational** site that teaches how to use and support your industry
- A **Portal** site that provides links to many industry sites from one convenient location
- A **Shopping** site that provides a complete catalog of your inventory

In the commercial real estate industry,

many sites are brochure or shopping sites with listings of properties for sale or lease.

Consider Your Commitment

Depending on they type of Website you have, maintaining a Website can a strain on your resources. A brochure site with general company information probably does not need to be updated more than once or twice a year, while a site with listings must be updated frequently.

One of the most difficult aspects of creating and maintaining a Website can be the creation of accurate, useful content. If your website is going to be at the heart of your business, you may want to consider a dynamic system to automatically update the site.

Part of Your Marketing Plan

A Website should be intergrated into your regular marketing. Add your Web address to all marketing materials and email signatures.

About Flash

Flash is a commercial product that was initially designed for animation but has evolved into a full-scale website alternative to coding. Generally, the Flash viewer is installed in the Web browser and no action is required by the viewer to see the Flash animation. The use of Flash often increases the production cost of a site.

The Good

- Allows for almost complete control of how an entire site, including text, looks
- Integrated animation and visual effects
- It can easily be put onto CD/DVDs for non-Internet distribution

The Bad

- It requires a special viewer
- It can be difficult for search engines to catalog
- It uses a specific program for creation and edits

The Ugly

- Bandwidth: a website done in Flash can become very bandwidth intensive and slow



“The Census Bureau of the Department of Commerce announced today that the estimate of U.S. retail e-commerce sales for the second quarter of 2004, not adjusted for seasonal, holiday, or trading-day differences, was **\$15.7 billion**, an increase of 23.1 percent ($\pm 3.5\%$) from the second quarter of 2003.”

Estimated Quarterly U.S. Retail Sales: Total and E-commerce (8/20/04)

Anatomy of a Website

The heart, brain, and lifeblood of an online life

What Makes a Website?

A website requires three things:

- A **domain name**
- A **webhost** (including DNS)
- **Webpages** (coded pages)

The Domain Name

A domain name (yourcompany.com, domainname.org) can be purchased and registered from many different online locations. When registering the domain, be careful about using your most commonly used email address. Since the registrations are often public, the contact email address may be discovered by spammers.

The Webhost

A Web host provides access to a web server. Web pages are placed onto a web server so that they can be viewed over the Internet. In addition to providing the server space and web server technology (generally Apache or Microsoft's IIS), the web host should provide use of their Dynamic Name Server. The DNS allows the conversion of "yourcompany.com" into numbers that the computer can understand and process accordingly. Depending on the kind of site you need, your hosting needs will vary.

The Webpages

The Web pages are placed on the Web server and viewed using the Web browser (such as Internet Explorer, Netscape Communicator, or Firefox). The Web pages themselves consist of code that links to images and other pages. The pages are often written in HTML or a related language.

The parts of a web site can be purchased together or separately, although package deals can save money and production time.

Behind a Webpage

A Webpage is a coded page that is displayed using a Web browser. It generally has some text, pictures (either .jpg or .gif), possibly animation (either Flash or an animated .gif), and links to other pages.

The Text

Simply put, the writing on the page. It is often the most important part of web pages. The text delivers the most basic message of the site and appears first when the page is being downloaded. Since most search engines (including Google) use the text of a site to determine its search results rankings, it is very important that your text be clear and accurate. Clear and accurate text information will help your potential customers get clear and accurate search result listings.

The basic look of the text is determined by the viewer's browser. You can make suggestions about the size or style, but how it appears on the screen is dependant on the viewer's browser and system.

The Images

Images should help illustrate your text and provide design support. Images can enhance your site but remember that the more images, the longer it takes to download a website. Most images on a site should be there for a reason. If it doesn't need to be there, remove it.

One common use of images is to get more control of how text looks. While it is nice to know how text will appear, you can run into bandwidth problems.

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Design Suggestions

Navigation

Navigation should appear on every page; be clear and easy to find; use consistent terms easily recognizable to the viewer; and, if the navigation is image-based, there should be additional redundant navigation that is text-based.

Splashpage

A splashpage is like a cover page for a Web site. It can follow the design motif but has limited navigation (usually just an "enter" button) and possibly a Flash-animated movie. Splashpages should be avoided because they are a slow-to-download barrier between the viewer and content.

Frames

Frames is a technology popular in the 1990s that allows the browser to be divided so that one division (or frame) controls the content in the other division. Clicking link "A" in one frame brings up content "A" in the other frame. Frames are rarely used today and should be avoided.

Higher Rankings

Ideas to raise your search result rankings

Focus on the text

The most important tool for effective searching (and a good Web page) is good text. Be sure that the text on your page clearly states what it is that you do and contains common terms used by your customers. Additionally, check that the text is actually coded text and not part of an image (because the image text is not cataloged). If you do have images, make sure that the designer added accurate descriptions to the image "alt" tags in the code. This helps not only by allowing the search engine to know what the image is but it allows for people not seeing the image to have a description of it.

META tags

Some search companies use "spiders" or "robots" to index Web pages. These programs read the information contained within a page's META tag. Alas, META tag abuse has caused many search engines (including reportedly Google) to ignore META tags. It is good to include them but they probably will not help with search rankings.

Internal Links

Make sure that you have text links that go to all the pages on your site and they refer back to each other. If possible, create reciprocal agreements so that your Web site address appears on other sites outside your own site.

Pay

Google allows for companies to purchase advertisements that appear to the right of the normal search results. The Google AdWords are "smart" ads that appear based on that the user's search.

Many companies offer "Search Engine" registration and increased rankings for a fee. Most search engines have free registration for indexing and do not allow for seamless pay-for-placement.

Free Registration

While Google may automatically find and index your site, you can speed up the process by registering the site with Google. You can register your site at <http://www.google.com/addurl.html>.

Looking for more?

Look to Property Line

Property Line can enhance an existing site or build a web presence from the ground up. Property Line's graphics and design teams match exact specifications to the latest in web technology, creating dynamic, professional websites tailored to the specific needs of commercial brokers as well as larger corporations.

From a basic agent site to a complete administrative work area, Property Line handles everything in-house, providing a single point of contact for all web services.



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