

Design a Web strategy, *then* design a Web site

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CRAIN'S DETROIT BUSINESS

An increasingly common way to advertise and to deliver information to the public and employees is through the Internet.

However, before small businesses begin designing their Web sites, they should consider several things.

First, business owners must ask what they want the Web site to accomplish. If the objective is to have a presence on the Web and provide customer information, then the site can be designed internally, said Paul Toenjes, director of strategic alliances at **Compuware Corp.** in Farmington Hills.

Toenjes suggested small businesses design sites with their audience in mind. That way the site will have the look and feel the audience finds appealing, he said. Pages should be organized and designed in a manner competitive with other sites in the same field.

"If your site doesn't look good, then that's the impression that the customer is going to have about your organization," Toenjes said.

For a more complex site that includes e-commerce, for instance, shop for a Web site design and development company, he said.

Jacques Habra, CEO of **Web Elite Inc.** in Ann Arbor, said small-business owners should check out other sites that design and development companies have created, talk with their clients and research two or three companies. Look at the education and experience levels of a company's staff, he said.

Business owners can surf the Internet for companies or can call businesses that have Web sites that are eye-catching and efficient to find out who they have worked with, Toenjes said.

IF YOU BUILD IT ...

How to build an effective Web site:

- Know your target audience.
- Look at other Web sites in your industry.
- Call companies with sites you admire, and find out who designed them.
- Decide what you want your site to accomplish before you begin looking for a Web design and development company.
- Check other sites that prospective Web design companies have created to get an idea of the quality you will receive.
- Make sure the company you hire is flexible enough to design the site you want.
- Evaluate the education and experience of the development company's staff.
- Speak with two to three companies; you may be wasting your time if you talk with many more than this.
- Make sure your site is easy to use. Web sites that are too complicated may discourage customers.
- Remember your site is an extension of your company. A sloppy Web site leaves a bad impression with customers.

Helpful Web site:
www.digitaldetroit.com

Sources: Jacques Habra, CEO of Web Elite Inc. in Ann Arbor; and Paul Toenjes, director of strategic alliances at Compuware Corp. in Farmington Hills.

The Web site company hired should be flexible enough to design a site that will be easy to use, appeal to customers and provide useful data, Habra said.

Once a company has been selected, be specific about what the final product should look like. It helps to show developers other business Web sites that they can emulate, Toenjes said.