

TCS

A FEW THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT WEB SITES

Since we've been developing web sites and strategies since 1996, we know that the Internet is continuing to change the way we do business. In fact the Internet itself has changed dramatically in the last few years, and continues to evolve, creating new challenges and opportunities.

Every year, dozens of business owners come to us for advice, many with the same questions. We're providing the following information as a service to our potential customers to help them make informed decisions when they're talking to a web site designer or developer.

Some of the information is subjective, based on our experience; some information has been gleaned from other web developers and sources such as Search Engine Watch and Adventive. Keep in mind that while we strive to keep this information current, some factors such as Search Engine fees may change without notice.

Contracts

TCS does not enter into any long-term contracts with our customers, except for custom situations that are negotiated for special long-term needs, such as consulting or product marketing. We never enter into a contractual relationship for web site maintenance, since we want our clients to have maximum flexibility to make the decisions that are right for them.

We do not advise anyone to enter into long-term contracts for web site maintenance, hosting or search engine optimization. As the owner of a web site, you should feel free to move or alter your arrangements; furthermore, the web hosting industry has undergone volatile changes and long-term hosting arrangements, while discounted, may not serve your long-term goals.

Search Engines

Search Engines continue to be one of the more controversial and misunderstood components of web site strategies. The majority of people accessing the Internet use popular search engines like Yahoo, and it's important that web sites are Optimized for search engine placement. However, Yahoo now charges \$299 per year to enter and keep your web site in their directory. When you apply for entry, Yahoo does not guarantee your site will be entered, and they do not give refunds if they decide not to list your web site.

Shopping Carts

Shopping carts have become an important component of business success on the Internet. Hand-in-hand with a shopping cart, a business owner will want to look at the many options (and costs) for credit card payment systems. Some shopping cart programs cost several hundred dollars to purchase and monthly fees of \$50 or more to host. An encryption certificate, costing about \$100 a year, may also be required. Most shopping cart programs are fairly easy to set up and maintain by the web site owner.

Once on-line, shopping carts can take as long as six months to a year to reach customers. It's important that the web site owner and their developers work closely together to find the right 'mix' of products and prices and that the developer respond efficiently and quickly to take advantage of customer requests.

TCS works with hosts to provide shopping cart programs that costs the customer only an initial set-up fee plus any applicable licensing and can be maintained by TCS or the customer. Encryption certificates are pre-installed, so there are no additional fees for this service. We work closely with customers to ensure that their shopping cart is accurate and that new products can be easily and quickly added. With our unique partnerships, TCS shopping carts are very affordable. Customers are required to arrange their own credit card/payment processing.

Domain Names

TCS only works with customers who will reserve (or who have already reserved) their own domain names (such as www.gjmarketing.com). Why? Because it's important that our customer feels he or she has complete freedom and flexibility to chart the course for their Internet future. Selecting the right domain name is important and while many have already been reserved, there are many variations still available. We advise our customers to reserve an available domain name as quickly as possible, even if a web site isn't planned for the near future. Many different extensions (.com, .us, .tv, .biz, etc.) are also available and we can help you select the right choice for your needs.

All domain names are ultimately registered through Verisign (also known as Network Solutions). Third-party registrars are used, but the ultimate registration still goes through Verisign. Currently, Verisign charges \$19/year for domain registration, with discounts for multiple years. Other third-part registrars may charge much less because Verisign allows recognized business to "batch buy" hundreds or thousands of domain names over a period of time with substantial discounts.

If you register your own domain name, be certain that you keep all records - e-mail, passwords and billing information - easily accessible. Be cautious that, when you are registering, you do not agree to any services that you do not want or need. Read before you click and make certain that the final billing amount is what you expect.

Ready to search for a domain name? Just go to www.networksolutions.com and use the whois database. Search for the root domain name only - do not enter "www." For example, to look up information on www.tcsmg.com, simply type in tcsmg.com in the search box.

E-mail Address

One of the major advantages to owning your own domain name is the flexibility and security it gives you for e-mail addresses. The e-mail address you use for your business cards, stationary and other printed material, all advertising and other types of communication should always be connected with your domain name. TCS can direct your domain-oriented e-mail address to your ISP e-mail address (this is done virtually and behind the scenes) or recommend technical support to set up your computer using your domain name for all incoming e-mail. You can have your actual ISP e-mail address anywhere in the world, including through AOL, MSN or other national services, move your account as often as you'd like, and you will never lose your domain-connected e-mail address!

Hosting/Servers

First, hosting and servers are basically the same for most web site owners. Your web site must be hosted by a server for your site to be accessible to users of the Internet or World Wide Web. Generally, an Internet Service Provider will host your web site. Fees can range dramatically; again, TCS does not recommend entering into long-term contracts with any host.

Important questions to ask a host/server:

- What kind of security/encryption does the server offer (and what is the additional cost for secure capabilities such as a secure order form or shopping cart?)
- What kind of technical support is available - and is there a toll-free number?
- Are there additional fees for re-directing additional domains into the same web site?
- How much space is offered? (most will offer 20 mb of space, which is more than most web sites need - large shopping carts and web sites that offer music or videos for download will require more, at additional cost)

TCS does not host web sites; we are developers and are not in the computer repair or ISP business. We can work with almost any host that a customer chooses; we can recommend an ISP that charges as little as \$9.95/month and provides excellent support. We work with the host on all technical issues; we can and generally do take of everything for our customers, at minimal cost.

Web Site "Hits"

Back in the "olden days" of the Internet (about 8 years ago), hit counters were placed on web sites as a cool "bell and whistle." Hit counters are rarely used now, since they do not offer an accurate or complete picture of web site usage. All web sites designed by TCS can subscribe to a usage report that gives an accurate count of web site visitors, pages accessed, error reports and dozens of other statistics that will help you gauge the success of your web site, and help you plan for the future. Ask TCS to see an example

of a usage report.

Web Site Development

Capabilities, fees and services vary widely. Throughout the industry, there are "designers" and "developers." TCS is a development company, since we look at your web site in connection with your other marketing material and develop your design features, technical components, optimization elements and over-all strategy.

TCS offers custom design, digital photography, database capabilities, secure order forms, shopping carts, animation, JAVA scripting and a variety of other services, all on a scale that allows you to have what you need, with the ability to grow easily and economically. Customers can supply unlimited text and graphics for their web site, at no additional charge. We also do not charge extra fees for scanning, resizing or compressing images. We also interface with the host and other specialists to upload your site and ensure that it is visible with the same high quality on all browsers, including AOL - again, at no additional cost.

If you prefer, we can design your site using a relatively easy editing program and then train you to perform the maintenance tasks. We do recommend a newer computer with at least 60 GB hard-drive space, 564 MB memory, a re-writable CD drive, and a budget range of \$250-\$600 for software purchase, depending on the programs selected. For many businesses, we recommend that two staff members be trained simultaneously.

We generally deliver a draft to our customers within 2-3 weeks after receiving the majority of your information. You then have two weeks for review and we will make any additions, corrections or additions necessary to ensure your satisfaction. We require 50% down before development begins; the balance is invoiced upon delivery of your draft, with a 30-day net.