TEPATO SYSTEMS, INC

DATA & TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS FOR SMALL BUSINESS

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Tepato Systems offers software consulting services to help small business owners and non-profit groups.

If you want to make better business decisions, software and other technology tools should be key parts of your business strategy.

The Great Debate - Do-It-Yourself vs. Hiring a Professional

Small Business and Non-Profit Websites

When speaking to small business owners and non-profit groups about website development, I often hear: "I'm going to do it myself using an online tool." I also commonly hear: "I need to be able to maintain my website myself."

I've been doing websites for over 10 years, and the pros and cons of "do-it-yourself" site creation is a topic that is frequently raised. Here are my thoughts on both sides of this issue.

Top 10 Reasons to Do It Yourself

1. Your site will be less than 5 pages of content. **
2. Your budget for the initial design and development costs is less than $500.
3. You have an account with a provider that gives you a free or very inexpensive site with an online tool to create and maintain the content.
4. You (or an employee) have the time and the patience to learn HTML programming and/or a new tool to create and maintain the site. You are very computer savvy, perhaps you have even done some computer programming in the past.
5. You anticipate needing to update your site contents on a daily or weekly basis at a minimum.
6. Your site is informational, like a brochure (it does not include animation or databases).
7. You will not be selling goods or services using your website. Your site will not include data which requires security protection (like credit card numbers or health records).
8. Your small business or non-profit organization does not have any competitors who already have professional-looking websites.
9. You don't need custom logos, graphics or branding that matches your marketing materials.
10. You already have purchased software (or can afford to purchase software) to do all of the following - edit HTML**, edit/resize graphics, and FTP** your content to the Internet.

Top 10 Reasons to Hire a Professional

1. Your site will include at least 5 pages, perhaps more.
2. You need your custom logo to be created/modified and included in the site. You have a lot of graphics to be edited, resized, or used in animation (like a slideshow).
3. Your site is for a small business or non-profit group with competitors who already have a professionally designed website.
4. You want a unique website, meaning you want a site that has been completely custom-designed, or will be created from a highly customized template design.
5. You want to own your domain name** and all site contents. This will enable you to transfer your site to use any tool or provider at any time, if necessary, without an extra charge.
6. You anticipate needing to update the contents of your site on a bi-weekly, monthly or quarterly basis (or less).
7. You want to deal with one vendor who will handle everything for you and send you a single bill. This would include registering your domain name** and hosting** your site, as well as designing and maintaining the contents of your site.
8. You personally (or your employees) don't have the time or the patience to learn HTML programming, Flash animation and graphic design. You don't want to have to purchase a lot of expensive software and then pay a full time employee to learn to use it.
9. You may not have strong computer skills and need some guidance. For example, what is needed to create a website, design ideas and pitfalls to avoid. You have a lot of questions on technology, websites and the use of software in general.
10. Your budget can handle:

   - $750 and up for an initial website design (one time charge)
   - $10 - $25 per month for services (hosting** and domain name**) on an ongoing basis
   - $60 per hour for maintenance of your content on an as-needed basis (an hour of labor can make multiple changes to the site, depending on the complexity)

** See definitions below

Precautions for the DIY Website Owner

If you decide to do it yourself, you either need to buy some software or use an online service (usually these are subscription-based).

Software gives you a lot more options in your design and maintenance, but if you've never done anything like this before, the learning curve may make it too costly.

Online tools can be easy to learn and can create a simple site quickly, however, they do have limitations, so be prepared for limited design options. Your site will look a lot like other sites that use the same tool. Also, to protect yourself, be sure to check the provider's terms and conditions. Sometimes online tools that are subscription-

type services have a high fee if you try to remove your site content before your agreed term is over (just like a mobile phone contract). Be very cautious of any provider who has a clause in their fine print that says you don't own the contents of your website, your domain name, or any part of your site. If you end up dissatisfied with their services and want to change providers, you may lose your entire site, and perhaps even the name you've registered!

If you're doing your website yourself because you think you need to update it very frequently, think about your business and your website contents carefully. If your site is informational, you may not need updates as often as you think. Many of my clients update their sites monthly or quarterly and that's enough to keep them current. Unless you are constantly adding new products or services or changing your prices, you may not need very frequent updates.

Precautions for Hiring a Professional

As with many professions, web design has its good guys and bad guys. To avoid making a costly mistake, take the following steps:

- Make sure that you have a contract which clearly spells out the price you will pay, and exactly what you will get for that money. My contracts include a detailed requirements document which lists every page, a summary of its content, and even includes a screen shot of the exact design you've selected.
- Your contract should also specify that you own the domain name being registered, and the entire contents of your website.
- Discuss your responsibilities in the design process with your provider. You will need to provide the content, which may include links, text, graphics and photos. You will also need to be available to review site progress and give feedback to your provider, especially during the early stages of design.
- Ask your provider if you will be able to review the website online during the design process, and find out how to do it. My clients are all given a link to see their site at any time during its development. This gives them the ability to review it and give me feedback at their convenience.
- Review the materials given by your provider and ASK questions until you are clear that you understand what you are getting into.

Please contact Tepato Systems if you'd like to discuss your specific circumstances. We can help you to navigate the confusing world of technology, understand your options, and make an informed decision.

I think this quote sums it up very well:

"Doing it yourself may save you money at first, but if you have to hire a professional to correct any problems later, it may end up costing you even more money."

- Heike Delmore, Founder, Jack in the Web

Definitions

FTP

File Transfer Protocol. It's how you upload your site's content from your PC to your hosting server so that your site is visible by users of the Internet.

HTML

Hyper Text Markup Language. It's the programming language that is used as the basis for most websites (there are others, but this is the simplest).

Page of Content

A single data file of file type "html" or "htm". A page can include text, graphics, links and a variety of other items.

Hosting

You pay a provider to supply space on a server that is connected to the internet. You FTP your content to that server so that it is visible to everyone on the Internet.

Domain Name

You pay a provider to "own" a name on the Internet, such as **tepatosystems.com** (called registration). This name is what a person types into their browser to see your site. Your ownership is usally paid on an annual basis.

Help with your data or with your company's website is just a phone call away... contact Tepato Systems for a free initial assessment of your needs.

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