

## Using the Internet For Business - Fundamentals

The Internet was rarely mentioned as a tool for conducting business just a few short years ago. Now, businesses must consider whether to use it, and how to get connected. The Internet serves many purposes from simply communicating with others electronically to highly interactive programs designed to sell products and services. It can be a valuable tool but an additional operational expense. Consequently, how involved a business becomes with the Internet is now another essential business decision just like bookkeeping, advertising, and merchandising.

A business may start using the Internet by means of an electronic mail (e-mail) program to communicate with employees, customers, and suppliers. This requires a computer, an Internet Service Provider (ISP), and the appropriate communication software. The next step in the progression of using the Internet, however, involves the creation of a website to give your business an “Internet presence.” This report provides a *brief* overview of the options you should consider.

### Why Take Advantage of the Internet

- Saves customers’ time, allows them to research products and services
- Is flexible and always up to date
- Saves postage, handling, and mailing expenses
- Is continuously available, “24/7 rule” (24 hours, 7 days)
- Becomes another advertising tool

## Uses of a Website

- ***Customer Service and Advertising***
  - Product/service literature
  - Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)
  - E-mail inquiries & responses
  - List of stores or service centers
  - Updates on products
- ***Order Processing***
  - Customized orders
  - Easy forms
  - Database of customer information
  - “Shopping carts” for multiple orders
  - Total cost calculations

- **Resource Procurement**
  - ❑ Recruit personnel
  - ❑ Customer leads
  - ❑ Market research
  - ❑ Electronic Data Interchange (EDI)

## *Developing a Website*

- **Plan the site**
  - ❑ Determine purpose (one or all)
    - ✓ Disseminate information
    - ✓ Advertise products or services
    - ✓ Sell products or services
    - ✓ Collect information
  - ❑ Examine the audience
    - ✓ Identify who you want to reach
    - ✓ Consider users' capabilities (computer connections, browsers, platforms)
    - ✓ Consider what users want to do at website...Entertainment ❏ Information ❏  
Find another site ❏ Purchase or order a product
  - ❑ Develop content
    - ✓ Documents
    - ✓ Graphics
    - ✓ Data
    - ✓ Programs
    - ✓ Multimedia

Your website should have something to say that's important to your customers. The content should be meaningful and concise. It should be updated as needed to give your customers reasons to come back to your site. The best design has more content and fewer graphics. Since graphics take longer to appear than text, many customers don't want to wait long to get to your site. As a rule, sites should load in seven seconds or less.

- ❑ Decide how site will be hosted
  - ✓ Own server
  - ✓ Private Internet Service Provider (ISP)  
Many ISPs are listed on the Internet or in the telephone directory.  
Questions to Ask Your Host:  
How much space is available on site?  
How many users can be served at any one time?  
What Internet capabilities can server support?

What server software do they use?  
Can you have your own domain name?  
Who will post new material, you or host?  
Can they provide statistics and what kind?

- **Promoting Your Site**

- Register domain name

Domain names are now registered by numerous companies rather than one national/international registrar. You can get a listing of registrars at [www.nsiiregistry.com](http://www.nsiiregistry.com). Currently, registrations cost less than \$35 per year. It's advisable to check your domain name with the US Patent and Trademark ([www.uspto.gov](http://www.uspto.gov)) office to make sure that it doesn't conflict with a registered trademark. This website has useful information about the latest controversy over trademarks and domain names.

- Register with search engines or through a consolidation service

Not all search engines are alike, and differ in how their software scans the website pages for content and keywords. A site to consult is [www.searchenginewatch.com](http://www.searchenginewatch.com). It lists and reviews major and specialized search engines, and provides search engine submission tips. When designing your site, pay particular attention to keywords, tags, titles, and text.

## Resources

- **Center for eBusiness and Advanced IT (eBizITPA)**

Knowledge Park, 5340 Fryling Road, Suite 201  
Eric, PA 16510  
814-898-6500  
[www.ebizitpa.org](http://www.ebizitpa.org)

The Center helps PA businesses use web-based technology to improve productivity and increase profits. The Center sponsors education and training, refers businesses to IT resources, and provides a reverse auction and RFQ tool.



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