

Getting Started

Before getting started with setting up a website, it's helpful to understand some of the key terms and concepts. First off, a website is just a series of files, much like a set of files on your computer. The difference between web files and your own files is the type. You have likely seen them before too. Web files usually have extensions like "html" or "php" or some other format unique for displaying in a web browser. Without getting into the nuances of format types and what each does, it's helpful to know that a website is just a series of files that are associated with one another.

What makes website different from other files is that these files are accessible to anyone on the internet. This means that the files are set up on something called a **web server**. You can set up your own web server (although I would not recommend this for beginners), or you can set up an account with someone else who can store the files for you on their server. Companies that do this are called web hosts. They will host (or hold) your web files for you on their web server so you don't have to worry about it. There are web hosting companies that manage tens of thousands of websites. Some of the bigger ones you may have heard of include companies like Godaddy, Dreamhost, 1&1, and countless others. I'll get into the differences between companies in just a minute. Here, it's best to just say that companies can manage many different sites for many different people.

So, how do they make things unique for you? It's through your web site registration – the unique name you pick for your website on the internet. So, let's look at the concepts of domains, registration and hosting.

Domains, Registration and Hosting

Domains

A domain is simply a fancy way of saying the name of your website. Often times, it may be referred to as your name, your domain, or even your domain name. These are all the same thing. Your domain is where people can find you on the internet. If people want to go to your website, they are going to type in the address to your domain. What that address consists of will be a function of how you are set up on the internet. First, let's talk about free domains.

There are many free resources out there for us to take advantage of. We can often get free domains from our internet providers. If you have an email address through a company like Google, Microsoft or Yahoo, you can also get free domains from them as well. As with anything though, there are pros and cons to these types of environments. The biggest thing in favor of something like this is primarily that it is free. You don't have to register anything. It's all taken care of by the company that is providing you the space on their web server.

There are some major downsides to this arrangement though. First and foremost among these is storage space. Storage space refers to how much space you can occupy on their web server. A web server is just like any other computer – it only has a certain amount of space available. It consists of hard drives, just like your desktop, laptop, or PDA. Granted, it has a lot more space than any of those, but it still has limits. As a result, the companies that offer free storage cannot offer too much. Typically free services will have limits anywhere between 5-50 megabytes of storage. With things like pictures involved, your storage allotments can be maxed out very quickly.

Another limiting factor in the free scenario is bandwidth limitations. Bandwidth refers to the amount of data you are permitted to both send and receive. This is often referred to as "traffic". So, let's take a hypothetical example. Let's say you have a picture that is 5 megabytes in size, and you put it on your website. Every time someone calls up that picture, they are transferring those 5 megabytes of data

from the web server to their computer. If you get 20 people looking at your picture, you can rapidly use up 100 megabytes of bandwidth. Bandwidth allotments for free services often range between 100-500 Megabytes of traffic, although more recently, these services have increased bandwidth to measure in gigabyte levels. While it's a good trend for the consumer, the minimal bandwidth of a free solution will never match what you can get from one where you spend a little money. An age old saying holds here that "you get what you pay for." Free in general means you won't get a lot.

Finally, getting a website set up through a free provider means that your website address will be part of their domain. So, if you set up an address of "myphotosite" and you go through Google, your full address will look something like "myphotosite.google.com". Your site is what is called a **sub-domain**. Your name is added to the front of the root domain name (here it's Google). This can be a pain if anyone wants to visit your site, they have to type in a big long web address. It also makes it more difficult to say, remember, and keep track of. Which would be easier to remember: www.myphotosite.com or www.myphotosite.google.com?

One last bit about free solutions – you can also be limited to certain types of content. What if you wanted to put a few music files on your site to play? Some free providers have restrictions on what they allow you to present, primarily due to liability clauses for content available on the internet – they can be held responsible for any content associated with their domain. In essence, you have "big brother" watching over the amount, type, and activity of your web space. This is not to say that free alternatives are a bad idea – it's just that they will be limited, and often restricted in what is allowed.

Registration

So, if a free solution is not your cup of tea, then that means you need to get your own domain set up on the internet. Just like Microsoft, Apple, Dell, and everyone else, you must get your name registered. Not only is it easy to do, but it also lets people can find your site easily. While it's fairly easy to get your domain name registered, there are some things you have to think about before actually getting the deed done. First, you have to think of a name for your site. Do you want a catchy name like "Shutterspeed" or "Lensworks", or some other name? Alternatively, many photographers would like their website to mirror their own name (like "Joes Photos" or "Sarah's Snaps"). Either way, deciding on a name is a one-time deal – you can't change it once you get it registered, the one you have is the one you have. (Well, this isn't always the case, but it's a good idea to go into things by thinking in these terms, so you can get it right the first time around!)

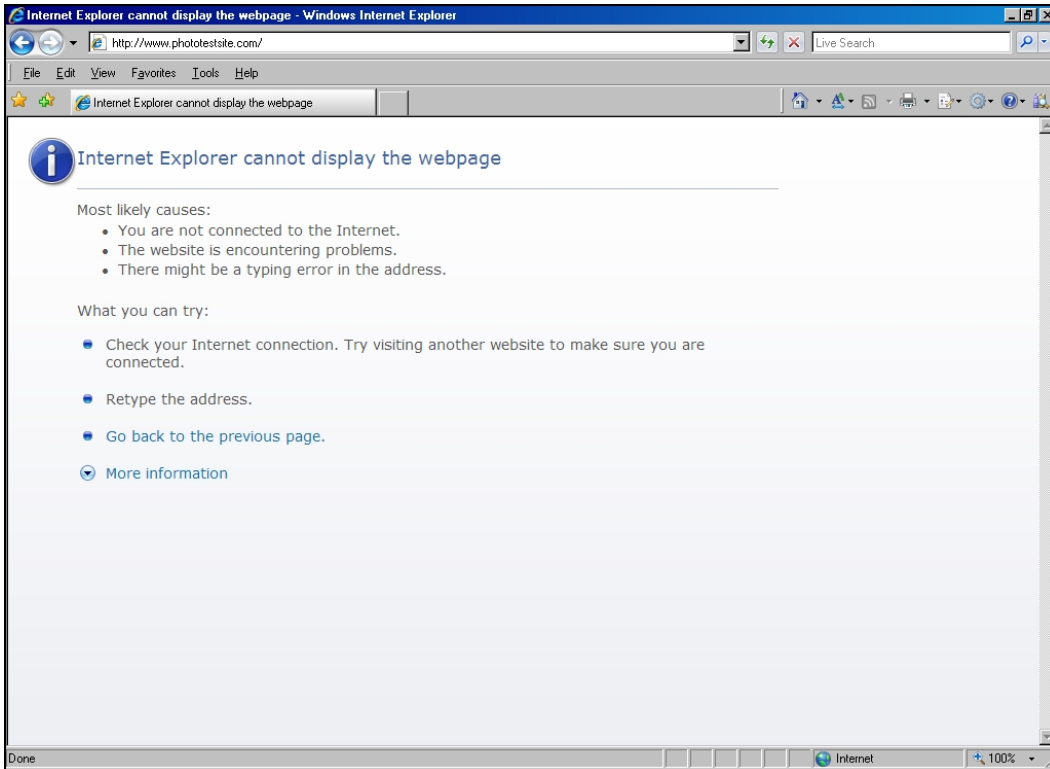
The next thing that you need to consider is what type of site you want to establish. Generally speaking, websites fall into one of 3 categories:

- Businesses – the most common, usually ending in .com
- Non profits – mostly identified by a .org, .info, and .net designation
- Government - usually end with the abbreviated version of the governmental entity (.us for United States, .au for Australia, .co for Colorado, .sc for South Carolina, etc.)

While the .com designation is by far the most common, other alternatives do exist that you may want to consider in the registration of your site.

Once you've decided on a name for your site, and how you want it registered, you need to check the name against what is already registered on the internet. This can be tricky because there are a lot of website names that are already in use. One way to find out if the name you want is available is to try entering it into your web browser. If a page is displayed with content on it, then that site is taken, and

you will need to figure out a different name. However, if you get a page that looks something like the one shown below, then you're in luck:



Another way would be to use a utility called "Whois" that can query to see if a name is in use. A universal whois utility can be found here: <http://www.internic.net/whois.html> or you can use any one of a number of other lookup services available from third party companies.

Once you find a name that you want, and determine that it is available, it is best to act relatively fast to get the name registered. If you wait too long, the name you want could be snatched up by someone else.

Okay, so who should you go to if you have a name to register? Well, most of the time, a web hosting company will provide registration services as a part of their hosting plan. Web hosting companies are organizations that simply store your website information on a computer that is connected to the internet for you. Different companies will offer many different types of services and packages for a wide variety of customer needs. The key to remember here is that you are simply registering a name (domain name)...or are you?

Hosting

Congratulations! If you've gotten this far, then that means you have made the biggest two steps in setting up your website. First, you've decided to go the route of a paid solution, **and** you've picked a name that is available for registration. So, now you are ready to get it registered. You can get a domain registered through any one of a number of registration authorities. Often times, the companies that act as registration authorities also act as hosting companies as well, so you can accomplish both the registration and the hosting with one fell swoop.

While you can register a domain and then host it yourself through your own web server, this is based on the idea that you are not well-versed on server setups and configuration. If you are, then my question is: why are you reading this? If you're not well-versed, then it means we've come to the

point where we need to pick a company to provide our registration and hosting needs. Which one do we pick? Excellent question!

Honestly, there are so many choices out there, any one of dozens to hundreds of options are available to you. With that in mind, as previously mentioned, remember that you get what you pay for. Be wary of companies that offer seemingly dirt cheap registration and hosting – they can (and often are) fly-by-night organizations that do nothing more than take money from unwitting people who are new to the field of hosting and web services. Other times, they may provide the registration and hosting service, but expect you to do everything else. Well, if you don't know how to install and/or configure IIS or Apache and how to park domains or anything like that, you could be up a creek without a paddle if you pick the wrong company.

So, the best recommendation I would have for someone new to websites is to pick an established company. Companies like Dreamhost, Godaddy, and 1&1 are excellent choices with great customer service. Another great way to find a website is to ask a friend who they use. Hosting companies often give discounts to customers for referrals. If you have a friend with a website, see if they'll refer you. Maybe they'll even give you a portion of their discount. If you don't have anyone who can refer you, the company I use is Dreamhost.

One of the great things about Dreamhost is that once you sign up, your storage and bandwidth allotments grow with you as your needs expand – at no additional charge. Another nice thing about them is they have a very easy-to-use interface. Their customer service is stellar, and best of all – they have some open source solutions for many of the more common needs, including photo album software, forum software, shopping cart software, all available on what they call “one-click” installs. Simply click a button and boom!, your software is installed for you by Dreamhost. Pretty slick! To visit the website, **and** get a referral discount from me, simply click this link: [Dreamhost Website Hosting](#)