

Give Your Website a Big Company Look

By Alexandria K. Brown

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Alexandria K. Brown
alexandria@ezinequeen.com

Boost Business With Your Own E-zine <http://www.ezinequeen.com>

We all DO judge a book by its cover, and the same saying goes for Web sites. I've seen many entrepreneurs offer great information on their Web pages, but compromise their image dramatically with a few amateur mistakes that can be VERY unforgiving.

If you want to attract high quality clients and customers, and convey that you're a legitimate, credible, and sought-after business, these five points are a great launching pad to give your site that "big company" look and feel.

1. Start with a high-quality LOGO.

The one your kid created for you doesn't count! I'm talking about paying a designer to do one for you, and it doesn't have to cost in the thousands. If you don't have much of a budget, consider the following options:

For my E-zine Queen site, I used an online logo service called "1800MyLogo" (<http://www.1800mylogo.com/>). At the time they charged only \$199 to design a professional logo based on my business, style, and personal preferences. The whole process only took about two weeks and was conducted entirely over the Web. (To see the final result, take a quick peek at <http://www.ezinequeen.com/>)

I've also heard good things about <http://www.gotlogos.com/> , where you can get a quick Web site logo for only \$25!

2. Get your own business DOMAIN NAME.

It's just a fact that folks will feel safer shopping at a site with its own domain name.

For example, if you were shopping online for a circular saw, would you be more likely to purchase from a hardware site called "...bobshardware.com" or the one whose URL is: "...geocities.com/3339/bobshardware"? (This is a fictional example, by the way.)

Having your own domain name implies you're a "real" company, and not Uncle Bob working in his kitchen at night (even though you my very well be ;)).

There are several "bargain basement" places to buy domain names, but the two most popular and credible are still:

<http://www.register.com/>

<http://www.networksolutions.com/>

3. Get (and USE) a business E-MAIL ADDRESS.

Nothing screams "amateur" like sending out professional e-mail from a handle like "fuzzybear4u@hotmail.com." Once you get a domain name for your Web site, have your hosting company set up a professional e-mail *alias* for you.

Let's go back to Bob, for example. Suppose Bob's e-mail has always been "BobSmith000002@earthlink.net." Now that he has his own domain name, he can instead use "bob@bobshardware.com". He still KEEPS his Earthlink address, because that's where he'll actually receive his mail. But he should only GIVE OUT the new one on his Web site, business cards, etc.

If you use Outlook Express or a similar e-mail program, you can set it up so that your e-mails ONLY show your e-mail alias and NOT your personal e-mail address. (To do this in Outlook Express, go under the "Tools" menu. Then choose "Accounts." Then select the account you use, and click "Properties." Enter your e-mail alias in both the "e-mail address" and "reply address" fields.)

4. Get a professional-looking Web site DESIGN.

This can mean either hiring a designer to do a custom site for you, OR designing it yourself. Unless you're both trained extensively in HTML and have a background in design, it's well worth the money to hire someone.

Find prospective designers who work with small businesses, ask to see samples of their work, and be upfront about your budget. If their rates are higher than you can afford, ask them if they have any pre-designed Web site templates they can just insert your information in, cutting down tremendously on design time and cost.

If you do want to put together your own site, check out the "corporate" section of <http://www.freewebtemplates.com/> for several neat designs you can use at no charge. (TIP: Avoid the ones with colored backgrounds; they'll make it more complicated for you, and your text will be harder to read.)

Whatever design you choose, make it CONSISTENT on every page of your site, by using the same design elements such as borders, fonts, and colors.

5. Tell us WHO YOU ARE and HOW TO REACH YOU.

Most of us (and rightfully so) are leery of purchasing online from a company we've never heard of before. To alleviate our fears, put contact information on every page if you can, with a physical mailing address, phone number, and e-mail address.

If you're uncomfortable posting your home address, lease a box at a mailing and shipping center and use that address. Avoid using "P.O. box" in your address if possible, which can appear suspicious. Real companies have real addresses!

Also, get a *toll-free* number if you can - it really says "big company." I got mine from my long distance provider, 1Com (<http://www.1cominc.com/>), because they charge no setup fee or monthly fees - I only pay for the incoming calls at my usual great long distance rates.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alexandria K. Brown, 'The E-zine Queen,' is author of the award-winning manual, 'Boost Business With Your Own E-zine.' To learn more about her book and sign up for more FREE tips like these, visit her site at <http://www.ezinequeen.com/>

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