

# A solid foundation for your Internet business

By Tracy S. Garrett

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Internet Store How To <http://www.internetstorehowto.com>

Odds are, if you're reading this, you either have or want to have your own business. More specifically, your own Internet business. Obviously, I can't possibly know where you are in your discovery process, but I'll assume you've already read a great deal of information about starting a business; be it online or off.

Assuming I'm right, then you've probably covered some basic steps, such as narrowing in on a specific target market and deciding what your unique selling proposition is. Perhaps you want to turn your hobby into a full time income. Whatever the case, you'll need to have a number of things in place in order to do business online. The most obvious is a website.

Unfortunately, this is where much of the information you'll see online starts to get fuzzy. What you typically see are comments about how easy it is to create a website "so just go ahead and do it." Often these sites will tell you to go buy a book on HTML, because "it's so easy to learn, you'll have your website created in a weekend."

To an extent I agree. However, mastering HTML isn't something that can be done in a weekend. More importantly, mastering it at a level that will allow you to create a website that projects a polished and professional image takes much more time than most entrepreneurs have.

This might not be the case if all you had to worry about was creating your web presence. However, as someone who is diligently working to launch (or expand) a small business, you've typically got to do everything yourself. What follows is only a partial list of things you'll need to be working on, in no particular order.

1. Domain name
2. Hosting Service Provider
3. Sourcing products or creating your own

4. Creating marketing material (Whether digital or printed)
5. Researching potential partners
6. Creating a newsletter or ezine
7. Driving targeted traffic to your website
8. Deciding how you'll accept payments online
9. Creating a terms of use statement for your site
10. Creating a privacy statement for your site
11. Setting up one or more autoresponders

Anyway, you get the idea.

Now, if your "day job" is webmaster for Thingamabobs Inc. then creating a website for your new enterprise WILL be easy. But, if your "day job" is as the Doorman at Thingamabobs Inc., you probably don't know your H-T-M-L from your X-M-L from your A-S-P from your M-O-U-S-E.

I can't argue against the value of learning HTML. I've spent years learning to program in many different languages and scripting technologies. Having this knowledge is what allows me to provide for my family.

However, for human beings that don't have a background in the ways-of-the-web there's a hugely overlooked resource available to anyone willing to invest some time and effort.

Perhaps you've heard of it.

Open Source Software.

This is software you can use and it doesn't cost a dime!

This is just my opinion, but regardless of how big or small your business is, if you aren't looking into open source for ways to positively impact your business then you might as well have a bull's-eye painted on your forehead. I can almost guarantee that your competitors are looking into open source software and ways to shoot you in the head with it.

To help you in your discovery process, I'd like to suggest that you visit <http://www.opensourcecms.com> and check out some of what is available to you in the way of open source software. What you'll see at this specific site are all "web" solutions, which is appropriate since I'm talking about you building your own website.

However, there are tons of open source offerings to be had that encompass every business need you'll ever have. All you have to do is search Google for "open source" and you'll begin to see just how broad the offerings are.

Anyway, to get back to the task at hand, I'd like to clarify my statement above regarding time and effort. Once you've found

a solution that interests you, I personally recommend you set it up to run on your own PC first. This way you can learn your way around the solution before you spend money on hosting.

You'll also have a much higher comfort level once you actually go live with your site. However, in order to run these open source web solutions on your own PC you'll need to setup a few things first. I've listed them below.

1. Apache (<http://www.apache.org>)
2. PHP (<http://www.php.net>)
3. MySQL (<http://www.mysql.com>)

All three come in versions that will run on a Windows PC and all three are free. Apache is your web server, PHP is the scripting language that allows for all the powerful features that you'll see in the solutions once you visit the site mentioned above, and MySQL is your database software.

Even if you have no experience, you can accomplish installing and configuring these applications. However, I can almost guarantee you'll hit some frustrating snags if you've never been exposed to any of this stuff. My advice is to read the "readme" files that come with each of the applications very thoroughly and follow them to the letter.

Once you've got the foundation in place, you can start to play with the different solutions on your own PC and find one that is a good fit for your needs.

Unless you've got a huge budget, or you don't need a database driven website, then you'll need to start experimenting with open source if you want to get a big jump start on having a powerful and interactive website that your visitors will love.

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