

Websites: The Basics

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The sort of website you need can usually be determined pretty easily by getting the answers to a few questions...

Will you need to update it often or will it sit unchanged for a long period of time?

If you need to update it often, you will either need to pay a developer for each change, you could learn some HTML and how to use FTP, or you can get a CMS website. CMS means 'content management system' and is a fancy way of saying "you can login to your site's admin area, type some changes and hit "Save" and your new changes show up immediately on your site".

With a CMS site you don't need to know any programming, but the upfront costs are generally 2-3 times higher. Keep in mind, you won't have to ask or pay a developer to make the changes for you, so for many, a CMS is far more economical in the long run.

If your site doesn't change often and doesn't have a huge amount of pages (I'd say around 10-20 is the limit before going to a CMS) you can get a HTML website and either update it yourself (learn some HTML and FTP) or if you need changes done, hire a developer to make them for you.

Will you be selling things and how much product will be displayed?

If you're selling just a few products, you can get a HTML site with a Paypal shopping cart and be good to go. If you have a lot of products, the management of that solution will spin out of control, and in this situation a CMS e-commerce site is the way to go. You can update product images, text and prices all via the Admin section far faster than dealing with Paypal or HTML.

Are you just interested in having your own blog?

There are several excellent blogging platforms out there which are free to use and feature rich. Some blogging sites you can simply sign-up on and start blogging right away. Others will require some setup and it's good to have a PHP/CSS guy around to handle that stuff and to customize the look and functionality of your blog. Blogs are also excellent for their SEO value, so even if you're doing a regular site, try to include a blog on it and keep it up to date.

One thing to keep in mind when planning your site, which anyone but the experts seems to ignore, is how important it is to include a strong SEO and Conversion Plan when coming up with your website's layout, feature-set, content and design.

Like they say, "measure twice, cut once". The same is true for planning your website.