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Website 101
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Are you one of the many businesses that don't have an Internet presence yet? Is it because you don't quite understand all the technical jargon? Websites, ISP's, servers -- what does it all mean? Then read on and learn the basics of what it means to having your own presence online.

The first thing you need to have is an Internet connection from an Internet Service Provider (ISP). An ISP is a company that lets you connect to the Internet. A few major ISP's are AOL, CompuServe, MSN, Earthlink, and Prodigy (now SBC Yahoo). When you register with them, they provide you with an access number which allows you to dial up to the Internet. Think of this as making a phone call, except to a global caller.

Once you are connected to the Internet, you can surf around and view all sorts of websites, from financial sites to health-related sites to playing games and more. You surf sites through what we call a browser. The two most common browsers are Netscape and Internet Explorer.

Now that you have surfed around and decided you want to put your business online, the next thing you will need to come up with is your domain name. If you think of a website as a home, then the domain name is the address of your home. The address will show up in your browser beginning with <http://>, such as <http://www.desktopdilemmas.com>. Each domain name is unique, which means no two websites can have the same address. Addresses are regulated through a global domain registrar (InterNIC). They make sure that no one can register the same domain name more than once. You can check the availability and register your own name at places like <http://www.networksolutions.com> or <http://www.directnic.com>. I prefer to check around for less expensive registrars, though. Godaddy.com can handle your domain name registration for as low as \$8.95/year.

After you have your registered your name, it's time to find space to purchase to put your address up at. This is called hosting, or server space. There are various companies that offer server space. You can choose to get free space at places like <http://www.geocities.com> or <http://www.angelfire.com>, but you are limited to what you can and can't do. Free space online is similar to renting an apartment. Purchasing space online is more like buying your own home. You have more leniency as to what can be done with it. But like with any real life home, you have to shop around to find the best deals for your online home.

Okay, so once you find your home and get your address, the next thing to do is to fill your home with furniture. This "furniture" will be your website. It fills your space with vital content for people to see. You can elect to learn website design on your own or you can hire someone to furnish your home for you. If you decide to hire a designer, then once again, you should shop around to find a good one in your budget range.

We'll go into maintaining your home and getting the word out in a future article.

And that's all there is to understanding some of the basics of being on the Internet and having your own home online.

Our next article will cover some of the technical terms involved with hosting a site

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