10 SMALL STEPS TO

BUILD SUCCESSFULLY

YOUR

PERSONAL WEB SITE

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By Erik Van Rompay

CEO Internet

Please visit my website: http://vanrompay.online.fr
to find for more e-Books

Some lines about myself

I am actually working as an Internet executive specialised in the rescuing and tuning of major e-Business platforms.

My first Internet experiences date from 1991 but I really discovered the web creation and publishing in June 1995. Since that day, my life changed as I have been opening and tuning everything from small web sites to major websites with one millions daily visitors and e-business platforms managing 2000 simultaneous transactions per second.

Implementing personal websites is as challenging as major websites.

As many friends and relatives have problems in finding the right way to create and publish their first web site, I decided to help them and created after some success stories these guidelines.

Have a nice reading and let me know at theonlineceo@yahoo.com if it worked for you.

INTRODUCTION

So you decided to create your own web presence. Congratulations! This is already an important decision.

I can imagine you are a little scared to start this event but this is a normal reaction. With more than 10 years experience, I still wonder if my new web project will reach the online-status, how much it will cost, the technical problems I will discover on the road and how much time I have to put in it ...

Don't be scared to fail. My first web site never got online neither did my second one. I just didn't found it worth doing even when everything was written and well prepared.

So my third version got online and it was a little bit weird as I registered 600 visits in the first month. Great numbers no? The second month, I got 300 visits and 120 the third month. People were trying to discover the Internet and you have instant success in a country hosting only 200 active websites. Nowadays, things have changed as we have billions of websites available and reaching 500 visits each month without promotion is a very good result for a personal web site.

So lets' start with it and I wish you a lot of success with your web site story.

Remember, the most important thing is to have fun with it and this is the reason why you should do it. Forget it if your main reason is to make money with your website.

If you have comments or want to share your story with me, please send me an email to   theonlineceo@yahoo.com.

Step 1: Start small by testing the Internet

Creating an Internet presence starts always with an idea. Perhaps you want to create a website to present yourself, your professional experience or just to show one of your passions (like horses, cars, a rock group…). Or even a humanitarian site to collect some money.

Before you start, surf around the web to see what others did in your field. In professional terms, make your own market survey. Take notes on the things you like and things you hate on those websites as it will guide you in the further process.

> *Authors' Comments: Everyone has a unique story to tell but don't think you are alone on the web. Your web site will live amongst thousands, or even hundred thousand web sites telling a similar story. Try to fix an idea on the message you want to send to your web visitors.*

Step 2: Create your story

After your market survey, you know what your story should be like so it is time to start telling it.

I always start with the bottom level – the foundations. Start writing your pages with your daily word processing package just as you should write an article. Create a file for each story and or chapter. If you want to publish a lot of pictures, separate these into small story chapters and write around these images the story you want.
One major difference between writing an article and a website is that a website must contain shorter texts as you are transmitting a message and not create an atmosphere like in a book. As specialists say, you read a book and you scan a web.

Once you get out of inspiration, you have to start a difficult part – structuring all that written information, pictures and articles. On the web, you only have entry page so you have to know what you want to show on that page. Put the most important issue in the middle and then lay all the other items around. For my professional projects, I use a lot of Post-its with the keywords of the chapters on it and stick it on a paper to structure my content. They are easy to move and very visual to create my first page with the underlying pages.

Once done, you got all the data and are ready to go to the web.

> *Authors' Comments: Keep it simple. Think on how your message will get through. Try to have good documents but don't go for a perfect set of data. A website is something that has to live so your content will change in time.*
>
> *My first website in 1995 and the one in 2001 contained one single page divided in 3 columns with several downloadable files behind it. Perhaps a little bit too easy but it worked as most people downloaded 2 to 4 of my e-books.*

Step 3: Is time on your side?

This is a major question as it will take time to create a web site. Even when web publishing is easy, you will spend a lot of time to create it and to maintain it afterwards. Are you sure it is worth the effort as there are also alternatives to publish your story like:

- Did you consider writing articles and publish them on a professional web site? This could be a good way to see how to interfere with the Internet users.

- Did you consider joining an existing web site as co-author (you write – he/she publishes for you)?

You can also write your story down in a book and publish it as a free e-book on the web.

So several alternatives co-exist.

One of the things I recommend is to start small and imagine several releases.

My actual website was designed for 50 pages – got online with 6 well designed pages and stayed in that shape for 1 month.
The second release added an extra 10 pages while a third version 2 weeks later added an extra 5 pages.

At the moment, I am rethinking the way to show the missing content to make my message stronger and I'll probably end with the publishing of around 35 pages.

Your web presence is a journey – not a destination. For this reason, create different releases.

Authors' comments:
I have done my promotion campaigns in different ways by writing articles, publishing e-books and creating web sites. Does it work…? I guess so as the keywords I selected in these articles allowed me to appear 4 times as first result on Yahoo, Google and MSN. And these articles of course mention my web site so without spending a dime (or a Euro in my case), I had good publicity.

Concerning the time problem – it does exist. I have done some monitoring on a free hosting site and more than 50% of the websites go online 3 months after their inscription. This is a long time indicating people have to organize themselves for their web presence.

At this moment, you should also set your objective as the number of people you want to reach per month to consider your web site a success.
Don't put your limit to high. For my website hosting my resume, my objective is 50 visitors per month. For a fan-club website for one of my friends, the objective is 2000 visitors per month. I know a charity web site with the aim to collect 1500 USD each month.
It is up to you now to define your personal target.

Step 4: Select your technical package
This is a little bit more complicated as you can have several solutions.

The first decision you have to take is to see if you want a specific domain name (like www.myfamilyname.com) or just host it somewhere on a shared server (like myfamilyname.hostingcompany.com). Both options are possible.

If this is your first web site experience, start small so don't take a domain. You can always upgrade later to your own domain web site.

I recommend taking a subscription with a web hosting company (like Yahoo, Lycos, Free, iFrance….). These services can be free or delivered through a small monthly/annual

subscription. These paid services contain in many cases some tools to create your web site. Once again, start small.

You can also opt to find the different software tools by bits and pieces. My website is hosted for free and I bought 2 software tools to create my web pages in a shopping mall for a total price of 6 (six) Euros.

You can also take the decision to find someone to create and publish it for you. I wonder how many parents use their son or daughter to do this job for them. Unless you use a member of your family, this option is very risky as you won't have the files or sources of your web site. Updating can be very complicated if the person is not longer available. Also, he or she can change their computer and forget to backup your files. So it sounds easy in the beginning but it is a very risky solution as I know more than 30 people blocked in that kind of situation. And without the original sources, it is complicated to update your website.

Authors' comments: Ask some friends what they did to create their web site but don't forget to compare their skills with yours.

Here are some of my personal experiences:
1995 – Being one of the first ones on the web is nice… but there were no cheap tools available so my first web site was created with notepad. Extremely difficult and I was happy to get 5 pages online.
1996 – Got a beta version of Hotmetal Pro. Major improvement but still a version for techies. Got a great site up with several nice features.
1997 – Using of Dreamweaver. A techie has set it up for me which made it easy for me to duplicate these pages to create my website.
1999 – Helped a person to publish his website. All documents were directly created with Microsoft Word and a lot of "save as" to create the html pages. At this moment, still the most easiest way to create and publish a web site. The look is not perfect but who cares if the information layout is clean and well structured.
2001 – Creating of a website to promote events but as many connected with extremely low internet speed, optimisation was key so I used 1st Page2000 from Evrsoft. It was easy to create a very simple website with compact html code but complex to update afterwards.

Nowadays, I am wondering if I would use some of the tools delivered inside the package when opening an account at a web hosting company.

Roughly said, even when I am wearing a white shirt today, nobody will care if I will be wearing a light blue shirt tomorrow. It doesn't make a deal so why bother? Pick the solution that seems to suit you best.

Step 5: Creating offline

Now you have to swap your written text files and pictures into your web creator tool. Save the files to your local hard disk as long as you are in the creation process.

As you need to get acquainted to this new web creator tool, the integration of your data can take some time. You will also discover that parts of your outline or web structure don't work any longer. So you have to adapt your web structure and the texts you wrote.

Authors' comments: Invite your friends for a pizza and during the discussion; mention you are creating a web site. Ask them their opinion on the interface, the way to navigate and so on. Don't forget to ask them how they experienced their first web publishing event.

Next step is not an easy one… testing your own work. I personally take a one week break between the moment I finished my web site and the moment I start testing it. This allows me to have a critical vision towards my own work.

Look to it with a very critical eye and ask the following questions:

- Is the site easy to use?
- Are my pages readable (text size, length of the pages, typing errors…)
- Are there visual problems (for instance 2 overlapping texts)

Authors' comments: take all the time you need to test your web site and be critical to yourself. But not to critical as you need to deliver results.

Step 6: Going online

This is the big moment. Publishing your data to the World Wide Web. Everything is suddenly available to billion of people.
- The first impression is great – the "I did it" feeling.
- The second impression is cool – the "Is it that easy to publish a website" feeling.
- The third impression is depressive – shit, we are thousand out there to have the same website.

So you start comparing your website to others (return to step one so it is important to have done this job at the start).

The best thing is to redesign parts of it and to rewrite parts of it.

Authors' comments: once online, don't forget to test everything if possible from a different workstation. This allows seeing if your images display well, your links work and your text appears as expected.
It is amazing to see how many websites contain errors.

Once online, my personal website gets updated twice a week with major modification in the layout and the user content.

Step 7: Making the ONLINE work

After a week or a month, you start wondering if your website is getting attention. The easiest thing is to put a free counter on the homepage to see.
Result – unless you are extremely happy – you will notice nobody looks to your website. All the invested time and efforts seem to be for nothing. So this is the time to execute your online strategy.
- Enhance your site: You can always make your site more dynamic with specific communications tools, better images, add-ons and advanced scripting language support.
- Promote your site: include the address of your website in all your emails, letters…

Test your site by using free online tools your can find on the internet (search free webmaster tools). This is very technical but
- Some web sites allow to test for free the HTML of your homepage
- Some web sites allow to test for free your "meta tags"
- Some web sites allow testing the performance of your web hosting company and the loading of your homepage.

Then starts the professional part with the updating and modifying of your web site.
- Add "meta tag" keywords to your web page code (look to the manual of your software tool how to do this).

- Once done, list your web site at major search engines and site rankings. This can be done for free or with a paid subscription.
- For the ranking, a lot of these are for free but you need to include their publicity (a small image).
- To generate more traffic, you can also subscribe yourself inside a webring.

Authors' comments: now it depends on you and yours skills to test your environment.

Concerning the testing: use as many tools as possible and also, ask some friends to give their feedback. Also ask them if the pages load well or if they find your site slow. This feedback is crucial and if they really love it, they will start promoting your web site so help you with your Internet success.

Concerning the performance: you can register your website inside a lot of directories for free but they ask you to put a small publicity on your website. You can implement them but take car to check their performance one implemented. Some are good but some are slow so it could be better to take these off as they will harm your website. This is the same for webrings (a slow webring will block the displaying of your website).

Step 8: Pointing to your website

One other thing that makes your web site successful is the implementation of what I call "pointers". It is like someone in the street that points to an object you didn't notice and you turn your head to fix that object.

On the web, you have several items that can point to your web site.

- Write articles and get these published (on the web or the written press). An important point for this success is to include every time your web site address.
- Ask your friends to include a link from their sites to your site
- Find an interesting website (with a good number of visitors) and create a partnership.
- Add your name to a huge amount of free directories. Some of these tools give results after one day but most of them take 15 days to integrate your website.

Authors' comments: A difficult moment as you just created a web site to avoid using the classical ways to communicate like the written press. But to promote your website... you have to return to the classical ways.
There is a small danger as all these activities will take you off your website. Don't forget to keep your website alive to keep your existing visitors coming back.

If you can, create an ideavirus (see http://www.ideavirus.com for more information).

Step 9: Learn from your success and grow

Successful web site owners know it is critical to learn from their results to move on fast and get better results.

The best thing to do now is to implement a web analytics tool. Even when some free web analytics tools are nice, the paid versions deliver a lot more detailed reports and more interesting data. For personal web sites, I always went for the free versions.

You can also think to transfer your web site to a proper domain name. Not necessary but it could be a strategic choice at this point.

These web analytic tools can learn you about the interest of your visitors and how they arrived to your web site. For instance in my case, people come through keywords but never through my name. For my friends' website hosting a fan club, most people arrive on his web site with a misspelled name of the artist. As soon as he discovered this, he invested in the purchasinf of that wrong spelled keyword in search engines to get a very good ranking – so a higher audience.

Authors' comments: Now that your website is up, you have to keep it running! You must know what works and what doesn't work. You also should know what your visitors want to see on your website and add content to satisfy their curiosity.

Step 10: Going professional

Once you have your domain name, you can transfer all your files from your old web server to your new one.
You can keep the old one (especially if it's a free account) and just put a script on the first page so people get routed automatically from your old site to your new web site. At least, you won't loose your old visitors.

Because you know the performance of your web site, you can create a business plan to see if it is worth going professional including:
- Including and making money with publicity
- Implementing e-Business solutions to sell some products online
- Invest in marketing campaigns (banners, emails, sponsored links…)

If you arrived at step 10, congratulations! A lot of people never realised this.

Authors' comments: At this time, you are leaving a personal website for a well running professional site. It now requires lots of time to manage the different aspects so the best solution could be to outsource a part of it so you can really focus on what you do best. This can be the creation, the updating or the promotion so outsource the part of it you don't like.

Remember, you have to update very regularly your website so if you are 2 or 3 people, it is a lot easier to maintain.

Appendix

Just a list of the tools I use on personal website. Most of them are free or for a very low price making it interesting to start with.

Web Creation
- **Web Creator** (www.mindscape.com)
- **1st Page 2000** (http://www.evrsoft.com/1stpage/)
- **Notepad (comes with Microsoft)**

Hosting
- www.ifrance.com (-> turnaroundexec.ifrance.com)
- www.online.fr (-> vanrompay.online.fr)
- www.free.fr (-> vanrompay.free.fr)

Promotion (for the French market)
- www.vitavous.com
- www.toutgratuit.com
- www.referencement-2000.com

Promotion (for the UK market)
- www.webring.com

Exchange of Links
- www.sahaya.com

Web Analytics Tool
- www.onestat.com
- www.estat.com

Document creation
www.PDF995.com (to translate my word documents into PDF)

Platform testing
- www.watchmouse.com
- www.pingwy.com
- www.referencement-2000.com
- www.i-referencement.net