

Attract, Manage and Build Your Clients
to a WIN-WIN Business Success...

The Webmaster BUSINESS Masters Course

Build *YOUR* Webmastering **Business**
While Building Your Clients' Business

by Mark Frank

1. Introduction

Every day, thousands of people think about starting their own Webmaster business. Some want to break away from the daily drudgery of working for someone else. Some crave the flexibility of working from home. Some need to supplement their main income. Some feel they are ready to expand their services beyond their circle of contacts. Still others... the list of personal reasons could go on and on.

But here's the catch...

Every day, most of these people do nothing but dream.

The Webmaster BUSINESS Masters Course was written for Webmasters who are ready to stop dreaming and start building a home-based Web site design business.

That's **you!**

Perhaps you are presently employed full-time/part-time in the field. Or perhaps you design sites for relatives, friends or associates as a favor in your spare time. It doesn't matter. You already know, based on current and past experiences, that consumer demand for Webmaster services is substantial and that it's not about to evaporate anytime soon. You are definitely not embarking on a high-risk business proposition.

On top of that, you will have all of the advantages of working from home...

- no office to rent
- no boss telling you what to do
- flexibility to pick your own hours
- ability to generate income in your living room
- and the biggest advantage of all, you're the person in charge. You decide how, when and where you want to work.

The Webmaster BUSINESS Masters Course will get your business rolling in the right direction. It gives an insider's view into some of the variables involved in setting up a business, creating a contract, working with clients, and other important operational aspects. This Course will help you avoid common problems and mistakes, the kind that cost you time and money.

Please note... The **Webmaster BUSINESS Masters Course** won't teach you how to design Web sites or help you layout pages or show you any cute HTML tricks. You must already have that under control or you wouldn't be getting ready to hang out your business shingle.

The **Webmaster BUSINESS Masters Course** will, however, help you establish your business on solid footing and position yourself as a successful independent designer.

How?

A quick overview of the Course will answer your question...

Chapter 2 - The First Steps

Start off on the right track. Use the guideline provided to develop a business plan that will keep you on the path to success.

Chapter 3 -- Web Site Marketing Secrets

The focus in this chapter is on niches. You will also discover some marketing secrets that will change the way you look at Web sites.

Chapter 4 -- Designing for Success

Get the most of your design time and learn about some very effective tools for creating the kind of results your clients will love.

Chapter 5 -- Attracting Clients

No clients... no business. Effective advertising is the key to pulling in contracts.

Chapter 6 -- Dealing with Clients

Your "people skills" are just as important as your design skills. Use communication tools and techniques that will help you build a positive relationship with clients.

Chapter 7 -- The Legal Stuff... Proposals and Contracts

A Webmaster business is built upon contracts. A good proposal can make the difference between working and not working.

Just one more thing before we launch into the Course...some brief introductions.

You first...

If you are reading this, chances are you fall into one of three categories...

Category #1 -- You like designing Web sites and you want to do more of them. In your Net travels, you have found lots of material on site design. But you have come to the realization that there is a real shortage of information on the “business end” of things.

You also like the thought of having your own business, working from home, and getting paid to do something you like.

Category #2 -- You have already started your own Web site design business (either formally or informally) but it isn't going as well as you had hoped. You know that others are doing this successfully, but you just haven't quite figured out how to make your business work. You just need a little direction and someone to hold you by the hand until you get the hang of things.

Category #3 -- You already have a successful design business and you want to pick up a few additional tools, tips and techniques to make things go a little smoother.

Whatever your category is, welcome to **The Webmaster Business Masters Course!**

And now, let me introduce myself. My name is **Mark Frank**. I have been operating my own home-based Web site design business since 1998 (forever in Internet time!). When I started my business, I had no experience running a small business and I had only designed a couple of Web sites. Even so, I was able to incorporate my business, put up a promotional Web site, and generate income from a computer in my kitchen.

I read everything that I could get my hands on, about design, business, working at home, etc. I took classes at the local community college in design and business. I also made every mistake I could possibly make (honestly, some of them I repeated two or three times).

As a result, these positive and negative experiences taught me loads of valuable lessons. I even wrote these lessons down in a book, [“Start Your Own Home-Based Website Design Business.”](#) I am sharing some of them in **The Webmasters BUSINESS Masters Course** but there are many more outlined in the book. (Additional details about the book are available at the end of the Course.)

I don't claim to be the world's greatest expert on this stuff. However, I have been where you are now and I have found a path that will also take you where you

want to go. I can tell you what to do to get started on the right foot, and better yet, I can help you stay out of trouble by telling you what **not** to do.

So, follow the valuable guidance offered in **The Webmaster BUSINESS Masters Course**. Not only will you receive answers to questions you might have, you will also receive answers to questions that you didn't know to ask.

As an added bonus, the Course will point you towards an excellent **business-building resource**, called [Site Build It!](#). Its comprehensive system of tools will help you deliver traffic-generating, successful sites (good for your clients' business) in less time and with a **profit** (good for your business).

Now that our introductions are finished, let us get on with the Course...

2. The First Steps

Your own business... sounds impressive, doesn't it? It conjures up visions of office buildings and row after row of designers producing Web sites while you sit back and rake in the cash.

Okay. Get your head out of the clouds. The office building is a desk in your spare bedroom. The rows of designers, nah... it's just you. It's time to quit fooling around. You have a business to run.

There is a lot more to starting a business than just saying, "I want to start a business." There are legal requirements, forms, permits, licenses, and fees to pay.

But before you attack the paperwork, sit down and decide just what it is **you** want from **your** business.

Take some time to think carefully about your new venture and how you will define "success." Think about what kind of hours you can put in at home, how hard you are willing to work, and any other personal factors that might influence your business decisions...

- Are you looking to make a little money from your Web site design hobby?
- Do you want to generate income in your spare time?
- Would you like to work in the evenings to supplement the income from your present job?
- Do you want to build a business that will let you work at home full time?
- Are you planning on becoming a major force in the Web site design market?

After you have given your "vision" some sort of framework, talk it over with someone else or a few people. Don't skip or rush this exercise. **The clearer your goals are, the stronger your business foundation will be.**

Great! At this point, you are ready to establish...

Your Business Structure

A business is considered a legal entity. This means that it has real rights and real responsibilities as far as the law is concerned. It can...

- Open bank accounts

- Write checks
- Pay taxes
- Generate income
- Distribute profits

(Generating income and distributing profits -- that's the good stuff!)

Where you live determines what types of business options are open to you. Each country has its own set of rules and regulations. These rules can even vary from one place to another within a given country.

That being said, when you start looking around, you will find that almost every place has a version of the three basic legal business structures...

- Sole Proprietorships
- Partnerships
- Corporations

Each structure is different from the others and each has its own set of requirements, advantages, and disadvantages as you will soon see...

1) Sole Proprietorships

A sole proprietorship is a business run by one person.

As a sole proprietor, you will provide products and services under your business name, but there is no legal distinction between you and the business. All of the profit from the business goes to you and is taxed as personal income. All business losses are your personal losses and they come out of your pocket. If you stop working, the business stops.

In short, **you** are the business.

To start a sole proprietorship, go to your favorite Search Engine and type in "sole proprietorship" and the name of your state, municipality, etc. You will find links to your federal and local regulatory boards.

These government sites will tell you what you need to do and what paperwork you need to file. The rules may vary somewhat, but the following is what you should expect:

- **A business license:** Many states, counties, and cities license businesses. Some require licenses only for certain kinds of businesses.
- **A Doing Business As (DBA) certificate:** As a business, you will be working under an assumed name. To prevent fraud, most places require that you register assumed business identities.
- **A zoning permit:** To control what kind of businesses are allowed to operate in residential areas, the Department of Zoning in your area may require a special permit.

Sole proprietorship is the simplest form of business organization, and the most popular. Roughly 75 percent of all businesses are sole proprietorships. They are easy to set up/operate, and are the most inexpensive option available.

However, there are risks with this type of organization. If something happens and the business is sued, you will pay the bills out of **your** pocket. This is the biggest drawback of a sole proprietorship -- your personal assets are on the line. You can lose your kid's college tuition, your car, your cash assets, and even your house.

The chances of being sued for designing a bad Web site are pretty slim, and even if a client does initiate legal action, you would expect the costs to be limited to a refund of the fees paid. The risk is there just the same so it's important to take that factor into consideration.

2) Partnerships

Your next option is a partnership. This can be considered a proprietorship of two or more people.

Many of the rules and requirements associated with the sole proprietorship also apply to the partnership (e.g., DBA, zoning permits, etc.) But there is an additional consideration for partnerships... "The Partnership Agreement."

The Partnership Agreement is a legal document that outlines the **relationship** between all partners. For those involved, it defines job assignments, responsibilities, profit sharing, and expense sharing. The Agreement also addresses how business disputes are to be resolved, how to dissolve the partnership, and how to deal with the resignation or death of a partner.

Basically, it defines who does what and who gets what.

Never enter into a partnership without a Partnership Agreement. Your Web site design business is not a social activity and money can make friends, relatives or colleagues behave very strangely. This is a business. Treat it that way.

There are some real advantages to starting a partnership...

- You will have more people to share the work
- There may be more funds available to get things started
- More people means more experience to draw from

These are all good things. However, a partnership can have its problems.

Like sole proprietorship, the partners **are** the business. Your personal assets are at risk in the event of a lawsuit.

And in many places, there is an additional risk -- each partner can be held financially responsible for 100 percent of business debt. You can wind up personally responsible for expenses incurred by your partner. If your partner charges \$100,000 to the business and leaves the country with the money, **you** will be responsible for repaying it.

This is **not** a good thing. So the lessons to learn here are...

- Only go into business with people you trust
- Visit a lawyer and set up a detailed Partnership Agreement before you do anything else.

3) Corporations

As was just outlined, with a sole proprietorship or a partnership, **you** are the business. There is no legal distinction. What you do, your business does. Any profit is your profit. And if there are legal problems, they are your personal problems.

Corporations are different.

A corporation is a **legal entity all by itself**. Instead of just working with you, your clients will deal with "The Corporation" -- a corporation that can enter into contracts, pay taxes, and be sued.

But if your business is sued, your personal assets (car, house, etc.) will be protected because you are just an employee of the corporation. This is a good thing.

Yes, your clients will still talk to you on the phone and you will still write the checks and pay the bills. But there is a key difference to note. You are no longer acting as an individual. You are now a **company representative**, not an individual doing business. And it's this distinction that protects your personal assets.

Setting up a corporation is usually a little more involved and a little more expensive than setting up a sole proprietorship or a partnership. You may feel it's worth the money for the legal protection and peace of mind it brings.

The big question is... which is the best choice for your Webmaster business? And the answer is... it depends.

It depends on what your long term business goals are, how much work you expect to get, who your target market is, where you live, and so on.

Most home-based businesses start out as sole proprietorships, but my recommendation is that you incorporate as your first step. It's a little more work, and it costs a little more, but it's worth the effort to protect your personal assets.

If you aren't sure which way to go, pick up the phone and call your local Small Business Association or Chamber of Commerce. Speak to the people who do this stuff for a living. They can't make your decision for you, but they will take the time to review the details of your situation and give you the advice you need to select the option that is right for you.

OK, the next step...

Your Business Plan

A business plan is a written document that defines...

- The purpose of your business
- The products and services you will offer
- Who your clients will be
- The legal construction of your business

For most new entrepreneurs (like you!), writing a business plan is the hardest part of starting a business. That's because you don't know what to expect and it can be very difficult to plan things you have never done.

And because it can be such a pain, some people just don't bother to do it. Big mistake! According to the people who study these things, lack of planning is the #1 reason why many small businesses fail.

Before you start a business, you need to know **what** you are going to do and **how** you are going to do it. If you don't, your new business will run into trouble as soon as you begin allocating your limited resources. You will wind up spending your time and money on those things that seem to need immediate attention but have no real bearing on your long-range business goals. And then, when the really important things come around, your business will suffer because you will not have laid the groundwork to address them and your available funds will have been depleted.

The bottom line is... **you must do the prep work.**

So fire up the word processor or go get a pencil. We will walk through the basics together. It will then be up to you to complete the full business plan afterwards...

1) Let's start with the **name** of your business. I don't know the name you've chosen, so I'll make one up for this exercise...

Business Name: Apple Web Site Design, Inc.

2) Write a very brief statement that tells **what kind of business** you are in. Obviously, you are designing Web sites. Will you be doing anything else?...

Type of Business:

Web site design and consulting services for private organizations and small businesses.

3) Create a "**Statement of Purpose**" for your business. Some people call this section a "Mission Statement." Think of it as an explanation of what your business is, what it does, and any features or assets that make your business special or unique (i.e., stand out from the crowd).

Here's an example, but don't just copy this presentation. You need to think about your own business reality and customize this section to reflect your particular situation...

Statement of Business Purpose:

Apple Web Site Design, Inc. is a home-based design company that provides quality Web site design, consultation, and Internet services to small business owners at competitive prices. The company will focus on providing Web site design services to professionals and to companies that provide business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-consumer (B2C) services and products.

As an Internet-based business, our primary storefront and primary advertising tool is our Web site (www.applewebsitedesign.com). This site makes us available to our prospective clientele twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

The business draws on the experience and education of the owners, who have on-the-job experience in business management and web site design. This comprehensive background provides the skills necessary to support business operations, technical aspects of a computer-based business, and the design and development of products for our clients.

4) List the **services that your business will provide.**

Look at the sample list below. Cross out those that don't apply to you and add others if you wish. If there are services that you won't offer now, but expect to offer in the future, list them as well and indicate when you intend to start providing them...

Products and Services:

Apple Web site Design, Inc. will provide a full range of web site design and development services including:

- Web site design services
- Consultation services
- Web site reviews
- Search engine optimization
- Copywriting
- Web site maintenance services
- Graphics services
- Logo development
- Photo editing
- Database development
- Subcontracting

5) Develop a list of **potential clients** who might be willing to pay for a Web site. You may wish to serve a variety of markets or you may want to target a particular group only.

Clientele Served:

Our clientele will consist of business-to-business companies, business-to-consumer companies, nonprofits, and professionals (doctors, lawyers, etc.) who are looking to promote their services and products on the Internet, and other Web site designers that need subcontractors for specific tasks.

6) Define your **business goals** clearly. This is often one of the most difficult sections of the plan to determine.

Don't consider your goals as wishes on a list ("I'd like to sell 500 Web sites this year"). Write down a set of well-defined realistic objectives. All your activities for the next few months will focus on meeting them. For example, if you plan to sell six Web sites within the next twelve months, you need to give some thought as to how you are going to accomplish that feat.

Take some time to consider your services and potential market. Set business/sales goals that you think are challenging, yet achievable. Stay away from goals that are way beyond your reach or that are too easy to attain...

Business Goals:

Our goal is to become profitable by the end of the second year of operation. We will do this by selling a minimum of six Web sites in the first year and twelve in the second. We will achieve these goals through aggressive marketing and promotion to specific segments of our target market -- that is professionals (doctors, lawyers, etc.)

7) List your **coordinates**. These include...

a) Civic address (which is also your home address!)

Location of Main Office:
Apple Website Design, Inc.
123 Winesap Road
Seattle, Washington 98101

b) Mailing address. This might be the same as your Main Office, or it could be a private mail box...

Apple Website Design, Inc.
413A Granny Smith Ave.
Seattle, Washington 98101

c) URL...

<http://www.AppleWebsiteDesign.com>

10) Describe the **legal construction** of your business. It can be a sole proprietorship, partnership, or a corporation. It may also have special features depending on local requirements and regulations...

Legal Construction:
Apple Web site Design will be structured as an S-Corporation.

11) Define **who is running your business and their position** in the company. The format of this section may change depending on the legal construction...

Principal Officers:
Your Name -- President
VP's Name -- Vice President
Treasurer's Name -- Treasurer

Your business plan is a living document. It will change and evolve as your business develops. With time, you will gain a better understanding of how everything fits together, and your original plan may require some revisions. Try to keep it in tune with your daily reality.

([Start Your Own Home-Based Website Design Business](#) provides a more in-depth discussion on this essential business element.)

Now for a quick summary of your actions so far...

You have gained a basic understanding of the three kinds of business structures and, hopefully, you have decided which is best for you. (If you are still not quite

sure, call your local small business support organization and discuss different scenarios with them.)

You also have a workable outline for your business plan -- a plan that you spent time reflecting upon and discussing objectively with a friend or two.

So now it's a matter of following your plan!

Don't just file it away. Check your progress against your plan and, in turn, check your plan against your progress. If you deviate, get back on track. If your goals change or you get new information, revise your plan accordingly.

It's critical that you maintain a clear vision of your goals and that you have a **well-defined path** to get there.

With that roadmap in place, we will turn our attention to three essential marketing "secrets" that will change the way you look at Web sites...

3. Web Site Marketing Secrets

No business can survive without **marketing**. Not my business. Not your business. Marketing brings in clients. And clients bring in the money that keeps your business alive.

As Webmasters, we sharpen our design skills constantly and try to keep up with new developments in the field -- trends, new tools, etc. However, for many of us, our understanding of marketing theory is less refined.

What is the core meaning of marketing?

There are sales and marketing professionals who do nothing but discuss and debate what marketing really means. They hold seminars and write books and articles on the subject. In my opinion, these people have too much time on their hands.

As far as you and I are concerned (as Webmasters), marketing means promoting your own business and your client's business. Anything you do to attract potential customers and encourage potential sales (or whatever action creates income) is marketing.

You may not realize it yet, but Web site design is all about marketing. For the most part, your clients will want to promote their products/services (i.e., their business) online and they will pay for your Webmaster services through their advertising budgets.

Very few clients will pay thousands of dollars for a Web site just for the sake of having a Web site. They **expect a return on their investment**, whether that ROI is more customers (leads), or increased sales, or cost savings due to a reduction in customer interface time (or whatever else contributes to their bottom line).

Your job is to build Web sites that will achieve the kind of **results your clients want and expect**. And in order to do that, you must build sites that attract ongoing targeted traffic, pull these interested prospects to the money-making Web page (s) and close the deal (i.e., get the order/contract/lead/etc.)

SIDEBAR

The ability to meet client expectations is the reason why **Site Build It!** is an excellent system for Webmasters. It will help you produce impressive traffic

results for your clients, no matter what kind of business they own. See what I mean by results... <http://results.sitesell.com/>

Your clients' business growth directly influences your own business growth. We both know that satisfied clients create repeat contracts and/or enthusiastic referrals.

SBI! provides you with the ideal working package for all but the most complicated projects... **design flexibility** (use your own HTML editor and graphic software), integrated into **traffic-generating backend automation/functionality** (like page optimization, SE submission/resubmission and reporting and click-in/click-through traffic analysis). You get to concentrate your efforts on the creative parts of your business (designing and copywriting), while **SBI!** automates the more tedious parts of traffic-building.

For more information about **SBI!**, visit <http://webmaster.sitesell.com/>

In this chapter, you will learn how to define your target market by narrowing possibilities to a specific group of consumers. You will also hear about three marketing secrets that reinforce why Web sites are more than just eye candy.

Actually, the most important secret of successful Web site design has already been alluded to in the opening paragraphs.

In case you missed it, here it is...

Web sites are marketing tools.

Most new designers don't recognize this reality immediately. And a surprising number of experienced designers don't know this either. They design sites that are beautiful looking. Unfortunately, their client sites don't rank well with Search Engines and as a result, there is no traffic generated. The content on these sites is not focused on the needs of customers so that when visitors do stop by, they "click out" instead of clicking on the client's money-making links -- those links that lead to sales/service contracts/leads/referrals/contact.

These sites may be beautiful... but they are failures all the same.

They are failures because they don't get results.

Your clients need successful Web sites in order to develop successful online businesses. They need sites that do the following (these are just a few examples to spark the discussion) ...

- Rank well with the Search Engines
- Attract interested targeted visitors
- Are focused on the needs of their visitors
- Keep visitors on site (and encourage repeat visits)
- Get the desired response (contact, buy, etc.)

In your work as a Web designer, these needs must drive your actions. As I said earlier, your ability to create successful business sites for your clients will directly determine the growth of your own Webmaster business. They win... you win.

Designing for success is a much bigger job than just putting up some content, adding some photos, using multi-media, etc. and because of that, you can charge hundreds or thousands of dollars for your services (more on this in Chapter 5). Your design efforts must produce **results... traffic and sales**.

Secret #1 is so obvious that we often miss it (i.e., Web sites are marketing tools). However, it's a secret you and your business can't afford to miss.

Secret #2 involves "targeting" and its role in the marketing equation.

How would you complete the following sentence?...

"I am planning to sell my services to...."

If you say "anyone," you are mistaken.

"Anyone" is not your market. It is unlikely that you will sell Web sites services to any of the following groups...

- Children
- Retired couples who want to do extensive travelling
- People who don't want Web sites
- Businesses with no advertising budgets

You can't be all things to all people. Cost-effective marketing (in both time and money) requires **focus**. It matches the needs/desires of the most appropriate target group with your "solution" (i.e., services).

So how do you identify your best niche? Begin by asking yourself the following questions...

- Who hires Webmasters?
- Why do they hire?
- What do they want?
- What do they need?
- What solutions do I offer that meets these needs?
- What makes my solutions unique?

Jot down your answers. Add some of your own questions. The goal of this exercise is to find the **ideal balance**. You want to identify a target group/niche that is neither too general (too much competition) nor too narrow (not enough potential clients).

SIDEBAR

You will do this same exercise many times in the future -- not for you but for your clients. "Narrowing the focus" can sometimes be a challenge for small business owners. However, most can't afford trial and error testing before they identify the right niche for their type of business.

Some of your future clients will require your assistance to find their niche. Unless you are knowledgeable about their business, you will have to get up to speed by surfing for information. Or you can save time with **Site Build It!**.

SBI! uses a proven process for identifying the most profitable niche markets. Its **brainstorming tool** will research related keywords/keyword phrases and provide their profitability ratio at the click of a button.

You don't have to be an expert in marketing theory with [**Site Build It!**](#). And your clients will never know how easy your research was. They will just see results-producing marketing in action.

Back to your own niche-identifying exercise...

Your "specific" answers and niche will be unique to your own situation. However, for the purpose of this Course, we'll keep your niche more neutral ...

Your target group is **small business owners** without a Web site who recognize that they need one. Now go one step further...

Your target group is small business owners without a Web site who recognize that they need one and have money available for advertising.

Narrow your focus again... Your target group is small business owners without a Web site who recognize that they need one, have money available for advertising, and have a budget big enough to hire an independent professional Web designer.

Not a surprising conclusion when you think about it. However, you would be surprised at the number of Web site designers that try to market to the entire world!

So when you start looking for contracts, focus your design and marketing efforts on your particular niche. Why?

Simple economics...

That's where the work is.

At this point in the "narrowing down" process, it's important to determine the price range for your services -- low, mid and high-end-- and exactly what type of services are available at each price level. This framework will direct your future marketing efforts. So what's the connection?

Economic factors come into play once again. For the most part, the advertising budgets of the different segments within your target market will mirror your price range. In other words, some small business owners will have more money to spend on your services than others do. You need to decide which type of clients you want to attract... those who demand high-end, or those who want mid-range, or those who seek low-end services.

A rough pricing framework might look like this...

Low End (\$100 to \$200 per page) = simple pre-designed template, a 2-page brochure-style Web site, client provides content, basic Web presence, etc.

Mid Range (\$2000-\$3000 per site) = some customization, content editorial assistance, graphic design, traffic generation, marketing advice, etc.

High End (\$4000-\$5000 per site) = more customization, content development, graphic design, traffic generation, traffic stats collection and reporting, ongoing site maintenance, marketing, etc.

Realistically, in the start-up phase of your business, most of your work will come from **clients looking for low to mid-range priced services**. So here are a few things to consider with these two particular groups...

Low-end service has some distinct advantages. Simple construction and pre-designed templates allow you to produce several Web sites very quickly. Even though the profit per job is low, you can make it up in volume. A decent income is achievable as long as you can establish a steady flow of work.

Like any business decision, there are pluses and minuses to consider. On the plus side, it is much easier to find work in this price range. Many small business owners have no idea what is involved in designing a Web site. The low-end price range fits with their preconceived price notions and more importantly, their advertising budgets.

On the minus side, any design job requires client interface. The more time you spend working directly with individual clients, the lower your hourly income is and the fewer jobs you can do.

The key is to **clearly define what the client gets for the price... and stick with it**. Maintain a balance between good client service and reasonable support. If you don't, the job can easily take two or three times longer than you initially expected. When that happens, you are moving from low-end to "zero-end" territory -- a huge waste of time and money for you.

At the **mid-range** price level, work is harder to find, but it pays better. These clients expect more than "just a Web site." They expect you to be able to talk to them about Search Engines/traffic generation, Internet marketing, and what a Web site can/should do to promote their businesses.

Usually, fees for these designs are quoted by the job, with an hourly rate for unscheduled labor, changes, and support. The jobs tend to be bigger than the lower-priced work, and they require much more time investment in dealing with clients.

If you are new to Web site design and marketing, your best option is to start with low-priced designs while you develop your skills. Once you have assembled a decent portfolio, secured some testimonials, and honed your skills, you can then move on to mid-range, custom design work.

You may, of course, decide to stick to making lower-cost Web sites because you enjoy that type of work and you find the income level satisfactory. Or you could go for the combo. It's up to you. It's your business (literally) as to which segment of your niche market you want to target.

SIDEBAR

The **SBI!** system will increase your profit margin for every contract, regardless of which price range it fits into. With **SBI!**, you will be more productive. It will help you build sites faster and make more money per site. (**SBI!** looks after the time-consuming, tedious tasks involved in traffic generation.) You can have more happy clients with less effort on your part! (<http://webmaster.sitesell.com/>)

And now it's time for the final marketing secret for your Webmaster business to be revealed. It's short and sweet.

Always write content directed at your primary clients. This applies to all your promotional efforts -- Web site, direct mail, phone calls, print advertising,

You might be tempted to make your copy appeal to other groups that you think may want to hire you. **Don't.** When you identify other potential markets, run a separate advertising effort for them.

The most profitable marketing is specific to a clearly identified market. If you try to make it appeal to everyone, it will appeal to no one. And your site will be in the Search Engine hinterland, far away from those traffic-producing first-page search results positions.

For the best ROI, don't dilute your marketing efforts. Keep your focus on people who already want/need your services -- your niche.

It's a good time to note that sometimes you will attract prospects within your niche that are definitely not your ideal clients. People will contact you who want very complex Web sites for a cheap price like \$200 or \$300, or by people who believe that everything on the Internet is free, and/or by people who do not realize the distinction between a Web site and an effective Web site.

Your first response will be to try to sell the **value** of your services to these people. You will spend precious time sending/answering e-mails and writing proposals. Then, without any warning, there is a break in communication and

you don't hear from them again. What a waste! These people were not your target market in the first place.

After you have done this a few times, you will realize that people with unrealistic expectations almost never become paying clients, even if they appear to be part of your target market. What's the solution?

In this case, respond to their e-mail (or follow-up phone messages) with a standard e-mail (customize the template as required). Clearly outline your services and price ranges. Then wait for a response. The ball is in their court.

It's important to educate potential clients, but for the most part, be very selective with your time. You will almost never get certain prospects to sign on the dotted line. Try not to show impatience or frustration. Treat all prospects with courtesy and professionalism. Even if they don't hire you, they may pass your name to others.

"Word of mouth" promotion can go either way... **positive or negative**. The latter is preventable.

If you walk away from this Course and forget everything else, remember these three important marketing concepts or secrets. They will make the difference between the success and failure of your business...

- Web sites are marketing tools.
- Identify your most profitable niche (including a particular segment within that target group). Find the balance between being too broad or too narrow.
- For the best ROI, don't dilute your marketing efforts. Keep the focus on your niche.

The next chapter, "Designing for Success," crosses the line between design and marketing...

4. Designing For Success

When inexperienced designers start a Web site design, they typically begin by laying out the major functional blocks of the home page or by doing a color and graphic layout.

But designing a site is just the same as building a house. You have to **start with the foundation** and work up.

If the foundation isn't solid, it will need reinforcement work later on. If the foundation isn't the right shape, then the final form of the house will not be what you need. Trying to fix a foundation after it has a house built on top of it is an expensive and time-consuming process.

A Web site is the same way. The functions of a site will drive its final form. You need to define the requirements as completely as possible **before** you start the site layout.

Why? Because if you don't, you may have to throw away what you have done and start over.

Not defining the requirements early can easily double the amount of work you have to do. Unfortunately, you don't get to increase your price to compensate for this. After all, it's not the client's fault that you didn't collect all of the requirements before you began.

There are certain steps to follow whenever you design a Web site. It doesn't matter how big or how small the site is, the steps are always the same. The professionals design this way and so should you -- after all, you are a professional designer now.

First, the big picture...

- 1) Define the purpose of the site
- 2) Identify your client's target market
- 3) Conduct a competition survey
- 4) Define the features of the site
- 5) Identify keywords
- 6) Develop the wire frame
- 7) Create the storyboard

- 8) Build the prototype
- 9) Complete the final design

Now, a closer look at each step...

STEP #1 -- Define the **purpose of the site.**

Just like a business, a Web site needs clearly stated goals. Without clear goals, the site will be much more difficult to design. The design will lack direction and the Web site will never quite meet the user's needs.

The site goals should just pop right out of your initial client interview, but often they will not be so apparent. Your client may not have well-defined objectives and may not even realize that they are required. It is also possible that s/he expects so much from the site that dozens of goals are presented.

When this happens, you will have to work with the client to define the real goals of the site. Discuss each one but keep narrowing down the choices as you go along.

SIDEBAR

Ken Evoy, well-respected Internet marketing author/guru and President of **SiteSell.com** (<http://www.sitesell.com/>) coined the phrase "**MWR (Most Wanted Response)**." It's an excellent term to use when you are helping a client pinpoint the purpose of his or her site.

Don't get trapped into goals that you cannot achieve or cannot control. A goal to sell 637 books a day is not realistic. You can design a site to sell books, but you can't control how many it sells. There are too many factors involved -- you don't have absolute control over the site's Search Engine ranking, the size of the market, or the popularity of the book.

It's acceptable to have more than one goal, but if you attempt too many things, the site will not accomplish anything well.

Here are a few examples of goal statements...

- The primary objective of this site is to promote and sell Mr. Smith's new book. The site will provide a direct sales outlet for the book, and it will also promote seminars associated with this book.

- The goal of the site is to create an online scholarly journal to promote the study of natural history.
- The Web site will be designed to encourage potential clients to contact the company about contracting Web site design services.

(Did you recognize the last one? It could be a possible goal statement for a designer's site.)

Once you have a clear goal for the site, everything else in the design should work towards achieving that goal.

STEP #2 Identify your client's target market.

After you figure out the goals of the site, you have to determine its audience. The best way to do this is by developing a "Customer Profile." You and your client need to define as many specific customer characteristics as possible.

This is where your marketing skills come into play -- especially, your knowledge about niche marketing and market segments. You don't have to be an expert but you do need to share what you know. Your client may or may not (the latter is the usual situation) have any experience with this.

Work with your client to figure out exactly who is going to visit his site and buy his products and services. How will they use the site? How do they shop? How will they buy?

Knowing who is going to visit and how they will use the site will shape the design.

STEP #3 Conduct a competition survey.

Search the Internet for similar sites to see what your client's competitors are doing.

Check out the features and content of their sites. You are certainly not going to copy their sites, but you don't want to overlook anything that might leave your client at a competitive disadvantage. You can also get a good feel for the needs of the target market by reviewing these sites.

SIDEBAR

You can do this manually via your favorite Search Engine tool, or you can use **Site Build It!** (<http://buildit.sitesell.com/>). Its super-brainstorming tool will automatically provide the URLs of the most popular sites for hundreds of keywords/topics related to your client's business theme.

STEP #4 Define the features of the site

The features of the site can best be described as those things that add functionality and utility. These include the client's requests, the features that you found during your Internet searches, and those items that you know need to be there (based on your expertise as a designer.)

Your features list might look something like this...

- [2" x 3" product photos \(16\)](#)
- [4" x 6" product photos \(16\)](#)
- [Flash animation of product #1](#)
- [Contact Us form](#)

The purpose of this step is to make sure that you have identified anything and everything that may drive the design of the site. You don't want to find yourself trying to squeeze something in later on in the process.

STEP #5 Identify the best keywords.

Discuss and create a list of keywords that the client believes his target market would use to find his business. There are also several keyword search tools available online that can help you supplement the list.

(I like [SBI!'s](#) brainstorming tool because it quickly identifies a list of related keywords/keyword phrases along with a profitability ratio. You can see at a glance, which keywords are the best choices to build theme-related pages around. The brainstorming software is also part of a complete all-in-one package, so it comes at no extra cost.)

STEP #6 Develop the wire frame.

Developing a **wire frame** is an essential step. You start integrating the information you have into a Web site. The wire frame is a tool that lets you organize and reorganize the site information quickly and easily. It makes it easy to spot any inconsistencies and omissions and it lets you view the entire Web site on one piece of paper.

Start by making a site map (list of all pages). Under each page name, list the features that you will put on that page, as well as any subordinate pages. You should include comments, ideas, and as much detail as you like in your wire frame. In fact, the more detail you include, the easier the next step will be.

Wire framing forces you to examine the site **page by page and function by function**.

It's important to carefully consider the **role** of the site's content pages. High-value relevant content pages are the key ingredients for building traffic. This reality is often the most overlooked and forgotten part of site development, especially with an e-commerce site. Don't fall into the same trap.

You should expect to make several versions of the wire frame before you are satisfied. Every time you update the wire frame, review it from the visitor's viewpoint, from the client's, and from your own as the designer.

OK, back to the present task at hand... imagine that you are a visitor and walk through the site...

Can you find the information you need? Can you select a product, add it to your shopping cart, and place the order? If not, go back and revise it.

Secondly, examine it from the client's perspective...

Does it include everything that was discussed in the interviews? Does it have all of the critical features that the competition has in their sites? If not, go back and revise it.

Finally, look at it from a designer's viewpoint...

Do you see anything there that will drive the design? Is the structure so complex that it will be difficult to create a navigation scheme? Is there room for growth? Does the shopping cart that you want to use blend well with this structure, or will you need to change the wire frame because you are locked into a specific layout by the cart?

Invite others to look at the wire frame. Ask them to walk through it as a visitor would.

The more people you get, the more likely you are to find potential problems. But select them carefully. You don't want reviewers who will stay quiet rather than risk hurting your feelings. Choose people who will really help.

Go through the wire frame as many times as required to get it perfect. Add as much detail as you want so that you don't miss anything. Remember, if you miss anything now, you will have to add it later, and the impact can be significant.

Submit the completed wire frame to the client for review. By doing this, you are saying, "These are the requirements for the Web site as I understand them." You want the client to agree to them before you continue.

STEP #7 Create the storyboard.

You are getting dangerously close to starting the layout, but you are not there yet. There is one more step -- "storyboarding."

Do you know how cartoons are developed? After the story and the dialog are written, but before the animation starts, the animators go through a process called storyboarding. In this step, simple sketches of key scenes in the cartoon are drawn and tacked to a wall in a meeting room. This allows everyone working on the project to develop a common baseline. It also defines critical features of each scene.

You are going to use this basic storyboarding concept, but you are going to modify it a little. Your storyboard pages will not contain any graphics. Instead, each page in the storyboard will contain everything you know about each page in the site.

Every page in the wire frame will get its own storyboard page. These pages will define all of the functions, features, and content of the corresponding Web site pages. This means more than just rewriting the information found in the wire frame.

The storyboard is where you write the text for the page and insert the copy provided by the client. Develop keyword-focused, high-value, Search-Engine-Optimized content pages that will please both visitor and Search Engine alike. If

you don't, the site will not deliver traffic or sales (i.e., results). And that means a dissatisfied client and no chance at repeat contracts or positive word-of-mouth referrals.

After you complete individual pages, you can organize them into a final storyboard that displays each page's position in the whole package. Doing this will help you to visualize the site and to see any problems in the relationships between the pages.

STEP #8 Build the prototype.

Up to this point, you have been defining the requirements and contents of the site. Now you can start developing the layout. (Finally!) In this step, you will develop some nonfunctioning Web pages -- demo pages for the client to review.

Open your favorite graphics package and start developing your layout visually. Identify a section for the page header, for the menu, for the footer, and for all of the features of the site. Go through your storyboard sheets and make sure that every page can be comfortably mapped into the proposed layout. If something isn't right, change the layout or revise the storyboard until everything fits together.

Once you have a rough layout, start the detailed graphic design. Pick the colors for the site based on client preferences, site themes, the target market, the products or services, or your personal preferences. Select your navigation scheme and draw the menu links on the page. Add a header and footer if they are part of your design. Continue to work on the layout until you are satisfied that it meets all of the requirements. If there are several distinct types of pages (content pages, product pages, etc.) then create layouts for each page type.

Stop here and send an e-mail to the client. Attach the graphic images and ask for feedback. If the client doesn't like the layout, color scheme, etc., now is the time to find out. Ask the client to define comments as clearly as possible. It may take an additional revision or two, but if everything was defined up front, the approval cycle should go smoothly.

STEP #9 Complete the final design.

Congratulations! You are almost finished. You have the requirements, the page contents, the layout, and client approval. It's time to do the detailed page layout.

Open your HTML editor and your graphics software and design a page template that matches the graphic version that your client approved. Include a functioning menu, define the font sizes, set up the links, and create areas where you can insert content. Save your design as a template so that you can just cut and paste all of the contents in place. If there are different page layouts, make a template for each type.

At this point, it is just a matter of integrating everything into the final product.

This isn't to say that this is a trivial step. The actual building process is still a lot of work, but you will have everything you need at your fingertips. You can now build the complete site, put it online and test it to verify that everything works.

The designing process, outlined in the nine steps above, works very well. If you follow it, your life as a designer will be much, much easier.

Please note that the process was developed for larger design shops. In these shops, the client calls and talks to a sales representative who addresses cost, contracts, etc. Once the contract is signed, the account passes to a design supervisor who manages the design and assigns it to a member of the design staff. When different people share responsibilities, it is essential that everything be well defined every step of the way or something may be overlooked.

In your one-person business, you will probably find yourself combining steps, especially when you are developing small Web sites. Let me emphasize something, though... I said '**combining steps**,' not 'skipping steps.'

When you develop the site map, you can also start collecting keywords, goals, and site features. You could also create the original site map as a wire frame. There is nothing wrong with that. The essential idea is to see that you have all of the requirements defined before you move from one stage to the next.

There is also one other consideration...

The design process has been laid out step by step. In reality, design is a repetitive process and all of the steps are interrelated. You may need to do some of the steps out of order, revise previous steps based on the results of later steps, or combine steps.

The size of the job will also affect your design process. Larger jobs will drive you to follow the steps more closely and to document them. On smaller jobs, you will

combine steps and do some of them in your head rather than on paper. Your design technique will be a reflection of your skills, training, and personality. You will find that as you gain experience, you will tailor the procedure to fit the way you work.

It all boils down to this...

If you are going to build a successful Web site design business, you need to know how to design successful Web sites -- sites that produce income for your clients.

That's the bottom line outcome your clients want and need. And, if you meet their needs, they will help you build your business by repeat contracts and word-of-mouth referrals.

Always keep in mind that you are not just designing Web sites. You are building **your business** by developing marketing tools for your clients.

There are many site development resources available. Some you can buy in bookstores. Others you can buy online. But most of these only give you little pieces of the puzzle.

They teach you about usability, or they tell you about copywriting. But they don't tie everything together. And very few of these resources tell you how to use Web sites as Internet marketing tools. They don't really give you what you need to make your Webmaster business soar.

There is, however, one small business source that ties marketing and design information together superbly...

SiteSell .com.

This small company already has an impressive "top-500" Alexa traffic ranking (and constantly gaining in popularity) so it knows what it takes to be successful. (Alexa.com, the leading online traffic-measuring company, is an Amazon-owned, Google-powered Search Engine that measures traffic-popularity based on a sampling of about 10 million users.)

SiteSell provides three valuable resources that will ensure the success of your Webmaster business...

Make Your Site Sell!

[\(http://myss.sitesell.com/\)](http://myss.sitesell.com/)

Make Your Words Sell!

[\(http://myws.sitesell.com/\)](http://myws.sitesell.com/)

Site Build It!

[\(http://buildit.sitesell.com/\)](http://buildit.sitesell.com/)

Since there is only enough time and space to highlight one of the above, let's focus on **Site Build It!**.

There are several “do it yourself” Web site tools on the market. For the most part, they are tools for amateurs. These tools boast about how easy they are to use and how beautiful their templates are, but few (if any) address the “business side” of site design.

They don't consider Search Engine ranking. They don't address the importance of customer-oriented copywriting. The simplest ones just let you get “something” online. Even the more complex ones don't do much more than that. In short, most of these tools make no concerted attempt to build high trafficked sales-generating Web sites.

As a professional designer, only one allows you to overdeliver for your client...**Site Build It!**

Use **Site Build It! (SBI!)** to create sites for 1-10 person small businesses (SSBs = small-small-businesses). See <http://buildit.sitesell.com/sbi-businesses>.

Its 50+ modules and sub-modules will help you build a high trafficked site faster and more efficiently at a lower cost. Compare the competition...
<http://buildit.sitesell.com/compare1.html>

Enhanced productivity lets you move on to the next contract in line sooner. **SBI!** will enable you to grow your business quickly as you complete project after project within budget and at a profit.

SBI! also includes a set of Net-marketing tools that lets you easily deliver value-added services (for example, e-mail marketing, real link-building program and pay-per-click research/mass bidding tools) at no extra cost to you.

Visit <http://webmaster.sitesell.com/> for more details.

Okay. The next two challenges go hand in hand... attracting new clients and then dealing with them. First things first...

5. Attracting New Clients

Too many new designers make the mistake of putting up a Web site, sitting back, and waiting for the phone to ring. If only business was that easy.

There are thousands of designers promoting their services on the Internet. Some of them are very good at getting top Search Engine rankings for their Web site. However, unless your site shows up within the first few pages of the Search Engine listings, most searchers will never even see it.

This isn't to say that you shouldn't have a Web site. A good site is an important part of your promotional activities. You just have to realize that although your site is a contact point and a place to show off your skills and abilities, it probably won't be your primary advertising tool.

So how do you find work?

You find clients by advertising.

However, this won't be "broadcast" advertising where you put your message in front of millions of people in hopes that one of them will call you. Instead, it will be **focused** directly at your target market -- small business owners who are already looking for your services.

Your clients aren't going to come to you. **You have to go to them.**

SIDEBAR

There are several effective strategies for getting new clients. This Course will provide a few pointers to get you started in the right direction. As always, a much more detailed explanation is available in [Start Your Own Home-Based Website Design Business.](#)

Do a quick examination of Web site designer ads in the newspaper, in the phone book, and on the Internet. You will notice that most of them are very poorly done.

The colors are bright. The graphics are nice. The layouts are very attractive. But the advertising copy in most of these ads is absolutely terrible.

Here's an advertisement that I found under a "Web Site Development" heading in my local phone book...

Total Web Site Design Services

Database Development
Multimedia
Interactive Forms
Custom Designs
HTML, ASP, XML
Web Marketing Solutions

There were dozens of ads under Web Site Development and this was the best of the lot. How pitiful! If you were a business owner, and you weren't experienced with the Internet, would you know if you needed a database? Would you know the difference between ASP and XML? Would this ad mean anything to you?

Probably not. And it won't mean anything to the majority of your clients either. You need to speak to your clients in terms that they will understand. You have to focus on their businesses and on their needs. Potential clients want to know what you can do for them. So when you write your advertising copy, remember...

- 1) Your clients are small businesses that advertise but don't have Web sites.
- 2) Your clients want their businesses to be more successful.

With these two points in mind, we can rewrite the ad to look like this...

Total Web Site Design Services

Harness the power of the Internet
Expand your customer base
Increase your sales and profits
Promote your products and services online
Complete design, copywriting, and technical support

Isn't this what your clients are looking for? It says, "I understand what you need and I can help you get it." Figure out what your clients want and show them that you can provide the appropriate solution. It's okay to list **your** credentials and skills, but remember that "all about you" is secondary to your clients' needs.

Your clients' needs always come first.

This same approach applies to all of the advertising you do whether it is on the Internet, in print, or face-to-face. Focus on the client. Describe the benefits of having a Web site. Use terms that will appeal to the client (ex., saving time, saving money, increasing profits, etc.)

You don't need to convince them that you are the greatest designer on the planet. You just have to **convince them that you understand their problems and that you can help to solve them.** This is why understanding your target market is so very important. The better you know what your clients need, the better equipped you are to meet those needs.

Where you position your promotional material is just as important as the material itself. If you put it in the wrong place, your target market will never see it and you will have wasted your time, effort, and money.

Place your advertising where potential clients will see it. Ask yourself these questions about your target market...

- Where do they go?
- What do they read?
- Who do they talk to?
- What do they like to do?
- What interests do they have?

And most important...

- Where are they likely to see or hear your promotions?

Local small business owners often belong to community associations and business associations, and they usually support community activities. So consider joining your local Chamber of Commerce and other local business and community associations. These networking opportunities will give you a chance to meet prospective clients in a relaxed setting.

Organizations/associations also distribute newsletters to their members on a regular basis. Put your ad into one of these newsletters and it will be delivered directly into the hands of your target market.

In addition, every business segment has its own trade journals, meetings, conventions, Web sites, etc. These can all be great places to advertise because they already have the attention of your target market.

The bottom line is...

Don't waste your time and money trying to flood the marketplace with your promotions. Position your advertising where the right people will find it.

Here are three promotional strategies to get the ball rolling...

1) Spread the word

Your own "word of mouth" is your best marketing tool. Tell everyone.
EVERYONE!

Tell all your friends, relatives, and co-workers that you are starting a Web site design business and are openly looking for clients. The more people know about this exciting development, the more likely the news will get passed along to the right ears.

When an opportunity to discuss your business comes up, make sure that you cash in on it. When people around you are discussing the Internet, join the conversation. Casually work in references about your design experience and your new business.

Be careful with this though, because it is easy to overdo this casual type of promotion. If your friends start avoiding you, you may want to ease up a bit.

2) Cash in on free publicity

The best publicity you can get is free. Get your name in the newspaper. Contact your local community paper and tell them about your new business. They might send someone out to interview you, and your business could get some free press. It's an easy way to introduce your services to the community.

If you design a site for a well-known national business, tell your local paper. This is the kind of human interest story that small papers love. Even if you don't make the front page, the exposure will create a buzz locally.

Newspapers also know that if they give support to local businesses (that's you), they often get support back in the form of advertising. So don't be hesitant to contact a reporter.

3) Become a contributing author

Try writing a column, such as "Promoting Your Business on the Internet," for your local paper, Chamber of Commerce, community association, or business

association newsletter -- anywhere to get your name in front of your target audience.

This may seem like a stretch if you are just starting out. You may not have the skills and experience to do this yet. Don't worry... you will soon.

Once you really start learning the craft, you will be amazed at how much more you know than everyone else does. You will also be surprised at how quickly you become a recognized expert after your name has been in print a few times.

Writing takes a little effort on your part, but it is free advertising and it can pay off handsomely if you choose your forums carefully. However, be sure that you only submit articles to publications geared to your target group. Otherwise, it's not worth your time and effort.

These are three simple techniques to get your name out to your target audience effectively and inexpensively (an important consideration when you are just starting up a business). They require some effort on your part, but the payoff is worth it.

(If you need additional ideas, [Start Your Own Home-Based Website Design Business](#) has more than twenty promotional techniques that will help you find work.)

The thought of "promoting yourself" to others may make you a little uncomfortable, but it's just part of the job. You had to learn HTML, layout, and design. Self-promotion is just another skill that you have to master to make your business work.

You don't have to be pushy. You don't have to be obnoxious. Just be friendly, courteous, and informative. Don't spend your limited time with potential clients talking about your business and your problems. Talk about theirs. People like people who listen to them. Once you have established a relationship with your client... **and** understand his or her business needs... you will be in a position to recommend solutions. (Solutions = you!)

Just remember to keep your advertising focused on your clients' needs. Figure out what they want and need to make their business better...

Then tell them how you can help them get it.

SIDEBAR

Join the **Site Build It! Certified Webmaster Program** and **SiteSell** will promote your services through its Webmaster Directory. The role of the program is to match motivated, focused clients with **SBI!**- certified Webmasters. Application criteria information is available at <http://webmaster.sitesell.com/certified>

Your “people skills” are just as important as your design skills as you will see in the next chapter...

6. Dealing With Clients

One of the most interesting things about running a business is the people you will meet. Or in the case of an Internet-based business, the people you won't meet.

Once your business site is online, it will attract clients from all over the country and from all over the world. As a result, many of your clients will only be voices on the phone. Some you will know only through e-mail.

This can create some unique situations for you. Communication is hard enough when you meet face to face. When you add the complications of distance, voice only (phone), or text only (e-mail), it can become very difficult.

It's important to learn how to communicate and to develop close working relationships with your clients despite these barriers.

The best way to keep clients happy is to keep them informed. Answer their questions and keep them updated on the status of their new Web sites. This could take a lot of your time, but it is an essential part of the job.

The key is to communicate with your client frequently. The two of you have to define the Web site in words before you can start coding Web pages. You also have to document any agreements or understandings that you make.

Let's look at the different forms of contact...

1) Telephone

The telephone is the fastest and most efficient means to communicate with your clients. On the phone, you can ask questions, discuss issues, and reach agreements. If there is any misunderstanding or confusion, it can be cleared up very quickly and at a relatively inexpensive cost.

Unfortunately, phone calls don't leave written records. So, after you complete a phone call where decisions and agreements were reached, document it with a follow-up e-mail. This will provide both you and your client with written confirmation of the discussions.

This follow up is a critical management step. It provides both you and your client with documentation of the design (and changes to the design). You can check

with the records as you progress through the process in order to make sure that you haven't missed any details. They also can be used to justify charging for work that was beyond that required by the initial contract.

2) E-mail

When you meet with someone in person, what you say is balanced by the tone of your voice, facial expressions, and eye contact. When you speak on the phone, the visual cues are gone, but your voice is still rich with tone and inflections.

None of these are present in e-mail. So be very careful. It is very easy to offend with e-mail. Jokes **will** be misinterpreted. Casual comments **will** be misunderstood. Keep your e-mails professional. Use them as a vehicle to communicate ideas and as a means to document site requirements.

Whenever you send an e-mail to a client, send a copy to yourself as well. Keep these copies in a folder with any messages that you receive from a client. These will provide both you and your client with a written record of discussions and agreements for future reference.

3) In Person

Face-to-face conversations have the advantage that you can express ideas freely and quickly with little chance of misunderstanding. If there is ever any confusion, you can pull out a piece of paper and clarify things with a sketch. If you have the option, always deal with your clients in person.

Similar to phone conversations, there is no concrete documentation of conclusions or agreements. Be sure to follow up every meeting with a written summary and send it to your client (and yourself) by e-mail.

From types of contact to types of clients...

People come in different sizes, shapes, and temperaments. Sizes and shapes have no effect on your relationships with your clients, but temperaments can be a major issue.

You will find that your clients fall into three categories...

- Nice
- Non-responsive
- Demanding

To make your business successful, you need to be able to deal with all of them...

1) The Nice Clients

Many of your clients will not have the slightest idea what goes into making a Web site.

They will be quite content to work with you as you lead them through the design process. When they disagree with something you propose, they will normally accept your judgment as long as you offer a reasonable explanation.

For the most part, these people are just like you, and working with them will be very pleasant. Communicate with them openly and often and things will go very smoothly.

2) The Non-responsive Clients

One day a client will contact you about a Web site, sign a contract, send you the first payment... and then he will drop off the face of the planet.

He will not provide the information that you need. The graphics that you ask for will never arrive. And when you ask for reviews of your work, you will not get them. Behavior like this may sound odd, but it is really one of the most common problems you will face with clients.

Why would anyone pay for a Web site and then not support its development?

- He expects you to do everything. That's why he hired you.
- He has no idea how to create content for a Web site.
- He is afraid of making a mistake.
- Your questions and requests intimidate him.
- He has more pressing things to do.
- He doesn't know how to use e-mail.

How do you deal with this?

Probably the best way to approach this is to call your client as soon as you see this problem developing. He might ignore your e-mail, but once you have him on the phone, he will normally talk to you. This may be the only way that you will get information.

If a phone call doesn't work, then what?

Picture this scenario... You set up your contract so that you received an initial payment (correct action). Then you started on the job and reached a point where you could go no further without input or reviews from the client. You contacted the client repeatedly (you have copies of the e-mails). And you have had no response.

What do you do at this point?

Stop working.

Notify your client that you have reached a contract milestone and can do no more work on the site until everything is approved and the next payment is made. Send the notice by registered mail so that you will have confirmation of delivery.

After they receive a notice, some clients will fuss because the site is not as complete as they think it should be, and they will finally send the information that you need. Others will fuss but still won't send any information, and some will still not respond.

Continue to work with the clients that responded to the registered letter. File the others away. Send an e-mail to the non-responders every three or four weeks. If they still haven't responded after a few months, just give up. Put all of their records in a safe place and focus your efforts on paying clients.

Be careful not to burn any bridges -- they may be back.

3) The Demanding Client

While the non-responsive client is frustrating, the demanding client is irritating.

The demanding client has the type of personality that has to be in control of everything. These clients will ignore most of the advice you give them regarding good site design practices, and they will insist that you do everything their way. They will tell you what to do and exactly how to do it.

Clients like this can be a real challenge. Fortunately, these traits normally show up in the client interview and you can usually avoid contracting with overly demanding clients.

If you do get one, be sure to **document every conversation**. Get all change instructions in writing (e-mail) and verify all verbal directions by e-mail (...as we agreed on the phone...). In the event of a legal dispute, your e-mail documentation will demonstrate that you provided advice and that the client chose to ignore it.

A demanding client presents a real problem for a conscientious designer. You want to design the best Web site possible, and your client will direct you to do things that you know will reduce the effectiveness of the site. All you can do is inform your client of the drawbacks of his approach, and then do as you are instructed.

It's his site and he is paying the bill. Give him what he wants, even if it is not what he needs.

Client personalities directly affect the way you “do” business and can often cause communication difficulties. Unfortunately, your challenges do not stop there.

There are a few other problems that may show up along the way. Don't worry. These concerns are not insurmountable. By being aware of what could happen, you can tackle any concern immediately and effectively.

Let's start with a concern that happens fairly frequently...

- **Lack of Direction**

Some clients feel their task is done after they sign the contract and send you the first payment. These are the ones who see a Web site as a commodity that is purchased as one would purchase a pair of shoes. The materials that they submit are sketchy and vague because they don't know what they need. They are not really non-responsive. They just have no concept of the design or marketing issues involved.

It can be difficult to identify these people during the initial interview. Once you get one, you may wind up developing the contents of their Web site for them. This is fine if that is what you contracted to do. If it isn't, you need to let them know that there is a problem.

If your agreement does not include developing site content and copywriting, you need to stop working and re-negotiate your agreement. Just be sure to do this tactfully so as not to drive your client away.

- **Submission of Materials**

Every Web site development task requires some input from the clients. Sometimes, the submissions will be unusable. Graphics/photos will be of poor quality and text will be poorly written or just a series of notes.

Deal with this as a contract issue. If the client is to provide photos and they provide bad ones, put a couple online for them to see. If they are satisfied, get written approval via e-mail and you are covered. If they are not satisfied, ask them to provide new ones. You may also have the option of buying or creating the images yourself (at an additional charge).

How you handle the text will also depend on the initial contract you established. If the client is responsible for providing all site content, let him know that there is a problem and explain the impact in terms of labor hours and cost.

If you are responsible for doing the copywriting, but you don't have sufficient information, you can either stop working or you can take your best shot at it and submit it for their review. Sometimes clients just need a place to start and they will be able to edit what you have written.

Be sure to keep the lines of communication open to avoid creating misunderstandings and resentment.

- **Scope Creep**

Your contract should clearly define the scope of the work involved.

Most clients will ask for more once you begin. Some will do this intentionally, but most will not realize that they are doing it. Be careful how you deal with these requests. Many of the requests will be trivial and you will want to do them just to keep your client happy. But some will require hours of work.

Don't hesitate to inform the client that these requests are beyond the scope of the contract and that they will have impact on cost and schedule.

As the site is being developed, the client should have some input as to its final appearance. However, once a client approves the overall layout, further layout changes are "out of scope."

When you get one of these requests, send an e-mail that identifies it as a change of scope. Outline the impact, give a time and cost estimate, and cite a specific

clause in the contract. The client will then have the option to proceed or cancel the request.

- **Preconceived Ideas**

Most clients start off with some idea of what they want in their Web sites. Some of these ideas will be good. Others will not be so great. You need to support the good ones and eliminate the bad ones, and you need to do this very tactfully. Your client probably thought about these ideas for a long time before contacting you, and many of them will be firmly planted in her vision of the site.

The best way to convince clients that their ideas have potential problems is simply to explain your concerns in terms of site performance (i.e., “Large images mean slow loading time and drive visitors away,” or “Pages with no text suffer in Search Engine rankings.”) This shows that you really know what you are talking about and that you have the client’s best interests at heart.

Communication has to be two-way. You are the Web site expert so the client should listen to you. The client is the business expert (i.e., knows own customers and business) so the Webmaster should listen to her. Both parties have to work together.

In most cases, the client will accept your judgment and give up on the idea... but not always. If there is a real issue, a quick search of the Internet will usually provide several references that will support your point of view. Consider sharing this with your client. Let her know that the final choice is hers and that you are just making sure that she has sufficient information to make her decision.

Be very careful about how you do this. You want to educate your client, not offend her. If your client still wants the idea incorporated into the site, put it in. It is her site and she is paying the bills.

Whenever you deal with people, there is a possibility of conflict.

Some conflict is good. It can encourage the creation of new and different ideas. Some conflict is bad. It can create negative feelings and can slow down or stop the business process.

If you run into a problem and you don’t know how to deal with it, determine whether it is an interpersonal issue (you and your client just can’t agree) or a

contract issue (your client has asked for something that is not in your agreement).

Just remember...

Your clients are people. They are paying you to provide a service. Treat them with respect and give them what they want in a professional manner. If you follow this advice, your business will prosper.

One small caveat...

Some people are just plain nasty. Life is too short. Find a way to “fire” them if they are abusive and move on. (Of course, this requires a mutually acceptable termination of contract between the two parties.)

We are now at the last (and certainly not least) section of this Course -- the art of formulating winning (and legal) proposals and contracts...

7. Proposals and Contracts

So far, **The Webmaster BUSINESS Masters Course** has covered business setup, marketing secrets, designing for success, advertising tips and good client communications. This chapter deals with proposals and contracts.

Proposals are the tools you use to **get work**. Contracts are the tools you use to **get paid**.

A good proposal gives your prospective client evidence that you understand the work to be accomplished and that you can deliver in a timely manner. It will also give you a chance to outshine your competition and get the job.

Once you have the job, you need to document your business agreement with a contract.

Your contract will define in detail what tasks are to be done, who is to do them, when they are to be done, what is **not** going to be done... and most importantly, what and when you get paid!

We'll begin with...

A Proposal

During your initial contacts with a new client, you will determine the requirements of the new Web site. After you have discussed this in some depth, you should have a good concept of what your client wants and what you intend to provide.

The proposal puts this understanding in writing. It shows that you understand the client's needs and explains how you intend to go about meeting those needs.

SIDEBAR

Special warning...

One of the mistakes that beginning designers make is to design the client's new site during the proposal phase. It is very tempting to try to impress your prospective client with the splendor of your work.

Don't do this! Prospective clients do not always become paying clients.

Sometimes they change their minds and decide not to get a site after all. Sometimes, they find someone cheaper. And **very often**, they are just gathering pricing information and have **no** intention of getting a Web site.

But there's more...

If you provide too much information, your prospective client won't need you. He will also have the option of sending your proposal (with your beautiful design) to another designer who can do it cheaper (because the design is already done).

Working without being paid and giving your work to your competitors are not good business-sustaining practices. You can't pass the buck and blame someone else. Your business depends on your decisions and actions.

So be disciplined. When a client asks for a proposal, work out the details and give him a proposal, not a design.

Almost everything in the proposal will be copied into the contract, so you want to capture as much detail as possible.

If you are clever, your proposal will even be structured so that most of it can be incorporated directly into the contract. This lets you reduce the time required to write the contract and allows you to give your client a contract that contains information in a familiar format.

At a minimum, your proposal should include these six items...

- Statement of the Work
- Basis of your cost estimate
- Exclusions
- Site Map
- Schedule
- Fees

You can change the order and give them different names if you wish. Just be sure to include all of them somewhere in your proposal. Here's a quick overview of the six...

1) Statement of Work

The Statement of Work defines the tasks required to complete the Web site design from start to finish.

You may wish to divide the Statement of Work into several sections. The individual sections should include a description of the final product as well as a description of the work you are going to do. (If you are using **SBI!**, remember to include the value-added features that fit for that particular client.)

2) Basis of Cost Estimate

When you quote a price for a Web site, you have to be able to justify it to your prospective client. Your justification comes in the form of a list of services you are going to provide, and lists of conditions and constraints.

The “services” list should include a description of every service you intend to provide. Typical services include...

- Developing a page layout to be used throughout the site.
- Designing the navigation scheme.
- Developing graphics required to support the page layout and navigation scheme.
- Submitting the Web site to Search Engines

You should also include a list of assumptions (conditions and constraints) in your proposals. This is how you build flexibility into the proposal but still maintain reasonable limits on what you are going to do.

As an example, if you agree to build a site with photos of the client’s products, you have to place a reasonable limit on the number of photos. Let’s say that you based your quote on two or three per page. Then you get an envelope in the mail with 4,271 photographs to scan, edit, and incorporate. You need to be able to pull up the proposal and point to the line that says “...up to two photographs per page, not to exceed 12 total.”

The same sort of logic applies to the amount of text you will write, special features on the site, additional services, etc.

The Basis of Cost Estimate is there to show the client exactly what you are going to do. It is also there to limit your client’s ability to add surprises or extra work without paying additional fees.

3) Exclusions

Everything up to this point has been describing what you **will** do. The Exclusions section describes what you **will not** do.

Exclusions are an essential part of the proposal because many of your clients are not computer literate. Even those that have some computer skills don't know much about Web site design (or they would do it themselves).

Before you know it, your clients will start asking you questions about setting up their e-mail and problems with their computers. They will also start forwarding SPAM (that shows up in their inbox) to you for your comment. (Yes, they really do this!) You will also get questions about Web site design, HTML, and other Web sites. You certainly want to provide a high level of support to your clients, but you need to be able to put reasonable limits on that support. With the incorporation of the Exclusions paragraph, you can point out to them that these questions are beyond the scope of the agreement and you can justify charging an hourly consulting fee to address them.

Be sure to include something like this in every proposal you write...

This proposal does not cover:

- HTML instruction
- Computer instruction
- Web site design instruction
- Web site and computer support beyond that specified herein

4) Site Map

The site map is a list of pages that you expect to include in the new site. It should also include a brief description of each page and a list of special features that will be found on that page.

Define the site map as accurately as possible because the size and complexity of the job are defined here. If this is not done correctly, you may not be paid what the job is worth, or you may have to increase the client's cost. Both scenarios are not pleasant.

The site map in your proposal can be very simple...

- Home Page -- introduction to the client's business and products

- Article Pages -- up to six article pages, written by the client
 - FAQ -- Frequently Asked Questions
 - Guarantee -- product warranty information
 - Testimonials -- comments and feedback from customers, includes a feedback form
 - Contact Us -- company address, phone, fax, e-mail link, map, contact form
-

5) Schedule

Both you and your client need to know how long the work is going to take.

And just so you know, it **will** take longer than you expect, especially if you are just starting out. (Unless, of course, you are using **SBI!** which will look after much of the tedious, time-consuming work.)

You need to be very careful with the schedule. It will eventually be incorporated into the contract and will become legally binding. You don't want to commit yourself to any dates you can't achieve. You also don't want to miss any contract dates because of things you can't control.

There are easy ways to deal with this...

First, break the job into three or four major sections and define the tasks to be done within each section. This will give you bite-size pieces. It is much easier to estimate the time required for small tasks.

Next, use approximate estimates (3-4 days, 2-3 weeks, etc.). This will give you a lot of breathing room in your schedule.

Finally, include the following paragraph in your proposal...

This schedule defines the major tasks to be completed during the life of the project. Individual tasks may be added, deleted or moved as required to meet the demands of the design. The elapsed times are estimates and may vary depending on workload, changes, customer submissions, and third-party service providers.

Unless your client is working against a specific deadline, he will probably accept these parameters.

6) Fees

How much is it going to cost? This is the most important thing your client wants to know.

You have to make this part very clear. No matter where you put it in the proposal, the cost quote will be the first thing your client reads. In fact, it may be the **only** thing your client reads.

Your cost quote must be very easy to understand...

Web site Development (80 hours @ \$75.00/hr.)	\$6,000
Search Engine Registration Fees	\$ 449
Domain Name Registration Fees	\$ 30
Total	\$6,479

Additional work will be billed at \$75.00 per hour.

Payment is to be made in three installments of \$2,160, \$2,160 and \$2,159 per the attached schedule.

Generally, the payment schedule follows this pattern... 1/3 advance, 1/3 midpoint (client approval) and 1/3 delivered (client approval).

You should also include a separate section for recurring fees (hosting, domain name renewal, etc.).

7) Submitting Your Proposal

After your proposal is complete, you need to submit it to your prospective client.

Your proposal is a marketing document. It can make the difference between working (i.e., \$\$\$) and not working.

Make it impressive. It should be visually appealing, clear and easy to read, and free of typos and errors in grammar. If you have difficulty with any of these things, get someone to help you. Your client will make his final decision based on your proposal. It would be very sad to lose this job because of a few spelling mistakes.

You must also make sure that the proposal addresses all of the client's requirements and that it answers all of his questions.

You can submit your proposal in one of three ways...

- Mail
- E-mail
- Deliver in person

If you are going to send a hard copy, print it out on a laser printer, or better yet, a color laser printer.

If you choose e-mail, don't just copy it into the email, send it as an attachment so your prospective client can see your proposal in all its glory on the screen. If you just paste it into the e-mail, it will be sent as simple text and all of your layout efforts will be lost.

If you deliver it in person, be sure to present a professional appearance.

The proposal should include a cover letter that introduces the proposal and perhaps highlights some special features or skills that your design and/or company has to offer. Anything that you can do to make yourself stand out from the competition will work to your advantage.

After you send the proposal, call your prospective client to tell him that it is on its way. Offer to go over it when it arrives so that any questions can be cleared up quickly. If you don't get a call in a day or so, follow up with another phone call to verify that the proposal was received and to answer any questions.

8) Contract

Whereas, the party of the first part, hereafter known as The Party Of The First Part, shall agree to enter into agreement, hereafter known as The Agreement, with the party of the second part, hereafter known as The Party Of The Second Part...

What does it all mean? Why is it so confusing?

As a designer, you speak one language (HTML, CSS, Search Engine positioning, etc.). Lawyers speak a different language. They don't have to learn yours, but because you are the party of the first part (or is it the second part?) and you will be issuing contracts, you should learn to understand theirs.

So let's start with some contract basics...

A contract is a signed, legally binding agreement between you and your client. It defines your responsibilities (design), the client's responsibilities (payment), and the requirements and limitations of the job.

As a professional designer, you will have a standard contract. It will have a large section of "standard legal stuff" where you fill in the blanks (your name, client's name, etc.). It will also include a place where you will insert the specifics of the job from the proposal.

Here is some sample information that should be in the "standard legal stuff" section of your contract...

a) Who's who...

Your name and client's name, or the names of your businesses

b) Responsibilities of both parties...

What services you are going to provide (Web site design, Search Engine submission, graphic design, etc.)

What your client will provide so that you can complete your task (graphics/photos, information, etc.) and what your client will pay you for your services.

c) Special considerations...

Limitations on the work you will do, fees for additional work, etc.

d) Confidentiality...

You agree not to give any of the client's proprietary information to anyone. Your client agrees not to give any of your proprietary information to anyone.

e) Copyrights...

Who owns the work products (Web site, graphics, text, etc.) when the work is done? Does the client have unlimited rights to sell and distribute these, or is he limited to just the one copy on the Web site? Do you have the ability to use the same design and graphics for another client?

f) Indemnification...

If your client gives you material to use on the site that belongs to someone else and you get sued, what happens? The contract should include a clause that says the client will assume financial responsibility if you are sued because of his actions. He should also be protected from you.

g) Termination of contract...

What happens if one party wants to end the agreement? Do you get paid? Suppose you are the one who wants to quit? Can you?

h) Limited warranty...

If you run into problems and cannot deliver the final product, what are the client's legal options? Can he sue you for millions of dollars? Your contract should limit your liability to just the value of payments that were made to you. The client should be able to get his money back, but no more.

i) Governing law...

Contract laws vary from country to country and state to state. Where is your contract defined?

j) Severability...

If one paragraph of this agreement is declared invalid, the rest of the agreement is still in effect. This is necessary in the event that a court declares part of your contract invalid.

k) Force Majeure...

The client cannot hold you responsible for events beyond your control (earthquakes, floods, personal tragedy, etc.). However, you are still responsible for completing the work after the problems have passed.

When you take all of this legal stuff and incorporate the contents of your proposal, you will have a very complete contract to give to your client. It will define who is responsible for what, what work is to be done, how much you are to be paid, etc.

Some designers prefer to work without contracts. They feel that contracts are impersonal and that a handshake is sufficient. This sounds great until you get a client who decides not to pay you. It happens all the time. And if you get stuck in a position like this, there is little you can do about it.

Never accept a job without a contract. You have no legal protection without one.

And don't even consider writing your own contract.

Contracts are written in a very specific language that only lawyers and judges speak. The language is very clear to those who speak it. Many words that you and I use everyday have a completely different meaning when used in a legal context.

If you write your own contract and you have to go to court to enforce it, the slightest mistake in the legal language can render it invalid -- or may even turn it against you. Your contract should come from a lawyer and it should reflect the conditions and events found in your business. But having a lawyer write a Web site design contract for you can be fairly expensive.

There are some free contracts available on the Internet. They tend to be very simple and most don't address all of the problems you will run into. There is also no guarantee that these freebies were written by legal professionals. Do your research carefully.

SIDEBAR

"Start Your Own Home-Based Website Design Business" includes a contract that my lawyer and I developed specifically for my business, **Website Design Biz.com** (<http://websitedesignbiz.com/>).

We started with a standard services contract, and then I had my lawyer add clauses to address every problem that I ever faced and every problem that I heard that other designers had to face. And when it was complete, I went through it clause by clause and translated the "legalese" into English.

You are free to customize this template for your own use.

Well-written legal proposals and contracts are essential to the longevity of your business. They protect the obvious -- your time and finances. However, they

also protect your **enthusiasm** -- a precious asset that is not always valued in the early days of your business.

A constant struggle to make ends meet, due to avoidable mistakes or omissions in either the proposal or contract, is psychologically draining. This type of situation can make you question your ability to run your own business.

Don't get caught in a downward spiral. Spend the necessary time to get things right at this critical beginning stage!

There are so many variables to consider when you are starting up your own business. This Course highlighted a few of the more important ones to get you off on the right track. It's now in your hands.

OK, a few final words and then you're off...

8. The Wrapup

Congratulations, you made it through **The Webmaster BUSINESS Masters Course**. You are ready to strike out on your own and start your own independent Web site design business.

Before you ride off into the sunset to seek your fortune, I would like to leave you with a few last thoughts...

Web site design for small businesses is very much a "cottage industry." Most of your competition consists of independent designers working in the comfort of their own homes.

SIDEBAR

Site Build It! is probably one of the best system of tools on the Net for Webmasters and as you can tell by now, I highly recommend it. **SBI!** is an affordable and easy way to stand out from the crowd. With its HTML Editor compatibility, you can put your personal design stamp on site creation -- important for you. And with **SBI!'s** backend traffic-building functionality/automation, your sites will generate consistently high traffic results -- important for your clients!

SBI! will be a great fit for the majority of your small business clients, including those who need e-commerce/transaction processing.

Build your business while you build sites that work. For more information, visit...
<http://webmaster.sitesell.com/>

Every day, the demand for Web sites (and Web site designers) grows. Ignore anyone who says that the peak demand has passed and that there is no market for designers. In ten years, they may be standing outside of your corporate headquarters asking you for a job.

And my final piece of guidance...

Don't give up. Every small business has its ups and downs. Don't let these discourage you. They are part of doing business.

Stay focused on your goals. Work when work is available. Use your time to improve your field-related skills/knowledge if work slows down.

Good luck with your new business.

You can do this!

Mark Frank

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

“Start Your Own Home-Based Website Design Business” is an excellent resource for Webmasters. It’s a “hands-on” tool that will put your business on the right (and profitable) track... and it all begins with those critical start-up steps.

Mark Frank shares his knowledge and experience so that you can bypass common business mistakes (caused by inexperience) which can cost you time and money.

The book is comprehensive in scope and focuses on your needs as a Webmaster business owner. It gives an insider’s view into some of the variables involved in setting up a business, creating a contract, working with clients, and other important operational aspects.

Here is a small sampling of what **Start Your Own Home-Based Website Design Business** provides...

- A proposal template
- A Web site design contract
- Guidance for running your design business -- chapters on setting up your office, determining your rates, getting work, how to manage a design, and other essential factors
- Practical aids

For more extensive details about **Start Your Own Home-Based Website Design Business** or to order this valuable resource book, go to...

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