

# Becoming Super in Cyberspace I: Website Basics plus a Few Good Frills

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***Want to develop a website or improve the one you have?*** Want to know more about developing a dynamic, unforgettable web presence to help build brand recognition for both you and your work? Here are **FIVE important steps** you should take before you ever sit down with a designer; they will save you money and greatly enhance the end results.

1. **Purpose and Plan.** What do you want your website to accomplish for you? Is it to build your **brand name**, get you and your work **better known with wider Internet exposure?** Get your **goals for the year ahead down on paper.** Then do some heavy thinking about what you want on your website. It is often helpful to use 8½ x 11” sheets of paper to plan each “page.” If you are clear and prepared when you meet with your graphic designer, you will be able to move quickly and easily through the process. And **time is money when it comes to web design.**

- determine your **market niche, your target audience**
- develop your **log line**, your “elevator” speech – who you are, what you do, and what you have to offer, in **30-60 seconds**
- make a **list of the ways a website will help you**
- establish a **year’s worth of goals**

Keep in mind that the “brand” you establish with your website should be carried through in your **hard copy materials** as well: business cards, stationery, and other marketing materials.

2. **Domain Name. Brainstorm** possible names for your website—on your own and with friends and colleagues. Be **professional. Simple and short** is good, something that evokes your brand or your mission. Often, your name is the best choice. Think of several possibilities. Try to get a **dot.com** if at all possible—it’s still the most memorable choice, but many names are already taken. Run the names you are considering through a search engine to see what’s available. Next:

- **Comparison shop for registration prices**—registering a domain name is really “renting” the rights to that name for a specified period of time
- Many people like to buy **one-year rights to several** names

3. **Host.** You will need to have a **company “host” your website.** That company might be your present Internet service provider or it might be a different company altogether. There is a **wide range of pricing**, so you will want to visit several and compare before making a choice. You **won’t need to sign up yet**, but be ready with your selection so you can tell your designer when you meet. Generally, your designer can get you signed up for the first year once your website is ready to go live.

4. **Visit a Ton of Websites. Google your genre or niche** to find out what other authors are doing. **Google your favorite authors** to see what their sites look like. Visit sites in related or completely **different** types of businesses. You are looking for **ideas**, to see **what appeals**, to see how others’ sites work or don’t work. As you visit each one, make a **note of what you like—colors, graphics, layouts, photo usage, organization, or anything else that really strikes you.** Make a list of about **half a dozen** of your favorites so you can refer your designer to them when you meet to discuss the “look” you want. Look at the **bottom of each home page** and you will usually find who that designer is and you can check out their websites, too. One of them may be right for you! While you are going through this process, **make notes about content** you would like to write for your own site. Keep **copyrights** in mind!

5. **Think about and have photos or other images ready to go.** If you have already had a **logo** designed for your business cards and stationery, you will want that design available in **digital form for your web designer.**

If you know how and have photos or illustrations in electronic form, **crop and scan** them at 72 dpi so your designer won’t have to spend time doing that. **Don’t worry** if you don’t know how to do this—you’ll **save simply by having already collected** the images you want to use and having them ready to email or hand over at that initial planning meeting. **Don’t give her the only copies you have.** It’s always best to keep your own master file. And **BACK UP!**

***You have your plan, your domain name, your preferred host, a list of favorite sites, and your photos. You are ready to sit down with a designer and discuss cost and compatibility.***

**Choosing a designer.** Get **recommendations from people you know**, by asking other writers **or people you network with.** Look at their sites and the sites of their designers. Once you have a **short list of about three people in your own region**, email them and ask to meet in person to discuss what you have in mind, their **fee schedule**, and their **availability.** You are prepared, so the meetings should go well. **Choose someone you feel comfortable with, someone who understands your goals** and preferences, who will carry out **YOUR plan**, within **YOUR budget.**

**DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING POINTS** and ask them to give you a **quote by email for doing three possible template designs**, with you providing the content once a design is chosen. Ask them to **include the charge for showing you** how to update content/text using Front Page or a similar simple editing program if you want to do this, or the cost for them to make changes for you if that's your preference:

- color palette
- fonts
- readability
- navigability, minimal download times
- photos and graphics, minimal download times
- use of negative space
- placing a meter/visitation tracker
- product sales and how to handle payments.
- selecting and coding keywords for search engines

**KEEP IN MIND:** An effective website does **four main things:** (1) tells **who you are** and **why you are unique** in your field, (2) **lists your services and products**, (3) makes a **marketing pitch**—asks for the order, (4) **builds your brand name recognition**.

**GOOD CONTENT IS ESSENTIAL.** Content is about credibility. It is a way of “showing” rather than “telling” who you are and what you do by demonstrating your skill with words. Here are some **key elements to consider:**

- If you did your upfront planning, you have identified your target audience and will want to **gear your website content** to what might interest them. Use **appropriate language** for your genre. It's not just about saying “buy my book.” It's about **creating an atmosphere, a cyber cafe**, where your readers will want to stop by and visit often, to learn more or be a part of the discussion. If you write fiction, you could post **brief but intriguing bios** of your main characters, their backstory, for example. Ask for feedback so your readers will register and feel vested in the success of your work. Find ways to keep them coming back for more.
- **Promote** your book, your services, your accomplishments, list events where you will be appearing/speaking/signing, provide **tips and/or articles** related to your specialty, and examples of your work. **Always strive to answer the reader's question: WHAT DOES THIS SITE DO FOR ME?**

**IN SUMMARY:** Clear language focused on your target audience, no jargon. Make it fun or make it serious depending on who you expect to visit your site. Make it as easy and simple as possible to participate or make a purchase. Use your “elevator” speech.

**Now you have your website, you are LIVE! What's next?**

**NETWORKING.** Review your email list, creating mailing groups where there is a common interest. Begin to think about creating **new contacts every day and everywhere you go**. Carry **business cards with your website listed** on them everywhere and **USE** them. Be prepared to use your book or business “elevator” speech when asked about yourself. Ask for the card of everyone you meet and add them to your mailing list. Remember that the person behind you in the **grocery store, at the PTA meeting, or waiting with you in the dentist’s office** are all people who might be **thrilled** to meet an author and become a fan!

**Networking is not just about getting yourself known**, although that is your longer term goal. **Help others** expand their contacts; become a **“tipping point” person**—when the time comes, many of these people will support you as well.

**Ask your biggest fans to provide testimonials** and post some of them on your website. In mailings, mention that you’d appreciate it if recipients who enjoy what you’ve sent them would direct others to your website so they can consider getting on the mailing list too. **Always try to drive traffic back to your website. Create a positive circle of action!**

**BUILD TEAMS, SPREAD THE WORD.** Create **advisory groups**, sort of a pyramid plan for writers—these will be people who love your work, who are happy to read samples or articles, who will promote your work and your website when they have a chance.

- Create a **blog, a “bletter”** (online newsletter); learn to **podcast**, have an **RSS** feed on your site.
- **Post comments on other websites, link to their websites if appropriate.** Ask them if they would post a link to YOUR website on theirs.
- **Write articles for posting on other websites or in their newsletters** (include your web address in your brief bio).
- **Join a new interest group now and then** and you’ll meet a whole new group of people who share that interest and might love your work. Don’t develop writing-related tunnel vision—**spread out and learn new things**. Who knows what might develop into a theme for a new book!
- **Try being interactive outside your normal rounds.**

Sometimes **new ideas don’t work**, so know when to move on. But keep trying! Bright ideas sometimes click and **become a lightning strike of inspiration**, information, or contacts.

**TIME MANAGEMENT:** Cyberspace can suck you in! Remember that our most important goal is to spend time **WRITING!**