

## BUILDING A BETTER RETAIL WEBSITE

The value of a professional-looking website and the power of blog technology can be tremendously important as marketing tools for businesses today. Professional website developers, though very good at what they do and indispensable, are many times simply too expensive for comic shop and game retailers. Everyone tells you that a web presence is critical to your success – but what is your website adding to your shop's business? Find out how to turn your informational website into a powerful marketing tool by learning some new tricks and hearing what other comic shop owners are doing successfully with their websites.

**Presenters: Daniel McAbee (Spartanburg, SC's The Tangled Web) & Chris Powell (Dallas/Ft. Worth, TX's Lone Star Comics)**

Monday 10:30 a.m. – 11:45 a.m.

Room 327

## What Am I Trying to Accomplish?

### Identify your goals:

- Promoting your store and events to new customers
- Communicating information to existing customers
- Allowing customers to set up or alter subscriptions
- Sell product through the site to store and/or mail order customers
- Some combination of the above

## Getting Started

### First things first:

- Domain Name selection (for website and company email)
  - expertsexchange.com (Experts Exchange), therapistfinder.com (Therapist Finder), penisland.com (Pen Island), etc. As there is no spacing or punctuation (unless you add a hyphen), these things can happen. Pay attention!
- Getting your company's materials together (graphics, information, etc.)
- Do you have or want the skills to build the site this yourself?
  - Community colleges have classes if you want to learn how to do it yourself
  - There are a lot of books and online tutorials that can give you a grounding in basic web programming
- Would you prefer to have someone else build the site?
  - A lot of local talent may be available in the current job market
  - Web programming can be done from anywhere
  - Ask your current customers, but make sure you treat it as a business agreement





## Build a Better Website

# Building a Site on Your Own

### If you are designing your own site, find out what your resources are:

- Diamond's website has downloadable image files, product descriptions, etc. for you to use.
- On the Vendor Tools section of Diamond's website, various publishers have made promotional artwork, banners, videos, etc. available for you to use.
- Comixology offers cover images and plug-in software to enhance your site. If you know enough to insert their code into your site, you can save a lot of time.
- Hijinx Software offers various tools for your website as open-source (free) software.
- If you are primarily a game store, ask your Alliance sales rep about inventory lists, etc. that they might have that would be helpful to you.
- Check out sites like <http://www.templatemonster.com/> that sell ready-made templates for websites, you may find exactly what you want and will start out with code that will give you a big jumpstart.

### What will you need to know in order to use these tools?

- Different resources will require varying skill sets. Hijinx is written in PERL, so your server must already be set up to run that code, or you'll have to install the software yourself. Comixology can be as simple as inserting a line of code into your website's code, but further customization can get more complicated.

### What software is out there to help?

- There are too many to list, and there are pluses and minuses to all of them. Microsoft has a program called Expressions, Adobe has a suite called Dreamweaver, but some folks just write HTML code in Notepad! This is an area where your personal experience and research will come into play, so put a lot of time and thought into it before making a big monetary investment.

## NOTES

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## Build a Better Website

# Hiring Someone to Build a Custom Site for You

## What are their qualifications?

- Start out with a review of their portfolio of prior work
  - Are their sites graphics-intensive? Colorful? In line with your company's image?
  - Have they done e-commerce pages?
  - Have they integrated blogs into their pages?
  - Do they have experience integrating data from multiple sources into the page?
  - Do they have recommendations as to where the site is hosted, who processes credit cards, what database is used, etc.?
- Contact their references
  - How were they to work with?
  - Was work completed on schedule?
  - Were they accommodating when changes were requested or your visions differed?

## Submit an RFP.

- Do they price by the hour or for the project as a whole?
  - If they charge a flat rate for the project, your RFP must be very detailed to avoid conflicts later.
  - Hourly projects can add up quickly. Hourly rates should apply to updates and modifications after the project has been completed, but are rarely a good idea during the initial work.
- They should be able to give you a timeline with milestones like “Domain name and hosting set up”, “Site’s graphic design submitted to client for approval”, “Test pages submitted for approval”, etc. so that you can properly track the project through to completion. An inability to do so at the outset can foreshadow problems down the road with timely completion of tasks.

## Get it in Writing

- Make sure that you have a written agreement and that the site, its content, etc. are all yours.
- Compensation, time frame, etc. should all be spelled out so that there are no questions later.
- Future work rates should be clear before you commit to them doing ongoing maintenance, etc.

## NOTES

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