



Building Your Website

In today's information age, it is important to develop a web presence for your new business. Most potential customers expect to be able to find information online about any company they consider doing business with. Fortunately, building a website doesn't have to be costly or complicated.

[Microsoft Office Live Small Business](#) makes it easy to create a website for your new business. It offers free Web hosting plus a custom domain name and e-mail accounts free for the first year. Many MCBI clients, such as [Adams Best Concrete Design](#) has created a unique, professional website through Microsoft Office Live. Visit <http://smallbusiness.officelive.com/GetOnline/> to get started with Microsoft Office Live.

The full-service approach offered by Microsoft Office Live is great for people just getting started building websites. If you choose not to use Microsoft Office Live, there are several steps you need to follow to create your own website.

- 1. Find a hosting company and domain name.** A hosting company provides a place to store your site where anyone can access it over the internet. When you store files on your computer, you are the only one who can access them. For the public to see your site, it has to be stored online by a hosting company. If you are affiliated with a larger organization, contact them to see if they can allow you to share their web hosting for free or a reduced cost. Otherwise, use one of the many low-cost hosting services available, such as [godaddy.com](#), [siteground.com](#), [FortuneCity](#) or [Yahoo](#). Cost for hosting (as of 2008) is usually less than \$10/month. A domain name is the web address someone types in to get to your site (such as [www.mcbi.info](#)). It is the physical location of your site on the internet. You can usually purchase a domain name at the same time you purchase a hosting service. You should choose something short, simple and unique to your business. If your business's name is already listed as a .com domain name, you might consider your business's name followed by .net or .biz. You can see what domain names are available by visiting a site that sells domain names, such as [godaddy.com](#), and doing a free domain name search.
- 2. Build your site.** Once you have set up your domain name and hosting service, the next step is to create your website. Some hosting companies, including Microsoft Office Live, provide site templates so that all you have to do is fill in your information. If you want to design the site yourself, you can use one of the many website editing tools out there. [Microsoft Office Publisher](#) and [Adobe Dreamweaver](#) are two well-known programs that allow you to create websites. There are also less expensive programs such as Actual Drawing ([try it free from download.com](#)), Web Page Maker ([also available as a 15-day free trial at download.com](#)) and Koala Edit Free Webpage Editor ([available for free with no limitations](#)) that enable you to build a webpage with no prior knowledge of web design. As you build your website, it's important to keep in mind the needs of your customers. Including business contact information is a must so potential customers can get in touch with you. You should also describe your products/services and why the customer should choose you rather than one of your competitors. An "About Us" section provides your company's history and shows your customers that you are a credible business.

3. **Upload your site.** This is the most important step! All of the steps until now are fruitless until you actually put your site online. Whatever web design program you use, you will be creating files and saving them to your computer. Save your first file as index.html. When people type in your web address, the first page they see (known as your “homepage”) will be the page saved as index.html. You can save other pages under other names, such as ourproducts.html or aboutus.html and create links to those pages on your homepage. Your web design program’s help section should describe how to do this in more detail. More sophisticated web design programs such as Adobe Dreamweaver allow you to upload your site from the program as soon as you finish creating it. However, most of the more affordable programs will only allow you to edit your site from within the program. Once you have used the program to create your site files, you can upload them through your hosting company’s website. Check the help section of your hosting company’s website for instructions about how to upload your site.

4. **Promote your site.** Include your site address on all of your marketing materials and correspondence. You can promote your site online and make sure potential customers can find it by taking advantage of Google's free [Webmaster Tools](#). You can also promote your site online by contacting sites whose users might be interested in your products. Ask the owners of these sites whether they will link to your site in return for you posting a link to their site on your site. The sites you contact should not be your direct competitors, but makers of products that are complementary to your own. If you sell bicycle tires, you might ask a bicycle seat maker to link to your website, but do not expect a competing bicycle tire company to link to you!

5. **Maintain your site.** Remember to update your site whenever there are changes to your information, such as the products you offer or your business's phone number. Open the site files on your computer with your web editing program and make the necessary changes. Don't forget to upload the updated files to your hosting service once you have saved them to your computer!