



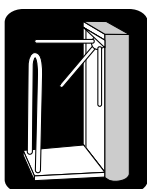
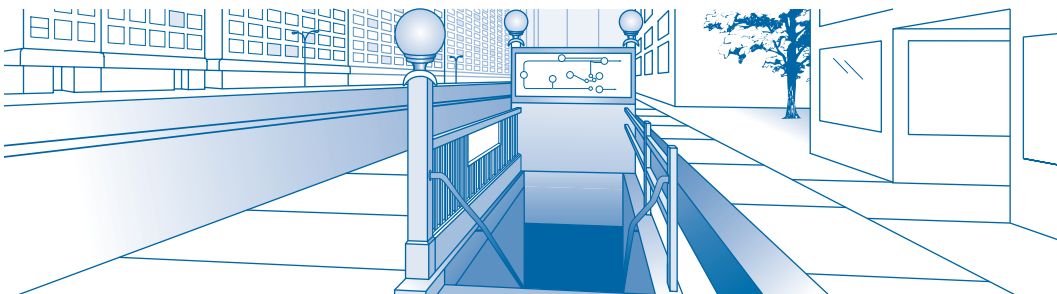
CHAPTER

1

Starting with a Plan

STATIONS ALONG THE WAY

- Figuring out a Web site's goals and purpose
- Determining what benefits the site will offer the consumer
- Constructing an identity for the site to improve the visitor's experience
- Establishing what information and graphics to display on the site
- Diagnosing whether the site needs a database to display information dynamically
- Defining ways to drive additional Web traffic to the site



Enter the Station

Questions

1. What are the possible main functions of a Web site?
2. What tangible benefits can a Web site provide to visitors?
3. When thinking about a Web site, can you readily describe the image or identity of a site as if it were a person?
4. How do you decide what information to display on a Web site?
5. How can you determine whether a Web site needs to use a database?
6. To improve site traffic, what kinds of additional content can you add to a Web site?



Express Line

If your client will be handling site planning, or if you're already confident in your own Web site planning skills, skip ahead to the next chapter.



hen you begin any Web site project, you — and your client, if you're designing for someone else — probably have a number of ideas about the final product. If those ideas are vague, you need to work on fleshing them out, and if they're specific, you need to keep them organized and understand the purpose behind them. In other words, you need a plan.

To get the project off to a good start and ensure these ideas and issues all get the consideration they deserve, you begin by pinpointing the purpose for building the Web site. Some people build Web sites because they have a product or service to sell. Others create sites to share ideas and information. Because the answer to “Why build a site?” is largely determined by the specific needs of the Web site owner, I've devised a series of brainstorming exercises in this chapter, which you can use as a guide to discovering that answer. By defining the site's purpose, you develop a foundation for the rest of the site planning. By the end of this chapter, you should have all the tools you'll need to establish a plan for building almost any Web site.


Determining the Site's Purpose

When you're ready to begin a new Web site project, the very first thing you should do — before you think of designing the site — is determine the ultimate purpose of the site. Start with a few simple questions: Why are you building this site? Will the site be professional, fun, silly, or informative? Will the site sell products, services, information, ideas, or some combination of these things? These are the kinds of questions you need to ask yourself right now, so read on.

Keeping up with the competition

The short answer to “Why build a site?” is that these days anyone who owns a business and wants to be taken seriously by savvy consumers should have a Web site. If you agree with the premise that, to be competitive, every business needs a Web site, you'll next need to figure out the site's main purpose. This step is often where you'll start your work as Web designer.






For the longer answer to “Why build a site?” you need to follow along as I take you on a quick walk down History Road: Since the boom of the Internet revolution in the late 1990s, every big company with a “brick and mortar” store learned that having a Web site would instantly make their products and services available to millions of site visitors each day. New Web sites sprouted up daily as more and more people purchased computers, learned how to use them, and began searching, finding, and buying the products and services they wanted online.



As the Internet continued growing in popularity, so did the idea that selling products and services exclusively online was a viable new form of running a business, mainly because it entirely negates the need for costly store overhead, which in turn can increase profits. Today, most businesses either have their own Web site, are in the process of creating one, or are in desperate need of having their current site redesigned and improved upon. People create Web sites to promote business services, sell products, share information, provide free resources, offer contests, coupons, tips, and advice, and more.

Gathering information

Oftentimes, a business will rely upon you, the Web designer, to assist it with determining the site's purpose. If you or your Web client haven't discussed this issue yet, read through the following questions and take careful note of the answers:

-  **Will this site provide in-depth information about a particular topic?** The function of a political news blog or nonprofit organization is to share ideas and information with the public. A lawn mower company might want to offer lawn-care advice in addition to selling mowers.
-  **Will the site be someone's personal Web site?** Personal Web sites are just for family, friends, and schoolmates. This could be a family photo album, a blog, or a place for online personal expression.
-  **Will the site be someone's professional portfolio?** Professionals use portfolios to generate new business and showcase their talents. People who use portfolios include artists, illustrators, designers, writers, singers, photographers, musicians, poets, and academics.
-  **Will the site sell any products, and if so, what kinds?** If the site will sell lots of products, find out how many product categories are needed and whether the products will be sold wholesale, retail, or both. Will the products be sold online or through an outside distributor?
-  **Will the site market services?** A company, group, or sole proprietor (like a nonprofit arts organization, a law firm, or a marketing consultant) might want a site it can include on business cards and in advertisements in order to help spread the word about its services. Ask how many services the group offers and whether it wants to make pricing information available online.

Developing a purpose statement

Use the answers to the preceding questions to begin forming a vision of how the site will look and function. For example, a realtor's Web site that markets rental properties and realty services will necessarily look and function much differently



than a nonprofit site for railroad veterans or one that showcases a watercolor artist's portfolio.

After talking over these questions with the site owner, you will find out whether you need to design the site to attract business, share information, provide feedback and advice, be a blog with text and photographs, provide a dating service, sell moving and relocation services, provide online banking, supply wholesale products to retailers, or some combination of these and other things. Then you'll want to take this information and boil it down into a purpose statement. Table 1-1 gives examples of several types of businesses and some purposes those business owners might come up with for their sites.

Table 1-1 **Example Purpose Statements**

Type of Business	Example Purpose Statement
Sole proprietor or entrepreneur, such as a business consultant, life coach, or private accountant	This site will market services to a wider audience, lend a sense of legitimacy to the business, generate more clients, and allow customers to register for a monthly newsletter.
Artist, designer, illustrator, photographer, poet, actor, musician, or band	This site will be an online portfolio for displaying and promoting work (art, music, photos) to art directors, editors, and other people in the industry. The site will help generate new business, share news and information, and sell a limited number of creative works.
Nonprofit organization	This site will promote services, provide industry-related information, educate the public, collect donations, offer public and private programs and events, list classifieds for members, and supply registration information for fund-raising events.
Small- to medium-sized business, like a greeting card company, a network backup hardware manufacturer, or an adventure tour company	This site will be an online storefront to sell products and services, answer FAQs, have a library of information related to products and services, and allow visitors to contact the business, receive customer support via e-mail and live chat, and subscribe to a weekly newsletter.

Take a moment to think about the purpose(s) of your Web site project and record your answers in the spaces provided here. If you don't have a project in mind, pretend you're planning a site for a marketing consultant who promotes art books. Whatever your particular answers happen to be, turn them into a purpose statement that you can keep handy throughout the first five chapters of this book; the statement will help you organize your ideas and plan the best Web site for your needs.

Type of business:

Purpose of site:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Defining the Benefits to Visitors

Now that you know your (or your client's) site's general purpose, you'll need to begin constructing ideas about the tangible benefits to visitors. You definitely need to know what the visitors will get from visiting this particular site and purchasing particular products and services *before* you build it. The benefits are what will set your site apart from your competitors. For example, when you're designing a site for a fine wine and liquor company, if you know that its distinguishing benefits are (a) the number of years it has been in business; (b) the quality of its products; and (c) its reputation for expertly rating and evaluating the wines they sell, you can highlight those details in the design for the company's site. If you don't have this knowledge at the onset of the project, you might encounter design revision setbacks further down the line.

Benefits can help persuade visitors to purchase products, use services, tell all their friends, and return to the site often. To really understand what those benefits are, put yourself in the shoes of the consumer and look at the business from his or her perspective.

Discovering the true benefits

Opinions won't necessarily provide any tangible benefits to the customer. Benefits, on the other hand, can sway a buyer toward one product over another. For example, every pizza parlor across the country will tell you it has the best pizza. And to stay competitive in business, each parlor will probably have a legion of regulars who will swear up

and down that the pizza there really is the best in their neighborhood, town, state, or country. To claim that the pizza is *the best*, however, is only an opinion.



Information Kiosk

A *benefit* is something that is useful, helpful, or advantageous and enhances or promotes healthiness, happiness, and prosperity.

Having the best pizza in town, then, while true, might benefit the consumers only if their lives will be improved by eating it. Therefore, rather than boasting on a Web site to have the best pizza in town, it makes better sense to market verifiable facts about the parlor — and build those elements into the design — like that it uses the best reduced-fat mozzarella, makes its own low-cholesterol pizza sauce from tomatoes grown fresh at local farms, is rated number 1 in the ZAGAT survey, or that two slices of its famous “salad pizza” are only 390 calories.

Seeing the visitor's perspective

Take a look at one possible type of business and see how you could convert someone's skills into benefits and clearly state why visitors should want to use the business's products or services. Suppose for a moment that you're a professional digital photographer looking to increase business by putting a portfolio Web site online. You have extensive studio experience, you've won some important industry awards, you've done a lot of fashion shoots around the world, and you're willing to travel for the right project.



Step into the Real World

What's in It for Me? When you purchase a product or service online, the benefits you'll receive from the item(s) are part of what makes you decide to make the purchase. Good online marketers know that those benefits need to appear front and center so you can decide quickly whether a product is right for you.





Take a few minutes right now to visit the following sites to see whether you can quickly identify at least two product or service benefits:

- **Dreamweaver 8:** www.adobe.com/products/dreamweaver
- **Firefox:** www.mozilla.com/firefox
- **Epson:** www.epson.com (In the Products area, note how features and benefits are highlighted for individual products.)
- **The Nature Conservancy:** www.nature.org
- **Julie Hasson, Chef:** www.juliehasson.com






Hint: Benefit statements often begin with action verbs such as create, manage, and develop.



The benefits to those visitors making their way to your site (rather than some other site) might include

-  Equipped; photographer owns her own studio and digital photographic equipment, so there will be *no hidden equipment fees*.
-  Accomplished; hiring this award-winning photographer means you can *feel confident that your project will have quality results*.
-  Experienced; with over ten years experience in the fashion industry, *you can rely on this photographer's skills, talent, and professionalism*.
-  Global; photographer has traveled in the past with *Elle, Vogue, and Sports Illustrated*, and is *willing to travel anywhere in the world*.

To discover some benefits your particular Web site project can offer to visitors, try asking yourself what you would want to know if you were looking to do the following tasks:

-  Hire someone who does what your client does. (For instance, your client might be an artist who paints faux finishes for home interiors, a clown who specializes in children's birthday parties, or a private marketing consultant for the knitwear industry.)
-  Find a company that sells what your client's company sells.
-  Find a business that provides services like your client's company.
-  Find an artist with your client's particular skills and experience.
-  Get information about a nonprofit agency like your client's organization.

You can easily convert the answers into benefits. Next, think about why visitors might want to use the products or services on your client's (or your own) Web site. Again, if you'd like a project idea to practice with, pretend you're creating a site for a marketing consultant who promotes art books. Record as many answers as you can come up with in the following spaces.

Benefits of this site to visitors:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Constructing an Image for the Site

The next important step to take with your project is to define the image that the Web site will project to the consumer. This image will establish the unspoken identity of your Web site to visitors — an identity that they will (hopefully) respond to both intellectually and emotionally.

To help construct this identity:

- 1. Try thinking of the site as if it were your client's best salesperson, someone who fully represents the best about the company.**
- 2. Come up with as many words as you can to describe this "person's" traits.**

Is the person professional or laid back, serious or fun, creative or traditional? If the salesperson angle is a bit awkward for you and/or your Web client, think of the ideal image the Web site should project and find adjectives that describe that ideal. Table 1-2 lists descriptive terms you can use to begin defining the Web site's image; it's by no means complete, but should get you started.

Table 1-2 Describing a Web Site's Image

Professional	Casual	Innovative	Creative
Traditional	Cutting-edge	Popular	Honest
Open	Fun	Witty	Intelligent
Smart	Open-minded	Supportive	Caring
Technological	Trend-setting	Urban	Cultured
Educated	Contemporary	Organized	Efficient
Cost-effective	Reliable	Trustworthy	Friendly
Talented	Confident	Capable	Established
Savvy	Respected	Clever	Solution-oriented

Besides giving you a clearer sense of what you're doing with this Web project, the identity you construct for it will help you make aesthetic and organizational decisions about the site such as what colors to use, how to best lay out the content, and what graphics to include throughout the site. For instance, if your Web client will be selling football helmets, you'll probably decide to use bolder masculine colors over pastels in the design, and if your client is a consultant looking to advertise his services, you'll probably want to advise him to invest in some good royalty-free, industry-specific artwork for the site rather than display the often overused and amateurish-looking illustrations from the Microsoft Word Clip Art archive.

Right now, use the following spaces to list at least ten adjectives that describe the company image for your current Web site project:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____



Transfer

In Chapter 2, you'll do a similar exercise about the type of visitor you'd like the Web site to attract.

Determining Site Content Requirements

By now, you should have a pretty good idea about the site you want to develop. You have identified the site's purpose, determined what benefits visitors will gain from visiting the site, and made initial steps toward defining an identity for the site. With all that in mind, you can start thinking about what actual content needs to be presented on the Web site.

Certain content should be on every Web site, regardless of the site's purpose. Beyond that, anything else that goes on the site is up to you — the designer — and your client. That said, following a few general guidelines helps make most Web sites more effective, and I suggest you use this chapter and the rest of this book as a guide to assist you in defining content for the site.



Information Kiosk

The more informed you and your Web client are, the better. Although many creative people — including Web designers — are intuitive thinkers, you'll still benefit from learning about the general Web design issues that I discuss in the following sections and throughout this book. Even if you already know a Web page should look or work a certain way, being able to explain why can help you educate your client, who might also be able to give you more constructive input if he or she understands the concepts behind your design and the principles that drive content selection. (And if you or your client want an unconventional site, keep in mind that even Picasso painted realistic portraits and practiced technique before he broke away from the traditions of his time, so learning more about these guidelines will still be helpful to you.)

The bare minimum

At a minimum, your Web project will need to supply basic information, and your job during the planning process is to decide what content you or your client will need.



Transfer

Determining what information a site requires at this point in the planning process is helpful because it will give you a road map to work from when you begin gathering this content. Pulling the content from various sources is the focus of Chapter 3.

The following information is commonly found in some variation on most Web sites:





Home page information: The home page is the most important page on the site because this is where you'll need to introduce the site to visitors. This page should contain at least a paragraph or two of descriptive text (formatted in any way except as a graphic) generally outlining what visitors can find on the site. Whenever possible, *keywords* (descriptive terms used to find information on a specific topic) in the text should be hyperlinked to other pages on the site.



Watch Your Step

In the past few years, many sites have used the home page as a place to play introductory flash animations or to have a different set of graphics than found on the rest of the Web site. Although never really a good strategy even though it contained a bit of the “wow!” factor, this practice is no longer favored because a lack of meaningful, searchable content on the home page could prevent the site from being fully indexed by the most popular search engines. Furthermore, when visitors can't find what they're looking for by quickly scanning the home page, they'll leave. Make the most of the home page by including only relevant copy, links, and graphics on the page, using the same layout found on the rest of the site.


-  **Contact information:** Be ready to provide the physical address of the company, the mailing address (if different), telephone and fax numbers, and a contact e-mail address. You might also want to include special contact information for various employees, departments, and services, as well as area maps, transportation directions, and hours of operation. Some sites also provide a form on the contact page where visitors can submit personal information, answer survey questions, provide comments and feedback, and/or request information.
-  **Privacy Policy:** If you intend to collect any personal information (e-mail address, name, telephone number, and so on) from site visitors during registration or for purposes of responding to an inquiry, the site would benefit greatly from including some kind of privacy policy.



Information Kiosk

In the most general terms, a privacy policy should state how the company will care for the collected data, including any cookies (personal data collected by a visited site's server and saved to the visitor's computer so future visits to that site will run smoother) collected from the computer used to visit the site. For example, if the company will share or sell the data with other vendors, you need to state that expressly. Conversely, if the company plans to honor the privacy of visitors and closely guard collected information as if it were a priceless gift, state that clearly.

FindLegalForms.com has a generic policy (Privacy Policy Agreement #28152) you can purchase online for only \$8.99, or if you want to generate a policy to match your specific business, you can use the Policy Wizard at the PrivacyAffiliates.com Web site for just \$19.95.

-  **Site map:** A site map is a page on a Web site that contains a list of organized text links to all the pages on the Web site. If you want your site to be accessible to as many visitors as possible, regardless of how simple or complex the site is, include a site map page.



Transfer

Site maps are not only good for long pages with a lot of content, they're also great for improving access to all the pages on a site by visitors with disabilities using assistive devices to access the Web. To learn more about how to make your sites accessible, see Chapters 11 and 19.



Footer: At the bottom of every page on a site, you should include the company name, copyright information, and a series of what I call *footer links* or navigation links to the most important pages on the site. At a minimum, include links to such pages as Home, About, Services, Contact, and Privacy Policy. This information will not only remind visitors whose site they're on, but also provide additional ways for them to navigate to other pages on the site. To really harness the full power of this often-overlooked Web real estate, treat this area like a mini site map and list links to not only high-level navigation destinations but also to more detailed subnavigation category pages.

Figure 1-1 shows an example of a site that includes all these basics.

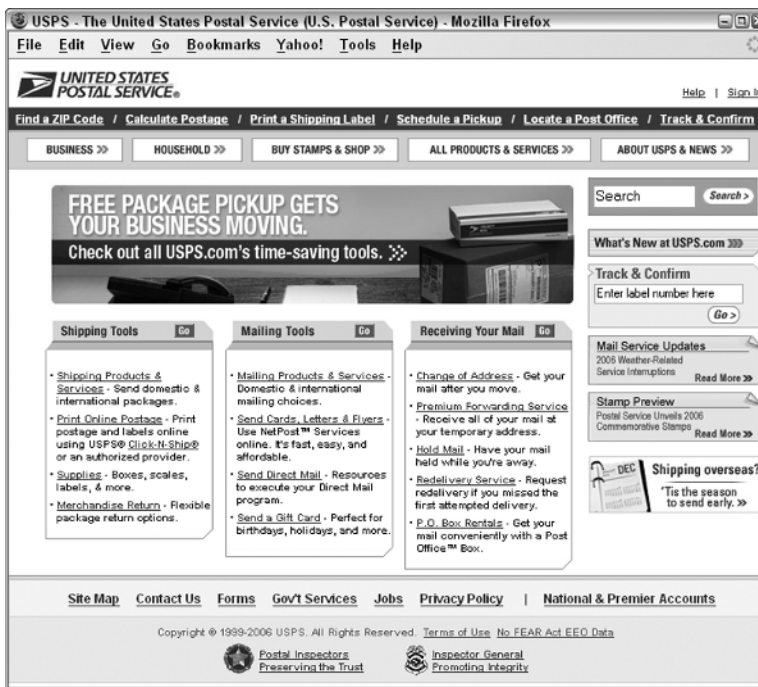


Figure 1-1: Most Web sites include this basic information.

Marketing and sales content

Whether the Web site you're designing is for a sole proprietor, entrepreneur, nonprofit organization, or a small- to medium-sized business, the rest of the content on the Web site should be geared toward promoting new business from visitors. You ought to provide ample information about the person, organization, or company and all the skills, talents, work, services, and/or products available plus anything else you can think of that will benefit the visitor and positively impact business.



Information Kiosk

As you make decisions about what information you do or don't want to include on a Web site, develop a keen awareness of the Web site's online and offline competition. For example, if you're designing a site for a children's ballet school, it should probably contain information that will help visitors choose to enroll their children as students, such as a schedule, photographs of the facilities and smiling children, a teaching philosophy, student and parent testimonials, and perhaps a price list. If the school's offline competitor happens to give students free tote bags, perhaps your client's dance school should also offer free tote bags and advertise that on the site.

The following list isn't meant to be comprehensive; rather, you can use it as a starting point for brainstorming about the content needed for each specific Web site.



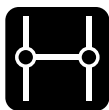
Company Information: This section of the site, usually called About Us or something to that effect, typically consists of either one page of company-related information or several pages of logically organized company details. The information here should describe the company to the visitor and include some form of the company mission statement. In addition, this section might include a directory with bios of the management team, a corporate history and philosophy statement, a resume or *curriculum vitae* (an academic's work history and accomplishments), and/or information about company internships and careers.



Biography: Similar in scope to the Company Information section, the biography page (either called About Me, Bio, or Biography) usually includes historical and other interesting information about the artist, sole proprietor, or small business owner. This page, or series of pages, should provide information to stimulate interest in the services, skills, work, products, and so on being presented on the Web site.



Product/Service Information: All products and services will require a detailed description. If the business is service oriented, describe what the business does, who needs this service, and how long the business has been operating. If the business sells products, the products need to be organized into logical categories and subcategories, such as Cat Products → Collars → Leather. In addition to a description for each main category, every individual product deserves its own description, including any information that might be interesting or necessary to purchasers, such as size, dimensions, color, weight, materials, ingredients, nutritional information, care instructions, country of manufacture, and warranty information. Also offer client/customer testimonials whenever possible.



Transfer

For any copyrighted material you intend to use on the site, including intellectual property, photographs, and illustrations, you must have permission to use it. This means paying royalty fees for rights-managed work, requesting and receiving written permission for non-rights-managed work, and otherwise obtaining the right to use and display the work created by another person or entity. To learn more about copyrights and permissions, see Chapter 3.

- **News and Press Information:** This area typically contains current press releases, a press release archive, articles about the business or industry, and/or any news items in the form of media coverage. This area might also have information about upcoming programs and exhibitions, gifts and collections, relevant technology, a historical corporate timeline, an image gallery or media library, and a listing of literary publications.
- **Portfolio:** This is the part of the site that displays an online version of an artist's portfolio, including photos and graphic examples of their work, a resume or curriculum vitae, video clips, sound files (MP3s), and more. The online portfolio is fast becoming the best way to market services to a global audience, generate new business, and share news and industry information with the public.
- **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs):** If visitors potentially have many questions that need answering, they'll benefit from viewing an FAQs page. Most FAQs cover information about contacting the site, searching for information on the site, customizing site preferences or membership accounts, getting more information, and using the site. If you don't have a list of information to create an FAQs page yet, start keeping track of questions the business gets asked. When a pattern begins to emerge, add those questions and answers to the frequently asked questions page.
- **Terms of Service:** Similar in importance to the Privacy Policy, the Terms of Service page should state how the site provides services to — and the conditions under which those services must be accepted by — visitors. This may include concepts of intellectual property rights, usage, registration, security, payment, advertising, applicable law, legal compliance, indemnification, and more. Because the Terms of Service should contain legal content specific to the Web site's offerings, the best way to create the page is to consult with a lawyer. Do-it-yourselfers can download a generic Terms of Use Agreement from FindLegalForms.com for only \$8.99.



Shopping Cart: Several kinds of Web shopping carts are available. The most basic is a cart that uses PayPal to process payments. Another option is to create an online store through Yahoo! Shops, which uses Yahoo!'s proprietary shopping cart system. For more customized solutions, you'll want something that's tailored specifically to your site's needs. With a simple search, you can find online shopping carts that are free and customizable, carts that are controlled by host providers, and carts that are powered by third-party software manufacturers.



Information Kiosk

In a 2006 Shopping Cart Software Report on [TopTenReviews.com](http://shopping-cart-review.toptenreviews.com) (<http://shopping-cart-review.toptenreviews.com>), ShopSite 7 Pro, MerchandiZer Pro, and Monster Commerce Pro were rated the best shopping cart software programs on the market.

Whatever cart you decide to use, take extra care to ensure that your visitors' personal information is safe and secure during the purchasing transaction. If the Web site will process credit card payments (instead of processing them through an outside service), you'll need to set up a special merchant account as well as purchase an SSL (Secure Socket Layer) digital security certificate for your domain. Your host provider should be able to assist you with these things.



Transfer

You'll find more information about merchant accounts, SSL certificates, and working with the different types of e-commerce shopping carts in Chapter 4.

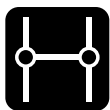


Customer Service (Help): If you sell anything on your site, your visitors will need a place to contact you, get more information, ask questions, and resolve problems. Look to successful Web sites to gather ideas on how to set up this valuable area of your site. Consider having sections for ordering information, privacy issues, shipping and delivery, dealing with returns or damaged items, and accessing account information, just to name a few. The easier you make it for visitors to get answers, the more positive their experience on your site.



Site Credits: Want to toot the horn of the designer or design team (you!) that turned a Web dream into a Web reality? If you've included a clause in your client contract to do so, add a site credit link somewhere on the site, preferably embedded somewhere in the footer links. Otherwise, ask your client for permission to include the link. The site credit link itself can go directly to the Web site of the designer or open a page similar in layout to the rest of the site with contact information for the designer.

- Ⓢ **XHTML, HTML, CSS, and 508 compliance information:** If being accessible to any and all Web visitors is important to the site owners, the site should proudly display compliance information.



Transfer

You'll learn more about following guidelines set by online Web standards organizations in Chapter 9, which is entirely devoted to working with Web standards.

- Ⓢ **Site Search:** Though not at all required, providing a means for searching an entire Web site's content with keywords can improve the site's *stickiness* (the ability of a site to entice people to stay on the site longer). The most popular free search tool is Google Free. Get the code from Google at www.google.com/searchcode.html. As an alternative to this type of remote site search tool (where a search engine remotely searches and returns search results for a specified URL), you could also build your own server-based search tool, complete with a search results page. For further information about both methods, read the WebMonkey.com "Adding Search to Your Site" article at <http://webmonkey.com/webmonkey/00/09/index2a.html?tw=e-business>.

Diagnosing a Site's Dynamic Needs

A *dynamic* Web site refers to a site that uses a programming language, such as ASP, JSP, PHP, or ColdFusion, to gather specific records of information from a database, such as Microsoft Access or MySQL, and display that data on a Web page. Many sole proprietors, small businesses, and nonprofit companies might have little need (if any) to offer a Web site with dynamic capabilities. Having dynamic content on a Web site largely depends on the goals and budget of the site owner.

By organizing and storing data in a database, the content can be selectively pulled according to different scenarios or rules set up in advance. For instance, one business might want to display the ten most recent news items on a page containing news about the company. Presuming new data is regularly being entered into the database, the programming language can be set to check article publication dates and always pull and display the ten most recent files on a particular page.

You can use databases to store and retrieve all kinds of data. For instance, you might decide to use a database on your (or your client's) Web site to display

- Ⓢ Articles, papers, and documents sorted by date, author, and so on
- Ⓢ Store locations, hours of operation, and contact information

- ONE PAGE Categories of products and product detail information
- ONE PAGE Lists of services and service detail information
- ONE PAGE A glossary of industry-related terms or FAQs
- ONE PAGE Customer membership information or saved shopping cart details

In addition to dynamically accessing and using data, databases can be used to assist with adding, deleting, and editing content on a Web site. For an added fee, many programmers and host providers can now build a custom *Content Management System* (CMS) for a site, which allows site owners to easily control specific site content through a customized Web interface. Depending on the size of the project and the complexity of the dynamic needs, a CMS Web site component can cost as little as \$1,000 to as much as \$15,000 or more. This type of cost-effective tool can be extremely useful for sites requiring frequent updates.

Though admittedly slick, not every site needs to use a database. To determine whether your site needs to use one, take a good look at the type of content you intend to display. Ask yourself these questions:

- ONE PAGE **How often will the content need updating?** Sites with daily and weekly update requirements might benefit from a database, whereas sites requiring less frequent modifications might be better off without the added expense.
- ONE PAGE **Are more than 20 products or services being sold?** If the site is selling only a handful of products, though time consuming, each product can have its own Web page. However, if more than 20 products will be sold, using a database to dynamically create each product page would be more efficient.
- ONE PAGE **What kind of growth does the company expect to achieve in the next year, three years, five years?** For some sites, there will be little to no intended growth, and therefore no real cost justification to using dynamic features. On the other hand, sites that project to grow their products and services over a few years might greatly benefit by building a site that can accommodate such growth.
- ONE PAGE **Does the company need to collect and use visitor data?** E-commerce sites have good reason to collect data from purchasers, to both streamline the ordering process and provide future sale and promotional information, whereas a small business could just as easily manage that information by using a simple HTML form and an Excel file.
- ONE PAGE **Is there or will there soon be enough dynamic content — such as a listing of store locations or the ten most exciting daily news articles — to justify the cost?** Depending on the complexity of the data processing, some things might be cost prohibitive for the start-up company yet affordable to the established business. Certainly the old adage “to make money, you need to spend money” pertains, but not everyone can afford to spend the money even when they want to.

The decision should be fairly clear after answering these types of questions. If you're still unsure whether to use a database, get quotes from programmers or hosting companies to see how it will impact the budget for your project. Money can sometimes be the great decider.

Defining Ways to Drive Traffic to a Site

When most people visit a Web site, they're typically looking for specific information about a particular product or service, like a 16.6-cubic-foot refrigerator. Although finding that information is important — presuming the products or services are the company's bread and butter — Web sites should also be sure to include other information that supports the product or service, such as the answers to frequently asked questions, company information, customer support, and contact information. Beyond that, any other information on the site is strictly optional — unless, of course, the site owners want to drive more traffic to the site, which they should.



Information Kiosk

Statistically speaking, the more traffic a site gets, the greater the likelihood is that it'll get visitors who will want the products and/or services being sold or will at least tell another person they know about your site.

Fortunately, you can use lots of great techniques to increase visitor traffic that have nothing to do with the product or service being sold. For instance, you or your client might decide to start a newsletter that offers industry-related tips, free downloads, or coupons, or the site owner (or you if he or she hires you to do post-launch site maintenance) might begin to post weekly articles on a variety of topics related to products or services. Other sites might post blogs, use polls, offer free calculator tools, or even have frequent contests with fun prizes.







In the following sections, you get a chance to look at a few of these options in greater detail. As you compare these options and decide which ones you might want to include in your plan, keep the site's purpose, benefit to visitors, and image at the forefront of your (and your client's) mind. These factors should help identify the best ways to make the site sticky.

E-newsletters

E-newsletters are a fantastic way to communicate regularly with customers through e-mail. An e-newsletter keeps a company or organization name, products, and services in customers' minds when they read it. And each one creates another opportunity to have a positive and meaningful exchange with site visitors.



Most e-newsletters are graphically formatted in HTML (but they might also be plain text, or you can offer both) and typically include the following:

-  Some kind of topical news
-  Sale offers
-  Information about new products and services
-  Upcoming events listings
-  Links to articles or products online
-  Company information, the date, instructions on how to subscribe and unsubscribe to the newsletter, and a few Web site links



Watch Your Step

Giving readers the choice to subscribe and unsubscribe is an important part of netiquette and will help you avoid looking like a spammer. With that in mind, I strongly recommend that, when sending e-newsletters, you take extra care to ensure that 1) you ask permission of your site visitors to add their e-mail address to your customer list *before* sending them anything, and 2) you include, in every mailing, a simple method for visitors to unsubscribe to your list. See the nearby sidebar for more about the art and practice of netiquette.

For exceptional information about writing and designing e-newsletters, check out the book called *Sign Me Up!: A Marketer's Guide to Creating E-Mail Newsletters That Build Relationships and Boost Sales*, by Matt Blumberg and Michael Mayor, published by Return Path Books.

To send newsletters, you can choose from a variety of e-mail programs, though the best supported applications are for PC only. Alternatively, if you'd rather outsource the management of your e-mail list to another company, several great online services can handle the job. Table 1-3 lists two mail programs and two newsletter services that have great reputations.

Table 1-3 **Third-Party Newsletter Services**

Product	Web Site
Direct Mail (PC & Mac)	http://ethreesoftware.com/directmail
Outlook Express (PC only)	www.microsoft.com/windows/ie/ie6/downloads/critical/ie6sp1/default.msp
Mail Chimp	www.mailchimp.com
Constant Contact	www.constantcontact.com



Step into the Real World

The Importance of Netiquette Nowadays, purchase anything online and you're probably automatically added to the selling company's e-newsletter. If you enjoy learning more about towel sales, electronics equipment, and office supplies (for instance), seeing these e-mails in your inbox might be somewhat of a pleasant surprise for you each time they arrive. But when unwanted newsletters arrive — especially when you didn't expressly authorize the enrollment to the e-mail list — these kinds of missives can seem more like spam.





When sending e-mails and otherwise communicating over the Internet, do you use your best online manners? Network etiquette, or *netiquette*, is the set of unspoken rules everyone online should follow whether sending personal or professional messages. Each interaction online should be polite, courteous, kind, and considerate — using a sort of “do unto others” set of e-ethics to guide all your online correspondence and transactions.

To find out how your Internet manners rate, take the Netiquette Quiz at www.albion.com/netiquette/netiquiz.html.

Tips and articles

If marketing a service is the main thrust of a Web site, e-mailing industry-related tips to subscribed members and publishing regular articles on the site are both smart ways to provide tangible benefits and build a positive relationship with visitors. And remember that the more positive contact a site has with its audience, the greater the likelihood that audience will want the site's product or service.

Coming up with ideas for tips and articles is quite easy, really. Just think of all the things you know about your client's business that could help visitors and then jot them down. For example, if the site you're designing is a dog-grooming business, the tips might include the following:

-  How to choose a dog-grooming brush
-  A review of the best dog shampoos
-  How to keep a dog's teeth clean
-  Exercise tips that keep dogs fit

Tips within the e-mail can also help bring visitors to your site to read more tips, as well as learn more about and potentially purchase the site's products and services. Take the CliffsNotes Web site (www.cliffnotes.com) for example, shown in Figure 1-2. There visitors can sign up for newsletters; browse for literature, test prep guides, and other titles; and get free advice on studying and student life.



Figure 1-2: Good e-newsletters include tips that get readers to visit the authoring Web site.

Take the same idea and apply it to your projected Web site. Try to come up with at least 12 ideas that you could conceivably use for tips or articles over the next 12 months.

Blogs

Blogging is fast becoming the best way for Internet readers to learn about and provide feedback on nearly every topic of interest. That's because blog news travels fast. Blogs encourage instant feedback from readers and are a place for readers to share information and experience. Best of all, participation in the blogosphere provides instant cachet in the Internet world. When combined with business goals (like increasing Web traffic and online sales), blogs provide business owners with the opportunity to communicate directly with their target audience.

So what is a blog? The name is short for Web log, and it typically refers to a Web site that posts short articles (or just a few paragraphs) of information related to particular products, services, news, careers, hobbies, thoughts, beliefs, or ideas. These articles tend to be published on a regular basis (daily is most popular) and listed on the site in reverse chronological order, with the newest articles at the top of the page and older articles below. In addition to newer articles, most blogs contain archived articles, pictures, and links to other sites and blogs.

One popular feature of blogs is the ability to allow visitors to e-mail the author and/or respond directly to any given article by posting their comments to it, thereby creating a forum for online exchanges between the blogger and the blog's audience. Having a blog that offers advice and feedback from other consumers can be a very effective sticky site tool.

As you consider whether to include a blog in the site you're designing, here are some points to keep in mind:

- **A blog needs people who can add new content on a regular basis.** To maintain the sticky factor, you need to be able to post new and interesting content frequently. It's what will keep people coming back to your site. Some blogs post one or more short articles per day. Others post content a few times per week.

To spread out the responsibility for authorship, blogs can be set up for groups or businesses where there can be multiple blog authors in addition to full participation in commenting and feedback.

Be sure to learn some basic blogging rules and authoring styles prior to starting your own blog. One helpful book is *We Blog: Publishing Online with Weblogs*, by Paul Bausch and company (Wiley). It takes you through the steps of setting up a blog, points you to some great tools, and even covers promotion and syndication.

- **A visually appealing blog makes a good impression.** Besides the content, the look of the blog is all important because a visually captivating blog will be more welcoming than one that obviously took no care to lay out. Fortunately, sites like Createablog.com contain useful, free layouts, scripts, graphics, and more to assist with the blog look and feel.

In addition to the overall look, adding pictures to your blog posts adds appeal, too. Though having images on a blog isn't a requirement, it's a nice feature to include, and most blog hosts allow you to upload photos to each post as a way to enhance or editorialize an article. Some even let you upload photos and text straight from your mobile camera phone.

Figure 1-3 shows how the folks at CHOW.com incorporate a blog (The Grinder) right into the main content on the site.

- **Take time to decide what blogging tools you'll use.** When you add a blog to your site, it can either be off your main URL, hosted by a special blog-hosting service (such as www.blogger.com), or on your main URL by using special blog software on the server used to host your site. The four most popular offsite blog hosts are Blogger.com, TypePad.com, BlogHarbor.com, and LiveJournal.com.

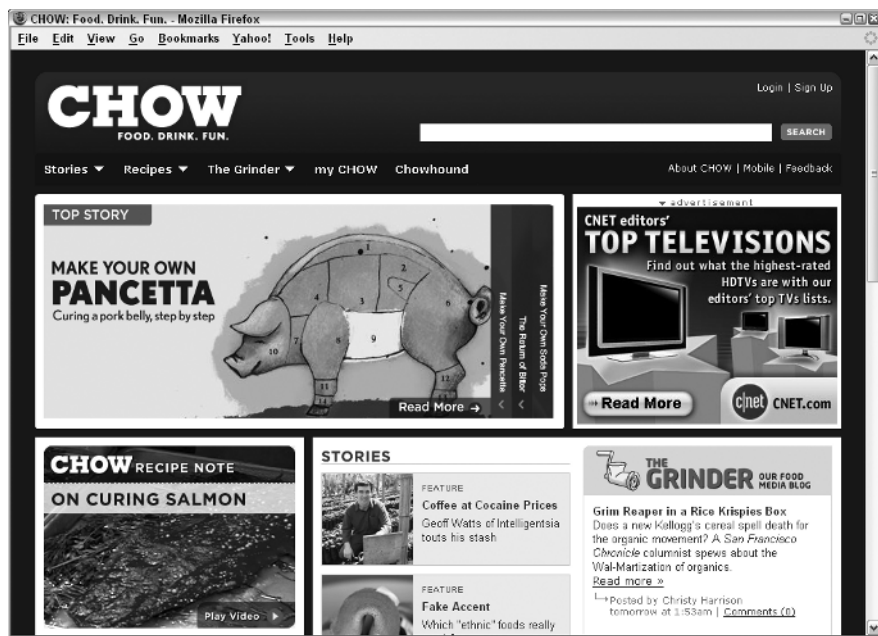


Figure 1-3: CHOW.com uses a blog to allow its writers to communicate directly with site visitors.

To find out which blog tool works best for your Web project needs, you (and/or your client) should test as many of them as you can by creating sample blogs. Most blog hosts offer either free basic blogs or 30-day trials of fee-based blogging services. After you've learned to use each of the tools, you can select the one that best meets your needs.

Some tools offer enhanced blogging services for a fee, such as TypePad.com, which has three tiers of pricing from a simple one blog per author (\$4.95/month) to a professional multiple authors with unlimited number of blogs (\$14.95/month), or BlogHarbor.com, which offers full features at different pricing tiers (from \$8.95/month to \$34.95/month) that vary by bandwidth (1GB to 40GB) and hard drive space (100MB to 5GB).



You can help draw visitors to your blog with a profile. When the blog is live on the Internet, you can create a profile (like an About page on a Web site) for the author or group. The profile identifies the blogger's interests by category (such as worldwide volunteerism, CSS hacks for Web designers, or organic foods and recipes), by statistics, and by outside blog links. This profile helps people with common interests find the blog. Profiling is key so that the audience visiting the site belongs to the demographic group the blog is concerned about. For example, if you create a blog for your client on the topic of fundraising for education, the target audience might not necessarily include train hobbyists unless one or more of the posts on the blog has to do with using hobby trains as a means to raise funds for education.



Information Kiosk

Beyond these basics, you can add other elements to a blog to enhance the visitor experience and generate revenue for the blog owner. For example, you can use AdSense, a tool by Google that automatically places content-relevant ads on registered users' blogs. Each click on an ad by a reader earns money for the blog owner. There are also ways of globalizing content through blog syndication (news feeds with ATOM or RSS) whereby the blog host generates machine-readable versions of the blog for display on special newsreaders, hand-held devices, and Web sites. Bloggers might also benefit from enrollment in blog services (such as Bloglines.com or Technorati.com) that allow for enhanced blog searches and sharing news feeds, among other things.

On the plus side, with very little overhead, blog posts can and often do spread news and information faster than most traditional media sources, such as TV, newspapers, and radio. Similar to some forms of guerilla marketing where information is passed through word of mouth, blogs far surpass traditional marketing avenues, because they're global and typically reach an audience who's interested and takes active participation in getting the news rather than passively having advertising and ideas presented to them.

On the minus side, regularly posting to blogs can be a very time-consuming task, so you'll need to consider in advance what kind of posting schedule to maintain, be it daily, a few times a week, or weekly.



Watch Your Step

An abandoned or unkempt blog can be more injurious to a business identity than no blog at all. A blog with little to no content — as well as one with little to no feedback — can give visitors the impression that the blogger doesn't care about visitors, which in turn can make visitors not care about visiting. And, if no one cares, why bother reading posts, exploring the adjoining Web site, and possibly using the site's products and services?

Additionally, keep in mind that blog audiences currently reach only about 20 percent of the total Internet population. (That's worldwide, with most of the audience living in the United States rather than abroad.)

The bottom line for blogging is that, because the blogosphere is rife with illiterate, uninteresting, and infrequently updated or abandoned blogs, it's probably going to be a good idea only if a person or business is willing to devote time to adding to and improving the blog, to implementing ways to drive relevant traffic to it, and ultimately to saying something interesting *and* saying it well.

Polls

Because people love to give their opinions as well as learn about what other people think, polls are great tools to add to Web sites where opinions matter. For example, folks who are crazy about *American Idol* can visit the entertainment section of America Online to (unofficially) vote for their favorite idol. Likewise, movie-goers who want to give their opinion about whether a book was better than the movie version of it can sound off with a poll at MoviePhone.com.

Polls generate buzz at the water cooler, and that kind of talk might generate more business. Like blogs, polls can be hosted remotely or added to a site by installing poll software on the server. Basicpoll.com, Pollhost.com, Bravenet.com, and Sparklit.com, among many others, offer free or subscription polling services. Or, if you're more technologically minded and want to configure a poll yourself, go to www.javascriptkit.com/howto/polls.shtml to find information about installing a polling program on your site by using PHP, CGI, or ASP.

Calculators

Depending on the type of business you're designing a Web site for, having a calculator somewhere on the site could help increase traffic from the target demographic. For instance, if the Web site offers mortgage loans, consider having a mortgage calculator on the site that crunches different monthly payments and interest rates for prospective clients. Or, if you're designing a site for a travel company, add currency and temperature calculators to the site as a special aid to travelers.

Because calculators are a great value-added feature for Web sites, and the JavaScript code for many online calculators can be found and used for free, the following exercise will walk you through the steps you'd take to find and use a calculator on any one of your Web site projects. For your own projects, I highly recommend you first visit www.calculator.com to get a general overview of the kinds of online calculators that exist, and then spend some time searching for free calculators to find Web sites that offer free JavaScript code.

For this exercise, you'll search for, find, and use a particular calculator script that converts file size (or bandwidth) into bytes, kilobytes (K), megabytes (MB), and gigabytes (GB). For example, if you want to know how many bytes are in a gigabyte, the answer is 1,073,741,824.

1. Open a blank Web page in your preferred HTML code editor.

To create one by using a simple text editor such as Notepad or TextEdit, open a new, blank document and type the following code:

```
<!DOCTYPE html PUBLIC "-//W3C//DTD XHTML 1.0 Transitional//EN"
"http://www.w3.org/TR/xhtml1/DTD/xhtml1-transitional.dtd">
<html xmlns="http://www.w3.org/1999/xhtml">
<head>
<meta http-equiv="Content-Type" content="text/html; charset=iso-8859-1" />
<title>Untitled Document</title>
</head>
<body>
<!-- Insert calculator script below this line -->
</body>
</html>
```

2. Point your browser to www.javascriptkit.com/script/script2/bandwidthcal.shtml.

This page contains a free script that will calculate different bandwidths based on user input.

3. In the scrollable text area below the word *Directions*, select all the code and press Ctrl+C (Windows) or ⌘+C (Mac) to copy it onto your computer's Clipboard.

Figure 1-4 shows an image of the page with the code selected.



Figure 1-4: To select the code, click inside the code box and then choose Select All from the Edit menu. To copy the selected code, press Ctrl+C (Windows) or ⌘+C (Mac).

- 4. Paste the copied calculator code from the javascriptkit.com Web site between the opening and closing <body> tags on your blank Web page.**

If you created your own page by using the code from Step 1, paste the calculator script below the line of code that says `Insert calculator script` below this line.

- 5. Choose File → Save As, give your Web page a filename such as *calculator*, and save the page with the .html or .htm file extension.**
- 6. View the calculator in action by opening the saved HTML file in a browser window.**

To open the page in a browser, either double-click the file to launch it in a browser or drag and drop the file by its icon into any open browser window.

- 7. To test the calculator script, enter any number in the first form field, select a unit of measure from the drop-down list, and click the Calculate button.**

For instance, you might type **2300MB** to find it is equal to 2,411,724,800 bytes, 2,355,200KB, 2,300MB, and 2GB.

Contests and Sweepstakes

Contests can consist of anything you can think up. Raffle off a car. Give away a free computer class. Send winners on an all-expenses paid vacation. Affiliate your company with a worthy cause and offer cash to winners while increasing awareness about an important issue. Sponsors of events will often provide valuable prizes for your contests at no cost in exchange for the free publicity, such as offering winners a \$500 Cingular gift card, ten passes to the new IMAX movie, or 100 free Betty Crocker cookbooks. Enrollment in the contest can happen automatically after a visitor signs up for the e-newsletter, registers for membership, or completes an online contest entry form.



Watch Your Step

If you do decide to have an online contest or sweepstakes on your site, be sure to follow the strict federal legal guidelines to ensure your contest is fair. Read the article “Online Contest or Illegal Lottery?” on the legality of contests and the pitfalls of illegal lotteries at www.techfirm.com/InternetContests.htm as a starting point to learn more about what legal rules to follow. You might also want to seriously consider hiring an outside firm, like Nationalsweeps.com, to organize and administer the contest for you.

Street Jargon

blog: A Web site that publishes a person's thoughts, ideas, opinions, and impressions (like an online journal) on a topic and solicits feedback from visitors. A person who has his or her own blog or writes for one is called a blogger. For a handy glossary on blogging, see www.samizdata.net/blog/glossary.html.

blogosphere: The world of blogging.

CMS: Content Management System. A tool developed by a programmer, typically with some kind of Web interface, that ties into a Web site's database and allows the operators of a site to easily manage specified parts of the site's content without having to know any programming languages or HTML.

cookie: Small data file containing personal information (name, address, phone, username, password, IP address, shopping cart contents, and so on) about a site visitor and the time spent on a particular Web site. A site's server automatically sends a cookie to a visitor's computer. The cookie file is automatically saved to the visitor's computer so that future visits to the same site will run smoother and give the visitor faster access to his or her online accounts.

database: A collection of information, like a spreadsheet, with data organized into categories that can be easily retrieved by a computer program or by programming language on a Web site. Many Web sites use Microsoft Access or MySQL for the database and ASP, PHP, JSP, or ColdFusion as the programming language used to retrieve and display the data.

dynamic: Dynamic data or dynamic content refers to the way information can be automatically pulled from a database with special programming code (ASP, JSP, PHP, or ColdFusion) and displayed on a Web page on the fly. For example, a site can dynamically display the three most recent news articles, show a different image on part of the page each time the page is loaded or refreshed, or display search results based on a visitor's search input.

home page: This is the first page on a Web site that visitors see when they type in your Web address, such as <http://www.yourwebsite.com>. This page should include the company name and/or logo, navigation to the rest of the site, and text describing the site's products or services.

netiquette: The art of being respectful on the Internet. The term was coined by Virginia Shea in the early 1990s and refers to the good manners and interpersonal and professional etiquette that Web users should practice when sending and receiving e-mails and otherwise communicating over the Internet.

continued



Street Jargon *continued*

standards-compliant: The World Wide Web Consortium (www.w3.org) and other noted groups set Internet standards to help streamline the process of creating similarly architected Web sites that are accessible to the widest possible audience and use the latest, tested technology. Following these standards will make your Web site standards-compliant.

stickiness: The ability of a site to attract and retain visitors. Ideal sticky site goals are to get the most traffic, keep visitors on the site as long as possible, and get visitors to return to the site as often as possible. Content such as blogs, e-newsletters, polls, games, contests, calculators, and the like can increase stickiness.



Practice Exam

- 1. True or False: If a Web site doesn't sell any products, it doesn't need a privacy policy page.**
- 2. True or False: A site map is a Web page that has hyperlinks to all the pages on a Web site.**
- 3. What are two reasons why a person, organization, or business might want to have a Web site?**

- 4. How can defining the purpose of a Web site assist with building a site?**

- 5. Describe three ways to use a database on a Web site.**

- 6. What two file formats can you use to e-mail newsletters to registered visitors?**

- A) JPEG or TIFF
- B) DOC or HTM
- C) Plain text or HTML
- D) XML or CSS

7. Why is it important to construct an identity for a Web site?

- A) The client needs a way to ensure quality control of the site so that the branding or identity conforms to standards he or she might have set for other forms of communication.
- B) The identity is something visitors can connect with both intellectually and emotionally, and it assists you with making aesthetic decisions about the site before it gets designed and built.
- C) Having an identity for a Web site makes it more memorable to visitors and gives them a way to find the site again, boosting its search engine optimization.
- D) By starting with an identity, you can more easily base a design on premade templates that come with Web page editors such as Dreamweaver, and using these templates saves time and reduces the amount of programming required to design a site.

8. Name some advantages and disadvantages of keeping a blog on a Web site.

9. A client comes to you to design and build a simple Web site for her eyeglass frames stores in the greater Atlanta, Georgia, area. The site is mostly static content, but she says she'll need to update the 100 or so photos of eyeglass frames about once every 6–8 months, and she wants to have a store locator where a visitor can type in a zip code to see the location, address, map, store hours, and contact information for the closest store. Would you recommend that this client add a Content Management System to the site? Why or why not?

