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Article 6: How to Set Up a Basic Website

The Importance of Online Presence

Having a simple website that is well designed creates an online presence for your business and can open new markets. Millions of people are browsing the internet all the time, looking for products and services and your website can be the drawcard. An effective website is a powerful tool to communicate with customers, both near and far away.

You can set up your own website or enlist professional expertise. The main advantages of setting up your own website include saving money and being able to build and manage your website without relying on a web designer or agency. Today's website design software is well evolved and puts the creation of impressive websites in your hands through following a few basic instructions.

Getting started

There are a few key things to consider before designing your website which will make the process more effective.

1. Make a decision on the primary **purpose of your website** i.e. is it going to be a general information page or a direct e-commerce platform. The homepage must be clear on what your business does and the user journey must be easy for customers to navigate your website.
2. Decide on the **domain name**. This will be the name and address for the website, known as the URL. Try to keep it descriptive, short and easy to remember. To check whether the domain name is available for use, one can use a free service such as www.namecheck.com to check this. For domains ending in co.za use <https://registry.net.za/whois/>

3. Choose a **website hosting** company. This is an organization that hosts the website and ensures that it is accessible to clients. It is recommended that the hosting organization should, as a minimum, have the following services on offer:
 - Free domain name with SSL
 - One-click-install for WordPress
 - Custom email accounts
 - No traffic limitations
 - 24/7 customer support

For potential hosting organizations, one can check www.hostingweb.co.za.

4. Decide on the **website platform** that is best for you. This is the platform that is used to design, customise and build the website, e.g. WordPress.org, squarespace.com or Google My Business. You can also enlist the help of a local IT company for this.

Build your pages

The next stage is to open the website platform you have chosen and follow these few simple steps to customise your website.

- Choose and install a theme.
- Add a business logo and images of your team, product or service.
- Customise the colour schemes and fonts.
- Add a side bar/widgets i.e. to display updates easily seen by customers.

It is advisable to have a few pages on your website dedicated to different aspects of your business and add relevant content. It is important to keep the content simple, easy and updated. A visitor to your website is a potential or returning consumer, so your site needs to attract them and meet their needs. Some examples of pages you could include are:

- **Homepage**– this is the first page that your visitors see when they go to your website. It is important to make a great initial impression.
- **About page**– a page explaining what your website is about, and introducing you company, team members etc.
- **Contact page** – a page allowing visitors to contact you. It is a good idea to publish full details including street address, postal address, telephone numbers and opening hours, where relevant.
- **Services page/s**– use this page to showcase your product or services.
- **Shop page**– if you want to launch an e-commerce store. Include catalogues, prices and the payment portal.

The following steps will help give you confidence in the operation of your website. It is recommended to conduct these steps, and have a friend or relative conduct them too.

- Ensure that you include a call to action on your website i.e. 'learn more', 'sign up', 'contact us' or 'buy this'.
- Test your website on various browsers as the look and feel can vary, impacting the user's experience i.e. Internet Explorer, Microsoft Edge, Firefox, Safari and Chrome.
- Go through each page, click on each link, check each image and that the format is correct.
- Once done, include your URL on all your marketing material, social media pages, with your networks and any product promotions to drive traffic to your website. You can also consider generating a QR code (a two dimensional barcode) to include on your marketing material that will allow for people to scan and be taken immediately to your home page.

References

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