

- World Wide Web
  - A system of Internet servers that support specially formatted documents. The documents are formatted in a markup language called HTML (*HyperText Markup Language*) that supports links to other documents, as well as graphics, audio, and video files. This means you can jump from one document to another simply by clicking on hot spots. Not all Internet servers are part of the World Wide Web.
  - There are several applications called Web browsers that make it easy to access the World Wide Web; Two of the most popular being Netscape Navigator and Microsoft's Internet Explorer.
- Internet
  - A global network connecting millions of computers. More than 100 countries are linked into exchanges of data, news and opinions.
  - Unlike online services, which are centrally controlled, the Internet is decentralized by design. Each Internet computer, called a host, is independent. Its operators can choose which Internet services to use and which local services to make available to the global Internet community. Remarkably, this anarchy by design works exceedingly well.
  - There are a variety of ways to access the Internet. Most online services, such as America Online, offer access to some Internet services. It is also possible to gain access through a commercial Internet Service Provider (ISP).
- Intranet
  - A network based on TCP/IP protocols (an internet) belonging to an organization, usually a corporation, accessible only by the organization's members, employees, or others with authorization. An intranet's Web sites look and act just like any other Web sites, but the firewall surrounding an intranet fends off unauthorized access.
  - Like the Internet itself, intranets are used to share information. Secure intranets are now the fastest-growing segment of the Internet because they are much less expensive to build and manage than private networks based on proprietary protocols.
- Things to consider before developing an Internet site from Joanna Krotz
  - What kind of information do your customers need?
    - "Every site decision you make should be thought about in terms of what your customers need," says Janet Jackson, co-owner of R2J2 Studios, a Web design company for small businesses. To meet visitor needs, she suggests choosing one of these three rough-cut styles:
      - Informational.
        - This site is an online marketing brochure or branding tool that invites visitors to learn about

the company and its offerings. It a good choice when you expect customers to call or visit after researching online.

- Transactional.
  - This, of course, is an e-commerce site. That can run from selling one product (a software program) to selling a service (online data storage) to a niche catalog that supports a brick-and-mortar shop to a fully functioning online store. Transactional sites are geared for a visitor ready to purchase. (For more about creating an online store, see this page.)
- Relationship builders.
  - This site works to develop relationships with customers over time. It encourages involvement and two-way communications, providing valuable data or expertise while requesting and capturing visitor information in return. Such sites offer educational or time-sensitive information and motivate repeat visits. That means you must invest in updating the content. These sites are designed for businesses that benefit or grow by interacting with their customers.
- How will the Web site boost your offline business goals?
  - Saying your site should be "sales-oriented" isn't enough. You need to directly connect the site mission with your offline goals and marketing (including offline messaging and materials).
    - For example, a jeweler that doesn't sell diamonds online can motivate an online searcher to visit the store, says Ben Schwartz of Marcel Media, a Chicago marketing agency. On the other hand, a shoe store that does sell online should offer incentives that convert browser interest into online sales. "Therefore, the jeweler's online goal should be to promote the actual store while the shoe site should direct individuals to pages where they can transact," says Schwartz.
    - The cost-effective result ([www.aeroshade.com](http://www.aeroshade.com)) was a straightforward site with clear navigation. On every page, visitors can click on "Order Today," which takes them to a brief online form. They check the products that interest them and can request a call or e-mail from a company representative.
- What are your budget and plans for future site development?

- The fast pace of small companies often results in throwing up a Web site just to get a "placeholder." But slapdash sites can turn costly, eating up staff time, spitting out glitches, and squandering opportunities.
    - Many times, site shortcomings are created because the company doesn't have enough money to take the site through every appropriate layer of information, says Lisa Holmes, co-founder of Yulan Studio, a Kansas City-area Web developer.
  - How will your site serve constituencies and stakeholders?
    - If you have investors, there should be a channel that keeps them up to date and provides financial news.
    - If you court the media, make sure there's an obvious button to click for an electronic media kit, plus news releases, bios of your management team and other info about your company.
    - Don't forget employees. You can set up a private, password-protected part of the site to post company-only news. (For info on setting up a private Web site with restricted access to just employees or employees and selected outsiders, see this page.)
    - With a smart, relevant Web site you can significantly cut marketing costs, expand your customer base, create brand or line extensions and, ultimately, grow the business.
- Steps in Intranet Development - *Todd Campbell is president of PreText, a multimedia content and design company in Seattle.*
  - Form an intranet advisory team.
    - For an intranet to be successful, it must meet the needs of a wide range of end users. Start by creating an intranet task force, says Greer, and make sure that it is made up of representatives from every part of the company. "Include a wide range of users: the experienced Internet users," she explains, "and non-users, who may otherwise innocently sabotage efforts because of their anxiety about Net things. And take care how to resolve issues between these two groups. Beyond that, consider including people from different company areas—operations, finance, sales, administration. . . . Include management. They're going to fund it."
  - Make sure that someone is in charge.
    - As important as the intranet task force is, ultimately someone must have final responsibility for making decisions about everything from which technologies to use to the appropriateness of posting scores from the organization's bowling league. Says Olguin, "You'll need to find a person who not only has a good understanding of the technology, but most importantly has a clear understanding of your

company's goals, and is politically up to the task of working with differing personalities and conflicting ideas."

- Plan for an adequate budget.
  - Although intranets are relatively cheap to build, they require an up-front investment and ongoing funding both for maintenance and for updating the technology. Don't cripple your intranet by failing to set aside sufficient funds. "Ensure that you plan for and prepare an adequate budget for the projects," says Bilson. "Understand the technology that is available, its capabilities and limitations, and consider the possible need for frequent upgrades as the technology evolves. Intranet and Internet products tend to have relatively short life cycles."
- Plan on updating the content.
  - The biggest benefit of an intranet is its ability to give users access to timely information. But that means information on the site must be kept current. Be sure that your planning takes into account the need to designate people throughout the company who will make sure that your intranet includes fresh information. Monroe suggests appointing what he calls "infomasters," people who are "willing to put forth the long-term commitment [to] . . . supply the input, keep it current and fresh."
- Keep your technical options open.
  - Internet technologies are changing and improving at a dizzying pace. Choose hardware and software that is flexible and adaptable. "Don't lock yourself into a single proprietary solution," says Bilson. "With all of the competition going on, and the rate at which new technology is emerging, you want to go with products that operate based on open standards. Locking into a proprietary solution will ensure headaches down the road."
- Be patient and supportive.
  - Intranets are an entirely new way for organizations to conduct their day-to-day business and they involve the use of technology that not everyone is comfortable with. "People resist change, even when it is for the better," says Bilson. "Give your users time to adjust to the new technology you are presenting them with. Provide adequate training, and most of all, plan ahead." Harris agrees: "Plan for resistance and be prepared to handle the issues with diplomacy."
- Promote your intranet.
  - Once your site is up and running, give people in your organization every reason and opportunity to become familiar and comfortable with it. "Start a contest online: Name That Intranet," suggests Greer. "Publish a 'What's

New' area to attract users. [Just] make sure you give your users value so they will use it."

- Intranet Content
  - those showing an "image of the day:" photos and brief stories highlighting something taking place within the company that day; stock price updates; "words of wisdom," or motivational quotes; employee pages showing 401(k) values, remaining vacation time, and benefit status; and company news
  - "Intranet technology equalizes communication across organizations, a factor that is certainly recognized by those who may have felt excluded in the traditional communications media,"
  - An intranet allows you to post critical information for all employees to see.
  - "But the lessons learned from successful sites on the WWW show that it's critical to generate enough interest that people come back repeatedly. To do this, content must be current and must apply directly to people's concerns.
  - You can save time (and trees) with interactive forms. Vacation requests, supply orders, changes to benefits and more can be handled quickly and efficiently.
  - Make sure your intranet follows good design principles. You can't just throw stuff up there and hope people will find it. Organize your intranet to make it as user-friendly as possible. We're trying to save time here, not frustrate people.
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