

Before You Buy a Website

What Are the Options for Web

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Website Basics

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Website Basics: An Introduction to

I am providing some introductory level information on the web in general in the Website Basics section. This is an overview of these topics. If you are considering a website, there are some terms that you will need to know. I hope the information given here is of value to you. I am offering a **DOWNLOAD** of the information in the Website Basics section.

By: Wink Longnecker
The Choices for Getting a Web Presence

Buying an existing web site:

This could be a good deal or a bad deal. Be aware that there is a thriving business in selling web sites that are not really thriving. There is software available that will build a web site based on keywords that are input and populate it with affiliate links. The main line for this software is 'Why Park a Domain'. Somebody will come upon it and buy something. I did not look at the sales but I suspect that implied is that you can then sell the site. My concern. Remember what P.T. Barnum is credited with saying: "There is a sucker born every minute."

Buy into a Program:

Website Basics

By Wink Longnecker – [The Hobby Webmaster](#)

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This Document contains information originally published on the site: [Before You Buy a Website](#)

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What is a Website?

A website is a collection of files placed on a server that is connected to the Internet. You may not realize that the thing of beauty that you see on your monitor does not exist as you see it on a server somewhere. The web does not operate like printed media or even TV for that matter.

There is a basic text file written in the language of the Internet known as html, or one of its variations. This basic file is an instruction sheet for your browser telling it what files are needed, where they are located, and where to place them on the page that you see.

A simple one page site may have all of the instructions in the html file, but a more complex site usually has an auxiliary file known as a style sheet. The style sheet (css file or Cascading Style Sheet) can be included (internal) in the html file but is frequently a separate file (external) that is referenced in the html file. The style sheet is used to contain the instructions for the layout of the site leaving the html file uncluttered to handle the content of the site.

In addition to the html and css files there will be image files for any pictures that are used on the site. If sound or video is used with the site there will be separate files for them as well. There are a few other types of files that are sometimes used but you can learn about them if the need arises.

If you know the html and css programming languages you can build a website with nothing more than a text editor like notepad that comes with Windows. While some knowledge of these languages is helpful it is not necessary to learn them to build websites. There are many website builder programs available.

These translate the content and layout in a visual editor to the html and css that browsers understand.

Many experienced webmasters use a combination of the editor program and some hand coding to tweak the code. This can allow for a better work flow as the program will do the heavy lifting as far as the code is concerned.

This is a basic overview of a website. There are more details in some of the [other articles on the site](#).

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About Domain Names - What's in a Name?

The domain name is very important to the website. It can help or hinder the sites ability to draw traffic. If you are buying a website you need to consider the domain name and maybe even research it a bit.

A good domain name is easy to remember and should be descriptive of the content or theme of the site. The best names are a single word, but almost all the good ones are taken. The general advice is to have no more than three words in the domain name. (See how well I take advice!)

There are three top level domains that are desirable. Many people think that having a longer dot com, dot net, or dot org domain name is better than having a shorter name within a lessor domain. I have had good success with some dot info domains, but the top level domains are more desirable, and probably easier to sell if the time should come.

A most easily promoted website name will contain the primary keyword for the site within the domain name. Do not miss the value that this can bring to you. I have several sites that see traffic without any promotion or significant content just because they contain the specific long tail search terms for which people search.

If you are unclear as to what keywords are and their value to you I have some information in my [Keywords Chapter](#).

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WebSite Hosting

If you have a website you will need a hosting service. A hosting service provides space on a server to place your website files so that they are accessible to surfers. There must be availability to the web from a fixed address so that your browser can find the files.

There are a few free hosting options. These are suitable for hosting personal websites or hobby sites. Many of the free options impose some limits on what you can do with the site. Some require advertising space on your site. Many do not allow you to use your own domain name. Many ISPs provide some server space in conjunction with your Internet service.

If you hope to make an income from your sites you will need to invest in paid hosting. Hosting plans vary greatly in price and the options that they offer. The hosting market is very competitive, so you can find good values without much problem.

The hosting that you choose may be determined by your intentions for your site. Blogging software, like WordPress, requires a server that supports php and an available database. For a basic static site the requirements are much less. Some plans allow you to host multiple sites on your space on the server. These additional domains would be known as addon domains with a regular hosting service.

Some Internet Marketers prefer a 'reseller' hosting plan. This allows for a separate IP address for each domain name. Should you decide to put a domain up for sale things can be a little simpler, but you can also move a website to a different server or host without too much trouble.

When choosing a host you need to be sure that the plan offers the features that you need and that the hosting company is reliable. All of the hosting companies will claim great up-time. You might do an Internet search using the name of the hosting company to see if there are many complaints posted about the service.

While it is possible to set up your own server and serve your own pages it is not really practical for most people. There are a lot of technical details to operating a web connected server and it is best to let a hosting service handle those details. You will be able to find a hosting company with a plan that serves your purposes without too much problem.

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Website Planning

Things to Think About Before Building a Site

A website begins with an idea. You probably have an idea for a site and that is the reason that you are exploring your options more. Or you may be looking to getting into Internet Marketing and need to know what is involved in getting a site up and running.

If you want your site to perform up to its potential the place to begin is with a plan for the site. There are two levels of planning that need to be taken into consideration. The first is the business plan for the site and the second is the physical layout for the site.

Pre-Planning for Your Site

While you may not consider that a personal or hobby site requires a business plan there are things that you need to consider. If you put the effort into building a site you must want people to visit the site. Pre-planning will make your site a better place to visit.

Pre-planning might include investigating the demand for the site that you envision, availability of an appropriate domain name, and, if it is to be commercial in nature, the products that are available for you to promote. You might also give some thought to how you will promote your site.

To investigate demand for the proposed site you could do some work with a search engine and some keyword tools. Think of searches that people might make using terms that would apply to your proposed site.

If there are a lot of pages returned that means that there is already a lot of content on your subject available. You would need to think of ways that you could make your site more interesting to visit than the sites that you find. If you cannot think of ways to make your site better than the others you will be lost in a sea of sites.

If there are few returns in the search results you need to decide if there is, in fact, a market that is just under-served or if there are few pages because you are one of the few people that are interested in your subject.

Another aspect of pre-planning would be to determine the best platform on which to build your site. There are specialized software packages available, many of them open source, that are well suited to building various types of site. There is blogging software, such as WordPress, that has been designed to produce blogs. There are several general CMS (Content Management Systems) that can be used for various types of sites. There are also web builder software packages to design and build general websites. I have more information on these topics on the [Before You Buy a Website](#) site.

Physical Planning of Your Site

There are physical things that you need to think about in the planning stage for your site. If you are building a site with some sort of site builder on your local computer you will need to keep all the files for your site in a dedicated folder. The structure of this folder will need to be the same as the structure on the server will be.

You may choose to include some sub-folders in this structure. If you plan a simple site with just a few pages this is not so important, but if you think that the page count may grow the time to set up your site to allow for ordered growth is in the beginning. It is common to have an images sub-folder at a minimum. You may also choose to set up sub-folders for auxiliary files if they will be used.

Also in this planning stage you need to think about site navigation. How are your visitors going to get around on your site? Ideally any page on your site should be accessible from any other page. If you do not make getting around on your site easy and intuitive for your visitors they may not stay long enough to see all that you have to offer.

You also need to plan the layout of your site. How do you want your pages to look? You will need to pick a color scheme and make choices about fonts. Do you want a single long column like a sales letter or a two or three column layout? Will you use a nav bar beneath your header, a nav column on the left or right, or some combination of these options.

If you will place advertisements on the page you need to think about the areas that will be devoted to advertising. The positions of the various types of ads can make a difference in how effective they will be.

There are many things to think about in the pre-planning stage of your website development. Planning your site well will make building and updating your site much easier. Your site can perform better with the proper planning.

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Your Image Editor is Your Friend

What is an image editor?

An image editor is a program for manipulating images. There are many freeware editors that will do most of the basic functions that are needed for basic web authoring. There are also much more

powerful applications available, like PhotoShop.

How should you use your image editor?

In preparing images for the web the most important function will be an easy to use resize feature. With today's multi-megapixel cameras or most photo scanners the image files are quite large. For use on a website a smaller file is desirable.

A large file takes too long to download and will slow your page loading time. People with a slower connection may leave your site before the image loads. Using the resize feature and compression will reduce the file size and allow your pages to load faster.

Images for the web should be resized to the dimensions at which they will be used on the site. You should always save the original in a folder and put the resized image in your images folder in your website folder.

Another feature that you should be familiar with in your image editor is the cropping feature. If you have a large image but only a small part of the image is important you can cut the extra image area away with the cropping feature. This will allow the important part of your image to show up larger on your web page. If the cropped image is still larger than the area where the image will go you should resize it to the proper size after the photo is cropped.

Most image editors also have many other features that you may wish to explore. Most provide a way to adjust the color, brightness, and contrast of a photo. Digital cameras tend to capture a lot of detail that may not be readily visible in the photo. By experimenting with the adjustment options you can sometimes improve the photo.

There are also some special effects offered by many editors. You may be able to superimpose text on the photo that becomes part of the image file. There may be a gray scale option that will turn a color photo to black and white. There may be a way to make a picture appear as if it is very old. Explore the special effects options offered by your image editor.

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Links - Your Magic Carpet

Links are the secret sauce that allow you to navigate the Internet be it across a site or across the world. Links are your magic carpet that will take you anywhere you want to go.

The search engines love links, both internal and external. Internal links call attention to the pages on the site that are available to be indexed. External links call attention to other sites that need to be investigated. The number of external links pointing to a site give the search engines a measure of the importance of the site in the eyes of others.

If You Want to Get Anywhere You Need a Link

Every file on the Internet has a unique address, just like every page in a book has its number. The link tells the browser which page in which book in which library has the information that you seek. Since you can't physically turn the pages of a site or the Internet you need a system of navigation to get around.

Links can be placed anywhere on the site. The navigation bar contains links to other pages or sections of a site, but links can be placed within the text or can be images. The icons that you see on a site are often links. Whenever your mouse pointer passes over a link it changes to the hand with the pointer finger extended to click the link.

Links within text sections are usually differentiated in some way. The classic link is underlined blue text, but the website designer can change the look of the link. There may be a hover effect used to call attention to the link, such as a background color or a change in the font color or size.

Internal Links

Internal links are links to other pages on a site. While a site can be a single page, most sites are made up of multiple pages. The internal links will instruct the browser to call for and load another page from the site. The site navigation system, be it a horizontal bar or a column on one side of a page, or even a combination of the options, is made up of internal links.

External Links

External links are links to other sites or to specific pages on other sites. External links will most frequently be within the text on a page, but can be in a section of the navigation system. Sometimes a special page is set up on a site for external links. Links within banners and other ads on a site are usually external links taking you to a landing page for the product or service.

Backlinks

A link from an external source to a site is known as a backlink. Backlinks are important to a site because they bring visitors to a site. Backlinks also have some power with the search engines. A site that has a number of quality backlinks will be rated as more important by the search engines so they will return those sites and pages higher in the search results.

The Internet is huge. It is estimated that there are over one billion pages of information on the web. Every one of those pages has a unique address. If you have the link you can get to any of those pages with just a click. So hop on your magic carpet and click a link and you will be whisked to your destination in an instant.

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Site Navigation

You Need Good Site Navigation

Good site navigation can make or break your website. Your visitors need to be able to find the pages on your site easily. On longer pages you may also wish to provide direct links to information that is on a different part of the page, or you may wish to link to specific information on another page, bring it up at the top of the view port. On a long page you may also wish to provide a link back to the top of the page.

These things are all easy to do within your editor environment but need to be planned in advance. You

can always add links later, but having the mapping of your site in mind will make things easier.

Top Navigation Bar

If your site is only a few pages a horizontal nav bar at the top of the page will probably be enough. It is still an option with larger sites through drop-down menus. All navigation should be in unordered lists. These can be styled to fit in with your site design.

With horizontal nav bars sometimes the bar is duplicated at the bottom of the page. Other times there is other common content listed at the bottom of the page, like contact information, privacy policy, or terms of service.

A Nav Pane

Often the primary site navigation is in a pane to the left or right, particularly for larger sites. This allows for more room for links than a standard (read easy) horizontal nav bar without drop-down menus. The left or right column position may also be easier for your visitors to find and use.

Combination of Bar and Pane

Many larger sites use a combination of the two options. More common but less frequently used links are put into the horizontal bar. These would be like a FAQ, contact information page, an about us or the company page, or various other pages that are needed but not on the main topic of the site. Then in the nav pane links to pages on the primary topic of the site would be presented.

If you have your site planned well you can have most of your navigation in place in a file that you can use as a master page. You will open this page and do a 'save as' your new page when you build an additional page for your site. Your layout and nav items can be in place rather than having to add them with each page. There are other more advanced options for dealing with your navigation section if your planned site will be large and updated frequently.

Your site needs to be easy to get around. This is accomplished by a comprehensive navigation system that is consistent from page to page. No page on your site should be more than three clicks from any other page, and ideally there should be a direct link from each page to every other page on your site. A site that is easy to navigate will hold your visitors longer and thus perform better.

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The Value of Keywords

Keywords are essential to your success

What Are Keywords

Simply put keywords are the terms for which people search. The search engines index pages on the web by the density of keywords in the content. When people search the Internet with a search engine they type or paste a word or a string of words into the search box. The search engine tries to match the

search terms with the content on websites.

As a webmaster you must think about the keywords in your content if you want people interested in your products to find your pages. You need traffic to your site in order to make money. But there is good traffic and bad traffic. Getting traffic to your site does no good if that traffic is not interested in what you have to offer. So you use keywords that will bring traffic that is interested in what you have to offer.

Where to Use Keywords

Keywords should be used at every level of your websites. The domain name will be easiest to promote if it contains your primary keywords. The title of the page should contain keywords for which the page is optimized. The headings of the sections should contain your keywords.

Finally, your keywords should be worked into your content in a natural flow. You do not want to stuff your content with keywords, but use of the keywords should be worked into the content enough that there will be no doubt about the subject matter that you address.

How to Find Keywords

Keyword research needs to be carried out in the earliest stages of planning your website. Ideally you would like to find a keyword that is searched for a great number of times but has little competition. A lot of people have been looking for those terms for a long time, but there are millions of keyword phrases and it is still possible to find some good ones.

If you just want one website you can do the research with free tools. It will take some time but it can be done. If you want to put up a series of micro-sites investing in a good keyword tool is probably a better plan. Google has a keyword tool as well as other research tools that are free to use. A keyword tool automates a good bit of the research saving a great deal of time.

The benefits of using keywords and doing the research are realized in having a site that draws organic traffic that is targeted to what you have to offer. Targeted organic traffic is very good for your site because it is free traffic that is interested in the subject matter of your site. This traffic is more likely to take advantage of the offers that you have on your site.

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On Page SEO Basics

There are companies that make a business of search engine optimization for web sites. This is a very broad subject and there are many facets to the discipline. On page SEO is a very important piece of this puzzle so should be taken into consideration from the planning stage through the completion of a website.

On Page SEO - The Basis for Organic Traffic

Organic traffic is traffic that comes to your site via a search engine. Someone types a search term or phrase into the search box and performs a search. The search engine returns a result page with links to sites that they hope will give the information for which the searcher is looking.

Targeted traffic is traffic to your website that is specifically looking for the information or deal that you

have to offer. Having a lot of visitors to your site will not do much good if they are not really interested in your subject.

On page SEO is your way to help the search engines provide your links to the people that you want to visit your site. With a little effort on your part in the area of on page SEO you can improve the quality of the visitors that the search engines send to you.

On page SEO means that you have the keywords, terms for which people will search, in the places that the search indexing algorithm will look for them. In titles and headings it is best if your keywords are in the first few words of the line. Then your keywords should be used in the content text in a flowing, natural manner.

The page title and description are important to your search engine success. The page title shows up in the title bar at the top of the browser window and will usually be the title shown in the search results. The page description is not visible unless someone checks the source view in the browser, but many times it is used by the search engines as the text for the search results listing. Both of these elements need to be crafted to capture your audience.

The heading tags carry more weight with the search engines in determining the content than the paragraphs of content. You should craft your page so that someone only reading the headings will have a good idea what the page is about. You also want to pull the reader in with your headings. You need to work your page keywords into your headings to the extent possible.

In the body of your content you want to use your page keywords often enough that there will be no doubt about the subject of the page, but you do not want to stuff your page with key words. It is more important to present good interesting readable content than to have sentences that do not flow just to up your keyword count. You want the search engines to find your keywords but you want your visitors to stay on your site long enough to evaluate what you have to offer.

Write good, information rich content while keeping your keywords and objectives for the page in mind and both your visitors and the search engines will be happy.

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Building Your Website

Website Construction Zone

You have done your research. You have done your planning. You have your site blueprint in hand. Now it is time to actually start building your website. You will need the tools and materials to do the job at hand.

Before you start building your site you should have your local website folder set up. If you will be using images on your site you should have those images in an images sub-folder. The images should be resized to the dimensions of the space where they will be used. This would include any header image or background images that you will use.

You will need to have your web editor ready for action. A WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) editor is in order if you do not know html and css coding. There are freeware options as well as commercial programs available. Some of the paid programs offer more functions, but may not produce cleaner code. There are also templates available if you do not wish to build the page from scratch.

The first page that you build will be named index.html. This will be your home page, the page that the browser opens if you just type in the URL in the address bar. Open a new page or your template page in your editor. The first thing that you should do is 'save as' index in your local website folder.

You should give the page a title and write a description of the page in the new page set-up dialog box. Remember to use your primary keywords in the title and description. The page title is what shows up in the title bar at the top of the browser window, so it is important that you give the page a good descriptive title. Do not confuse the page title with the file name under which you save the page.

The next step will be to produce the page layout if you are building the page yourself. If you will have more than one page in your site you should definitely use an external stylesheet. An external stylesheet will contain the rules that you set up for styling of the content of your site. These rules can define things like the fonts to use, the background color or image, the text color, and size and spacing of various elements. An external stylesheet will insure that things are consistent across your site.

After you get the layout as you want it, but before you add content that will change from page to page, you may wish to do a 'save as' master page. To a large extent a master page is a template for future pages for your site. This will save time when you start on your next page.

After you have your basic layout complete it is time to start adding your content. Your content includes the text that you will place on the page and any images that you may use. For a multi-page site there will also be site navigation. When you have all of your content in place and styled as you prefer your page is complete and ready for uploading to the server.

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Publishing Your Site

You have your site built and tested on your computer. It is a thing of beauty and your site navigation is all working. It is now time to publish your pages to the web. How do you transfer your files to your host server?

Publishing Your Website

When you have completed building at least your home page you will want to publish your site. Your files only become a website when they are available on the web. You can open the files on your computer with your browser and you can show your friends or family, but the world cannot see your pages until they are uploaded to the proper directory on your hosting companies server.

There are a few options for publishing your site. Your web editor may have a publishing function that you can use. Depending on the editor and the server this may work well for you. The publishing function in some editors may have problems with some file types that you wish to use. If your editor's publishing function does everything that you need for it to do it may be the easiest way to publish your site.

Most hosting packages include some sort of file manager that can be used to transfer your files to the server as well as copy or move files on the server. If your editor publishing function works most of the time but has problems with a certain file type you may be able to transfer those files with the site file manager.

If you want to move a larger number of files quickly and easily the best choice is to use an FTP client. An FTP client is a file transfer protocol program that you install on your computer. There are freeware

FTP clients that work very well. There are also FTP clients available for purchase that may give you some features lacking in the freeware clients.

Whichever path you choose you will be transferring your files by FTP. If you are using your editor's site manager or an FTP client you will need to fill in the FTP address, user name, and password. Your hosting company will provide these to you with the information about your hosting package when you set up your hosting account. Your site manager or FTP client will be able to save this information for you so that you do not have to fill it out each time that you upload files.

If you are using the hosting service file manager you will need to be signed in to your hosting account to access the service. Select the file manager option and look for an upload button or link.

An FTP client is generally set up with a left and a right pane. In the left pane is an explorer type view of the files on your hard drive. In the right pane is a similar view of the files on the server. You can drag files from the left pane to the right pane. You can also select multiple files or folders and place them in queue for upload with an option in the context menu.

FTP clients allow you to rename files and folders on the server. You can also set file permissions through the FTP client. Files on the server can be moved by dragging and dropping in the server view. If you plan a large site an FTP client is a valuable tool.

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Promoting Your Site

A website is a very lonely place without visitors. In order to have a good level of traffic you will need to promote your site.

Some ways to promote your website

In order for your website to serve its purpose you need visitors to your site. In order for people to find your site you will need to promote your site. There are over 150 million sites on the web and over one billion pages. It is easy to get lost in the crowd.

If your site does not show up on the first page of the search results you will get little or no traffic from the search engines. Having a planned, focused site will help with your Search Engine Results Page position. You will still need some billboards that point to your site.

There are quick ways to gain a good deal of traffic to your site but they can be quite expensive. AdWords or other paid advertising can be very effective, but unless you have very deep pockets you better have a good plan for monetizing your site. This traffic will only last as long as your paid promotion lasts for the most part.

There are many free ways to promote your site. If you have optimized your pages and chosen good keywords (terms that people actually search for) your next step is to get some backlinks to your site.

You would like to have sites with a high traffic count put a link to your site on their site. There are various ways to accomplish this objective.

There are various web directories available, some free and some paid. You can search the web to find many options as far as directories.

You can join a forum that relates to the subject matter of your site. In your profile most forums allow a

web site listing. Some allow a link in a signature that shows each time you post to the forum. Be sure that any posts that you make on a forum relate to the topic being discussed and don't spam a forum with posts that have no value to the other members. Usually links should not be put into your posts and certainly not links to commercial or affiliate sites.

Commenting on blogs related to your subject can also be helpful. The same restrictions apply to blog comments as forum posts. Most blogs are set up with 'no follow' links, so you will probably not gain a backlink, but if the blog is related to your subject matter and you write a good comment you may see some traffic to your site.

You can open accounts on social networking sites. You will need to participate in the social aspects of the community and not just shout about your wonderful website. Traffic from social networks tends to be more curious in nature than the targeted traffic that you would like to see.

One of the prime ways to promote a site is through article marketing. You can syndicate some of the articles on your site or write original articles for the article directories.

For this to be successful you need to provide good information in the body of the article. The article directories allow a resource box that goes at the end of the article. You can promote your site or offer in your resource box. The better article directories get a good deal of traffic and many have a high page rank.

If an article is picked up for syndication in a newsletter or reprinted on another site you can see direct traffic as a result. You will also have the benefit of the backlink to your site from the original article on the directory site and from any sites that choose to reprint your article.

A method of site promotion that is growing in popularity is through videos. You can produce a video and place it on YouTube and provide a link to your site. If your video should go viral the result can be thousands of impressions and a flood of traffic to your site.

All of the free methods of promotion require a bit of commitment. You can't do any of these things just one time and see traffic build. If you do a combination of these ideas and do them consistently for several months you will see the traffic to your site begin to build. It takes time for the search engines to index your site and it takes time for the spiders to find the external links to your site, so keep promoting and you will gain traffic as a result.

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Know Your Traffic

Knowing about the traffic to your site can help you improve the performance of your site. A good site tracking solution can be a very valuable tool.

Knowing Your Traffic

The visitors that come to your site are all VIPs. Without traffic there would be no value to having your website. The more information that you have about your traffic the better you can tweak your site to draw even more visitors.

You can manually dig through the traffic logs for your site, but while this gives full information there is more information than you need to know. A website stats tool will provide you with the information

that is of value to you and often does some additional processing to add good information.

You may be interested in the locational information for your visitors. This can tell you, to some extent, if you are reaching your target audience. Of greater interest are the referrers that are sending traffic to your site.

For your organic traffic you should pay particular attention to the search terms that people used to find your site. If you see that there is a particular theme to these search terms you may want to develop some additional content to better target these terms.

With most hosting accounts there are some stats options. Many of them provide an analytic program in addition to the server logs. These can be of value in analyzing your traffic.

One of the more popular of the external utilities is Google Analytics. Google provides you with a code snippet that you place on your pages. This is not visible to your visitors but does report to Google. They then aggregate the results and give you a summary through an online user interface.

The information given will include the location of the visitor, the search terms used for the organic traffic or the referrer for linked traffic. They also give you the pages visited and the time spent on the page. The report defaults to the last month of traffic but can be focused on a daily basis. This is a free service offered by Google.

Knowing your traffic can be a great benefit to you. You will have good information about the traffic so that you can better target the website. It may suggest additional content that would be of value for you to develop. Stats can tell you if you are effectively reaching your target audience.

Thank you for reading, for more information please visit [Before You Buy a Website](#)

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