

"How do I get my business on the Internet?"

There are four basic steps to establishing a Web presence for your business:

1. Plan your online business

The Web is a rapidly expanding medium for information, entertainment, and, increasingly, commerce. Some businesses may only be able to use their web presence as a "billboard" or virtual "brochure" declaring their products/services. On the other hand, businesses can create much more than a simple marketing presence, with value-added services such as downloadable samples of products, information services, the option of online discussion or "newsletter" services, etc. The new online medium offers new ways of marketing and transacting business.

Just like a regular business plan, an online business plan will need to define what your business aims to achieve by operating its online presence. You should learn about the World Wide Web, email and the Internet in general as part of this planning stage. See SBV's Information Sheets *What is the Internet?* or *What is Electronic Commerce?* for a basic introduction.

2. Register your domain name

Many *Internet Service Providers* (ISPs) offer a service to register Internet domain names for a fee. A domain name registration service will register your unique web and/or email address with one of the organisations mentioned below; it is also possible to register your name directly with the authorised domain name firm (see below).

What is a domain name?

A *domain name* is an essential component in email and web site addresses. It gives your Internet addresses an identity that means something to your customers. Every organisation on the Internet is identified by a numeric address called an IP (Internet Protocol) number, e.g. *64.34.0.80*. A domain name is the translation of that string of numbers into letters, making it easy for people to understand. The Domain Name System (DNS) translates domain names into IP numbers and back again. *Domain names mean something to people, and IP numbers are understood by computers.*

What do the parts of a web address mean?

There are various different parts of a web address, and different domain name endings. There are different rules of registration for each type of domain name ending; this is because different regulatory organisations administer the different domain name types. A typical Australian commercial web address or *Universal Resource Locator* (URL) might look like this:

http://www.typicalbusiness.com.au

To dissect this address:

<i>http</i>	stands for <i>HyperText Transfer Protocol</i> , an Internet standard data "language" which allows content to be delivered in a web browser.
<i>://</i>	divider that tells the computers involved in the Internet that "the next part is the domain address"
<i>www.</i>	means "World Wide Web"; not all URLs have this part of the address. Note the full stop "." character (pronounced as "dot"); this tells Internet computers & browsers that part of the domain name has finished. <i>All "dots" in web addresses are significant.</i>
<i>typicalbusiness.</i>	this is where your business name or acronym would appear (see below for more information about acceptable domain names)
<i>com</i>	means a "commercial" type of domain; other types include educational (.edu), associations (.asn), network service providers (.net), community organisations (.org) The Australian policies for such domain names can be accessed at this web site: http://www.aunic.net/policies.html
<i>.au</i>	means this name is registered in the Australian domain (.au). Other countries have other endings, e.g. ".sg" = Singapore, ".uk" = United Kingdom, etc. Most USA domains don't have the country qualifier in their names; this is due to historical

reasons.

Most businesses in Australia choose the domain name endings **com.au**, **au.com** or **.com**. For example:
xyzcompany.com.au *xyzcompany.com* *xyzcompany.au.com*

The ending **com.au** or **au.com** is typical of a commercial organisation seeking an Australian identity on the Internet. Domain names ending **.com** indicate a commercial organisation seeking an *international* identity on the Internet; see <http://www.internic.net> for details. These international domain names are immensely popular and new registrations number about 150,000 per month; Australian domain names are being registered at rate of just over 2,500/month.

com.au names

Domain names ending **com.au** are regulated by the Australian Commercial Domain Name Authority, Melbourne IT. Melbourne IT became the **com.au** domain administrator in October 1996; since then it has created a separate business, Internet Names Australia (INA) to administer the registration of **com.au** domain names.

The restrictions on **com.au** registrations are basically:

- these names are used by commercial organisations, and must have an ACN (Australian Company Number) or ABN (Australian Business Number);
- domain names are registered on a first-come, first-served basis;
- you can only register one domain name per company name and one domain name per business name owned by that organisation;
- a domain name must bear a close relation with the registered name;
- a domain name must be constructed of alphanumeric characters in the same order they appear in the registered name;
- a domain name must not be a town name, service type, industry sector, good, or organisation type;
- a domain name must not conflict with another company's registered trademark.

INA offers businesses two levels of service; a two-day turnaround (\$125), where a domain name is registered for two years within two days, and a two hour service (\$285). More information can be obtained by calling the customer service number 1800 354 595, or by visiting their web site: <http://www.ina.com.au>. The site also offers online payment of registration fees.

It is possible to check to see if a domain name is already registered at this site:
<http://www.ina.com.au/services/servicesfr.htm>

au.com names

NetRegistry (phone 1800 78 80 82) is the ultimate authority for all domain names registered under **au.com**. Like most international Domain Name Authorities, NetRegistry will allow any individual to register any domain name they wish unless someone else already owns that domain name. Domain name registration costs \$199 for two years. It is possible to search for, and register **au.com** names at NetRegistry's web site <http://www.netregistry.com.au>

3. Choose an Internet Service Provider (ISP)

The choice of which ISP you subscribe to will depend on decisions about: payment plans, the cost and range of services offered, number of Points of Presence the ISP has (important if the business is in several non-metropolitan locations, for example), the number and quality of modems the ISP operates, support options offered, amount of web server space included in price, etc.

The ideal way to find a good Internet Service Provider is simply through word of mouth. You probably can't find the *best* provider that way, but at least you can find one that someone else is not frustrated with. For some reason, everybody feels that their own provider is the best. Also, every ISP is better at some things than others, and what your friends consider important may not be what you consider important.

Don't shop by price alone - if at all. The cheaper a provider is, the more likely they will be skimping on some part of their service. ISPs offering bargains are also often new entries into the business who haven't done all that is necessary to understand what it will take in the long run.

It's a simple matter to support hundreds of customers, but once you reach the 1000-customer level, bargain pricing starts to fail unless one has deep pockets. You simply can't pay for quality support people, competent administrators, good hardware and good networking with a bargain pricing scheme. You can't get something for nothing!

Be especially wary of providers who bait you with low prices over a two or three-year contract. While it may seem enticing, three years is a very long time. This is especially true on the Internet, where the state of the art changes every six months or so.

See SBV's Information Sheet *Internet Service Providers List* or visit an ISP listing on the Web for details of ISPs that operate in Victoria. One such list is <http://www.i-net.com.au/isp.vic.html>

What will it cost?

Costs for your Internet services will, naturally, vary depending on the services and support options you choose. In a recent (*PC User*, September 1998 edition) survey of costs for larger *Melbourne* ISPs, the best rate for 30 hours of Internet connect time per month ranged from \$30 - \$78; the services offered for this rate by these ISPs varied, as did the performance and support on offer. Non-metropolitan charges will vary; contact ISPs directly.

4. Design and publish a web site

With some of the user-friendly software on the market today, a simple site could be quite easy for a determined and computer-literate amateur to develop. Remember, however, that web "surfers" will judge your business on the site that they see, and as with all forms of marketing, first impressions are important. It is important to remember that many of your potential visitors won't have high-powered computers and fast connections, so designing your site for a reasonably low "bandwidth" (ie. fairly slow connection speed and lower-quality graphic hardware) is a good idea unless there is a specific reason for targeting high-bandwidth web surfers (a computer graphics firm would probably not sacrifice the "look" of their site for this reason).

While it is possible for amateurs to create a reasonable web site using the many HTML authoring tools about, a fully functional site with electronic commerce features (e.g. online ordering), or advanced graphic and other design elements is probably best left to professionals. SBV's web page on commercial web services offers links to directories and individual web designers:

http://www.sbv.vic.gov.au/ozcom_web.htm

What will a site cost?

Once again, a basic, no-frills site will be cheaper than a site featuring the latest animated, multimedia features and high quality graphic designs. A basic site design from a professional could cost as little as \$300; some professionals charge on an hourly rate, and/or a per-page rate. Some firms now offer extensive packaged services (e.g. domain name registration, email accounts, online product database development, web site design, hosting and site marketing) for under \$10,000. It is worth shopping around for a good deal, but, as with other business decisions, ask for referees from the service provider.

Once your web site has been created, you'll need to publish it on a *web server*; basically, a web server is a powerful computer running HTTP, FTP SMTP and other Internet software that is always connected to a fast Internet connection.

What happens next?

Usually a business would pay an Internet Service Provider (see also listings in the phone directories for "web presence providers") to "host" their site - sometimes free, possibly costing \$40 to \$80 per month for 10MB of disk space. This may include operating their email and other services. It is possible for a business to set up a web server and manage the site themselves, but this involves major investments in time and equipment, and web server administration is what ISPs do full-time.

Once a domain name is registered, it is possible to publish web content or use an email address using this domain name. As mentioned above, a deal with an ISP often includes an allocation of disk space on their web server. Typically 10-50MB (megabytes) of disk space is ample. Usually the business or their web publishing/designer would create the web site, (complete with any graphics, animation, sound or more advanced features) and *upload* (or copy) the files to the web server.

Maintaining web sites

Like any information about your business, it is crucial that the content on your web site is current and accurate; this is particularly important for sites offering services such as online ordering & sales or "added value", dynamic features such as newsletter-type services. Unless your site has been authored specifically to allow non-expert maintenance, or unless you have HTML (Hyper Text Markup Language) skills on staff, you'll need to pay for skilled external assistance to update your site. Costs for such work vary, but rapidly-changing content will require frequent changes, and web publishing professionals often charge \$50 - \$150 per hour.

Promoting web sites

Many web services exist to promote your web sites; visit SBV's Marketing web page for links to sites that can help: <http://www.sbv.vic.gov.au/market.htm>

There are many ways to promote your site; it is simply another form of address:

- word of mouth;
- stationery: letterheads, business cards, envelopes;
- email signatures;
- search engines.
- advertising;
- print: annual reports, brochures etc.;
- reciprocal links;

most of these means of promotion are fairly obvious, and are dealt with in other Information Sheets in this series; web specific promotion methods are briefly outlined here.

Reciprocal links

Search the web (using a search engine) for pages relevant/similar to your own business. Find email addresses on the pages that you find and contact them - these people are already interested in your subject area, and you know they have Internet access! If it's appropriate, ask them to put a link to your home page. This method also creates a list of bookmarks which you should include on your pages as a resource. Be ready to put a link in for anyone who does the same for you. Look out also for *newsgroups* relevant to your subject area.

Search engines

The best way of all to get your web site to be found by other people on a search engine is to go around to as many as possible, select the "Add URL" link from their home page, and give your web site details to them in the format that they ask for. Visit SBV's Marketing page <http://www.sbv.vic.gov.au/market.htm#internet> for links to sites that allow you to fill in your site's details, or see the Search tools pages on SBV's site for links to many search engines.

If manually submitting your site isn't your idea of fun, then you may want to try the free, semi-automated submission sites. This may take over half an hour to complete. You'll need to prepare some keywords and a short description of your page; you might consider using the META tags in your web page document as well. (for a discussion of the META tag, see books or web resources about Hypertext Markup Language (HTML)). Many commercial web promotion companies are offering their services; some web site design / hosting businesses also include registering your site with multiple search engines.

Internet industry assistance

Below is a listing of industry bodies that can refer you to professionals who can assist you set up and operate a web site; businesses and individuals offering web services may benefit from joining one or more of these organisations.

Industry body	Web site	Description
Australian Computer Society (ACS) Ph: (03) 9690 8000	http://www.acs.org.au/ email: acsvic@acslink.net.au	Professional association for those in computing and IT fields.
Australian Information Industry Association (AIIA) Phone: (02) 6282 4700	http://www.aiia.com.au/ email: aiia@aiia.com.au Victorian contact: Laurie Ffrench ffrench@aiia.com.au	The national organisation representing the information technology and telecommunications industry of Australia.
AIIA Members' directory	http://www.aiia.com.au/1membersAIIA.html	Lists the members of AIIA with links to their home pages where available.
Australian Interactive Multimedia Industry Association (AIMIA)	http://www.aimia.com.au/	Supports and represents firms that develop and publish digital content, software applications, digital solutions, components and tools for use on the desktop, networks and online. The association represents individuals, small, medium and large multimedia developers and service providers, and others.
AIMIA member directory	http://www.aimia.com.au/thesite.cfm?menu=memcorner	Allows you to search for AIMIA members by company or skills set.
Australian Multimedia Enterprise Ph: (02) 9326 9099	http://www.amme.com.au email: Martin Cooper cooper@amme.com.au	The AME was recently sold by the Commonwealth Government to Allen & Buckeridge, an Australian venture capital manager. The AME finances Australian multimedia concepts and projects on a strictly commercial basis.
AME's market research reports page	http://www.amme.com.au/my_html/market_information.html	Market research links about Internet and multimedia industries.
AUNIC Australian Network Information Centre	http://www.aunic.net/	Lists the policies regarding all Internet domain names in Australia.
Australian Web Designers' Directory	http://ozwebdesigners.net/	A commercial directory of web designers.
Australasian Web Publishers' Association (AWPA Inc.)	http://www.awpa.asn.au/ email awpainfo@awpa.asn.au	A professional association for Australasian-based World Wide Web practitioners, and others with an interest in this field.
WAL (Web Author Locator)	http://www.awpa.asn.au/memberdb/srchmem.html	Searchable database of AWPA members.
Internet Industry Association Contact: Secretary, IIA, Ph (02) 9869 3060	http://www.ii.net.au/ email info@ii.net.au	The national body representing members involved in Internet services.
Listing of current IIA members	http://www.ii.net.au/members.html	Includes web page links.
Internet Names Australia (Melbourne IT) Ph: (03) 9344 9295	http://www.melbourneit.com.au/ http://www.ina.com.au/index.html email: info@MelbourneIT.com.au	Internet Names Australia is a commercial organisation that oversees .COM domain name registrations for Australia.

All contact details and web addresses were correct as at 12 August 1998.