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# Master of your own domain

*Here is a true DIY guide to getting a Web site up and running in less than 90 minutes.*



Mortimer

**BY MICHAEL MORTIMER**

In the 1999 movie *Analyze This*, mobster boss, Paul Vitti (Robert De Niro), respectfully listens to avuncular retiring mobster, Dominic Manetta, dispense fatherly advice. While talking about changing times for the Mafia, Manetta warns ... “The times are changing and you’ve got to change with the times.”

Vitti responds “What, we supposed to get a f\_ \_ \_ \_ \_ ’ Web site?”

To be sure, that was an amusing joke, picturing organized crime with a Web site. But Mafia Web sites aside, this is 2010. Let’s get serious about lawyers, Web sites and why, in my opinion, when it comes to having a Web site you should do everything yourself. (By doing it yourself I mean: coming up with a domain name; designing your Web pages; providing content for your site; uploading pages; and maintaining the site.)

**Disclaimer**

There are billions of printed and Web pages talking about Web sites, each article or book discussing particular Web technologies, such as Java or Adobe Flash, CSS (a type of Web page creation and authoring software/technique), domain names, search engines, site placement, advertising methods, etc. The intent of this article is to do two things: pass on to you the tips and tricks I have learned over the last 15 years of creating and maintaining a law Web site ([employlaw.com](http://employlaw.com)) and to provide information sufficient to where you can have a Web site up and running within 90 minutes after concluding your reading of this article.

As I say in all my how-to articles, what I present to you is one of many ways to do things. I know there’s other ways to do whatever. My how-to articles are not intended to say, “My way is the best way, and you are a



dumb ass if you don't do as I say." Nope, it's the opposite really. I have never considered my tips and tricks to be the last word on doing anything.

So if you have a better way to do what I discuss in here then by all means do it your way. I won't take offense.

### Why you need a Web site

Considering the cost of having a Web site nowadays and the ease of getting one in place, I should simply only have to say "why not?" But here are some specific reasons:

- It's incredibly inexpensive nowadays, e.g., \$5 a month, so why wouldn't you?
- Your Web site can function as an online resume. When a prospective client meets in your office, you cannot spend 30 minutes trumpeting your law school and law firm achievements, but you can discreetly do that on a Web site. (Note: I won't go into detail, but from what I have seen in my office, people read every word you post on your Web pages. They also tend to screen-capture the content and/or print the pages for their files).
- Clients and others expect that a competent, modern, professional lawyer and firm will have a Web site. It's evolved to the point that if you don't have a Web site, people will think that odd and many prospective clients will question your abilities.
- A Web site can get you business. While your pages may not place well on search engine results (mainly because you are too late to play in that game), your Web address plastered all over the Net, such as in forums, YouTube, news sites, chat rooms, etc. will give people a place to go to find out more about you and the services you provide.
- And think about this. All you need is one case where a \$10,000 fee is generated and that justifies the Web site costs for 1000 years (this assumes you are paying \$10 a month for a Web site).
- Online document storage: You can use your Web disk space as a document/file repository, an online backup system (for that \$5 to \$10 hosting packages now in-

clude 100GB of hard disk space on the hosting company's servers! And if you get a company's \$15 monthly package, you can get unlimited disk space.

Why are companies so generous with hard disk space? Simple really, as the size of hard disks increase, to where 1TB (terabyte) disks cost \$30, it's nothing for hosting companies to be generous in allocating Web disk space.

- A content-rich Web site can show opposing counsel and prospective clients that you are an expert in your field.
- A Web site that provides lots of free information and legal help for citizens can fulfill the expectation that we should all perform so many hours of pro bono work annually.

### How I did it

As with many of my articles, I like laying a foundation that provides you with a basis to judge the value of my "advice" and an example of one way to do things. Read my story and the thinking processes I went through. This is pretty much what you must do if you intend to get a Web site up and running.

In 1995 I agreed with what I read in newspapers; the Net was going to be the way of the future. In between litigating cases I started to read up on what the Net was all about, its capabilities, what it could be used for, and what I could do with it. From what I read I concluded that the Net was going to be a place for information, shopping and porn. (Sad but true, people in the '90s who jumped on the porn bandwagon made billions on the Net. I digress, forgive me.)

In between my litigation duties I started to learn what it would take to create a law-related Web site (pertaining to my practice emphasis at the time, employment law). Why do it myself? Only one word, which still applies today, for the two of us... MONEY!

Back then, the least expensive deal I could find for someone to produce a Web site was a couple college students who wanted something like \$2500 as a flat-fee to get me up and running. I made an ap-

pointment to meet with them and write a check but they were no-shows. I took that as a sign from below to do the thing myself.

In 1996 I had been using the Netscape Web browser. Netscape has a free Web page creation program called Netscape Gold or something like that. In July 1996 I uploaded my Web site; employlaw.com went active.

About 18 months into having the Web site, I was getting new cases from it. In year 2000, the big step was discontinuing advertising in the Yellow Pages. I decided to rely solely on employlaw.com for getting new cases.

In year 1999-2000, I recognized the uniqueness and value of the Net search service with an odd name, Google. Prior to Google I had been linking to the Alta Vista search engine. Speculating that Google was going to be big, I provided a link to Google on my Web pages and called it a unique search service for all things related to employment law.

**Sidenote:** At some point after 2002 when users enter certain search terms in Google, employlaw.com shows up on page one, in the top three results/hits (e.g., type "California employment law" and see where employlaw.com shows up. Or try "California wage claims" or "California noncompetes").

Since the birth of employlaw.com, I have been the chief cook and bottle washer. I taught myself everything when there was little information out there for newbies. Back then if you wanted a Web site, you had to either teach yourself how to do things or hire a professional at \$50 to \$100 an hour.

There are still Webmasters who charge the above-mentioned rates. What has changed is that for \$10 monthly (or even \$5 monthly if there's a promotion or you buy three years service, for example), with no previous knowledge you can have a decent-looking Web site up and running in 90 minutes! This is because the hosting companies now provide some excellent templates for you to use for your Web site.



## The Basic Concept – How it all works

Getting a simple Web site up and running is a fairly easy process to understand. Here's how easy it is:

- You pick a domain name. The domain selection process is the most fun aspect of creating a running Web site. You can think about it, run names by friends and relatives to get their opinions on your choices, and eventually you end up with a name you think is cool and unique. You then are thrilled when buying the name and you are told that the name is available.
- You then choose who you want to host your Web site.
- From that company's Web site you select a hosting package based on price, features, etc.
- You create your Web pages, either on your computer with software the hosting company provides or online at the hosting company's page for that purpose (e.g., Dotster, a company I recommend, infra, has a section of the site called "Site Builder," a place where all the templates are available for you to consider.)
- After you are done with your creation you have to transfer or copy the pages to the hosting company's servers (a fancy way of saying you need to place your files on a section of the company's computer hard disk reserved for you).

That's it; you now have a Web site up and running.

This is far simpler than the old days when creating a Web site and getting the pages on to the Net (computer server) required one to know things that lawyers understandably had little time to learn. At the minimum, do-it-yourself lawyers had to know some html code, FTP, DNS, URL and other alphabet soup.

## Some specific tips and tricks

### Selecting a Domain Name

- Yes, most of the good, catchy names are gone.
- Select a name that is easy-to-remember, non-corny, short, non-infringing.

- The ".com" extension is king. Ninety-nine percent of Internet users will assume that no matter the name, the letters to the right of the period spell out "com." There's no way around it, repeat ".com" is king.

While you can have certainly selected an extension other than .com, just keep in mind that most people won't remember it. Most people enter .com by habit (even "thewhitehouse.com" instead of .gov to contact the President). A few years back, WhiteHouse.com directed people to a porn site. That angered the real White House, but there was little they could do about it. (For an interesting read check out the history of WhiteHouse.com at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whitehouse.com>)

- Don't use underscores for blank spaces. (Think about it, how many sites have you heard people say that the domain name includes an underline/underscore.
- Same goes for hyphens. Avoid them. People will not remember to insert a hyphen in the domain name.

### Selecting a domain hosting company

When selecting who will host your Web site, there are three aspects that are most important to consider about a company: longevity, customer service and ease of use.

- You want a company that has been around a long time because that means it is not going anywhere (and probably has its act together).
- You want the ability to call an 800 or other toll free number 24/7, and you eventually get to a live person.
- You want a company that is known for having courteous staff where the CSR does not make you feel like an inconvenience for having called.
- For DIY tasks (do it yourself), developing a Web site and maintaining it (e.g., making changes to content), are easily accomplished. This stuff can get really confusing if a hosting company does not take the time to make its site easy to navigate. Some sites are better than others. I suggest you go to the sites you are considering and see what their DIY pages look like.

**My recommendations:** While there are thousands of hosting companies out there, I feel comfortable in recommending two companies I have used since 1997. And I will diss another that I still use, but only for minor business and because I am too lazy to cancel them. Note that as an actual user, none of these companies has given me anything to make these recommendations. As a matter of fact the companies don't know they are being mentioned in this article.

### • Hostway

(<http://www.hostway.com/index.html>). I have been using them since 1997, and they have been trouble free all that time. They have been the hosting company for employlaw.com

Coincidentally they upgraded my account just last week. (Better features, less cost, this to reflect my receiving what new customers get). A few things changed in terms of log-on so I called Hostway's tech support at 2:00 a.m. A live person answered the phone and provided answers and solutions.

**Bonus Tip:** This brings to mind that it is a good idea to occasionally check your hosting company's Web site. If you see they are offering promotions or plans for less money than what you are paying, call and tell them to give you the new rate.

- **Dotster** (<http://www.dotster.com/>). I have been with Dotster since 1999, the year they started in business. (The site's banner says "Over 10 years and 1 million customers"). I have about 55 domains registered with Dotster. They now give me a reduced rate for domain name renewals.

Dotster lists hosting packages that are a great bargain. For example, if you want to pay monthly, the Deluxe package will cost you \$8.75 per month. But if you prepay for five years, the price works out to \$6.11 monthly. That price gives you 100GB of Web site (hard) disk space and unlimited bandwidth usage – two important considerations on which hosting company to go with.

- **Network Solutions** – I'd avoid them. I won't go into detail, but last year when I



changed hosting packages, they assured me they would safeguard and transfer all my files from one hard disk to the other. Instead, they deleted every file I had on their servers. That's my experience with NS, judge for yourself.

• **Others** – Hosting has become big business. (Consider Dotster. Assume they are getting \$10 monthly from each of those one million customers. That works out to \$10 million in monthly revenue just on hosting.)

You have seen the Go Daddy commercials and are probably aware of other companies too. I would suggest you perform a Google search on any company you are considering, to check for complaints and praises.

Remember, the most important factors to consider are company longevity (how long have they been in business), ease of use and availability of technical support (avoid companies that are great at answering the sales call line, but the tech support line endlessly rings or has only pre-recorded messages).

#### **Creating your Web page(s)**

There's plenty of Web page authoring software on the market. There are freeware, shareware and professional programs that cost upwards of \$500.

For your purposes, assuming the goal is to get a Web site up and running in 90 minutes, I suggest you use Dotster's Site Builder. They have some really nice templates meant for professional industries such as doctors, lawyers and engineers.

Later you can consider Web creation software (a nice beginner program will cost you less than \$50). These are WYSIWYG programs (pronounced "wiz e wig") that stands for "what you see is what you get." Another fancy term that simply means you don't have to know HTML code to set up pages, the program does it all for you.

Those programs also include an FTP program or feature. "FTP" means "file transfer protocol." While it sounds complex, all an FTP program does is provide the means to upload your computer's

Web pages from the PC onto the hosting company's servers.

Think about it, there has to be some way to get files from your computer onto the Net, so to speak. Well, an FTP program or feature is what does that.

Obviously space constraints preclude my going into more detail here, so let me simply throw out some bulleted general tips and tricks on creating Web pages:

#### **Content:**

• **No audio or video to auto-start.** Always make playing audio or video an option by the visitor.

• **Pages** should not be so "busy" that visitors can't find what they are looking for.

• The site should be **easy to navigate.** That means large icons for "next page," for example.

• **Contact information** at bottom of every page. Notice how the professional Web sites include "Contact Us" on every Web page. There is a reason for that. Don't require or expect users to go to your home page, for example, to get contact information. They won't do it, plain and simple.

• **One-click e-mail contact** – have an icon that says "click here to e-mail." People expect it, so have one.

• **Disclaimer** (Self explanatory. But see my site's disclaimer page to understand the concept. Note: My disclaimer page has been copied and plagiarized by firms large and small, so go ahead and use it. employlaw.com

• Make sure there's a **title** for each page, that shows up when someone bookmarks or favorites a page.

• **Don't talk in legalese.** Remember the audience. If your audience are the working classes, talk in terms they understand and so they feel comfortable with you.

• **Provide content.** Give them a reason to bookmark/favorite your page. Motivate them to click the "Press Here to Contact" e-mail icon on your pages.

• **Don't make it sound like you are fishing for clients.** Make your pages look like you want to help people by providing information. For example, see my page on unemployment benefits, that even the

EDD has referred people to! Employlaw.com.

• In regards to content, **don't write treatises.** Don't post legal articles, pleadings or published cases where you were the attorney of record. If your Web site is meant for clients and the public (a.k.a. prospective clients), this kind of material might as well be written in Latin. Such things are meaningless to most lay people.

Of course if the intent of your Web site is to impress your colleagues, peers, opposing counsel, mistress, corner grocer and judges, then post away. But don't fool yourself. If you do this, the purpose of your Web site is not to help people, it's to intimidate, brag and to massage your ego.

• If you are going to provide case documents or other material from cases you have handled, **be very careful that you don't slander or libel anyone** or that you don't violate settlement agreement confidentiality provisions or privacy rights. (For example, on employlaw.com I have non-compete and severance agreements posted as graphics, to make the pages interesting. Those are from actual cases that settled. So I had to be careful to redact any information that could be used to identify the defendants in those cases).

• **People love links.** See employlaw.com for one method of providing links. Note that links are relevant to the page a visitor is on.

**Super big bonus tip:** Look up on the Net how to set up your links so that when someone presses your provided link that it opens a new browser page and separately keeps the user on your page. You want this so that if someone presses one of your links that they then don't vanish, never to be seen again.

Nothing's worse than someone wanting to contact your office, but because they pressed your provided links, they navigated away from your site and cannot remember your site name, where you were and they did not favorite or bookmark your site.

The above "links open to a separate new page" technique does not mean you



are holding the visitor against his or her will, you are simply not making it easy for them to accidentally get lost, unable to ever find you again.

• **Don't steal – don't plagiarize.** In this copy/paste age it's easy to "borrow" someone's copyrighted material. Treat others as you want to be treated. Do you want lawyers visiting your pages and swiping your creations for use on their sites? It happens to me a lot. I have not bothered doing anything about it because coincidentally the criminals are cheesy lawyers who are exactly the kind of people you would expect to see stealing copyrighted material. Since they are basically dumb-ass fools with no money, I don't waste my time going after them. (It's actually pretty amusing to see their unsophisticated

techniques, using a thesaurus to change words here and there, changing the order of the sentences. But my hidden code nails them every time.)

Also, lawyers should remember it's also just as easy for authors to search and find thieves. (For example, I have hidden code on my pages. If someone steals my content they will also be swiping the hidden code. I can use Google to search for the hidden code, and Google finds it faster than it takes you to say *handcuffs*.)

### **Conclusion**

OK, I'm in trouble with the editor because my article grossly exceeded the word count I was limited to. But there is a lot to say about Web pages, and this article has not even scratched the surface.

I suggest you at least get started with something on the Net. Select a domain name, order a hosting package (sheesh, they even have month-to-month contracts that means you are obligating yourself to paying \$8 next month and no more if you no longer want the service. Can anything be less onerous?), use the hosting company's Web page creation services, FTP your files (easy to do if you are already online creating your pages), and after this you are good to go. You have a Web site!

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