Building Your OWN Website

5 Tips for Creating Your Own Executive Search & Recruitment Site

from your friends at

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Introduction

Over the past few years, an explosion of user-friendly platforms and tools have made it increasingly easy for novices to create attractive and functional websites. For many executive search, staffing, and recruitment firms, building a website using DIY apps and services can be a great cost saving measure.

However, in a marketplace where your website is likely your primary advertising channel and initial point of contact with clients and candidates, just having easy tools at your disposal isn't always enough. You'll want to make a good impression right from the start, and build a website that's prepared to grow with your business.

This booklet will give you helpful tips, pointers, and important food for thought as you plan to create or update your website.

Consider Hiring a Professional

Before embarking on a self-made website project, consider whether you need to hire someone first. There's more to creating a successful site than just having the software. You'll need to give consideration to design, browser compatibility, writing style, imagery, maintenance… if you're busy working with your jobseekers and hiring authorities, will you have the time to properly manage your site? Will there be someone else in your organization who'll take on the task for you?

Hiring a web designer can be worth the time and money. You may even be able to find a freelance design student looking to do a portfolio-building project who will give you a discount rate. Money invested in a well-built site up front will save you money when the site needs to be updated later on.

Here are a few items to nail down when getting started with a third-party:

Make sure the designer knows what you are trying to accomplish with the website. The site they build should be created to meet your business goals. Make sure you set out goals for the site that can be measured and monitored.

Ask to see the site while it is in progress, rather than just seeing it when it's ready. Ask for the reasons behind the design choices. A good designer will create a site based on the goals you provided, not just on their (or your) personal aesthetics. For example, if you're an IT recruiter, you'll want a website that would be appealing to IT professionals. Be sure to mentally draw a separation between what *you* like and what your target *audience* would like.

Make sure you set out terms for your ongoing relationship. Be sure you know who owns the content on the site, who is responsible for maintaining it, who you should contact if you need support, and so forth. You'll want their help and advice for making regular improvements and upgrades to the site.

Start with The Content

How you build your site will depend on what you plan to put in it. Many recruitment firm websites take a simple form — a homepage with information about the company, a page about the staff, a page with info for clients, a page with info for candidates, and perhaps a blog. Plan your site before you start building it so that you don't have unnecessary pages.

Keep things brief and simple. People generally want to spend as little time as possible on a site and it's very easy to go elsewhere, so keep the number of pages to a minimum, and use headings and bullet lists to organize page content into easily readable chunks.

When you're writing content, think about who you are writing it for. Is the tone appropriate for your clients and candidates? Is the content something they'd actually be interested in reading, or is it just what you want to tell them? The content doesn't have to be long — it just has to serve the purpose. For example, "welcome to our website" is content that doesn't really help the visitor. Make sure that you're using the specific phrases and words your target audience would use — remember that Google and other search engines return results based on the relevance of the content, and no one can find you based on phrases that aren't in your pages.

Make the 'next steps' clear. If the main thing you want people to do on the site is view your jobs or contact you, be sure that you make that menu item, link, or button easy to find. Do a 'squint test' — if you squint your eyes and look at your page, the most important items on the screen should be the ones that stand out.

Choose Tools & Hosting Carefully

Knowing what you want to put on your site is the hardest part of putting a site together. Finding the right hosting platform is the next piece. There are a number of options available, most of which offer the same features (responsive design, pre-built templates, domain registration) but not all are created equal. Here are a few items to consider when choosing your host.

Use tools that are meant for the job. While Microsoft Office products such as MS Word, Publisher, and PowerPoint can export HTML, they are not website creation tools. In fact, even copying content from a Word document directly into a website builder can cause formatting problems when not done with care. If at all possible, type up your content inside of the website builder you're using, or use a "Paste From Word" option if one is offered. Copying your content into Notepad before copying it to the web is also a sure-fire way to strip out any formatting that might cause trouble.

Avoid "free" services. Generally, if you're not paying with dollars, you'll pay in other ways, such as reduced support (or none — try getting in touch with their support team before you sign up to see how it goes), reduced reliability, limited features, or mandatory ads in your pages. Remember that the website is an integral part of your business and should be budgeted for appropriately.

Be wary of 'blank canvas' web builders like those available through GoDaddy, as they can create pages which are unfriendly to search engines and not consistent from one browser to another. If you're not building a design from scratch, look for a service that offers professionally made templates. Also, be absolutely clear on who owns the template, the content, and the domain name and how you'd go about taking them with you if you want to switch hosting services in the future. For example, a WordPress-based site can be hosted practically anywhere, while a Wix website must be hosted on Wix.com.

Be Mindful of Your Branding

Human capital businesses need branding just like any other service, and your website should be consistent with your branding. Remember that jobseekers in particular are looking at dozens of websites a day while searching for positions, and a firm with a clear brand will stand out from others.

Often, the design of your logo and colors will inform the look of your website. If you don't already have a color palette or logo selected, start there. Like all elements of your website and your brand at large, your colors and logo should be selected based on the way they'll represent your business to your intended clients.

Choose images with care. While graphic elements make your site visually appealing, they also convey information. If you're buying the same stock photos of people in suits shaking hands or talking on the phone that your potential clients and candidates have just seen on a dozen other websites, you're sending the message that your business is just like everyone else's. In general, photos of your team or your clients and candidates are more effective communication than pictures of smiling models. You may want to skip pictures of people entirely — perhaps illustrations or objects or some other graphic element better suit your brand. Select images that work visually as a group. Crop and resize them appropriately before putting them into the page, as large image file sizes can slow the site down.

Stick to one or two typefaces, as too many fonts and sizes can impact legibility. Select a single typeface for headings and another for the content, or a single typeface in a larger size or different color for the headings than for the content. Avoid the temptation to over-use bold text, centering, bright colors, or other 'attention grabbers'; remember to do the 'squint test' as mentioned in section 2.

Grow & Maintain

Once your site is up and running, you'll want to make sure it doesn't just sit there. A website is a living thing that needs regular care, and it's much less expensive to make incremental improvements over time than to tear the entire site down and start over every few years.

Consider writing a blog. While your available openings and information about your company are likely the most important content on your site, you can attract more visitors with related content in a blog. Share your insights about the recruitment industry, or tips on how to be a better job seeker, or news about your company's latest placements and accolades. If you do start a blog, create new content and post on a regular basis, even if they are short posts. Short content added regularly is better than irregular content, which may give visitors the impression that your blog has been abandoned.

Track your site's stats. Google Analytics and Google Webmaster Tools are free and easily implemented tools that will give insight as to where people are finding your site and which pages they're spending their time on. You'll be able to adjust your content to attract more of the visitors you're looking for.

Promote your site. The 'Field of Dreams' adage "if you build it, they will come" does not apply to the web, and particularly not to highly-competitive markets like recruiting and staffing. Getting visitors to your new website requires some investment of your time and money. Budget for online ads, and seek ways to gain a presence on the websites where you would expect to find your target clients and candidates. Don't limit yourself to 'job search' websites; there are likely forums or groups for your area of specialty where you can participatie in a non-recruiting capacity. Establish credibility so that you are sought out when needed.

Conclusion

Building your own website, when approached with proper forethought, can be a cost-saving and rewarding process. Remember to start with your content, stick to your branding, research your hosting options, and keep making improvements after the site goes live. Do consider calling in a professional first, as it may actually be less expensive and less of a hassle in the long run. After all, if you were starting a traditional brick-and-mortar business, you wouldn't lay your own bricks and mortar!

Two final items: Job listings are likely a very important bit of your content. You'll want to create the job listings with a database-driven system rather than putting them online by hand. Check with your recruitment software provider for job board options.

Also, be sure to look at your website on multiple devices and at different screen sizes to make sure it's behaving as you'd expect. It will almost certainly appear differently on someone else's computer or on a different brand of web browser.

Good luck, and have fun!

Glossary

The following are common terms in the world of web design which you may encounter during your process:

CMS (Content Management System)
A web-based system that facilitates website building without web design skills. Common CMSs include WordPress, Joomla and Drupal. Some web hosts have their own built-in CMS offering.

CSS (Cascading Style Sheets)
While HTML describes what the content of a site *is*, CSS describes how it *looks*. The stylesheet for a site includes information about fonts, colors, margins, etc.

Domain Name
Your web address (http://mysite.com). You can register ownership of a domain without having a website for it. You may also encounter "CNAME" or "subdomain" records, such as "http://jobs.mysite.com" which may be hosted on the same server or elsewhere.

HTML (Hyper Text Markup Language)
The main format of information on the web, which uses tags to semantically 'mark up' content. For example, you may see `<p>` and `</p>` marking the start and end of a paragraph and `<h1>` and `</h1>` marking the ends of a 'level one heading'.

JavaScript
A programming language common to web pages. Unline 'server-side languages' such as PHP or ASP, Javascript runs in the web browser on the visitor's computer. It is often used for creating interactive or animated content on a website.

Responsive Design
A method of designing a website which detects the size of the browser and changes the layout of the content accordingly.

SEO (Search Engine Optimization)
SEO refers to the adjusting of a website's wording, HTML, and links from other sites with the intention of maximizing the site's placement in search results. Along with paid advertising, SEO is a component of SEM (search engine marketing).

SSL (Secure Sockets Layer)
A technology that allows encrypted communication between a website and a visitor's browser. This requires a 'security certificate' for the website. It enables the https:// type of web connection, and often displays a 'padlock' icon appear in the browser.

Web Browser
The software that a visitor's device uses to display a websites. Common browsers include Google Chrome, Microsoft Internet Explorer, Apple Safari and Mozilla Firefox.

Web Host
The company that stores your website files for public viewing. Your web host may be the same service that manages your domain name and email, but not necessarily.

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