



behindthechair.com

It's All about YOU.

by Chantal Todé



The dot.com hype has quieted down, but don't think for a minute that the internet is going away. In fact, more people are on-line all the time-shopping, researching, and hanging out. Also on the rise is the number of households with high-speed internet access. And as for job searches, does anyone even bother with the newspaper classifieds anymore?

So if you don't already have a website or if the one you have is a few years old, it may be time to revisit the subject. Your site, after all, is a relatively cheap way to advertise your business. Case in point? "We get calls everyday asking what services we offer and all we have to say is, 'If you have access to the web, you can download all the information there,'" says **DR. JONPAUL LESKIE, who opened JONPAUL'S, an upscale men's salon in Duluth, GA, nine months ago.**

Best of all, now that the technology has been around awhile, there's a better understanding of what works and what doesn't. Here are some guidelines for developing the best site at the best price, without tech failure.

MONEY, MONEY, MONEY

The estimates for what a salon should spend on a web site vary greatly. The going rate is anywhere from \$50 to \$5,000. The more expensive a site, the more extras it will have, but not all of these necessarily improve a website.

The GENE JUAREZ chain of salons, located in the Seattle area, created a website four years ago. "When we initially did the site, we did it all in Flash, because we were told that was the way to go," says VANESSA GALLANT, marketing manager. The site is beautiful, but the Flash technology, which enables your site to have sound and movement, proved to be a mistake, according to Gallant. That's primarily because it is very expensive to update. As a result, the gift card and employment sections had to be rebuilt without Flash so they could be changed regularly. "Sometimes you sacrifice usability for all the bells and whistles," says Gallant.

For most salons, it's not necessary to go to the expense of building an extensive site, notes MARY RECTOR-GABLE, founder of BEHINDTHECHAIR.COM. "All people really want is to get your basic information." She recommends avoiding Flash, since the majority of your clients probably still aren't on high-speed networks. If you feel you must create a mini-movie, put it on an intro page and be sure to include a "skip intro" option.

When determining your budget, one important decision is whether you want to hire a designer or work with a company that offers pre-designed templates. The second option is generally the least expensive, starting at around \$500 plus hosting costs, but offers minimal customization. Chicago-based CHAMERLIK DESIGN offers such a program for salon owners. "A lot of salons are just looking for a presence online," says JIM CHAMERLIK, vice president of design services, about why this option makes sense. A typical site created with Chamerlik's firm includes a logo, photos, a section about the salon, its services and staff as well as contact information and map information. Add-ons such as gift certificate sales cost more.

If you want a truly unique site, the cheapest method is to find a graphic design student through a local college, says Rector-Gable. Expect to pay anywhere from \$1,000 to \$1,500 for the design alone. First, "look at a lot of the websites out there and figure out what you want." Some notable salon sites to see include: www.jonpauls.com, www.donshaw.com, www.vanmichael.com and www.donatosalon.com.





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Expect to pay more for a professional designer. But "don't look in the Yellow Pages," cautions **DINO IANNIELLO, a principal at the design firm THINCFACOTRY in Atlanta.** Instead, he suggests contacting several websites for design professionals, such as www.aquent.com, www.aiga.org, www.howdesign.com and www.creativehotlist.com. Each can provide a list of local designers.

The basic idea is to keep the site as simple as possible while providing the necessary information and reflecting the personality of your salon. Leskie, whose background is in information technology, wanted to his salon to feel like a gentlemen's club, a mood he had designers replicate on the web by duplicating the look of his brochure. Don't underestimate the importance of having a website that reflects your salon. Chamerlik says he knows of one upscale salon that really skimped on its website and is probably losing customers as a result. "People spend lots of money on their hair," he says. "They expect to see a website that reflects the same level of quality."

THE BASICS

Once you determine your budget, it's time to think about content. Start with your basic information, such as your telephone number, address, hours of operation and prices, and decide about how best to present them. Rector-Gable recommends putting your telephone number, e-mail contact information and salon hours on the home page. "A lot of people will search for your salon on Google instead of dialing 411, so be sure your phone number is prominent," she advises.

Here are more tips on how to put your best virtual face forward:

- Photographs will really give your site its personality. Consider putting up images of the inside of the salon, portraits of the staff accompanied by brief bios and any editorial or before-and-after work the salon has done. "This will help differentiate you," says Rector-Gable.
- Include descriptions of all services. "Don't assume that somebody knows the difference between all of the different types of massage on your menu," says Rector-Gable.
- Update the site regularly with special promotions, news about your salon and seasonal fashion trends, if appropriate.
- Link the salon's address to Mapquest, which will provide specific directions to your salon. This option is very convenient for visitors and doesn't cost much.
- Instead of Flash, which is costly and cumbersome, consider adding other animated elements like an area that changes color when the arrow moves over it or a logo that fades in from nothing. Chamerlik says, "Animated gifs and simple rollovers are a very cost effective way of incorporating a little pizzazz and they don't require massive downloading time."
- Request a flexible design that enables you to add features at a later date, such as sound, a shopping cart and on-line booking capabilities.
- If you get a lot of calls from the media, build a section that includes past articles featuring the salon and downloadable images, press kit and logo. "All you have to do is say to reporters is 'Go to our website and download that information,'" says Leskie, instead of spending time and money on mailing out press materials.
- Keep things as simple as possible for the user. For example, consider creating a downloadable file that lists all services and their prices on one page, suggests Ianniello.
- Put your website address on every piece of literature you print as well as on the front of your salon.