

WHAT YOU NEED TO HAVE FOR AN ONLINE PRESENCE

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OVERVIEW

For most people having an online presence means having a website. That is true to a large extent. But for those who have had even a little experience in this, have realized somewhere during the line, that online presence also means being part of social networks, relevant groups and platforms.

Over the years that I have dealt with customers and clients and providing consultancy and development and design for websites and related software, I was quite struck by the general assumption which a lot of people have and that is - its complicated and difficult to get a website up or to have an online presence. To a certain extent it is true, specially if you have no clue how to go about it. **But I can tell you with assurance that you can have an online presence within a few hours and without spending any money. I know for sure because I have been doing it for others.**

WHERE YOU STAND

I am assuming you are someone who has never created a website or a blog or really considered social networks as something which can be a serious tool for getting your service/product/message across.

Or its likely that you have tried some things but gave it up because it was complicated or cumbersome, but you would still like to go ahead if you got the correct guidance and tips and tricks from an expert.

You could also fall in a third category of people who have a good idea of how all this works, but simply dont have the time or the inclination to put in effort in doing this. So you would like to get it done by someone else.

SO WHAT ARE THE THINGS THAT CAN BE SETUP WITHOUT SPENDING ANY MONEY

Here is what is possible without you having to pay a single cent:

- A website where you can put up content including images, videos, pdf files etc. You can also get to choose the look and feel of your website - I would say about 60% of customization is possible.
- Have a Contact Form for people to contact you by email.
- Have a Facebook page for whatever your website stands for.

- Have a Twitter account for your website.
- Create videos or host videos on Youtube related to your website
- If your service/cause/business is visual in nature eg.artwork, clothes, fashion, real estate or anything which is rich in pictorial content, then you can have a page on Pinterest.com
- Link most of the above in a seamless fashion. So your website content and updates show up on Facebook and Twitter and Pinterest. This keeps your online presence synchronized and up to date on all the different platforms.

Is it possible to start off having an online presence without having to create a website? ABSOLUTELY.

But if you are really serious about doing something online, you will feel the need to have a permanent residence on the internet, in the form of a website. But its not absolutely important at the outset. A lot depends on what your plans are.

WHAT DOES ALL THE ABOVE MEAN FOR YOU

Once you are through with at least a few of the above steps, what you will have is:

- A place where people can find you or look you up. And its not just one place, its in multiple places. Its like being at 3 places at the same time.
- Getting your message/service/product out to the world.
- Getting a contact list which comprises of people who are interested in what you have to say or offer.
- A place where you can express yourself or talk about your service or cause and reach out to the whole world.

WILL YOU BE ABLE TO SELL PRODUCTS/SERVICES WITHOUT SPENDING MONEY?

Technically YES. But only if you already have an account with an online payment service like Paypal or ClickBank or a related service.

But please dont expect to have a fancy shopping cart or a full ecommerce platform without having to pay anything. However, what you can have is a listing of your services or products for which people can pay online and then you can deliver the service or product separately.

CURIOUS ABOUT HOW MUCH IT WOULD ACTUALLY COST IF YOU WANTED TO GO ALL THE WAY AND SPEND MONEY?

If you are curious, here is a lowdown on the things you would require. The costs are very approximate but they are not far off the mark.

1. Domain Name Registration - \$10 a year
2. Website Hosting - Varies from \$25 to over a \$1000 a year depending on what you choose
3. Customized Design and Development - Anything between \$100 to a few thousand dollars depending on how complex the website will be
4. Website Maintenance - Depends on point 3 above.
5. Marketing your website - Approximately \$500 a year upwards

There is no really limit to how much one can spend on this. It all boils down to what you are looking for.

But the point is that you **dont need** to take a deep dive right at the onset and spend a huge amount of money and invest a lot of time. That is a risk which could turn bad. You can start small and take steps to get familiar with the whole process and see what kind of a response you get. If things look good, you can always put in some money and take it to the next level.

My advice for first timers: **DO NOT TAKE A BIG PLUNGE UNLESS YOU ARE ABSOLUTELY SURE ABOUT WHAT YOU ARE DOING AND HOW ITS GOING TO TURN OUT.**

There is no harm in starting small by taking quick and easy steps. That way your risk at every step is small and incremental and if at some stage you feel like dropping everything , you won't feel so bad about it.

WHAT IS THE FIRST AND MOST IMPORTANT STEP YOU SHOULD TAKE

I would suggest you take the time to write out in not more than 5 lines what exactly you are expecting with an online presence.

Are you looking to get a wider audience? Are you trying to sell something? What kind of an audience are you looking for? How much time will you be able to devote to this once everything is up? I am sure you get the gist of what has to be clearly laid out. Being able to summarise your objective in 5 lines shows that you are very clear about what your are looking for. It will serve as a blueprint at every stage to make sure you are still on track. And this clarity will be invaluable for others when you enlist their help in meeting your objective.

WHO AM I TO TELL YOU ALL THIS

I have been a software developer, project leader and a web entrepreneur for over 20 years. I write complex software for global clients all over the world and have created and consulted on mission critical websites. I have been on both sides of the outsourcing industry, both as a service provider and a buyer, so I know exactly what works and what doesn't. Like everybody else, I have made my share of foolish mistakes, learnt lessons the hard way and now I wanted to use my expertise and experience to help others meet their online objectives.

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