

Fast Web Design For- The Skint Webmaster

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Got a few replies. Lesson number one: advertise where clients of the caliber you want will see it. The clients I got thought £300 was a lot for a web site. They didn't want to pay web hosting. They wanted a lot of bang for their buck. 'Mission creep' was a term I grew to know and loathe.

This set me thinking: how could I give these people all they could ever want, but not spend a lot of time and money? Lately, I realized how.

So how can you get a full featured site up in a day? Easy (ish!).

1. Mambo Content Management System <http://www.mambo.com>

I wish I'd found this software a couple of years ago. It's freeware. The default set-up allows people without web design skills to update the site. It has a WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) option. This adds HTMLArea code to text input form fields. Each HTML code input box becomes a mini HTML editor.

If you can use Microsoft Word, you can add formatted HTML code to the site.

To get it running you need to know how to install MySQL databases, or have PHPMyAdmin as part of your web-hosting package.

You can add articles, edit them, send emails to members, and be contacted by users.

The only criticisms I have of this software are:

1. The admin interface is confusing. It's all there, just finding and using it is the problem!
2. You need to search around template sites to find ones suited to your site purpose. I wanted simple, clean, business ones. Most of those available seem to have a fat graphic which covers half the screen. There are more restrained ones out there.

These are minor gripes, compared to the relief of finding what is essentially a web site in a box. It can be installed in an hour, once you get familiar with it.

Again, this is full-featured, freeware software. You can add lots of freeware 'plug-ins' to it, to get a professional shopping cart.

Therein lies the danger. Some of these plug-ins require altering or overwriting the default cart files. When you try to upgrade the cart version later, you may 'break' it, by overwriting plug-in, thus creating errors.

The trick here is to only install plug-ins that add files (rather than overwrite them) or that require minor alterations to existing files.

What I do is download all the versions of the plug-in type I need e.g. a WYSIWYG editor. I then choose the one which has the least files, or which creates a new directory for its files. If it requires that important files be overwritten, or is complex, I chuck it.

Mambo and Oscommerce. Don't try to integrate them! Hyperlink from one to the other. I've tried integrations of other softwares, like PhpBB and PhpNuke. Fine, when it works, but when you upgrade one or the other, arrgh!

Keep databases separate. If one goes skew-whiff, then at least the other will still work. Same goes for adding chat rooms and the like. If they're all running off the one database, and that database becomes corrupted ...

It may offend your sense of tidiness for your visitors to have to sign up twice at your site, but you'll thank me for this sage advice later. Remember KISS is the basic rule of computing (Keep It Simple, Stupid!).

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