

Pre-Sales Guide



Thank you for considering SimpleUpdates as your website CMS and host. This document has been made to make the process of planning for a website and the signup process easier. With this document, you can gather information and complete your website plans.

Planning for your new or updated website:

The initial planning steps need to answer questions like:

- Who is the target audience?
- What information would visitors most often want?
- What website features would assist visitors in finding their interests?

You can also look at what resources you have to share, and categorize this content:

- What resources could be shared? (calendars, documents, forms, etc.)
- What website features would best assist your visitors to access these resources?

Then you have general design considerations:

- What design would be easy on the eye?
- Can the site be made easy to understand?
- Will the site be easy to maintain?

Keep in mind the general rule: **The simpler it is, the more effective it will be.**

You may see any number of websites with fancy moving graphics, complex links and shouting text, but ask yourself, will that really help you present yourself to your visitors?

Below is an outline of 10 steps that go into planning a good website:

1. Strategize

Answer the questions asked at the top of this page, and think about your target audience. The more you meet the needs of your audience, the better will be your success. In that theme, the more you know about your audience the better.

2. Think through your Home page

You have 10 seconds to convince visitors that this site is worth exploring further. You only have one chance at a first impression. Make sure the design creates the desired effect and also depicts your organization accurately. Make sure the home page delivers on any promise your external advertising or search engine description makes. Show them at a glance what is contained on this website so they can plot their own course of investigation. To do this there are links to each main section of your site.

3. Before you design a page, make an outline on paper

Plot out as precisely as possible what information and functionality you will have on each page. The more you have mapped out your content structure, the easier it will be to create the site.

4. Make navigation easy for your visitors

Always give the user what they expected when they clicked on the link. It is also helpful to always show a way home. The history “bread crumbs” are automatic on most all sites, and they show the visitor where they came from and how to get back there. Confirm your links, and make sure that each link works as you expect.

5. Design with an open mind

Begin designing only after you have finalized your content information and functionality. Be open to design changes as you proceed. Making your design flexible will assist you later as your site may grow and develop.

6. Revise and update your design as needed

Review your site content to make sure everything that you wanted has a place on your site.

7. Quality assurance

This includes copy-editing, a click through of every link, and test of every function. It should also include, if possible, testing on different browsers and platforms (mac/pc).

8. Search engine listing

Submit your site to the search engines, and consider placing paid ads for your site. Work to get incoming links from other sites.

9. Analyze and optimize

Evaluate how effective your site is at meeting your goals by asking these questions:

How many visitors does the site have?

Where are they coming from?

Why is that the best source of traffic?

What pages are the most popular and least popular?

10. Repeat

These steps do not represent a one-time activity, but rather a progression which sites repeat, steadily improving the site.

The Advantages of Using SimpleUpdates

We know that you have a lot of options when looking at a website provider, and we appreciate the opportunity to explain why SimpleUpdates is your best choice.

- Our system is **secure**
 1. SimpleUpdates logins are protected by military grade encryption for each and every login.
 2. We use firewalls and block malicious hacking attempts dynamically.
- SimpleUpdates is **reliable**
 1. Our servers are located in a world class datacenter with 7x24 hands on support, ready to resolve any hardware issue.
 2. We utilize robust server Linux OS, with daily security updates.
 3. Our servers have RAID-5 disk and data redundancy.
 4. We have a dedicated server that handles our backups from within the data center, and it can even do a bare metal restore if needed.
- Your website is very **customizable**
 1. You can incorporate any design into SimpleUpdates.
 2. You will have complete control of the CSS and layout.
 3. You can have an unlimited number of people helping you edit your site, and you can give precise permissions on what each person can access.
 4. We have a variety of tokens that will make your work easier. Tokens are like script pointers that are replaced with content from the site, like a list of new articles, a photo gallery, or calendar items.
- Not only do we provide a solid platform, but we back it up with **personalized support**
 1. Unlike most open source projects, where you get a collection of scripts, and have to trust your luck with a web search for help, SimpleUpdates makes your website progress an easy turn key solution.
 2. We set your site up, enable your email through Google Email, offer training materials and optional live phone training.
 3. Our support staff is located in our corporate offices in Southwest Michigan. We will not send you to India to talk to someone who does not know about your site.
 4. We hold live training events around the country that are free for all to attend.
- SimpleUpdates is **easy & fun to use**
 1. Our simple graphical editor will make editing your site as simple as using a word processor.
 2. Rather than learning “How to make it work”, you can focus on “Getting things done.”
 3. The team approach allows the webmaster to focus on planning and deployment rather than being overwhelmed with being the sole gatekeeper, or bottle neck for adding content to the site.
 4. It is rewarding to see your efforts quickly deployed to your website audience.

Resources

As you prepare to launch into your website creation or redesign, we suggest that you take an inventory of the resources you have available.

Planning Resources:

- Ask someone who knows. Most people know at least one person who is familiar with websites. Utilize that knowledge – ask whatever comes to mind. No question is stupid. The kinds of questions you ask let those in the know understand how best to help you. (Remember to ask your children. They may be an outstanding resource!)
- Search the Internet for information – it will be difficult to exhaust this resource!
- Take a web design class – most community colleges offer introductory web design classes that can help you get a good handle on where to begin.

Content Resources:

- Your message – what you want to say is the basis for your website content. It is likely there are other sites out there that are saying something very similar. Link to those that are appropriate.
- Your look/personality – consider what you would like people to see and feel when they first come to your website. What colors, fonts, graphics will make them want to stay on your site? Visit other websites and make notes of what you really like about them and what you don't like.
- Use the spell checker! – misspelled text may be fun for a joke, but it's not a good idea for your website.
- Graphics – you may use your own awesome photographs, the graphics of a friend (with their permission) or purchase them from any number of graphics providers. There are online graphics options for every budget.

(Copyrights – be respectful of the rights attached to other people's words and graphics. Verify you have permission to use an item and give credit for it appropriately.)

Time and Talent Resources:

- Your time and your talent – creating and maintaining a website is a commitment. Make a careful assessment of your time and abilities for this particular project. Remember, a website is never finished. It needs regular updating to keep it interesting.
- Friends, co-workers/employees, volunteers – editing a SimpleUpdates website can easily be divided up so that the responsibility for keeping it up does not have to depend on any one person. Choose those who have both the time and the talent as well as the willingness to help.
- SimpleUpdates support staff are qualified to advise and coach you at any stage of your website design.

Your Team and Site Goals

Once you have identified your resources, and thought about your target audience, it is appropriate to bring together your website team. This could be administrators, finance, content providers and website volunteers. You want to all be on the same game plan related to your site goals, and the time line you would like to work toward for your site.

Remember, not everything has to be launched at the same time. Segment your website plans into phases so that you can launch your site, and then continue to build it into a more robust site with new features as time allows for its expansion.

Communication is key. Be sure you are clear with each other with your mutual expectations, and who will be responsible for what aspect of the site. When setting up users, give each user only the access permissions that they need. There is no value, and some risk in making everyone on your team a website administrator. Plan on having one or two website administrators, and the rest be editor user level with specific permissions related to the duties they will perform. Security based on assigned roles is our recommended practice for all users.

Update Your Site Regularly

Keeping the information on your website fresh and up-to-date is key to effective Internet communication. Have ever revisited a website and discovered that it was the same as it had been the last time you were there? Have you gone back a third time? A site that is not regularly maintained is a site that will get much attention.

The frequency with which you update your website should be determined by the audience you are trying to reach. News sites update constantly. Can you imagine going to the CNN site and reading yesterday's news? Churches, schools, clubs, etc. may need to update weekly, while small businesses and online stores may only need to update when there has been a change to products or policies.

SimpleUpdates knows that website maintenance is a commitment. If possible, lighten your load by giving access to specific/limited areas of your website to different people on your team.

Suggestions for fantastic websites (options included with every SimpleUpdates website):

- Update your site regularly with the graphical editor
- Utilize the Calendar module for your events
- Communicate via the Email Newsletters module
- Share pictures with the Photo Gallery module
- Use RSS Digest, RSS Feeds, and/or Podcasting to share information dynamically

Domain name

The domain name is a unique name that identifies your website. It is the name that is used to access your site.

The choice of your domain name needs careful consideration:

- Does the name clearly reflect the message of your website?
- Is the name simple to remember?
- Is the name simple to type?
- Is the name as short as possible?
- What alternatives will work if your first choice is already registered?

Once you have a list of potential domain names, you must register the name you will be using. When you start the registration procedure you will be alerted whether the name you are trying to register is available or already registered by someone else.

Choosing a registrar is almost as important as choosing the name. A good reputation is crucial. We suggest sites that we host on our servers, also register / renew their domain name through SimpleUpdates. Some of the advantages of using SimpleUpdates for domain name renewals are: we can directly help you with domain name issues, DNS pointing, we offer combined billing, live support and renewal notifications. If you prefer to do the registration work yourself, GoDaddy.com has a good reputation.

Domain names are leased, not owned. When you register you will be asked how many years you would like to register to use the name. The annual fee will be multiplied by the number of years you request. At the end of the chosen amount of time, you will have to renew your domain name or it will become available for someone else to register.

Registering multiple domain names is a good idea. You can have similar names, or the same name with unique extensions. When you register multiple domain names, you can:

- Protect your brand and online identity from those who may have unsavory purposes.
- Keep others from registering a domain name that draws customers to them instead of you.
- Enjoy more opportunities to market to — and be listed in — search engines.
- Provide customers more ways to find you when searching the Internet.
- Create distinct advertising strategies that reach different target markets.
- Capture common misspellings of your domain name, instead of sending visitors to an error page.

Domain name extensions

Each extension is a separate domain name and must be registered as such.

YourDomainName.**com**, YourDomainName.**org**, YourDomainName.**net** are three different domain names. When registering your domain name it is smart to register these three most popular extensions whether you intend to use them or simply prevent others from using them.

There are many additional extensions including (but not limited to):

- .info – which is becoming more popular
- .mobi – specifically for mobile devices
- .biz – which businesses are starting to use
- .tv – for sites with video presentations as their main purpose

Numerous extensions that indicate the country you are based in, for example:

- .ca – Canada
- .us – United States

Domain Name Servers

Each domain name used to access your website must list the Server names where your website is hosted. Your SimpleUpdates Domain Name Servers are:

- NS.SIMPLEUPDATES.COM
- NS2.SIMPLEUPDATES.COM
- NS3.SIMPLEUPDATES.COM
- NS4.SIMPLEUPDATES.COM

These Name Servers must be set in your domain name registry for each domain name you are using for website access. If you are holding the name rather than using it, there is no need to change the default Name Servers.

If you already have a domain name and are switching to a SimpleUpdates website. You may keep your registry where it is, and switch the domain name servers to SimpleUpdates. Or you can ask SimpleUpdates to transfer the domain name registry to OpenSRS where SimpleUpdates will administer the domain name for you.

Warning: NEVER pay a domain name renewal invoice without verifying that it is 1. really an invoice, and 2. from the registrar your domain name is registered with. Junk mail, appearing to be domain name renewal invoices are actually attempts to transfer control of a domain name away from you.

Choosing a standard template or ordering a custom design

Using the SimpleUpdates system, you have an unlimited variety of design options available to you. The SimpleUpdates template engine can accept HTML code, so any design you can make in HTML will work perfectly in SimpleUpdates. We have standard templates ready for use, we can customize a standard template, or our designers can create a custom design to your specifications.

How to Select a Standard Template

On the site sign-up form, under step #3 – Configure Your Website – you will see an opportunity to select your standard template from the pull down menu. In order to preview these templates, click on the text link which reads “Click here to choose your template”. These templates can be easily switched from one to another even after your site has launched.

Customization of any standard template is available for a small fee, with the cost depending on the scope of changes. The most common customization involves the swapping out the standard images in the template with your custom images.

Ordering Artwork for a Custom Design

If you find that none of the standard templates currently available fit your need, then we also offer Custom Graphic Design Services to assist you in creating a new template from scratch.

We have more help materials on this topic once you decide to pursue a custom design. This includes a worksheet with questions which when you answer will help us design just the site you are looking for. Request the *Custom Design Guide* from support or via our help website: Help.SimpleUpdates.com.

Custom Design Components (budget \$1,000 as a baseline)

A large consideration in getting a custom website design is to understand the costs involved. Let's review the usual costs for a baseline. A custom design is a very collaborative product: It is your sharing with our graphic designers what you would like, and then approving concepts and revisions to get as close as possible to your ideal.

A custom design provides you:

- Up to 3 hours of consultation. (Initial interview and revision discussions.)
- Two home page designs and matching secondary page designs for you to choose from.
- You select one of the two, and receive 2 rounds of revisions on the way to a final home page and secondary page design. (If more concepts are needed, we will re-evaluate the proposal).
- All together you will have 1 home template, 1 admin template (for logging in and customizing) and 1 secondary page template.

The specific elements that are included:

- Up to 10 stock photos incorporated into the design either provided by you or from our extensive stock photo library. Custom photos or single image purchase from online stock agency charged at cost. Image research time is charged by the hour.
- Rollovers included if desired.
- Three feature (rotating) items if desired.

Once we have a better grasp on the scope of the project, we present a custom proposal. Our proposal will outline with as much detailed as possible what you will receive for a specified cost. Our custom designs have ranged from \$800 to \$5,000, depending on the number of elements needed and the time it will take our team to assist you. Graphic design costs are independent of content migration or training / support package plans.

Ordering your SimpleUpdates account

You will want to have this information ready as your order your SimpleUpdate account:

- Main web master's contact information
- Who is paying the bill, and credit card information
- Support plan you would like (optional)
- Your site title (this is printed in the header of your site)
- Your domain name (www.example.com)
- Site focus (select from the list to categorize your site)
- Site description (a sentence describing your site)
- Site key words (up to 20 words that characterize your content)
- Your main navigation links (the main sections under your home page)

To place your site order, please visit www.SimpleUpdates.com and click the "Signup" link. If you have any questions, we look forward to helping. Contact us as is most convenient for you:

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Welcome to the SimpleUpdates Internet family.