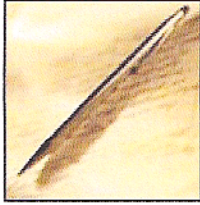**YAHOO! SMALL BUSINESS** INSIGHTS

PLANNING YOUR SITE
Doing your homework upfront will make the process easier.

Taking your business online can be challenging, especially if you haven't done your homework. Like any other business endeavor, it requires careful planning and a little research.

Laurel Delaney, owner of Chicago-based Global TradeSource, Ltd., an international marketing and consulting company, decided to launch her company's web site four years ago.

"I wanted the world to know about me," she says. "It's that simple. I thought [a web site] was the most efficient way to make that happen. But, I knew I needed a plan to make it happen."

Map It Out
Before you build a web site, Delaney recommends starting with a low-tech approach. Make a T-square on an index card. On one side, list the things your business can accomplish with its own web site. On the other, list the problems a web site might create.

"You'll be hard-pressed to come up with a negative list," she says. "The only thing you're going to look at when you have all your pros is, 'How am I going to be able to launch it? How am I going to be able to afford it?'"

That's when you make a plan.

The first step is doing your homework. Explore your options. There are scores of companies that will help you set up, design, and run your new site for less than $30 a month. Don't be afraid to shop around. As soon as you familiarize yourself with one company and its technology, explore another that might offer something even better.

Next, develop a business-value proposition. What will make your site unique? Determine what you are trying to achieve with your business during the next year. Decide how a web site can help you accomplish those goals. Develop content with both your business-value proposition and your business goals in mind.

Finally, know your customers and how to attract them to your site. More eyeballs translate into more business. Be aware of what potential clients are looking for and where they are going to get it.

MORE TIPS FOR PLANNING YOUR SITE

- **Start small.** Your initial site should be modest and simple. If you are true to your vision in a clear and concise manner, big clients will take notice.
- **Pay attention to details.** Make sure your site includes contact information, including an email address and other crucial information. Be sure that links are current and functional.
- **Follow through.** If you make promises to your clients on the Web, keep them.
- **Market yourself.** Do what you can to get your business noticed. Advertise and promote both yourself and your site.