

# Website Decision Guide: *Help for Authors and Publishers*

## A resource from **American Author: Easy Websites for Authors**

Need help choosing options and saving money?  
Call for a free 15-minute website consultation.

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**In today's world, every author and publisher needs a website.** Here's a guide for choosing an effective website, and why Content Management System websites are the best option for most authors and publishers. An evaluation table is included at the end of this article.

The stakes for a good website are extremely high. The global Internet population now exceeds one billion people! A poor website will prevent your success. A great website will gain you access to the world's biggest market. The three most important criteria for evaluating Web site effectiveness include

Features

Affordability

Ease of use

It pays to consider each of these criteria in connection with the four basic types of Web site options.

## The Four Types of Websites

### 1. Custom

In the early days of Web sites, skilled webmasters ruled the online world. Even today, most sites are designed and maintained by webmasters. Costs for designing a site are rarely less than \$2000 and can run to \$20,000 or more.

If you decide to have your site custom-designed, be sure to investigate each webmaster's track record for providing timely updates.

#### √ **Advantages:**

- A title-specific design.
- Okay if author has lots of money to spend and doesn't want to use website on an ongoing basis.

#### √ **Disadvantages:**

- High Price.
- Low flexibility.
- No ability to add content or update events or reviews without paying webmaster fees.

- May or may not include dynamic features such as online store, newsletter, auto-responders, etc.
- Service is only as good as the webmaster.

## **2. Static**

A simple two- to five-page static author Web site is a cheaper option, but not effective. Typically, it features an author page, a title page, and a contact information page. Static sites usually cost hundreds, rather than thousands, of dollars but, as the name indicates, they aren't flexible enough to grow with an author's career. Also, they don't provide for functions such as email management, newsletter emailings, event calendars, and online ordering. Beware of sites that are subdomains — e.g., [www.PODcompany/yourbooktitle.com](http://www.PODcompany/yourbooktitle.com). It is important to own your own domain name.

### **√ Advantages:**

- Lower Cost

### **√ Disadvantages:**

- No flexibility.
- No valuable content for clients.
- No reason to visit the site more than once.
- A sub-domain site name will not be accessible to search engines.

## **3. Homemade**

With a web-design program such as Front Page (\$199 from Microsoft) or Dreamweaver (\$399 from Macromedia), it is possible to create your own Web site. For some the process is even fun. Unfortunately, the functionality of sites created with such programs is often minimal and their look is often less than professional. Those who choose to build their own sites can purchase domain names for roughly \$9 - \$25 a year and register with a hosting service for roughly \$4 - \$30 a month. Other than cost, a big advantage of homemade sites is the ability to edit content.

### **√ Advantages:**

- Inexpensive.
- Full control of content.

### **√ Disadvantages:**

- Learning curve to create an effective site.
- Design and layout must be professional.
- Difficult to add online store, newsletter, auto-responders and other website features.

#### **4. CMS-based**

In the last few years Content Management System technology has made it possible to self-publish an effective Web site. You hire a CMS Web site company to help set up your site's design and provide the control panel you will use to create and manage content. Some of these systems operate as simply as a word processor. Costs range from \$20 to \$50 per month for domain registration, hosting and access to CMS technology, depending on services.

##### **√ Advantages:**

- Inexpensive.
- Powerful.
- Easy-to-use

##### **√ Disadvantages:**

- Potential for frustration without excellent help resources
- Potential limitations unless provider can provide individualized services as needed.

#### **Features to look for in a CMS provider:**

- Page count. Will the site have enough pages so that you and your authors can share expertise, provide information, and generate sales? Will it accommodate the FAQ sheet, the press kit, and free downloads, and how easy is it to create these kinds of content?
- Newsletters and Blogs. Will the site's email management features let you send regular messages to your lists? How will the lists be organized on the site?
- Online Forms. Will you be able to gather emails and information from site visitors easily?
- Online store. Is online ordering available with the site? Monthly fees for online store transactions can range from \$25 to \$100. For independent publishers, PayPal's free setup with no monthly fees and competitive per purchase charges provides a cost effective solution.
- Creating and editing content: Will you have control over content? Are there limitations? Will the site support multiple users, such as members of a book club?
- Can sections of the site be password protected to allow restricted access to coursework, online manuscript submissions or other content that should not be available to everybody?
- Finally, what about technical support? Is there a human being you can call for help?

**Hundreds of thousands of companies** provide services for the Internet. Knowing your basic website types will help you narrow the field. The following point system may help you decide which companies to interview for services. The closer to 100 points, the more closely you may want to investigate each company.

| Characteristics             | Points | Scores |
|-----------------------------|--------|--------|
| Content Control?            | 20     |        |
| Ease of Use?                | 15     |        |
| Website Features?           | 10     |        |
| Telephone Help and Support? | 15     |        |
| Knowledge of Author Issues? | 15     |        |
| Monthly Costs?              | 10     |        |
| Setup Costs?                | 10     |        |
| Custom Design?              | 5      |        |
| Total Score                 | 100    |        |

Knowing your options can save you thousands of dollars in website creation costs. Once you're online, an effective website can help you earn thousands more dollars.

**About American Author:** <http://www.AmericanAuthor.com> [info@AmericanAuthor.com](mailto:info@AmericanAuthor.com)

American Author provides content control websites, with specific help for authors, including publication, marketing, and promotion options.

American Author Content Management websites provide affordable, powerful, and easy to use solutions for authors and publishers. Live phone help ensures that clients can create successful and effective websites.

**Call 877-700-2519 for a free website consultation,** including specific attention to your title and your needs.