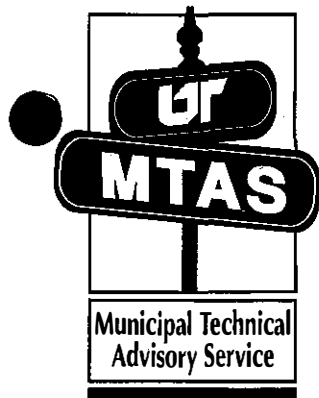




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Pricing Your Place on the World Wide Web

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To many, the World Wide Web is an incomprehensible and expansive new technology that has grown at a phenomenal rate. How it works and who uses it baffles many in local government; what it costs baffles nearly all.

According to a recent National Public Radio report, in September 1997, 19 million U.S. households had Internet access. Since the beginning of 1997, the average weekly connection time per home has nearly doubled from 6.5 hours to 12.8 hours. The number of household Internet service subscriptions is increasing exponentially.

Home and community use of the Internet for communication, information gathering and distribution, and electronic commerce is significant and becomes more so as the next generation of voters emerges. Local governments may well face citizen demand to extend 24-hour access to city hall via the Internet before the end of this century.

Based on price estimates from several Internet Service Providers and Web site designers across Tennessee, the following is a summary of probable expenditures for hardware, software, and services.

Accessing the Internet

Once you have decided that this technology will be an asset to your local government, how do you access the Internet?

Initially, you will need several things:

- a computer capable of connecting to the Internet (a 486 PC with an ethernet card will do, a 133 or 166 MHz Pentium or an Internet-ready Macintosh is preferable, and there are other options for sophisticated data processing units);
- a modem or a dedicated access line;
- an Internet Service Provider (ISP), who will provide dial-up or dedicated access to an Internet server. Many phone companies, including BellSouth and the regional cooperatives, offer this service as do a growing number of independent companies. Prices and quality of service do vary. (MTAS can help you compare services and prices.)
- an Internet browser, such as Netscape Navigator or Microsoft Internet Explorer. A browser is software, normally provided by your ISP, that is installed on your computer and allows you to navigate the Web. Consider it a window to the world of information that exists in cyberspace.

Creating a presence on the Web

Once you have Internet access and have “surfed” the Web for a few weeks, you may decide that you have something worth publishing on the Internet for your constituents and the world to use. So how do you create a presence on the Web? Can your staff handle it in-house or will you need to hire it out? Either way, you should become familiar with the medium and how your colleagues are using it so that you will know what you want.

Look at several sites and bookmark ones you find attractive, easy to navigate, and are full of good content. Some local government sites you might choose as models can be found at <http://mtasknx61.ips.utk.edu/ARC/locals.html>

Knowing what you like will help you decide if you can handle the site in-house or if you require a professionally-created Web site.

If you choose to do your site in-house, MTAS can teach a volunteer or staff person to create and maintain your site. Some items to budget for are:

- training someone to create and maintain the site;
- software to create and maintain the site; and
- time involved in creation and maintenance.

Several very good Web sites are created by volunteers, retirees, students, and new Web designers who want exposure on the Internet. Morristown's site (<http://www.morristowncityhall.com>) was taken on as a business class project and is an excellent page. Loudon County is in the process of partnering with the county high schools and the chamber of commerce to have Web sites created and maintained by high school students as part of the students' training to enter the work force.

Hiring out a professionally produced site requires the same care you would use in contracting for any service.

Briefly, these are the steps you should follow.

Choose a designer

Look at a designer's work first. A good designer will have several Web sites available to view. Ask to see his/her client list and don't hesitate to call for references. Look at several designers and be choosy. There are many good Web designers in Tennessee who charge reasonable rates. Your ISP probably has a staff designer but you should be free to choose another designer if you prefer.

Draw up a contract

As in any field, there are norms one can expect when buying Web site designs. These usually include services to be rendered, scope of work, ownership of copyright, payment, and delivery terms. There are several sources on the Web for sample contracts. One good sample is at: <http://www.wilsonweb.com/worksheet/pkg-con.htm> Or, you may call MTAS for some sample contracts. In any case, have your attorney draft or review your contract.

Check the progress often

It is easier to change design work earlier in the process than later. Once a design gets past the “blueprint” stage, you will likely be charged for changes.

Whether you have your site done in-house or by a professional, you will need to have it placed on the Internet. To do this you must have the site hosted by an ISP.

Hosting your site on a server

When you are ready to publish your site on the Web, your ISP can sell you space on their Internet server. Ideally, the server should be connected to more than one of the national Internet backbones, in case one backbone goes down for a time. This way your page will still be accessible on the Web. Again, MTAS can help you compare quality and prices for ISPs.

You do not have to use the same ISP to host your Web site that provides your connection to the Internet, but you may find it simpler to do so. If you want your own, unique Web address, the ISP can register a domain name for you at a cost of \$200 for two years. Your URL (uniform resource locator, i.e., your Web address) will look something like **www.yourname.net**. If you don't need a unique domain name, your address will look something like **www.ISPname.com/~yourname** and should be included in the price for hosting the Web site.

Estimating costs

So, what kind of costs, might you expect to incur for Internet setup? Here are the usual cost elements to consider (prices are approximate):

Equipment:

computer	\$ 2,000
modem	\$ 200

Connection to the Internet (ISP service)

\$250/year for unlimited connection time
\$400/year for site hosting
\$100/year for unique Domain name (if you want it).

Site creation and updates (designer)

\$1,000 for creation of an extensive site
\$35/hour for maintenance and updates

Software for creating in-house sites

Adobe Photoshop	\$250
HTML editor	\$ 80

Using these prices, if you need a new computer, a modem, Internet connection for that one computer, Web site hosting, a unique Domain name and a professional designer to create and maintain your site, you can budget about \$4,000 for the first year.

If you intend to have the site professionally designed and maintained, require site hosting, and need Internet connection for a computer and modem **you already have**, budget about \$1,700 – \$2,000.

Glossary of Terms

blueline - a printer's term used in the final stage of proofing. Any corrections made at this stage are expensive if you have to fix the problem by reproducing new printing plates.

bookmark - a method for saving the URLs of websites so they may be retrieved quickly.

browser - software that is used to navigate the World Wide Web.

dedicated access line - a method of connecting directly to the Internet via a high-speed line.

dial-up access - a method of connecting to the Internet via a modem that "dials up" a phone number on an existing phone line.

Domain name - the Internet address of a web site.

ethernet card - a very common method of network-ing computers.

Internet backbones - large, very high-speed lines that transport Internet data; called "tier one providers." Smaller ISPs connect to the backbones.

modem - a device that you connect to your computer to talk to other computers via the phone system. Basically, modems do for computers what a telephone does for humans.

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