

The ICOSA Inc. Difference

As internet consultants for over 7 years, the founders of ICOSA Inc. established in 1998 it's own network to provide superior internet hosting services that are mission critical web management solutions unparalleled in the industry. This goal is met by offering an advanced hosting platform with the tight security, reliability and high-bandwidth necessary to meet your online business needs coupled with an in-house creation staff that allows for a seamless integration between the creation and hosting phases of internet development. This complete "one-stop" approach allows ICOSA Inc. to establish the best internet presence for your company using current technologies and inventing new ones, while taking a great deal of the headaches out of trying to mate an independent design firm created web site with a hosting company's server. Not only does ICOSA Inc. offer you your own virtual web, FTP and mail servers in one tidy little package, we ensure that everything is going to work because every component in your site has been painstakingly tested with our servers to give you the most reliable and worry-free web hosting service available. There are a lot of decisions you are faced with when you are establishing or upgrading your on-line presence. Your site conveys who you are, in what you believe, the benefits you offer and what differentiates you from your competition. ICOSA Inc. understands this and works with you to design a web site that is stylish, easy to use, and reflects your company's goals and values.

When it comes to design philosophy, ICOSA Inc. believes three key ingredients will make a web site successful: **Simplicity**, **Scalability**, and **Secure Transaction E-Commerce**. Now, we do not want to belittle the validity of the informational page, because it certainly has it's place on the web and if your business is a service it is an excellent means of advertisement and customer support. However, the internet is evolving from a group of users that have been raised in a world focused on the ways in which technology can increase the quality of life. It is this group that will propagate e-commerce from the 2.6 billion dollars spent on the internet in 1996 to the expected 400 billion by 2002¹. A professional in today's business world does not have a great deal of spare time even with all of the hi-tech gadgets directed towards increasing productivity during the down times of the past, so as to create more free time. Now, would you want to spend what little free time you have running errands, fighting lines at the mall, taking that nerve wracking trip across town in rush hour traffic to the specialty store, or spend quality time at home with your spouse, family and friends? With an appropriately designed web site for your company, they can now do both, conveniently on their time, without any of these other hassles. These busy professionals will sit down at their computer 20 minutes before going to bed and at your easily found, simple to use, secure web site, place orders for all of the items they did not get while they were at home spending important time with their family today.

Simplicity in design is a web site necessity, especially in an e-commerce site. There is nothing more frustrating than being in a web page that you have already visited and not being able to locate the information you have found in the past. Odds are pretty good that if a viewer cannot find the information quickly they are

¹ International Data Corporation

off to the next site. Simplicity and **E-Commerce** cross paths in this regard. Placing an order should not be complicated. The item should be easily found, a click of the mouse should add it to the cart, a few key strokes to enter your credit card number and logoff. Some business people have been trying to get away with out using a point-click-buy shopping cart system or secure credit card transactions. ICOSA Inc. feels that this is cutting off the nose to spite the face. You have a viewer who wants to make a purchase but you are constraining that viewer to your schedule and not theirs. A “we just want to be on the web and if they really want my product they will put the effort in to call when I’m available” attitude means that there is a strong possibility that your new found customer will surf away just as quickly as they washed in, because another web site is just a click away.

Scalability is the corner stone of a successful, cost effective web site. Both large and small corporations are putting a high priority on an internet presence. Unfortunately, some are not paying a lot of attention as they position themselves for the game of the millennium and are producing large, unfocused, poor risk web sites. By using a modular web site philosophy, a cost effective yet impressive web site can be produced. Design an appealing home page and basic catalog structure with the items that have an Internet niche. This allows for your site to build some recognition on the World Wide Web and at the same time recoup the initial startup costs. As your client base builds, add the more common items that would not necessarily support a catalog by themselves but will become “convenience purchases” to save on a shipping charge or having to make an extra stop on the way home tomorrow. All of the ICOSA Inc. web pages are designed with this future in mind. The way in which the code is written is such that none of the original work needs to be thrown away when it is time for the next module to be added.

One final note on design, keeping the home page dynamic is an important part of keeping clients coming back to your web site time and time again. If things are constantly changing then people will come back just to see what’s new, and the more they stop by the better chance a purchase will be made.

Why is it so important that your creation company is the same as your hosting company? Other hosting companies give you a directory, your disk space, your bandwidth and then you are on your own. In a steady state world this would be all right, but the internet is a dynamic place where technology is constantly on the move and even mundane things such as server maintenance can cause difficulties. Using the example of regular server maintenance, this often includes the installation of what are known as patches. These “patches” are fixes from the operating system and server program companies, in our case Microsoft, that repair an inadequacy in the original programming. Sometimes this alters the means by which a web page or one of its components is served causing your site not to function properly. Maybe there are some cryptic help files on other hosing companies’ web sites for you to dig through in a futile attempt to rectify the situation if you are up on dynamic HTML and advanced scripting, but in the long run you are still on your own. At ICOSA Inc., because we designed your page and are intimately familiar with its operation, the revisions are automatically made to your affected pages as a part of your hosting service agreement. More importantly, you and your viewing audience never even know that any of this happened. ICOSA Inc. worries about your web site so that you can concentrate on more important things such as your business.

When selecting a web hosting service provider, there are several important elements:

Connection to the Internet. The connection to the Internet is one of the most important considerations in selecting a hosting company. Every one likes to throw out numbers and acronyms like T1, T3, OC-3, OC-12, DS-3, 128 Kbps, 256 Kbps, 512 Kbps, 45 Mbps, 155 Mbps, 622 Mbps, but what do these all really mean. All of these describe the type of connection that each company uses to get to the “Information Super Highway.” Let’s use a water hose analogy to help explain some of this. A garden hose will only allow a small amount of water to pass through it at a relatively low pressure. On the other hand, a fire hydrant hose will allow vast quantities of water through at high pressures. The connections to the Internet work in the same fashion. The larger the connection, the quicker information will pass, the faster your viewer will see your web page. The funny thing about this however, is that the speed of these lines changes with the number of users currently “in the hose.” Therefore, companies that boast these huge connections to the internet are also using those same lines for other services such as ISP (Individual Service Provider), voice or other types of data services. ICOSA Inc. employs a dedicated T1 line at 256Kbps that is used strictly for hosting services and nothing else. In our case, ICOSA Inc. has what is known as a First Tier connection, meaning that it runs directly from our router into the Internet “Backbone” in Chicago. There are no other users on our line, no other stops it has to make on the way that would slow it down or allow errors, which enables us to maintain a consistent high-speed connection to the Internet and determine when our clients will need an increase in bandwidth without having to worry about someone else slowing our customers down. “Sometimes it is better to have the medium size hose for your own personal use than the fire hose that is being tapped off of by every one on the block.”

Scalability of service. As we just discussed above, popularity could be the best thing for you and the worst thing for your web site. Since ICOSA Inc. is the sole user of our connection to the internet, at any time our monitoring systems see the need to increase the bandwidth provided to us by Digex, one of the leading connection service providers in the world, it is simply a phone call away. So go ahead, make your web site popular.

Security. Security is one of the biggest issues with the Internet today. ICOSA Inc. attacks security on three fronts; physical server security, partitioning of the users on shared servers, and encrypted access. The security of the server itself is protected from the outside world physically by 24-hour monitoring and an alarmed office. There is no outside access to the servers except for a password protected remote access server that is used solely by ICOSA Inc. employees. On shared servers, all directories are password protected and segregated so that it is not possible to get from one client’s directory to another’s. Finally, 128-bit encryption is used through secure sockets layer (SSL) technology. This ensures all financial information is encrypted and digitally signed using Verisign’s RSA public key technology.

High Performance Web Servers. The servers employed by ICOSA Inc. are constructed in house with cutting-edge quality components from companies such as Intel, Mylex, and Seagate. They are all Dual Pentium II 350 mhz or faster processors on 100 mhz buses, with 512 Megabytes of SDRAM as the minimum memory, and 8 Gigabytes of local disk space on a RAID Array for data-loss protection. The operating system used by ICOSA Inc. is the Microsoft Windows NT 4.0 Server with all current patches and the server platform is the Microsoft Back Office Suite, which includes the latest versions of Internet Information Server (IIS), Site Server, and SQL Server. The internal routing operates on a completely Cisco powered network. All components are kept in a climate controlled office and are protected by uninterruptable power supplies that are further backed-up by on site generator power

Server Support. Since the World Wide Web has no down time, our servers are monitored 24 hours a day 7 days a week. In the event of a problem, we probably already know about it and are usually working on the solution by the time you call. For this reason we guarantee a 6 hour call back on your technical problems, which will usually consists of us calling to inform you that the situation has been resolved and your site is up and operational.

Traffic Monitoring. ICOSA Inc. tracks all web site traffic using Web Trends traffic monitoring software. These reports are customizable to each client's needs and can include: user profile by regions, most/least requested pages, top entry/exit pages, single most requested pages, advertising views, most submitted forms and script, most active organizations and countries, activity level by day of week and hour, errors, most downloaded file types, top referring sites/URLs, top search engines, top key words, most used browsers, and visiting spiders.

Finally, I would like to ask you to keep in mind the service that is provided to you by ICOSA Inc. when you start comparing hosting prices. Remember that apples can not be compared with oranges. The **ICOSA Difference** is that no matter what happens you are covered. Monthly maintenance fees cover many services that are not included at other hosting companies, especially site revisions and updates. It's always funny that when you start adding the extras on to the base model at a discount dealer, you always end up with a price that is more expensive than the one offered by the company who didn't try to hide anything. ICOSA Inc. is an honest firm that offers cutting-edge application technology, helpful customer service, extensive product support and comprehensive account management, all at an affordable price.

Thanks,

Randy Skiba
ICOSA Inc.