

A vertical image of a starry night sky. The background is a deep blue and purple gradient, filled with numerous small, bright stars. A prominent, bright white meteor streaks diagonally across the middle of the frame, starting from the lower left and ending in the upper right. The text is overlaid on the top portion of the image.

Building a Website for the Small Business Owner

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*A Handbook and Reference Guide for the
Small or Local Business Owner*

By Tad and Tricia Stephens



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All right – you know you've got to build a website in order to get started with Internet marketing (most of the time but there are exceptions). But even the most web-savvy business owner has to start somewhere. And where is that?

For building a website it all starts by creating a winning website within a tailored budget. You're not a huge multinational corporation who can afford to spend millions on a website – you need a functional, aesthetic, effective website to lend you credibility and enable your Internet marketing strategy, and you need to do it without breaking the bank.

No problem! There is no reason a website should cost more than you can afford. Let's dive into the details.

The Theory

You need a website for many reasons. It's the focal point of your Internet marketing strategy, sure. But it's also the best tool available to businesses in the Digital Age to help influence consumers. A website is crucial to your business's visibility – a shop window, of sorts, that can entice people to come in and buy.

In this day and age, it gives off a bad impression if you don't have a website. It would be akin to not having a telephone number or an address. It's a necessary investment in the success of your business.

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That said, it's not just a window dressing, either. The primary purpose of having a website is to get traffic. You want people's eyes on your product or service – after all, why have an awesome business if no one has any way of finding out about it?

Do It Yourself (DIY) Website Construction

Like most small business owners, you're probably on a tight budget, and it might be out of your reach to hire a professional Web developer. However, you have to compare the costs of hiring an expert against the costs of spending a lot of your time learning, building and maintaining your own site. It's easy to get sticker shock when considering high up-front costs, but don't make the mistake of letting the opportunity costs of DIY website construction empty your pockets. While you're developing your site, you're not developing your business!

If you decide to create your own site and prefer as much a done for you result as possible. Then my 2 favorites are Wix and GoDaddy (just Google them to find and there are plenty of others). These can be super fast and easy even for the maybe not so tech savvy.

On the down side, these also lock you into the providers platform. On the up side these can also get you up and running in a day. I tell all my clients it is better to have one of these types of sites than none at all. You would be surprised at some of the big name online and offline marketers that use Wix, GoDaddy, and other cookies cutter sites.

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A definite viable alternative.

If you decide to create your own site and not use a cloud based service, the #1 platform for that is called [WordPress](#). It's fast, relatively easy, requires little to no knowledge of HTML, and comes with thousands of prepackaged themes (site design templates) you can use that have already been constructed with user experience in mind. To do anything advanced, such as e-commerce, you'll have to learn how to create and maintain web content, however.

Two other platforms you can consider are [Blogger](#) and [Tumblr](#). They're both highly easy and intuitive; however, hosting a site with either of these sometimes looks unprofessional to prospective clients. Building a site on either Blogger or Tumblr should only ever be used as a stepping stone to a future web page, especially because neither platform has useful, intuitive capabilities for hosting advanced functionalities.

Hiring A Developer

Why should you decide to spend money on a developer rather than doing it yourself? Web design is a discipline that blends art and science, and takes a long time to become an expert in. If you want to make sure customers have a great first impression of your business and can intuitively use every feature of your site, all while looking great, it can be a steep learning curve – and you still might not have the best website possible.

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You have to decide whether your potential return on investment will be high enough to justify hiring a web designer or a design firm.

If you decide to go this route, the number one key to guiding the designer's work is in setting objectives to make your website purposeful. What is the purpose of your website? Raising awareness? Generating leads? Closing sales? If you want to sell your product or service online, you'll need e-commerce functionality, with a "shopping cart" and secure payment systems. If you're only using your site for marketing, you need to make sure you've got plenty of ways for folks to contact you so they can set up their desired offline transactions – Email, phone numbers, physical address and even live chat windows are excellent facilitators.

Even if you've hired a professional to create your site, you're going to need to learn how to maintain and edit it so you can keep it fresh and current. Not only is the "freshness" of a website (how often it is updated) imperative to potential customers (no one likes to see a website that hasn't been updated in a year,) it's also crucial to your search engine rankings. Of course, we'll cover more about that in a future article on search engines and SEO or Search Engine Optimization.

You've also got to be sure to test your site regularly. Is it compatible for all browsers, including Internet Explorer, Firefox, Opera, Safari and Chrome? Is it optimized for mobile devices like smartphones and tablets? Your designer should handle these considerations, but it's up to you to inspect what you expect.

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What Makes A Good Website?

[According to Netcraft.com](http://Netcraft.com), as of March 2017, there were 1,760,630,795 (yep, 1.7 Billion with a “B”) websites on the Internet. That should tell you it's a game that anyone can play. But it's not a game that everyone plays well! Here are six essential elements of a good website:

1. *The website is built around a purpose.* A good website meets the purpose of the site, and isn't overly broad or lacking focus in its approach. A website that tries to do too much just ends up with a muddled, disorganized design, that confuses readers. If the readers are confused, they're not confident in your business – and they're not going to do business with you. Remember the marketing adage; a confused reader never buys. When it comes to websites, they don't always have to be simple, but they do have to be elegant, intuitive, and able to communicate effectively and quickly.
2. *The website has credible, authoritative information that provides value to users.* This is a measure of quality that exists independent of the purpose of the website. People surf the Internet for content, and if your content isn't useful and credible, people won't find value in it and won't use your site. Plain and simple. Likewise, your content needs to be up-to-date, copyedited and free of typographical errors and complete. Too many sites try

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to hire freelance "writers" for bottom-of-the-barrel fees that lack credentials or experience; those sites end up with ugly, ineffective web copy that alienates or confuses their visitors. If you're not a natural writer, you may need to hire a professional to write your web copy and content for you. We'll cover more on what great content looks like in the chapter on content marketing a little later in the book.

3. *The website is easy to use and easy to access.* You can build the most elegant, purposeful site on the Web, with the most valuable, credible information available, and if people can't use it, all of that effort was for naught. This principle comes back to simplicity. If your web pages are disorganized, if there are too many links (or if the links are broken and don't lead anywhere) or if the information doesn't flow in a natural, organic way, you're going to turn people off from using your site, and people that can't use your site definitely won't give you their business.
4. *The website is well-designed.* Web design – both in terms of user experience and graphics – is key to establishing your credibility. A website should use small graphics that don't take a long time to load and that always fit the content. Similarly, the graphics shouldn't blink, move or flash or do anything else – these grab people's attention, but Web users hate them because they distract from a page's content and remind them too much of the pushy, overbearing advertisements many marketers use. The layout of

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the site should be as simple as possible – think the three-column layout used in newspapers, or the standard blog format you know and love. When people recognize the layout, they're comfortable with it, and more likely to engage with your content. It's also important to use white space correctly, ensure that headlines use a serif (Sometimes Called With Feet As This Is) font and body text uses a sans-serif (without feet) font, and that you never use more than three standard font families on a page.

5. *The website's ads are under control.* Whether you're letting another business advertise on your site (if you're in the content business, for instance) or you're advertising your own call-to-action, *don't be greedy with people's attention.* People usually don't go to websites with the intention of buying something – they're there to consume content and research a buying decision. This is a slow, organic process that you need to respect. If you overwhelm the content of the page with ads or intrusive calls-to-action, you'll drive users away. Instead, treat your advertisements the way you would any other image (except calls-to-action, which should be prominent without being intrusive.)
6. *The website has a good domain name.* The websites people return to are the websites people can remember. Not everyone remembers to bookmark sites they're interested in returning to, because not everyone is sure they're going to be interested in coming back to it the first time they visit! Having an overly

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complicated domain name (or one hosted on a free server, such as the aforementioned Tumblr) makes it difficult for people to remember your site, and also conveys an image of unprofessionalism. Also, be careful about having a single domain name that ends in .net, .co or anything besides .com. Most folks only remember .com as an ending, and won't remember how to access your page again in the future. Lastly, there are many hosting companies and domain name registries available on the web, and they vary in their price and usefulness. But remember that when you're selecting a service to host your site and register your name, you get what you pay for. You want to select a hosting company that can guarantee that your site won't go down for long periods of time – because every moment your content isn't available to folks is every moment your site *isn't* driving traffic or sales to your business.

Step-By-Step

There isn't a magic formula you can follow to make a great website, but there is a simple, step-by-step list of actions you can take to get one up and going.

1. *Name your site.* Ideally, this should be the same name as your business. If you can't get that domain name for any reason, try to pick something generic that relates to your product or service, so

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that people can draw natural, easy connections between your site and your business.

- 2. Register your domain and secure site hosting.* Many companies do both domain registry and web hosting; as we mentioned before, you get what you pay for! So don't just go for the bottom of the barrel when it comes to price.
- 3. Choose your theme (a predefined website template).* The theme determines the usability, feel and aesthetics of your site. WordPress has thousands of these you can use for free (or purchase for a small fee) that will give you endless customization options for your website. These are helpful for those of us that aren't computer scientists, because it gets a web page up and running without all the hours it would take to learn to code and design a site. Using a theme also lets you adjust interface, colors, functionality and more – so you can optimize your users' experience.
- 4. Get a logo.* Your business should already have a logo, but if it doesn't, you need one quick. If you don't have training in graphic design, don't design it yourself; a bad logo can actually harm your business by undermining your credibility with consumers. Sites like [UpWork](#) or [Fiverr](#) are good resources for finding graphic designers that will deliver you a professional, aesthetic logo that will strengthen your brand.

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5. *Build the core functionality of the site.* If you're trying to sell online, this is the part where you build e-commerce functionality. If you're using the site for content marketing, start creating and posting content! And if you're primarily concerned with an informational page to help customers find your offline business, ensure your home page has everything a consumer needs to make a decision about whether (and how) to do business with you.