START YOUR SITE!

Should You Use a DIY Site Builder?

20 Free Website Creators

Dos and Don’ts for a Great Website

How to Protect Your Site from Hackers

What Is HTML5?
Do I Need It For My Business Website?

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"We’re a big player in the no one knows what it is but everyone thinks they need it space."
Your Website Edition 2018

Thanks for taking a look at the latest edition of Small Business Trends magazine.

In this month’s edition, we’re taking a look at the very important topic of your website.

Did you know that more than one-quarter (28%) of small businesses surveyed recently said they have no website at all? It seems like a figure that’s impossible to believe but those without say that the web is not that important to the success of their business.

Perhaps there are other factors that weigh in on the decision to not start a website, too. Maybe there’s an intimidation factor, too?

Well, in this edition of the magazine, we tackle the task of getting your site off the ground and online.

In our cover story, Staff Writer Annie Pilon goes over 30 great tips for building your company’s first website. Be sure to check out them all.

And expert contributor Megan Totka has a list of do’s and don’ts for building your site that you need to read.

One of the big deterrents to building a site is probably the time and effort (and expense) that goes into building a site. Our Executive Editor Shawn Hessinger has a story in this edition that explores the pros and cons of DIY site builders like Wix.

These tools make it much easier to get a nice-looking website online but they do have their drawbacks.

There’s also a list of the top website builders available to small businesses today.

We’ve also got tips on boosting the speed of your website and we explore the importance of HTML5. What is it and does your website need to use it?

There’s all this and so much more inside this edition of Small Business Trends magazine this month.

Wishing you much success,

Anita Campbell
CEO and Publisher
@Smallbiztrends

P.S. Please subscribe (free) so you never miss future editions. Go to http://smallbiztrends.com/magazine.
News Roundup-Your Website Edition 2018

There’s never a shortage of new tools and tech advancements that help you build a better website for your small business.

Alexa.com Revamps Competitor Research Tool

There’s another Alexa out there. Alexa.com has just revamped its Competitor Keyword Matrix tool. The Matrix does local SEO research for your company to determine what is and what isn’t on the sites of your competition.

Need a New Logo? Wix Can Help

Thousands of small businesses are using the Wix website builder tool. Well, how good is your site if you don’t have a great logo on top of it? A new logo creator tool from Wix may be able to help.

Spruce Up Your Images with New PicMonkey Tool

Bright, vibrant images are essential to your great website. But not everyone has access to or can afford the top graphic design software. That’s why PicMonkey released a new free tool for small businesses. The tool allows users to edit and spiff up the images that are going on a website.

SALESmanago Offers Bells and Whistles for Your Site

Ever wonder how big company sites are able to send you notifications or get those pop-ups to happen when you visit?

You can do it, too. But they usually require hiring someone with a little technical know-how. That is, until now. A new raft of tools from SALESmanago gives you the ability to add those features to your site -- which are great for turning site visitors into customers.

DIY Not for You? Check Out WordPress

Sometimes those DIY site builders can’t provide everything you need for your website. You need a little more. A platform like WordPress is an answer for that. You’ll need more technical know-how but a recent survey found that nearly one-third of the top 10 million sites on the web are using WordPress.
30 Tips for Building Your First Website

Don’t know a blog from a website from social media platform? Are you ready for your first business website but don’t know how to get started?

Having a professional, comprehensive website is important for pretty much every new business. But getting started can seem intimidating for those who have never had their own website before. Below are tips for building your first business website.

**Have a Clear Goal**

Every small business website is different because everyone serves a different purpose. If you want your first business website to be a portal for people to buy products, you need to build it around that goal. If you want it to provide information and entice potential clients to call you, you have to build it with that goal in mind. A website without a clear purpose will only cost you time and money while providing little, if any, benefit.
Write Your Own Content

Before getting started with building your first business website, you should decide, at least in basic terms, what you want it to say. According to Emily Bracket, president of design and branding firm Visible Logic, the website owner should at least start the content creation for their own site. Even if you plan to hire someone to edit or polish it, you know the basic message of your company more than anyone else will.

State Your Purpose Clearly and Quickly

You do, however, want to make sure that the written content of your website isn’t too long-winded. Website visitors don’t often spend a lot of time reading through pages of content just to find basic information. So make sure that the important points about your company and its offerings are very clear and easy for visitors to find.

Tell Customers What You Can Do for Them

It can also help to try reading your content as a potential visitor. According to Bracket, a common pitfall she sees among new website owners is a tendency to focus on what they do, rather than what benefit they provide to customers or clients.

Utilize Calls to Action

Another way to make your goals very clear to visitors is to utilize calls to action. Do you want them to sign up for your newsletter? If so, add a form on your main page. Do you want them to shop through your new collection of products? Tell them so.

Develop a Page Hierarchy

Almost all business websites include at least a few different pages. You might choose to go with a very simple format, including a home page, about page and contact page. Or you might want different pages for your different services, with a main services page that offers a general overview. That’s something you should decide on, or at least consider, before building or hiring someone to build your site.

Having a professional, comprehensive website is important for pretty much every new business

Draw Inspiration

If you’re unsure of how you want your first business website to look or how you want your content to read, look around for some websites that you really like. Don’t copy them, of course. But looking for some outside inspiration can help you get an idea of what you want from your new site.

Professional Website > Personal Accomplishment

Small businesses strapped for cash might want to go the DIY route for their first business website. While some have done this successfully, it’s tricky for a new business owner. Bracket said in a phone interview with Small Business Trends:

“I hear it all the time from business owners who tried to build their own websites. They felt so proud and it was such a great learning experience. But the fact is that customers
don’t care what a great learning experience it was. They only care that your website looks professional. So even if you worked really hard on it, if it doesn’t look professional it can be detrimental to your business.”

 OWN YOUR DOMAIN

Bracket also recommends that all businesses purchase an actual domain name. Some providers offer free ones that come with extensions. But yourbusiness.com tends to be more professional and easy to remember than yourbusiness.wordpress.com.

 CHOOSE A RELIABLE HOST

There are also plenty of different hosting platforms available. Bracket and her team recommend and mainly work with WordPress, which she says is a great scalable and customizable option. But there are others that you can look into based on the needs for your particular website.

 Every small business website is different because everyone serves a different purpose

 CONSIDER FUTURE GROWTH

However, if you plan or hope to grow your business quickly, think carefully before choosing a low-cost platform aimed at very small sites. Platforms like Wix and Squarespace can work great for businesses that plan to stay relatively small and use just a few features. But if you ever outgrow them, transferring all of your site content to a new host can be a pain, according to Bracket.

 GET A DESIGNER YOU ADMIRE

If you are going to hire someone to create your first business website, choose someone who you think fits the style of your business. One of the best ways to do this is to look at those sites that you admire and see who’s responsible for the design.

 SEEK SAMPLES AND REFERENCES

Once you have a few names to consider, take a look at their other work and don’t be afraid to ask for references.

 CONSIDER THE PROJECT’S SCALE

However, even if you’ve found some sites you like, they might not have many elements that would be applicable to your own website project. When looking for examples, you should take into account the scale of the project along with the actual design elements. You don’t want to choose a designer based on their work with huge brands that have hundreds of website pages if your project is very small and basic.

 PERUSE PRE-MADE THEMES

Not every brand new business owner will necessarily have the resources to hire a design team. There are plenty of pre-made themes available for purchase, depending on the web host you’ve chosen. So find a theme that fits with your branding and will allow for small edits down the road.

 STAY AWAY FROM FREE THEMES

However, Bracket cautions against businesses choosing free themes for their sites, since they often aren’t as secure as those you purchase. It doesn’t have to be a huge expense, but even a small investment in a good theme can help keep your first business website secure.
Add a Face

One of the common elements of many popular small business websites, according to Bracket, is a photo of the founder or the team. She explains:

“A lot of times with new businesses or website owners, they want to try and make their businesses look big. But that’s not always beneficial. A lot of customers want to know that there’s a real person who’s going to be working with them. So including a good photo of yourself or your team is almost always a good idea.”

Tell a Personal Story

Another way to make people feel more connected to your business through your website is to tell your story. Bracket says:

“It’s really nice to include a story about yourself or why you created the business in the first place, as long as that reason is something more than just ‘to make money.’ If you started the business to help people or if there was a specific thing that happened that led to your business idea, people love stories like that.”

Set Up Easy Contact

With very limited exceptions, every business website, no matter the type or size, should include contact information. This can be an email address, phone number, address, social accounts, or all of the above. The more ways you give people to contact you, the more likely they are to feel comfortable reaching out.

Always Include a Contact Form

When deciding which types of contact information to provide, a contact form should always be included, says Bracket. Sometimes people are looking to get in touch but they don’t have access to their main email program or just can’t click on your email link for whatever reason. A contact form makes it easy for people to send a message no matter where they are or what kind of device they are using.

Keep Design Elements Simple

Whether you’re working with a designer or just choosing a template, don’t go too crazy with different design elements. Stick with a few colors or textures and don’t add too many different fonts or type sizes.

Make Text Easy-to-Read

Since the text of your site is likely what’s providing most of the relevant information to your visitors, it’s important that they can actually read it. Basic typefaces, like those that your designer or theme are likely to suggest, are best for readability. So don’t go changing all of your fonts to fancy lettering just because you think it looks cool.

Add Valuable Images

Visuals like images can also go a long way for adding interest to your first business website. Some ideas for relevant images include team photos, examples of your work, and even relevant stock images.

Avoid Cheap Stock Photography

However, an overwhelming amount of stock photography won’t really add anything to your
first business website. So if you’re not willing to make a small investment in good images, it might be best to just skip it. Bracket says:

“Some people see other websites that utilize great photos and they think, ‘I really need a photo here.’ But then they don’t want to pay anything for photography so they end up with one that doesn’t show anything about the business, is low quality and has been seen a thousand times. If it doesn’t actually add anything to your page, you might just be better off with no photo at all.”

Include Customer Testimonials
Customer testimonials can be another great element of a lot of business sites. If your business is brand new, work on getting some quality testimonials first, rather than just publishing bland, generic recommendations. But even a few text blocks from customers can help build your credibility.

Scout Good Images
Including images with those testimonials can increase their prevalence on your site even more. But you might have to work on getting the best images possible. Bracket explains:

“I’ve found that, for clients that like to include photos with things like testimonials, if they ask clients for photos they tend to be a bit bashful about sending them. But if they just ask if they can use a photo from their LinkedIn page or take one while they’re on a sales call, they’re more likely to go for it. You have to make it really easy for them.”

Add Video Elements When Possible
You can also add video testimonials or other types of video content to your first business website if it’s relevant to your message and high quality.

Insist on a Mobile Site
But no matter what type of content you decide to include on your website, make sure that the site itself is responsive or mobile friendly. Having a site that isn’t mobile optimized can drive away customers, hurt your SEO and look unprofessional.

Research SEO
SEO is a concept you’ll have to keep in mind throughout the entirety of running your website. Your designer should be able to help with the basics at first. But over time you’ll likely want to educate yourself about some of the concepts so that people can easily find you online.

Learn as You Go
Once your first business website is live, the process is far from over. You’ve made a great first step. But a company’s website is never really complete. Add or change elements as your business grows and changes. Adapt to things like SEO and mobile designs. And always remember to keep your customers’ needs and wants in mind when it comes to your first business website.
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The Most Important Dos and Don’ts for Your Business Website

Is your small business website effectively pulling in visitors, keeping them around and converting them to customers?

If your website is a little more than an online placeholder, it’s time to start putting it to work so you can grow your business and take advantage of the huge potential consumer base for the online market.

Today’s consumers are accessing your website from their desktops and laptops, and also from their smartphones and tablets. This checklist will help you make sure that your site is doing what it should for your small business – increasing your profits.

Your Website Should ...

Look Professional
Sloppy, plain or homemade-looking websites are a visitor turnoff.

Have a Private Domain Name
Even if you’re using a WordPress.com, investing the few dollars a month in a web host and domain name tells visitors you’re serious about your company—and makes you more trustworthy.
Be Secure

If you accept online credit card payments for products or services, your site must comply with the requirements of the Payment Card Industry Security Standards Council (PCI DSS).

Have a Memorable Domain Name

Make your private domain name something easy to remember. Preferably the name of your business.

Contain Your Business Name in Text

Search engines can’t index words from your logo image. Make sure your company is findable.

Contain Your Business Address in Text

Once again—no text, no search indexing. Local search results are more important than ever, so your address should be prominent.

Have Your Company Phone Number in Click-to-Call Format

With so many people looking up businesses on smartphones, offering a one-touch way to contact you will bring you more customers.

Make Contact Info Easy to Find

Search engines aren’t the only ones that need easy access to your contact information. Make sure visitors can get in touch with you quickly and conveniently.

Tell Visitors What You Do at a Glance

Through images, succinct descriptions or both, visitors to your site should be able to figure out right away what your company does.

Highlight Your USP

Your unique selling point (USP) lets visitors know why they should stick around and do business with you, instead of click back to the search results. What makes you stand out from the competition?

Show Off Customer Testimonials

The best way to tell people how great your company is is through someone else’s words.

Invite Visitor Feedback

You can learn more about what’s working and what isn’t on your website—and get more testimonials—by having a feedback form for visitors.

Speak to Your Visitors - Not Your Ego

Your website content should focus on how you can benefit your customers, instead of how awesome you are.

Don’t make them jump through hoops for an online purchase.

Offer Fresh Content

Keeping your site updated makes both visitors and search engines happy. An integrated small business blog is a great way to do this.

Contain Keywords

Natural SEO (search engine optimization) strategies are essential in getting new visitors to your website.

Make it Personal

You don’t have to share your favorite colors or foods, but including the names and bios of...
business owners and staff on your website gives things a personal touch.

**Link to Other Websites**

Outbound links can help improve search engine results and make you look like a valuable resource.

Like every widget and form you can find stuffed onto your home page. Clean and to the point works much better.

---

**Have Other Websites Link to Yours**

Inbound links carry even more search engine juice.

**Make Checkout Easy**

The more steps customers have to go through to buy something from your website, the more often they’ll abandon their carts. Don’t make them jump through hoops for an online purchase.

**Connect with Social Media**

Place social sharing buttons prominently on your website for increased reach.

---

**Your Website Should Not …**

**Have a Lot of Bells and Whistles**

Like every widget and form you can find stuffed onto your home page. Clean and to the point works much better.

**Use Flash Animation, Moving Text, Fancy Cursors or Music**

These things are unnecessary, annoying to most visitors and slow down your loading time.

---

**Post Images Without ALT Tags or Text Captions**

Because search engines can’t read images and descriptive text helps to increase your rankings.

**Have Dead Links**

Ones that lead nowhere or to an error page. Check your links frequently to make sure they still work.

**List All Your Products and Services**

Don’t do this in one long, continuous scroll. Break things up naturally and use smart navigation to help visitors find what they need.

---

Megan Totka
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A website is your place of business on the internet. And simply by being on the internet, you give your business the opportunity to grow.

But some business owners may still ask the question, “Does my business really need a website?”

The answer in most cases is yes. A website brings advantages that are hard to beat. A website gives credibility and works for you 24/7. It can also offer place to collect leads, give you a storefront online, provide a place from which to build a mailing list, and provide a home for customer support. It even offers a way for people to find your brick and mortar business. And, if well optimized for SEO, a website can attract new customers through search engines.

Two Approaches to Building a Business Website

There are two main methods to get a website up and running. (1.) You can use a DIY website builder tool such as Wix, Squarespace, Weebly or GoDaddy Websites. (2.) You can have a web designer or developer build a custom website for you.

Both approaches include both positives and negatives.
DIY Website Builder Tools – Pros and Cons

Millions of business owners and entrepreneurs are opting to use do-it-yourself website builder tools. Here are some advantages and disadvantages.

On the positive side, DIY website building tools are:

- Inexpensive, with costs typically ranging from free to $30 per month
- Fast to launch, often within a few hours
- Website is hosted for you automatically
- Safe with security handled by the website provider
- Attractive, with professional designs included
- Packed with industry templates, sample verbiage and images
- Easy to use — some tools literally as easy as “drag and drop”
- Easy to update on your own with no delays or added cost
- Enhanced with basic SEO and traffic analytics tools
- Capable of using your domain name, though perhaps with a bit of extra cost

A website brings advantages that are hard to beat. A website gives credibility and works for you 24/7.

On the negative side, DIY website builders:

- Have limited customization options
- Don’t let you own your website design — so if you switch website providers, you must start over

Millions of business owners and entrepreneurs are opting to use do-it-yourself website builder tools.

- May include ads with their “free” plans and have other limitations removable only if you upgrade to a paid plan
- May offer only limited use of advanced marketing tools and advanced SEO
- May offer support limited to online help with telephone support only available if you upgrade or pay extra
- Take some time to use even if they are easy to master

Custom Website – Pros and Cons

When it comes to getting a custom website built for your business, you’ll need to hire a Web developer to create one for you (unless you have rad development skills yourself).

On the positive side, custom websites offer:

- Full design customization possibilities
- Personal set-up attention, including someone to talk to and everything done for you
- Personalized support by someone you know and trust
- Use of any advanced marketing tools and add-ons you wish, not limited to the tool provider’s choices
- Use of your own domain name
- Ownership of your design, if the contract with the designer so states

On the negative side, custom websites:

- Are more expensive than DIY sites, typically $2,000 and up
Every small business and every situation may be different.

- Take a longer time to launch, typically one month or more
- Require communicating your needs from scratch to your designer — this can be overwhelming if it’s your first website
- Require you to get your own hosting arrangements (your designer may help with this, but still it requires a separate arrangement)
- Make security your responsibility, including disruption from and clean up of hacked websites
- Require more ongoing expenses to operate, including hosting, updating, support requests, etc.

There’s no right or wrong answer when it comes to choosing between DIY website builders and custom websites. Every small business and every situation may be different. It depends on what you’re looking for, how much time you can devote to using a DIY tool, how much time you can devote to using a DIY tool, how big your budget is, and how customized you want your web presence to be.

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20 Free Website Builders for Small Business

In this day and age, it’s nearly impossible for a small business to succeed without establishing some sort of digital presence.

Unfortunately, not every would-be entrepreneur is a digital guru — and not every start-up can afford to spend money on a shiny, new website.

Thankfully, there are plenty of free website builders out there designed to arm small business owners with all the basic tools they need to get up-and-running and turn a few heads online.

1. Weebly

Weebly has been around for a while, and so it’s definitely one of the most popular website builders out there. There are no hidden costs involved in constructing a new website — and although premium and ecommerce versions do exist, a vast majority of small businesses are unlikely to need them. Weebly’s top feature is its intuitive, drag-and-drop interface that makes Web creation dead simple for even the most IT-challenged individuals.

2. Wix

Wix boasts a similarly easy-to-use interface, and is immensely popular because the site offers
users hundreds and hundreds of free design templates to choose from. It doesn’t matter what industry you’re operating in. Chances are, Wix will have a free template that caters specifically to your needs. After selecting a template, the site’s drag-and-drop feature makes drafting your first website a quick and painless process.

There are plenty of free website builders out there designed to arm small business owners with all the basic tools they need to get up-and-running and turn a few heads online

3. Webs

Webs is an ideal website builder for small businesses because it offers an unrivalled level of SEO functionality. Built-in search indicators can help you to optimize your new website so that your small business starts to generate organic traffic quicker. The platform’s themes are well-designed. Changes can be made instantly and all of the layouts are relatively intuitive.

4. DudaOne

DudaOne is an innovative website builder that focuses largely on producing responsive mobile sites. It has a clear interface, intelligent social media integration and a great built-in analytics system. By setting up a free site, small business owners gain a fast, natively responsive website, Web hosting on Amazon Cloud and crucial community support. From there, users can upgrade to various business and ecommerce packages that come with multi-language sites, push notifications and unlimited product categories for online stores.

5. SiteBuilder

SiteBuilder is still one of the simplest and most intuitive website design tools available online. Its platform is incredibly user-friendly, and comes with all of the tools you’ll need to get a dynamic small business website immediately live. SiteBuilder also includes basic ecommerce features and premium plans with a wide range of custom design tools.

6. Squarespace

Squarespace is a professional website building platform designed largely for those operating within creative industries. The site has loads of high-caliber templates geared at photographers, musicians, writers and art venues. Squarespace’s templates are extremely visual-based — and although they aren’t quite as customizable as the templates some other platforms may offer, small business websites built on Squarespace are some of the Web’s most clean and responsive.

7. WordPress

WordPress is still a small business favorite, and for good reason. WordPress is one of the easiest building platforms for beginners, and it offers some of the Web’s most well-designed free templates. WordPress also comes with a wide selection of free analytics and SEO tools that make it fairly simple to keep track of how your site is performing. Bearing all that in mind, it’s little wonder around one in five sites on the Internet are now constructed using WordPress.

8. Yola

Yola is a Web-based tool that makes life easy for small business owners who are after a simple, code-free way of producing a professional commercial website. Yola operates a drag-and-drop interface with fully-integrated social features and quite a few handy widgets. It’s
worth pointing out that Yola’s free accounts don’t include access to the platform’s useful blogging tool — and so small business owners may ultimately need to go premium in order to unlock Yola’s full potential.

9. IM Creator

IM Creator is another simple drag-and-drop system that offers a wide range of professionally-designed Web templates that are hugely responsive. With IM Creator’s free package, users can take advantage of a second level domain and a respectable 50MB of storage. The platform also updates its selection of templates on a regular basis — meaning it’s a relatively quick and painless process to give your small business website a complete makeover.

10. Sitey

Sitey is an intuitive platform that offers small business owners incredibly professional-looking websites in the blink of an eye. With each free account, you’ll receive 50MB storage, 5MB file upload and 1GB worth of bandwidth. Better yet, you’ll gain access to Sitey’s database of excellent templates, image galleries and simple social media integration.

11. Jimdo

Jimdo is another well-established website builder, and is quite useful for those who are a little bit more comfortable with coding. Jimdo enables users to create free, mobile-friendly HTML5 sites. The platform’s top strength is its free online store as most website builders tend to charge an arm and a leg for this feature. Jimdo also offers a generous 500MB of storage and great customer support.

Before committing to a website builder, you should always do your homework

12. WebStarts

WebStarts provides a rapid solution for small business owners who need a website quick. The platform’s templates boast intelligent layouts, and its design interface is extremely easy-to-use. That said, those in need of a large website or more integrated features will most likely need to upgrade to a premium plan. WebStarts’ free version includes just 10MB of storage for a five page website.

13. Moonfruit

Moonfruit is home to some of the Web’s most creative design templates. The platform’s free version enables small business owners to create a website of up to 15 pages on a second level domain. But Moonfruit does a whole lot more than host a few free templates. It also enables you to create an optimized mobile version of your site, and can be fully integrated with your company’s social media profiles.

14. DoodleKit

DoodleKit offers some of the best editing functionality of any free website builder. Although its free version is limited, it does enable you to create a site up to five pages in under five minutes. You can also take advantage of the site’s free blogging platform, which is an immensely useful tool in order to expand your brand’s digital profile. DoodleKit includes a range of great design templates and hosts a useful forum that can help to inspire you when constructing your own site.
15. Voog

Established site Edicy has recently relaunched under the name ‘Voog’, but it’s still a fast and simple website builder that will help you to establish an online presence in the blink of an eye. Voog doesn’t come with the most all-encompassing user experience, but its free trial version does offer free lifetime hosting, generous storage space and allows you to register more than one editor in order to manage the site.

16. ezweb123

ezweb123 is an award-winner website builder that offers a wide array of package options for small business owners. The site’s free package will enable you to create a website of up to 15 pages that’s hosted on a second-level domain. ezweb123’s biggest draw is convenience. From a design point-of-view, the platform is extremely basic and very easy to use.

17. Webnode

Webnode offers a dynamic solution for small businesses in need of a simple, online store. The platform’s free ecommerce package includes 1GB bandwidth, 10MB storage space and enables you to sell up to 10 products. In order to expand that store, you’ll need to upgrade to one of Webnode’s premium packages — but its free offerings are ideal for a part-time micro-business.

18. emyspot

emyspot is an all-encompassing website builder with an attractive range of free features. A small business site on emyspot has got no page limit, and enjoys use of a blog and unlimited bandwidth. Meanwhile, the platform’s free version offers a generous 250MB worth of storage. Dynamic ecommerce templates are available for an additional fee.

19. GoDaddy

GoDaddy might be better known for its hosting services, but the company also offers a user-friendly website construction platform. GoDaddy users enjoy quite generous storage limits, and a clear, drag-and-drop interface. The platform also includes decent photo editing software. That being said, users will need to go premium in order to take advantage of GoDaddy’s ecommerce, mobile and blog features.

There’s definitely a website builder out there that’s perfect for you and your small business

20. Zoho Sites

Zoho Sites is another useful drag-and-drop editor. It’s a crystal clear building tool, and includes an ecommerce upgrade that is fully integrated with PayPal. The platform’s top feature is definitely its form builder. Users can take advantage of an unprecedented level of fields. Including drop-downs, URLs and file uploads.

Before committing to a website builder, you should always do your homework. After all, no two businesses are alike, and so you’ve got to come up with an idea of what it is you’re after in a website. But once you’ve figured that out, it doesn’t matter what industry you’re operating in or how comfortable you are with the Web. There’s definitely a website builder out there that’s perfect for you and your small business.
When it comes to business marketing, it is important to ensure these days to have a prominent online presence. And for that, having a website is a must.

It can be a great marketing tool for your business. But what’s the use of owning a business website if it has no visitors? For your business to perform properly, you need to ensure that people are attracted to your website on a regular basis. There might be several ways to ensure this. And one of the most important among them is surely how you have designed your website.

The primary aim of a well-planned web design strategy is to create a unique user experience. It must be an experience that’s unparalleled and that will make the visitors return to your website time and again. And for that, it’s essential to have a website that loads fast. But how can you alter your Web design to get the best results in terms of speed of your website?
Here’s a quick look.

**Make the Website Lighter**

That’s the first thing you need to do. One of the major reasons behind long loading time is a heavy Web page. You have to get rid of all that’s trash. Remember, the smaller a Web page is, the faster it will load. If there are images and videos that are absolutely not relevant to your content, delete them immediately.

Getting rid of something that’s not needed is surely the hardest thing. So, take your time. Find out which components are actually adding value to your website. But ensure that you remove from your Web page everything that’s not necessary or does not add any value to you or to the visitors.

**Compress the Web Page**

A full size Web page is sure to take a lot of time to load. A compressed website, on the other hand, is faster. Which compression algorithm do you want to use? You can have multiple options, such as:

- Deflate
- Gzip

Compressing the Web page ensures that the server does not need to send a lot of data to the page while it’s loading. So, it is going to take shorter time to load.

**Split Large Pages into Shorter, Multiple Ones**

Why have websites become slower these days? One of the primary reasons is the increase in the size of the Web pages. Are most of the pages of your website too long? Then they are sure to take a bit of time to load. There’s no way you can help it, except one. Just split the long Web pages into multiple pages that are shorter in length.

Doing this will help you get rid of that long scroll bar on the side of the page. Moreover, the attention span of most people these days is pretty short. Having multiple pages with less information on each will help significantly to cater to these people perfectly.

**Use Single Code Source for All Web Pages**

Have the same script on a number of pages of your website? Just wait before you create separate scripts for each page. Once you use separate scripts, the website will have to read them every time the pages are loaded. That will take a lot of time. Instead, use an external code, that is, you should use a single code source for all the pages. It will ensure that the code remains in the cache. Thus, the time taken for loading the scripts won’t be necessary anymore. This will help the page to load faster. And more so for pages with larger codes.

**Keep the Coding Clean for Google**

When it comes to coding, you will have to keep it clean. It is essential to write the JavaScript properly. Moreover, you will need to avoid using a lot of external resources. Ensure that the images are not too large. You should pay proper attention to the different attributes of Web design for your page. This is because, Google likes cleaner coding.

By following these steps, you will be able to help your website in terms of SEO. It will rank...
high with Google’s search engine results for relevant keywords and thus, generate more traffic. It is also important to make the codes smarter to ensure they can be easily read by the search engines. The HTML should also be simple enough. It is also essential to remove the duplicate scripts to make the Web page load faster.

You have to get rid of all that’s trash. Remember, the smaller a Web page is, the faster it will load

Reduce the Extra White Space

White space is one of the most important components of Web design these days. It can give your website a unique look. It can also form different shapes on it. But are you using too much white space? This can also have a negative impact in terms of the page load time. Remember, the white space also adds up to at least a few bytes in terms of size. Hence, reducing this space means you can cut down on that size. So, it will be less for the server to load. The result: the pages of your website will load faster.

Optimize the Images

When you are creating a website, it is essential to include images there. It helps to enhance user experience. But make sure you use the right format for the image. There might be multiple options, such as:

- Scaleable Vector Graphics (.SVG)
- Portable Network Graphics (.PNG)
- Graphic Interchange Format (.GIF)
- Weppy (.WEBP)
- Joint Photographic Experts Group (.JPEG or .JPG)

No matter which format you use, you will need to optimize the image for the web and compress it to ensure that it loads properly and fast.

A web page that takes a long time to load usually results in reduced user interest. It is essential for the Web page to load fast, so that the visitors remain interested in the topic.

William Johnson
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What is HTML5? Do I Need It for My Business Website?

By now you may have heard the term HTML5 in your online travels. But do you know what HTML5 really is?

It’s important to know because HTML5 gives you more choices for a richer website, along with additional features. You’re likely to be hearing more about it.

In fact, your next website may be written in HTML5. So you’ll want to be informed so you know enough to communicate properly with your Web developer, and consider your options for your website.

So, What Is HTML5?

HTML has been around since the beginning of the Internet. It is a language that serves as the building blocks for websites. HTML is the code that makes the images appear on the page, aligns those images, makes the text normal or bold, specifies what font the text should be, and much more.

Since the 1990s, there have been 4 versions of HTML. We are now transitioning to version 5, which is what we are here to talk about today.
Planning for HTML5 started back in 2004 by the World Wide Web Consortium, and a decade later, a relatively small number of websites use HTML5. This just goes to show that this process of upgrading HTML versions is not an overnight thing. It takes years (not to mention some controversy and a breakaway group of dissenters).

But when HTML5 starts to become more widely used, HTML4 won’t be pensioned off to a sunny island. HTML5 and HTML4 are built on top of one another and each will peacefully co-exist with one another, bringing their own set of features.

HTML4 and HTML5 are co-existing right now. Some older browsers can’t read HTML5, though.

**HTML5 Benefits**

So you’re probably already asking what the benefits of the new HTML5 will be. Let’s take a look at some key benefits.

**Addressing The Flash Problem**

If you have an iOS device, then you will already know that the device is not able to use Flash. Android has its own Flash issues too. With Android you may need workarounds to see Flash elements of a site or a flash video. This is disruptive to the user experience if parts of a website remain off-limits due to a software incompatibility.

HTML5 allows you to make fancier effects and animation, and fancier webpages, without the need for Flash. HTML5 can be seen as an alternative to Flash, not a replacement.

**Richer Websites**

HTML5 will have the potential of making websites faster and more interactive. Examples of this include playing streaming video on a website MUCH faster. Sites such as YouTube are already offering HTML5 video players. (However, you must switch it on yourself as it’s not a default setting).

Or it may mean playing audio on a website without plugins, using code to draw on a website (with your finger or a stylus pen), or dragging and dropping files onto a website (such as the uploading feature on WordPress).

A great example of HTML5 is Chrome Experiments, a website run by Google, which shows some of the things that HTML5 is capable of. The examples on this site are made with something called WebGL, and this is a HTML5-related technology which creates 3D objects and animations.

**HTML5 makes websites faster and more interactive**

**Better Semantic Markup**

Semantic markup is not a creation of HTML5 – it has been around for a while now – but HTML5 improves upon it.

What is semantic markup? Let’s try to break it down without getting too technical and getting lost in the details. In the old days, a website had information but there was no way for a search engine to make sense of that information. It merely indexed what it found but there was no context attached to give that information any meaning. A phone number was just a string of random numbers.

With semantic markup however, data is interpreted in its proper context, so a phone number is identified as a phone number, the
opening times of shops are identified as shop opening times, and so on. This makes search engines able to better understand your queries and deliver more accurate information. So you could ask Google when Walmart in your area closes, and it will bring up the times.

Also, say you’re looking for a law firm in New York? Semantic markup on search engines now has the contact details, along with a marker leading you to a Google map for directions. You can even read reviews, and view the company’s Google Plus page.

So semantic markup has the potential to make the web much more useful. Semantic markup can also include video, testimonials, and details of products for sale.

How Can Businesses Get Started With HTML5?

So the question you’re probably now asking is “what do I need to do?”. The first thing to stress is that you don’t have to do anything right now. Your website may go along perfectly fine without HTML5.

But if you have a business which heavily relies on an online or mobile presence, it won’t hurt to start planning and going over options with your Web developer.

Consider what features you need and how they could help your business. HTML5 may or may not be the right choice to bring those features to your online presence.

But keep in mind that it might be counterproductive to be cutting edge if your customers aren’t there yet. The CTO of Small Business Trends, Leland McFarland, has some advice on the whole HTML5 issue:

“Remember, your customers may be using old browsers. It’s not just a matter of what you or your developer want. A goal should be to make your site accessible to as many readers or viewers as possible. If some of your audience won’t be able to see that cute animation because of an older browser, do you still have an alternative they can see? Perhaps a page with text and a few image captures? Ask your developer to build that alternative in so that everyone can have a good experience on the site.”

Your Analytics data for your website (such as Google Analytics) should be able to tell you the kinds of browsers and devices your audience primarily uses. That should give some idea of what your audience’s needs are. One of your first considerations should be delivering what they want and need. But also consider the kind of new audience you’d like to attract. For example, HTML5 might be able to draw in and retain more people using Apple devices.

HTML5 is the future, and has the power to add additional functions to your online presence. As a small business owner or manager, it will help if you get ahead of the curve, learn more about HTML5, and start planning for how to use it.

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Small business owners know that content is vital for increasing reader engagement, encouraging customers, and pushing people through the sales funnel.

That being said, even the most interesting information in the world won’t do well if it’s on a poorly designed website.

There are specific design choices (like white text on a black background) that discourage readers by making the viewing experience unpleasant or even uncomfortable. If you want to build the most beautiful and effective site possible, follow this list of dos and don’ts.

**Website Design 2016: Dos**

Crafting a page for the internet isn’t like writing a paper for school or college. Our expectations have changed over time, and
now it's very easy to spot websites that don’t meet these requirements. Any time you’re building a page you should:

- **Pay attention to your color palette.** Remember, warm shades like red and orange are exciting. They can call for action or bring memories of sunshine and summertime. High-energy companies, such as a skateboard retailer, will likely enjoy brighter hues. Cool shades often are more sophisticated and relaxed, and may be better suited for a site with a more casual nature.

- **Include images.** People are naturally drawn to graphics and pictures, especially when greeted by forward-facing models. High-quality pictures are visually stimulating and help keep viewer attention.

- **Follow the F pattern.** The top left corner of your page will get more attention than anywhere else. Our eyes scan in an F pattern, meaning we read the introduction then browse for the information we’re after. Well-designed websites will always take this into account, even when publishing blogs and product pages.

- **Balance content and white space.** Too much content is glaring and overwhelming for your viewers. Make sure there’s enough white space to give their eyes time to adjust. At the same time, look for a balance between your elements. While people spend more time looking at the top left, they still favor symmetrical designs for everything but text.

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**Faux-Pas to Avoid**

There are plenty of simple mistakes people make every single day. When you’re building or renovating your site, make sure you avoid:

- **Amateur images.** Nothing will make your site seem outdated faster than poor quality or badly manipulated photographs. Watch out for pixelation, displeasing colors, stretched proportions, and shoddy layering techniques.

- **Outdated designs (i.e., WordArt).** At one time, these options were the first choice for sprucing up a grade-school presentation. Today, they have no place on your site. You’re better off having no graphics at all than building a site that looks like a third-grade project.

- **Excessive advertising.** Spam and popups are everywhere, and if your website resembles either of these in the slightest, people will be quick to turn away. If your viewers can’t tell the difference between your content and an ad, you’re in trouble. Some consumers will avoid a website forever if they see too much advertising.

- **Too many graphics.** High-quality images are good, but blanketing the page in text bubbles and small pictures is not. When the page is too busy, it will feel overwhelming and spammy. Every image
DESIGNING YOUR WEBSITE

Try to avoid software or huge videos that take too long to load

- Jarring colors. Bright shades can be a wonderful tool to set the mood for your website. Unfortunately, they can make or break you. When your colors are too bright, they can be downright painful to view on a screen, plus they are distracting and unprofessional looking. Keep things simple and try not to oversaturate.

- Bogged-down load times. Flash was the most interesting way to interact through your site at one point, but now people are focused on speed. Try to avoid software or huge videos that take too long to load. Your viewers could get bored and leave before the page fully loads.

Crafting a beautiful website is important, and not as difficult as it may seem. Keep these guidelines in mind and you'll be able to build the prettiest online platform possible.

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How to Protect Your Site from Hackers

Each passing day brings with it news of a brand new leak of personal information over the Internet.

Be it credit card information belonging to millions of users or their email IDs and passwords, personal nude pictures of celebrities or even top secret classified government data — the world of hackers has democratized the internet and its lack of security at every possible level.

You might now be wondering what this has to do with your innocuous little blog or website that does not carry users’ credit card information or nude pictures of Scarlett Johansson.

Well, hackers can turn your nondescript website into a malicious spy bot in a matter of minutes, sending sensitive user data to hackers without your even realizing it. Worse, they can hack into your website databases and destroy or manipulate important
Hackers can turn your nondescript website into a malicious spy bot in a matter of minutes

information, injecting your content with malicious links and even hijack the hosting server to be used in botnet DDoS attacks.

But enough of this scare fest. It’s not all doom and gloom out there on the Web. There are things that you can do to secure your website from hackers and becoming a target for online vandals. Here’s a roundup of the easiest steps you can take:

Keep All Software Updated

Whether your website was built from scratch by your development team or you chose to create a DIY site on a third party turnkey platform, as a site owner it’s your job to ensure that every piece of software you run is up to date.

CMS providers like WordPress, Joomla and their ilk work round the clock trying to plug any holes in their systems and release regular patches and updates that make their software less vulnerable to attacks. Ensure that you run these updates and have the latest version supporting your site at any given point in time.

If your site uses third party plugins, keep track of their updates and ensure that these are updated on time as well. Often, many sites include plugins that fall into disuse over time. Clean out your website of any unused, old and non-updated plugins — they are sitting ducks for hackers to be used as a gateway to enter your site and wreak havoc on it.

Build Layers of Security Around Your Site

Just as you lock your doors before leaving your house and install antivirus software on your desktop computer before browsing the web, you should also have a security system to serve as your website’s first line of defense against hacking attacks. A Web Application Firewall is that first line of defense. These solutions are designed to inspect incoming traffic, provide and weed out malicious requests — offering protection from SPAM, brute force attacks, SQL Injections, Cross Site Scripting and other OWASP Top 10 threats.

Until just a few years ago, Web Application Firewalls were only available as hardware appliances, but today a few Security-as-a-service (SECaaS) providers are revolutionizing the industry by using cloud technology to cut down prices of security solutions previously found only in enterprise level setups.

Consequently, all website owners can now “rent” a cloud-based Web Application Firewall, without committing to pricey security appliances or even owning a dedicated hosting server. Better yet, these plug-and-play services don’t require you to hire security experts or attempt to learn every aspect of web security. (Most of us just don’t have the time to become cybersecurity experts too.)

With hundreds of thousands of websites hacked every year, it’s becoming clear that hosting providers are not sufficiently
equipped to handle all website security threats because frankly website security is not within their primary agenda. Now cloud-based Web Application Firewalls are filling that void.

**Switch to HTTPS**

HTTPS or Hyper Text Transfer Protocol Secure, is a secure communications protocol that is used to transfer sensitive information between a website and a web server. Moving your website to the HTTPS protocol essentially means adding an encryption layer of TLS (Transport Layer Security) or SSL (Secure Sockets Layer) to your HTTP making your users’ and your own data extra secure from hacking attempts.

While HTTPS is a necessity for all online transactions, the rest of the website is usually on HTTP in most cases. However, all that is about to change with Google’s recent announcement that HTTPS will be a search ranking factor. Besides the security aspect of things, it now makes even more sense to shift your entire website to HTTPS to improve your search rankings simultaneously.

**Use Strong Passwords, Change Regularly**

This one’s another no-brainer. Brute force attacks that try guessing username password combinations have multiplied at alarming rates over the last couple of years with thousands of attacks being detected on a daily basis across the web.

Using strong passwords is an effective way to limit if not completely eliminate brute force and dictionary attacks. Strong passwords are not just a requirement for your email or financial transactions online, they are also imperative for your website server, admin and database passwords.

Make sure your password is a combination of alphanumeric characters, symbols, upper and lower case characters and is at least 12 characters long to prevent brute force attacks.

Do not use the same password for all your different website logins. Change your passwords regularly to keep them doubly secure. Store users’ passwords in encrypted form. This ensures that even if there is a security breach, attackers do not get their hands on actual user passwords.

**Make Admin Directories Tough to Spot**

An ingenious way hackers gain access to your site’s data is by going straight to the source and hacking into your admin directories.

Hackers can use scripts that scan all the directories on your web server for giveaway names like ‘admin’ or ‘login’ etc. and focus their energies on entering these folders to compromise your website’s security. Most popular CMS’s allow you to rename your admin folders to any name of your choice. Pick innocuous sounding names for your admin folders that are known only to your webmasters to greatly reduce the possibility of a potential breach.
This is such a basic and easily avoidable hacking scenario, that it’s astonishing how millions of websites still ignore it.

Conclusion

Most of us go through life with the philosophy ‘It won’t happen to me’. However, that philosophy has been proven not to be true in the world of online security. A successful attack on your site not only leads to compromising of users’ data and your own information, it can also lead to a blacklisting of your site by Google and other search providers as your infected site risks spreading malicious content throughout the web.

Erring on the side of caution works best in this area. Implement at least these basic steps right away, to avoid being a soft target for malicious hackers.
5 Must-Haves for About Us Pages

Whether you don’t like writing about yourself, you’re not sure what goes there or because the whole thing just makes you feel plain awkward, writing the business About Us page is a task that intimidates many small business owners.

You think you know what you want to say, but then you get to that blank WordPress page and you suddenly forget how long you’ve been doing this, why you love it or, sometimes, even the company name. But your About Us page doesn’t have to be something you dread. Instead, craft a page that you’re proud of and that helps communicate exactly who you are and what you represent to your customers. It’s easy!

One lesson we’ve all learned from the social media revolution is that people like doing business with people they know. And that’s the power of crafting a good About Us page. You give your customers a look into who you are, who your company is, and you build the trust they need to move forward with your business.
Below are five best practices to keep in mind when crafting your About Us page.

**Tell a story**

Take a few moments and think about all the experiences you’ve had running your business. The funny ones, the proud ones, the ones that make you wince looking back at them. Pick a story that you think captures the essence of your business and what it represents and then use your About Us page to tell it to your customers. Maybe it was the day you first opened the business. Maybe it was your third anniversary when you looked around at what you had created. Avoid writing down your whole company history or regurgitating your company mantra. Instead, use your About Us page to tell a story that introduces customers to your business, displays your values and, most importantly, captures their attention and makes them want to learn more.

**Share your credentials**

Don’t get so caught up in telling a compelling story that you forget to list your credentials. Potential customers want to know why they should trust you with their business. Share how you got started, what your experience is, how long you’ve been doing with this, any awards you’ve won, people you’ve worked with (if possible), associations you’re involved with, industry causes you support, etc. Why should a potential customer trust you with their business?

**Give your customers a look into who you are**

**Introduce yourself with pictures**

If someone clicks on the link to your About Us page it’s a pretty clear sign they want to get to know you. Maybe it’s their first time on your site, or they just discovered your blog, or they’re thinking about making a purchase but want to make sure they can trust you first. This is your chance to let them peek behind the curtain and see what your team looks like. Get personal by including pictures of yourself, your real staff (no stock photos), the outside of your establishment, the office dog, etc. These images again build upon that story you’re trying to tell.

**Let them know what they can expect from you**

No, I don’t mean to list off all the services that you offer or the products that you sell. I mean to convey what kind of a business you are and what they can expect from their experience with you. What are some of your
What are your company’s core values?

company’s core values? What sets you apart from everyone else? Don’t use this area to sell, but to humanize your company and to put a face on the experience. It may also mean linking to interior content that highlight content or views you think are important.

Tell them how to get to know you better

Provide links to other places you reside on the Web, be it a Twitter account, Facebook account, or a link to another social media forum. By providing these other outposts for people to check out it helps build trust in the company and shows that you’ll be easy to get a hold of if something goes wrong. As consumers, we like checking out how a company responds on Twitter or how they use Facebook to help us make judgments about what type of business they are.

Those are the five things I look for when evaluating a business (or personal) About page. What trust cues do you look for?

Lisa Baron
Contributor
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This Small Business Teaches Coding Skills to Young People

Coding is a valuable skill. So those who learn young can find themselves with lots of opportunities throughout life. That’s exactly what The Coder School hopes to accomplish.

What the Business Does
Teaches coding to kids.

Founder Hansel Lynn told Small Business Trends, “We teach kids to code in a social and fun setting using a methodology that’s tailored to individuals. We don’t teach with one-size-fits-all curriculums or software, we recognize that each student learns differently and accommodate for that. Most of our teaching is in a 2:1 ratio, 2 students to one coach.”

Business Niche
Customizing lessons to kids.

Lynn says, “By customizing the lessons to our kids, we are keeping our students more
engaged and interested. Teach at their skill level, speed, and interests, and you’ll keep them interested longer.”

How the Business Got Started

After his daughter tried coding.

Lynn explains, “I am a franchise owner of School of Rock, a music education business. Seeing how amazing kids can be onstage led me to want to do the same thing for coding (plus, I have a professional background in coding/tech). The story goes – I sat my daughter down to do an online coding course – and she blazed through it. But when Proud Papa asked basic questions about what she did – she answered “I don’t know, I just got to the end”. That was the light bulb, that while there are resources out there, kids often just “get to the end” without really understanding the material. That’s when I knew an in-person customized mentoring model would work best for teaching coding. I then brought in Wayne, my best friend and old rhythm guitarist from our old days in a band together, who happened to be looking to open a small business, and off we went.”

Biggest Win

Gaining interest right away.

Lynn says, “Operationally, it was the opening day of our first school. It was elbow to elbow, people wanting to sign up without even necessarily knowing what they’re signing up for, because they didn’t want to miss out! It instantly validated the demand, and led us to decide to open school #2 right away.”
Biggest Risk

Jumping into franchising.

Lynn says, “The biggest risk is probably starting to franchise, with the hope that others can recreate our business model. The end result of the risk is simply that our franchising arm would need to shut down.”

How They’d Spend an Extra $100,000

Marketing the franchises.

Lynn says, “Spend it on marketing for our franchisees, or give it to our franchisees for their local marketing. We really aren’t looking to over-expand in franchising. We feel comfortable with our pace of growth, and are really focusing on making sure our franchisees are having a great experience like we are.”

Brainstorming Strategy

Going for runs.

Lynn explains, “As an ex-ultrarunner, I would go on 4-5 hour runs in the mountains to clear my head and find inspiration for new company ideas. Probably half our ideas came from those long runs!”

Favorite Quote

“The only good race pace is suicide pace, and today looks like a good day to die” – Steve Prefontaine, legendary track runner
Every so often, especially in tech, there comes an idea or set of ideas that everyone promises will totally revolutionize, well, everything. Sometimes they’re right (blogs, social media, smartphones) and sometimes they’re not (QR codes, Google Glass, etc.).

But usually when something new and notable comes along, people often jump first and ask “What is this?” later. And I understand the instinct. I wish I’d have utilized Facebook more early on instead of having to pay for that reach now.

It’s tempting. I get it.

Anyway, I was perusing a new service one day that everyone told me you totally had to do or you’d be left in the dust because it’s completely disruptive and, hey, what’s that over there? Can I do that? Where do I sign up?

And this cartoon came to me.

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