

HOME

PLAN

HOST

CREATE

PROMOTE



# Business Website Basics







# INTRODUCTION

No matter what type of business you're starting, the first step to marketing successfully is creating a business website. Today, every small business must have an online presence in order to succeed. After all, the Internet is where most consumers and B2B buyers alike turn first to look for products and services.

According to recent statistics, 81 percent of [B2B purchases](#) begin with a Web search, and 91 percent of consumers go online when they want to find local businesses. Web searches drive sales: [Google](#) reports that one-third of customers who search on a computer and over half of those who search on a mobile device visit a business right after doing the search.

If you don't have a business website, those potential customer won't find you. Fortunately, creating a business website is easier than ever. Here's what to do.

## STEP 1 PLAN YOUR WEBSITE

Start by choosing your website domain name. Your business's domain name is the [www.yourbusiness.com](#) address for your website. Ideally, it should be short, simple and include your business name in some form. Of course, with so many websites out there, your exact business name may not be available as a domain name. (To find out, visit domain sites such as [GoDaddy.com](#), [Register.com](#) or [1and1.com](#).) If this is the case, try adding a short, relevant term to your business name. For instance, if your San Francisco cleaning service, Mighty Maids, can't get the domain [mightymaids.com](#), try [mightymaidssf.com](#) or [sfmightymaids.com](#).

Whatever domain you choose, make sure it's...

- **SHORT.** Shorter URLs are easier to remember and type, especially on mobile devices, where most searches now take place.
- **MEMORABLE.** Avoid generic terms in your domain name.
- **CLEAR.** Write the name in lowercase to see if it looks confusing or spells something offensive.
- **EASY TO SAY.** Do people get confused when you say the URL out loud? Try to avoid homonyms (words that sound like other words, such as bear and bare).

Avoid using hyphens, underscores or other punctuation in your domain name—it's too confusing. Finally, avoid domain names ending with anything but .com. If you choose .net or .biz, people will type .com anyway and may end up at your competitor's site.

If you find your dream domain name is registered, but the owner hasn't developed it, see if you can buy it at a reasonable price.

Next, you'll begin the design process. Before you start designing your website, you must set goals for what you want it to accomplish. Your goals could include:

- **Making it easy for customers to find you online**
- **Building your brand**
- **Increasing sales by gathering leads**
- **Providing information to help customers research a purchase**
- **Providing online customer service assistance, such as contact information, email address or phone numbers, or live chat customers can use to get help or make appointments**
- **Selling products online by adding ecommerce capabilities to your website**
- **Reaching out to national or global consumers beyond your local area**





By knowing what you want your website to accomplish, you'll be able to design it in a way that supports those goals. For instance, if you want to help customers do research about a purchase, you'll want to provide lots of information, such as spec sheets, white papers and comparison charts. If you want to generate more leads, you'll want to offer something of value in return for the customer's contact information or make it easy for them to contact a sales rep online.

Your goals will affect your choice of elements for your website. Some of the elements a website may include are:

- **Titles**
- **Headlines**
- **Product names**
- **Product descriptions**
- **Product photos or videos**
- **Help page**
- **FAQs**
- **Customer service information**
- **Articles**
- **Blogs**
- **Downloadable content such as white papers or ebooks**

#### HOW MUCH WILL MY WEBSITE COST?

In general, registering a domain name costs about \$10 a year, and hosting a website costs under \$10 a month. However be sure to take into account additional costs such as:

- Ecommerce functionality
- Email accounts
- Bandwidth capacity (some hosts charge more if your site needs more bandwidth, such as a video-intensive site or ecommerce site with a lot of traffic)
- Marketing or other add-on services

Then there are the website “must-haves.” Every business website needs:

- **Contact information (phone number, address, hours of operation, contact form or email)**
- **An “About Us” page**
- **A site map (this makes it easier for visitors to navigate the site, and also improves your rank in search engines)**
- **Social integration (links to your business' social media accounts)**
- **Mobile-friendly design and functionality**

Mobile friendliness means your website is easy to see and use on mobile devices, even on small smartphones. Mobile friendliness is growing in importance: Google now ranks mobile-friendly websites higher than non-mobile-friendly sites in its search results.

To ensure your website is mobile friendly, ask your website design company if they use responsive design. With responsive design, your site “detects” what type of device the user has and responds to that device—so whether the user is on a Mac desktop or an Android smartphone, they get the same experience.

## STEP 2 CHOOSE A WEB HOSTING COMPANY

A Web hosting company owns the servers where your website “lives.” When building their websites, most small businesses today choose companies that not only host the website, but also provide a range of one-stop website services, including building the site for you or providing easy-to-use templates for do-it-yourself websites. Many will also register your domain name, set up ecommerce functionality and even provide add-on marketing services for additional fees.





Popular companies that provide one-stop website solutions include:

- [GoDaddy.com](#)
- [Web.com](#)
- [Yahoo Small Business](#)
- [Wix.com](#)
- [Weebly.com](#)

The elements you plan to include in your website will affect your choice of web hosting and design company. Here are some other factors to consider.

Two basics every Web host should offer are unlimited transfer and disk space (the space used to store information and transfer it from your business to your customers), and an uptime rate of at least 99.9 percent (meaning the time the site is “up” as opposed to down).

#### BEYOND THAT, ASK YOURSELF:

Do you need a dedicated or shared server? Many small businesses do fine with shared servers (servers that host your website as well as other businesses' sites). However, if you expect to have a lot of visitor traffic; will need the capacity to do large file transfers; will have streaming video, sound files or other bandwidth-hogging features on your site; or will have multiple customers making ecommerce purchases at once, consider getting a dedicated server just for your business. This ensures you won't run into problems when, for example, the other business on your shared server gets busy at the same time yours does and your site crashes. A dedicated server also helps your site load quickly—which is very important, especially for mobile users.

Will you need multiple domain hosting? Generally, a Web hosting account gives you the option to have a certain number of sub-domains. If you have growth plans that may include “spinoff” websites, make sure the company can host multiple domains on one server.

What content management system do you want? You will use the content management system (CMS) to post content on your website. If you're familiar with a certain CMS, look for a Web host that offers it as an option. One popular CMS you might be familiar with is WordPress. If this is your first time using any CMS, talk to the host about which options are easy for beginners to use.

What kind of support is offered? Can you get support for website problems 24/7? How fast of a response is guaranteed? Does the company provide support by phone, email, live chat or all of these? Are there additional charges for support beyond what you're paying for hosting, and if so, how are these calculated? Don't wait until your ecommerce site crashes two weeks before Christmas to find out that your Web host only offers support until 7 p.m. The better the support you receive, the less likely you are to lose customers—and sales—to a malfunctioning website.

What ecommerce solutions does this Web host provide? If you plan to sell your products or services online, or think you might do so in the future, look for a Web host with ecommerce capabilities such as shopping cart software, inventory management tools and online payment acceptance built in. That ensures you'll be able to get your ecommerce site up and running fast. You might want to choose a site builder that specializes in selling online, such as [Shopify](#) or [Volusion](#).

Before making a decision about a Web hosting company, talk to other entrepreneurs you know to see what services they use and how they like them. Also check online reviews and user forums. If you see a lot of complaints, that will tell you something. Popular review sites that can help you find the right Web host or website builder and rate them include:

- [TopTenReviews](#)
- [Web Hosting Geeks](#)
- [Web Hosting Search](#)





## STEP 3

# CREATE CONTENT FOR YOUR WEBSITE

Content refers to the words and images on your website. Here are some tips for creating effective website content.

- **KEEP IT SHORT.** Long blocks of text are hard to read online (especially on mobile devices). Write your content with mobile use in mind. Use short words, short sentences and bulleted or numbered lists when possible. Break up text with lots of white space.
- **MAKE AN IMPACT.** The trend today is for large, impactful photos and graphics and a clean, uncluttered look. Choose fewer design elements, but make each one count. If you're not a professional photographer, there are plenty of websites where you can license stock photography to use on your site for reasonable prices. Never use images off the Internet without obtaining a license for them—you could face fines or even lawsuits if the owner of the image finds out.
- **USE KEYWORDS.** Keywords are the words people type in when they're searching online for what you sell. Use keyword tools such as [Google AdWords Keyword Planner](#) and [Bing Keyword Research](#) Tool to find the most popular keywords used in relation to your type of business, product or service. Use those keywords in your content, especially your headlines and subheads.
- **ALWAYS INCLUDE A CALL TO ACTION.** Every page of your business website should include a specific, clear call to action—that is, something you want the user to do. “Join for Free,” “Call Today,” “Buy Now” are all examples of calls to action.
- **PROOFREAD.** When potential customers see typos, grammatical errors or spelling mistakes on your website, they may think your business is sloppy about other aspects of business, too. What's more, a typo in your address or phone number will prevent customers from getting in touch with you! If you don't have good proofreading skills, find a freelance editor.

Depending on the type of content your site needs and your skills, you may be able to create content yourself, or you may need to seek outside help.

Visit the websites below to look for editors, writers and proofreaders with experience in website copywriting.

- [Elance.com](#)
- [Freelance.com](#)
- [Guru.com](#)
- [UpWork.com](#)

## STEP 4

# PROMOTE YOUR WEBSITE

Congratulations—your website is up and running! Now what?

- **PROMOTE YOUR WEBSITE IN ALL OF YOUR OTHER MARKETING AVENUES.** Put your URL on your business cards, in your email signature, on your print marketing materials and on your letterhead. Include it in print ads and press releases. Include links to your website in your social media posts.
- **KEEP YOUR WEBSITE UP TO DATE.** At least once a month, review your website to make sure all of the information is still current and up to date. You may need to do this more often if, for example, you have an ecommerce website or own a business, such as a retailer or restaurant, that hosts frequent sales or special events.
- **GET LISTED ON LOCAL SEARCH DIRECTORIES.** Having your business listed on local search directories like [Local.com](#), [YP.com](#) or [Google+ Local](#) helps prospective customers find you when they search for local businesses. Visit the site and fill out your listing (or, if there is a partial listing already, “claim” it). Include relevant information customers would want to know, such as hours of operation, address, phone number and anything else that would help customers decide to do business with you. Update these listings monthly, too.

Setting up your business website is your first and possibly your most important step to marketing success—so take the time to do it right, and you'll reap the rewards.