

# CREATING A BUSINESS WEBSITE



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## Part 1 | Keep it Simple

Getting your small business online is easy. You only need time to do it all yourself (not recommended – trust me) or money to pay someone to do it all for you (that can get expensive). It's my job to help you minimize both your investment in time and dollars.

The difficult thing for any small business owner to do is to keep not only the process, but the final product, as simple as possible.

Whether you're creating your first website or redoing an existing website, you'll want to take the process in phases rather than trying to accomplish everything at once. Take your time and get the basic elements of your website online, then start adding the extras. It's



much like decorating a new home - there's no reason to start picking out area rugs before the floor is even built.

Keeping it simple also refers to the design and layout of your website. This is surprisingly difficult because it's our tendency to want to put more online than is necessary. When it comes to design and layout, always think simple, clean and inviting.

A website with a clean design, simple navigation and ease of use is what will provide the safest solution to your web building dilemma. Your end goal is to have an online presence that is both professional and effective.

It's difficult to keep thing simple you want to tell visitors and prospects all about your business. Just provide enough content to move your visitor to the next phase of creating a new customer, such as calling you, visiting you, or signing up for something you're offering.

Most small businesses want to say too much on their website. We want to explain too much. We want to show too much. We want to wow too much.

Another reason to “keep it simple” is of the short length of time visitors will spend on your website. If you’re lucky, a few minutes at most. That’s it. They’ve come to get the information they were wondering about, and move on. Keeping it simple gives you the best opportunity to move the visitor closer to becoming a customer.

Remembering to “keep it simple” will serve you well in all facets of creating and recreating your small business online presence.

## Part 2 | Don’t Go Alone

The biggest question I had when putting my small business online was, “How am I going to do this?” I was fortunate enough to have worked with a local web design agency to create a basic website for the company I worked for at one point, but really had no clue as to the technical or marketing sides of having a successful online presence. So, when I started my own business, I went at it alone. And let me tell you, it is a never-ending process.



You have a few options when it comes to creating, recreating or improving your small business website. Let’s take a look at each of them.

### Do it Yourself?

If you plan on creating or recreating your online presence alone, then my heart goes out to you. It is a time consuming, frustrating and costly investment. And that investment is time, both to you and your family. When you try to go at it alone, it will take up nearly all the time you spend doing the things you love, whether that's time with your family, on the golf course, shopping, or time relaxing with friends. Yes, you will save dollars. That is, unless you consider your time worth something. Because when you add those hours up, you're spending a lot of sweat equity going at it yourself. I think it is possible to learn what you need to know in regard to web marketing (which is how to attract, persuade, and build business with your web presence) in a few months of heavy study. But, creating your website is a beast. Taking the time to learn a web creation/editing tool is a nightmare. Believe me, you don't want to try to build your own website. Unless you have a solid background in design, CSS, and HTML, you'll never have a finished website that is professional enough to represent your business. That is, unless learning these tools will be a full-time job over many months. There are services that claim you can build your own website without knowing the technical stuff. Avoid them. You will never be able to create a web presence with enough flexibility and professionalism without working with either a web design freelancer or web design agency.

### **Web Design Freelancer?**

Your second option is to utilize an independent web designer. If you can find a good one (references, references, references), you should be able to make it through the process of getting a solid website online for \$1,000-\$5,000. If you go this route, what you'll probably end up with is a professional looking, 3 to 8-page online business card. It will most certainly lack the elements that we stress are so important at Website Blueprint (<http://www.websiteblueprint.com>): Internet marketing elements, SEO (search engine optimization), email marketing, blogging, social media, and utilizing your

website as a “sales funnel.” But, many small businesses have to take things in small steps, and getting a professional-looking website online is step one. So, how do you find a freelancer? It could be a friend of a friend or you can find designers through services like elance.com or guru.com. If you don't have the time to build a website yourself (who does?) and don't have enough money for a web development agency to do most everything for you (see below), an independent freelancer may be your best first step.

### **Full Service Web Firm/Agency?**

If you can go this route, congratulations. Your business should end up with a great web presence, and you're going to save yourself both time and frustration. But, can you afford it? There are great design firms in most mid-sized and larger markets. I have no doubt if money weren't an obstacle, you could set up an appointment with a full service web firm/agency and have them take care of (nearly) everything for you. What's it going to cost? Without knowing your specific requirements, my best guess would be in the range of \$5,000-\$15,000. Now, if you've got the cash, you're good to go. But, there are still elements of web marketing that you're going to want to understand yourself. With a freelancer, you're going to have to “know it all” when it comes to web marketing, so you can tell them what you want. But, with an agency, you only have to “understand” web marketing. There's a big difference. A basic understanding of SEO, email marketing, blogging, social media, and online marketing is crucial no matter how you decide to move forward. You don't need to know it all, but at least know enough to be able to communicate with the agency or firm that is developing your web presence. There are specialists in web design/development and specialists in web marketing. It's not often that your designers/developers are going to have the full range of understanding of how you'll actually build business with your web presence (though, they should certainly know more than an independent web designer). If you're receiving our email tips from Website Blueprint ([www.websiteblueprint.com](http://www.websiteblueprint.com)), we'll give you a

solid web marketing education so that you can make sure the agency who's creating your website includes everything you need to build more business online.

### **Finally...**

You may fall somewhere in between the options above. You may already have a website you like that represents your business well. Or, you may already have a website that you want to look a little better or be more effective building business for you. If this is the case, decide if you need a full service agency or an independent designer to do some work cleaning things up for you. Not sure how good or bad your website really is? Feel free to contact us at Website Blueprint to setup an evaluation session for an honest appraisal of your current web presence.

## **Part 3 | Think Like Them**



When the time comes to create or redesign your website, it's so easy to fall into that bottomless pit of thinking about all the things you want online. Do not pass go! Hold up, and shift your perspective. Don't think about what you want online, think about what your current and potential customers really want from your website.

Get an idea – in advance of what your end goals are for your website. Do you want it to be informational, a lead generator or do you want to sell products online? Think about what your visitors need when they visit you online.

Consider why someone is coming to your website. Really? Why would you be visiting if you were a customer or prospect? There are usually two reasons for most small business website owners:

1. They just need a specific piece of information that's on your website.
2. They're researching and considering doing business with you.

That's about it. If they're considering doing business with you, your goal is simply to give them just enough information that will get them one step further in the sales process (to call, email or visit you in-person).

It's a lot like staging a house to sell or going on a first date. Your goal is to impress them enough that they want to take the next step in the relationship or buying process.

However, if you're a business that's selling a product online, then you're entering the realm of ecommerce. Although that's an entire topic all together, you'll still want to fully grasp all the basic elements we're discussing here that are extremely important to any small business owner.

One great way to get into that "think like them" mentality is to browse other websites in your field in other towns and cities. As you browse these sites, pay attention to the content and ease-of-use on the site. Would you be proud if their website was yours? What on their site would entice a potential customer to call or visit you. Consider everything that you like and dislike. Wait! Are you still thinking like the customer? (OK, just checking). Now ask yourself, if I were a potential customer, what information would I want? Note which websites provide this information and which ones don't.

After you have browsed a bunch of websites in your industry from the customers' perspective, you'll have a much better idea of what a customer will want when they visit

your website in the future. This information will be very important to always keep in mind while you create or recreate your own website.

## Part 4 | Get Clicked

One day you will have a website up and running that you're proud of and you know is an asset to your business. But, how are you going to drive people to it?



There are two ways to get traffic to your website: promote it (which we'll cover later) or get it to show up in search engines, such as Google, Yahoo! or Bing.

Ahhhh, the world of SEO (Search Engine Optimization). There are many books on the subject, there are hundreds of websites dedicated to it, and there are many highly skilled professionals out there that make their living from it. It's all about getting that search engine "Google Juice!"

Here's the good news. For a small business owner looking to get people to find your website by searching on Google, the process of getting your business on the first page of local search results is a relatively easy process. The hard part about SEO is if you are trying to compete nationally. That's because when you're searching for a generic product or website, you don't add a location into your search terms. When you're looking for something locally, you naturally add your location [town/city/region/neighborhood] to your search. If you owned a dry cleaning business, getting it on to the first page of Google (or any of the search engines) is hard



to do under the search term, “dry cleaner.” But, getting that same business to show up under “dry cleaner in downtown Poughkeepsie” is much less difficult.

By understanding the right words (keywords) to add into your pages, page titles, and meta-description, you should be able to rank high locally in Google and the other search engines in a short amount of time (a few weeks). The key for the local business owner is to know what keywords to utilize and where they should be placed. What should your “keywords” be? Ask a few friends and family members what phrase they would use if they were searching for the product/service you sell. If I were looking for a dry cleaner in downtown Poughkeepsie, I would type in the obvious phrase, “dry cleaner in downtown Poughkeepsie.”

1. Be sure that the phrase “dry cleaner downtown Poughkeepsie” is located multiple times on your home page and throughout your website.
2. Be sure the phrase “dry cleaner downtown Poughkeepsie” is located in your page titles.
3. Be sure the phrase “dry cleaner downtown Poughkeepsie” is located in your page description.

If you only do those three things, you’re going to have done more than many of your competitors and put yourself at a big advantage when it comes to appearing on the first page of Google and the other search engines. There are obviously many other techniques that can be done that are beyond the scope of this guide, but just by just doing the three steps mentioned above, you’ll have given your website it’s first big boost for appearing on the first page of the search engines.

## Part 5 | Build Relationships

If you want to turn website visitors into paying customers, you'll want to remember that your website provides the opportunity to build relationships. This is so important to remember.

There are only a few ways to extend the relationship once someone is at your website. They can pick up the phone, email you, or come and see you. But, if they don't do any of these, you've lost your prospect.



The solution is to persuade them to sign up to your email list (aka email marketing). Email marketing is a vital (and I mean the most vital) element to building relationships with your website visitors.

Your website should have a form on every page that simply asks for two pieces of information - first name and email address. When someone fills out that form, they're now on your "email list" (email database). Once a "subscriber" (potential customer) is on your email list, you can begin to send out eblasts to all of these "subscribers" whenever you want. Of course, "whenever you want" shouldn't be more than once or twice a month. The goal is to stay in front of your visitors or customers without overdoing it.

What type of information should you email your "list?" There are three types of eblasts: promotional, informational, or a combination of the two.

1. A promotional eblast would contain details about your service/product, company news, a coupon or a sales pitch.

2. An informational eblast educates your subscribers. The idea is to brand yourself or your business as an authority or expert. If you owned a dry cleaning business, your eblast might include a couple paragraphs about how to get rid of stains on a certain piece of fabric, a review of a new leather care product, or a list about how to select the best tailor. The bottom line is to provide something that's helpful to your subscriber that's related to your type of business.
3. I think the best idea for small businesses is the combination eblast. It gives you the opportunity to first provide a helpful tip, followed by a soft sales pitch.

Two of the biggest questions I get about building an email list is, "how to I get people to subscribe ?" and "how do I add my current client email addresses to my database?"

"How Do I Get People to Subscribe?"

You have to entice them by giving away something that is good enough that they would be willing to give you their email address. My best suggestion is to give away a special report, such as (if you were a dry cleaner): "10 Ways to Keep Your Clothes Looking Great" or "5 Insider Tips of Picking the Right Dry Cleaning Service." If I were the dry cleaner, I'd also include a coupon for signing up; such as 25% off your first order.

"How do I add my current client email addresses to my database?"

Your email list must be 100% opt-in subscribers. That means that you can't just add them to your list, they need fill out the form (subscribe) themselves. The best way to do this is to email your customers in the traditional manner as you may have done in the past and ask them to sign up. Just be sure you give them something beneficial in exchange for signing up. This may be your special report, or some type of special customer coupon. Put yourself in their shoes. If you were a customer and received the email, what would it take for you to become a subscriber?

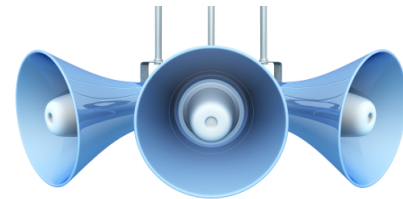
That brings us to what service to use for your email marketing. There are many out there. Perhaps the most well known is Constant Contact ([www.constantcontact.com](http://www.constantcontact.com)). The service I use and recommend is Aweber at [www.aweber.com](http://www.aweber.com). You can sign up for an account, create a web form for your web person, and have them add it to your site (or do it yourself with Aweber's help — they make it easy with great support). Then, you can begin to manage emailing your subscribers. There's a learning curve to sending out that monthly email, but it's not too steep. If you're on a budget, it's definitely a job that you may be able to handle yourself.

There aren't many ways to build a relationship with folks who visit your website. But, email marketing is the one I've found to be the most simple and effective way to stay in touch.

## Part 6 | Promote Your Site

There are three ways to promote your website: via search engines like Google, locally through traditional marketing methods and online through social networking. We've already touched on search engines. Let's discuss the other two methods.

Promoting your website locally simply means that your web address should be displayed everywhere that your business is seen or heard in the public eye. This



includes your radio and TV commercials, as well as your print materials - billboards, phone book, business cards, brochures, and so on. In other words, if your business name is spoken, written or displayed anywhere, your web address should be the next piece of information that is seen or heard.

The other vehicle for promoting your website is the world of social media and social networking, which offers plenty of online options for getting your website address out to the public.

If you're not someone who spends a lot of time on the Internet, don't worry about the element of social media and networking right now. But, if you are a bit of an Internet junkie, then you should definitely get involved with some social networking sites.

Depending on your type of business, I recommend are Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, and YouTube. Each can provide you ways to get noticed online, while providing opportunities to share links back to your website. Even though we don't have the space in this guide to get into the different aspects of social media alternatives, let me touch on a super-simple overview of which may be good for your small business.

### **Twitter**

Twitter is a solid social media venue for most any business or business owner. If you're more of a service professional, you should have a Twitter account with your name featured. If your business is more of a service-business/retailer, your Twitter account should feature your business name. For instance, an insurance agent or financial advisor may want to use themselves as their Twitter account persona. Whereas, if you're a dry cleaner or tanning salon, it would be more beneficial to use your business name as your Twitter persona.

### **LinkedIn**

The benefit of using LinkedIn is more for you, the business person, than your business itself. LinkedIn is a place where business people connect and are seen by one another. Even though, you'll have opportunities to share information about your business products or services, the site is more about you, the owner. Every business owner should have a LinkedIn account.

## **Facebook**

Although many of us have Facebook pages to connect personally with friends and family, your business may benefit from a Facebook business/fan page as well. I think Facebook pages are most beneficial for businesses and organizations that have more of a community-based appeal; such as restaurants, bars, and charities.

## **YouTube**

Almost any business can benefit of having a YouTube page. Not only does YouTube offer a great way to add video to your website, your presence on YouTube can be beneficial as well. If you're that dry cleaner, do a simple (but professional) video tour of your facility. If you're that insurance agent, have a simple (but professional) greeting from you, telling potential customers about how you can assist them. You Tube is also great for adding any company videos or commercials you've had produced. They'll not only be seen on YouTube, but you can add them to your website as well.

Another place to get found online is to participate in relevant forums or blogs in your area. Try to find websites in your area that have blogs you can comment on. Perhaps your local Chamber has one. The primary reason why "commenting" on local blogs and forums can be important is that it allows you the opportunity to include a link to your website. Sure, lending your voice to an online conversation allows others in your community to become more familiar with you, but the ability to add that link to your website is free promotion...and that's the name of the game.

Just remember that if you are going to comment on blogs, bring something to the conversation. Don't just put a link to your website by itself; that's bad form. It doesn't take much to include a few sentences that add to the discussion.

Once you have a website you're proud of, you'll want to get the word out. Promoting your site locally and through social media are two cost-effective ways to do it.

## Part 7 | Keep it Fresh

Keeping fresh content on your website is very important for your positioning with Google and the other search engines. You see, search engines love fresh content. Google, Yahoo! And Bing consider a website that doesn't change for long periods of time as less important than others, and in the process you can lose some of your search engine credibility and positioning.



But, when you consistently add new content to your website, the search engine gods are more likely to reward you with higher search rankings. OK, it may not be that deep, but it works.

So then, what's the best way to keep your website fresh with new material? Your best choice is to add the type of information we discussed for your email marketing messages. These included helpful tips, company news, promotion/sales information, etc...

And the great part is that it's a win-win for you. By adding this new information to your website every couple of weeks, you're going to not only receive Google/search engine benefits, but you'll also have great content for your monthly or bi-monthly eblasts.

You can consider calling this page on your website something like, "News." But, do you want to know the secret of what this page really is? It is a blog! That's right, for a small business person, having a "blog" as part of your website pays really big benefits. Now, if I had initially asked you to add a "blog," instead of a "News" page to your website, I may

have lost you. After all, many small business owners don't think of a blog as a pure online business tool. But, it can be. Big time!

In less than five minutes you can login to your blog's online control panel, type in a paragraph about your new fall promotion, new extended summer hours, helpful tip or new staff member, and Google will see your site as fresh and more relevant. Not only that, but as you're adding this new content to your site, you're automatically creating new web pages (the blog's software does it for you) with a lot of great keywords related to your business. That means even more opportunities to be found during search inquiries.

Also, with the Aweber ([www.aweber.com](http://www.aweber.com)) email marketing service I mentioned earlier, your blog posts can be sent automatically to your email list. How sweet is that?

## Part 8 | Test Drive

Picture this scenario: A potential customer comes to your website to get directions to your store. It's early March, but you still have a "Happy New Year" image on your home page (bad on so many levels). Having outdated content on your website makes you look unprofessional. That is why taking the occasional test drive through the pages of your website is a worthwhile exercise. How often? For most small businesses, I'd say once every couple months is sufficient, more frequently if your content changes often.



Here are some of the steps I take in my test drive:



1. Go from page to page and read over your content. All up to date? Good.
2. Now go to every page and make sure all your images are still there...ever been to a website with a red "x" where an image was supposed to be? Not good.
3. Go to the navigation bar at the top and bottom of your web page. (Yes, navigation at the top and bottom of your site is a good idea.) Click each of the links for each of the pages. All good?
4. What about the copyright info? Got the current year on there?
5. Now fill out the email marketing form you have on your site. Did it work? Did you get back the auto-responder email from yourself? Is everything on the auto-responder email still current?
6. How about grammar, spelling and punctuation? This is one that I always have a problem getting right. It's super-important that you get your website proofed from a pro whenever possible.
7. Finally, ask a business colleague or friend to take the same steps. You'll be amazed how often they'll catch something that you didn't.

Links that lead to a dead page, images that don't appear and content that's no longer relevant reflects poorly on you and your business. Take that occasional test drive just to make sure everything is always correct and up to date.

## Part 9 | Analyze

So your website is running smooth and you're picking up new business. You're bragging about it over Thanksgiving dinner. You know you're "all that." Now, let's add an advanced element into the equation. Let's "analyze." In our world, this means, "Web Stats!"

Web statistics. It's like being a voyeur to your own website activity. Creepy! How 'bout this, it's like opening a window and being able to see how people got to your website, and what they're doing once they're there.



The way you get your website statistics is a very similar process to how you get your email marketing forms onto your website. You're going to have to sign up for a free Google Analytics account. Then, you're going to get a piece of HTML code (don't freak out...it's just a little text.). You're going to want to give this snippet of code to your webmaster, and they will paste it under the hood of each page of your website. I don't recommend you do this yourself. This is one of those things many geeks may say is easy (easy for them to say). But, if you screw it up. Well, you're...never mind. You get the point. Unless you're going to make your website your hobby, doing anything "under the hood" in code is just flirting with disaster.

Once your Google Analytics code is on your web pages, it's continuously collecting data. Anytime, you can login to your Google Analytics account and see what's been happening on your website. Here are just a few things that you'll learn with your Google Analytics web stats:

- Number of visitors
- Number of page views
- Average time on your site

- Percentage of new visits
- Pages most often viewed
- Search engines used to find you
- Keywords used to find you

When you can analyze, you can understand behaviors. And when you understand behaviors, you can make adjustments to persuade more website visitors to your website and to get them to take the next step in the buying process.

## Part 10 | Keep Learning

I hope you've gotten the big strokes regarding what's most important while building (or rebuilding) an online presence for your business. It is true that your website has become the most important marketing

tool you have. You should be pleased with yourself. You know this. That's why you're reading this. You want to do it well. And you will.



The process of knowing everything about this online side of your business could take years to fully grasp (and I'm an authority on that misery). But, you don't need to know everything. You just need to know enough about what's happening (just as you would your print, radio, or any other form of marketing) to be able to communicate with the experts (web designers and web masters) about it. See, the more broad strokes you know, the better you will be able to communicate with the person or people that you'll contract to help you. And help keep you from getting ripped off.

I designed Website Blueprint ([www.websiteblueprint.com](http://www.websiteblueprint.com)) to help you through this process. But, there are many other sources that can help. Here are a few:

- Websites and Blogs
- Podcasts via iTunes
- Dummies Books
- Talking with other business owners

I'm not suggesting that learning how to create a successful online presence for your small business is easy. But, it is a necessity in today's business and marketing world. And there's no doubt that your online presence will continue to become more and more important from this point forward.

So keep learning so you can communicate effectively with those that who help you through the process. Educating yourself will save you hours of frustration, lots of money, and give you a website and online presence you'll be proud to say, "that's mine."

**Learn more at Website Blueprint: [www.websiteblueprint.com](http://www.websiteblueprint.com)**