**Business Online Presence Setup Checklist**

**Can you refine this further?**

This checklist focuses on the essential steps for a solo consulting business.

**Phase 1: Planning & Identity**

1. **Finalize Your Business Name:** Ensure the name is exactly what you want; this will be the basis for your domain and branding.
2. **Define Your Core Consulting Service:** Be clear on what you offer and who your target clients are. This helps inform website content and messaging.

**Phase 2: Domain Name**

* Your domain name is your web address (e.g., yourbusinessname.com).
* You will purchase this from a **Domain Registrar**.

1. **Check Domain Name Availability:**
   * Go to a few domain registrar websites.
   * Search for your desired .com domain name first.
   * If .com is taken, check .co, .net, or relevant industry extensions (like .consulting). Stick to .com if possible for credibility.
   * Make a note of available options.
   * *Example Registrars:*
     + GoDaddy: <https://www.godaddy.com/>
     + Namecheap: <https://www.namecheap.com/>
     + Hover: <https://www.hover.com/>
2. **Register Your Domain Name:**
   * Choose a registrar and purchase your selected domain name.
   * Opt for domain privacy protection if available (often free or low cost) to keep your personal contact information out of public directories.

**Phase 3: Website Hosting**

* Hosting is where your website files are stored online.
* You will purchase this from a **Hosting Provider**. Shared hosting is recommended for a solo consultant initially.

1. **Research & Select a Hosting Provider:**
   * Look for providers known for reliability, speed, good customer support, and affordability for shared hosting plans.
   * Check if they offer a free domain name for the first year (can simplify things if you register the domain with them).
   * *Example Hosting Providers (check their shared hosting plans):*
     + SiteGround: <https://www.siteground.com/>
     + Bluehost: <https://www.bluehost.com/>
     + HostGator: <https://www.hostgator.com/>
     + DreamHost: <https://www.dreamhost.com/>
2. **Purchase a Hosting Plan:**
   * Choose a shared hosting plan that fits your budget and expected website traffic (likely low initially).
   * Complete the signup process.

**Phase 4: Connecting Domain & Hosting**

* This step tells your domain name where to find your website files on the internet.

1. **Obtain Hosting Nameserver Information:**
   * Your hosting provider will give you specific addresses called "nameservers" (they usually look like ns1.hostingcompany.com and ns2.hostingcompany.com).
   * This information is typically in your hosting account dashboard or welcome email.
2. **Update Nameservers at Your Domain Registrar:**
   * Log in to the account where you registered your domain name.
   * Find the DNS (Domain Name System) Management or Nameserver settings section for your domain.
   * Replace the default nameservers with the ones provided by your hosting provider.
   * Save the changes.
   * *Note:* It can take anywhere from a few minutes to 48 hours for these changes to update across the internet (this is called DNS propagation).

**Phase 5: Professional Email (@yourcompany.com)**

* Crucial for professionalism. Using Google services here is an excellent choice.

1. **Sign Up for Google Workspace:**
   * Google Workspace provides professional email using the familiar Gmail interface, plus other tools like Calendar, Drive, Meet, etc.
   * Choose a plan (Business Starter is usually sufficient for one person). There is a cost per user per month.
   * During signup, you will specify the domain name you just registered. Google will guide you through connecting your domain for email.
   * Google Workspace Website: <https://workspace.google.com/>
2. **Verify Domain Ownership for Google Workspace:**
   * Google Workspace will provide you with instructions to verify that you own the domain you specified.
   * This usually involves adding a small code or record to your domain's DNS settings (the same place where you updated nameservers, but adding a *different* type of record, like a TXT or CNAME record). Follow Google's specific instructions carefully.
3. **Set Up MX Records for Google Workspace Email:**
   * This is the most critical step for email delivery. You need to tell your domain where to send emails for @[your domain].
   * You will update your domain's MX (Mail Exchanger) records at your domain registrar (or sometimes your hosting provider, depending on your setup - Google will tell you where).
   * You will replace any existing MX records with Google's MX records. Google provides the exact records and step-by-step instructions for common registrars.
   * Google Workspace MX Record Setup Guide: <https://support.google.com/a/answer/174125>
4. **Create Your Professional Email Address(es):**
   * Once the MX records are set up and propagated (this can also take time, similar to nameservers), you can create your specific email address(es) in your Google Workspace Admin console (e.g., yourname@yourcompany.com, info@yourcompany.com).

**Phase 6: Website Creation (Initial)**

* You need at least a simple online presence. You have options.

1. **Choose a Website Building Method:**
   * **Option A (Most Common for Hosting):** Install a content management system (CMS) like **WordPress** on your hosting account. Most hosting providers offer easy one-click WordPress installation. WordPress is very flexible but has a learning curve.
     + WordPress.org (the software): <https://wordpress.org/>
   * **Option B (Simple Google Option):** Use **Google Sites**. This is a free, easy-to-use drag-and-drop builder integrated with Google Workspace. It's great for very simple sites (like a basic landing page or online brochure) but less flexible and powerful than WordPress.
     + Google Sites: <https://sites.google.com/>
   * **Option C (Website Builders):** Consider dedicated website builders like Wix, Squarespace, or Shopify (if selling products). Some of these include hosting and domain options.
2. **Plan Your Website Content:**
   * What information do clients need? (Services offered, About You, Contact Info, Testimonials, Portfolio/Case Studies).
   * Keep it focused and professional.
3. **Build Your Website:**
   * Install WordPress (if using Option A) and choose a theme. Add your content.
   * Or, use Google Sites (if using Option B) to build your pages and add content. You can connect your custom domain to Google Sites.

**Phase 7: Google Business Profile**

* This is essential for local search visibility, even as a solo consultant serving clients remotely.

1. **Create/Claim Your Google Business Profile:**
   * This is a free listing that appears in Google Search and Maps when people look for services like yours.
   * Go to the Google Business Profile page.
   * Search for your business name. If it exists, claim it. If not, create a new profile.
   * Fill out all details accurately (services, service area, contact info, hours if applicable).
   * Verify your business (Google offers various methods like postcard, phone, email, or video).
   * Google Business Profile: <https://www.google.com/business/>
   * Add or claim your Business Profile help: <https://support.google.com/business/answer/2911778>

By following these steps, you'll establish a professional online presence with your own domain name, reliable hosting, a dedicated business email powered by Google Workspace, and a foundational website, even as a solopreneur. Good luck!