

A 'Gotchas' Guide to... DIY websites for Small Business

Kudos to you for building your own website, or even just starting to think about it. It's a bit of a minefield isn't it?

There are lots of website-building platforms out there which make website creation more accessible to everyone as well as quick and 'cheap' to create. But what are the 'gotchas' and the things you may not understand (yet) about this option?

**"Thinking of dipping your toes into
the world of DIY websites?
Find out if it's right for your business."**

DIY websites built on platforms like GoDaddy, Squarespace and Wix certainly have their place and there are some great designs and sites out there. What you don't want however is to build a beautiful website, then sit back and wait for results that can't possibly materialise.

As business owners, possibly dazzled by a shiny new website, could you be missing some of the key actions required to build a website that delivers tangible business benefit.

Free plans

These are great for the pocket in the early stages but not 'always' great for customer perception. Let me explain..

Sometimes, in return for free, you have to carry the website platform's branding too. While not a huge pain, it does detract from your own branding, especially if that's not too strong to start with.



Depending on your business it can also give the perception that you are too small to pay for a fully fledged website and that you're not well established yet.

**"You are effectively a great ad...
for someone else's business"**

Free plans are designed to lure you in. Once you've spent ages designing and building your website and shown it to your friends and family, the last thing you're going to want to do is build it again somewhere else. So when 'FREE' no longer works for you, it's probably too late - you're invested....

You don't actually own your website or the design

You are in fact only a subscriber to the platform. If you decided you were unhappy with your service or found that you needed to add paid-for functionality and costs spiralled, you couldn't just up and move your website to another provider.

You would need to start all over again. And even if you had the patience to start again, you would need to be very careful about keeping any SEO value you've built that's associated with your domain name.



More Functionality - More £££

One of the biggest challenges with website building platforms is that you are limited to just the functionality in the package you subscribe to. Sometimes you can add extra products to your service at a monthly cost, and sometimes you have to upgrade the entire package to obtain the single additional feature that your site needs.

Some platforms charge for all the little extras that you kind of expect as standard with a website. This results in monthly costs creeping up and before you know it, the total cost of ownership (TCO) is way above what you budgeted for.

The extras could include:

- Email: many platforms direct you towards subscription email packages like O365 if you want customers to be able to contact you from your website.
- SSL: this is the security certificate that gives your site that familiar padlock sign, indicating the site is a safe one to visit and interact with.
- eCommerce: a must if you want to sell from your website. This will always be an extra, as an add on or as a more premium package.
- SEO tools - whether you understand SEO or not, this is of huge importance in making your website visible. The way you build your website is just as important as any tools you employ after you've built it.
- Integration - with 3rd party apps like Mailchimp, Hubspot or Google Analytics.
- GDPR - you may need extra know how to make sure your site complies.
- Support - if you do get stuck, can you get help from your provider and how quickly can you get help (think email with 5 day turnaround v phone support)
- Limited bandwidth and storage - affects the size of your website, speed, storage space for images and emails and importantly, It can also impact performance. As you are on a shared hosting platform you're also at the mercy of your hosting neighbours.
- Premium templates - you know what its like. You scroll through 101 lovely design templates and then you pick the only premium template, but you've just got to have it!

Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)

SEO is a R-E-A-L-L-Y big topic and really important to understand. Without strong SEO your website is unlikely to rank well with search engines like Google, Bing and Yahoo. Even when SEO is done properly, organic growth takes time, so you really need to give this matter proper attention.

Your website needs to have been built with two types of SEO in mind. Broadly speaking there's on-site SEO and off-site SEO.

On-site SEO

On-site SEO refers to how your website is constructed, the actual content and the quality of the build itself.

This includes a lot of behind the scenes stuff like meta data, correct use of headings, labelling of images, device responsiveness..... I could go on.... for a long time!



Good on-site SEO helps search engines to understand what a human visitor would see (and what value they would get) if they visited a page, so that the search engine can reliably display what human visitors would consider good results for their particular search (keyword).

Semrush (an all-in-one tool suite for improving online visibility and discovering marketing insights) suggests these two basic checklists to ensure your website is constructed well technically.

Technical SEO

- ☐ Leverage "Inspect URL" feature in GSC
- ☐ Check for duplicate versions of your site
- ☐ Ensure your website is mobile-friendly
- ☐ Identify and fix broken links
- ☐ Check your site's loading speed
- ☐ Use an SEO-friendly URL structure
- ☐ Make sure you are using HTTPS
- ☐ Find and fix orphaned pages
- ☐ Find and fix crawl errors
- ☐ Check canonical tags
- ☐ Check the page depth
- ☐ Add structured data

On-Page and Content

- ☐ Fix duplicate, missing, and truncated title tags
- ☐ Run a content audit and prune content
- ☐ Find and fix duplicate or missing meta descriptions
- ☐ Optimize images for SEO
- ☐ Find and fix multiple H1 tags
- ☐ Organize topic clusters
- ☐ Improve title tags, meta descriptions, and page content
- ☐ Find and fix keyword cannibalization
- ☐ Update outdated content
- ☐ Improve content readability

Off-site SEO

This refers to actions taken outside of your website to impact your rankings within search engine results pages (SERPs). As this is additional effort that isn't related to your website builder as such, we'll park it there and perhaps come back to it another day.

But in simple terms (since you asked) it happens when other reputable places on the Internet (pages, sites, people, etc.) link to or promote your website, effectively "vouching" for the quality of your content.

Conclusion

As a small business owner, a website shouldn't just be a nice to have. Unless your website has a very specific purpose for a known or invited audience to visit it (eg membership or private groups) and you direct people to it personally, you'll need visitors to find it organically when they search for whatever it is you are offering.

"Know what you are trying to achieve for your business, with your website"

Your website needs to work for you and enable you to meet your business goals. It is an investment and can either drain your finances or pay for itself. Be savvy, understand what you are trying to achieve and make sure you understand both the limitations and benefits of using a DIY website building platform before committing.

About Beknowin

Sam Wakefield is Beknowin, a Freelance Wordpress Web Developer passionate about helping small businesses to get the most out of their website investment by offering business mentoring as standard with every engagement.

Hailing from a corporate career in the IT industry, Sam has also built several small businesses herself. She draws insight from her own and her customer's industries and her experience in solving all manner of business challenges, to offer advice, guidance and support.

If you'd like to have an informal chat about your website needs, get in touch.



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