


Running a Website With WordPress

A Quick Guide For
Business Owners

Alastair McDermott

 WebsiteDoctor



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WebsiteDoctor

books@websitedoctor.com

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Introduction

Imagine that you're hosting a dinner party where you *really* need to make an impression. You've been busy rushing around preparing your signature three course meal, setting the table with your good dishes, making sure the lighting is appropriately mellow. You know your guests are arriving any minute — but you're good to go — everything is perfect. As you open the front door to your guests, you happen to glance down and notice that you're wearing the wrong shoes and your socks don't match!

Odds are that no one will even notice, but it knocks your confidence right out. **That feeling sucks.**

You wanted to welcome your guests confidently; wearing your best to highlight all the hard work you've been doing and make the experience as pleasant and memorable as possible. But you can't forget about your shoes and socks.

As a website owner, just like a dinner host, there can be an awful lot to keep track of! And small mistakes — even ones that most other people don't notice, can have a bad impact on you and the overall impression that you make. You wouldn't want to greet your guests in bad shoes and socks — and your WordPress website shouldn't greet your readers without a clean appearance and smooth functionality — on the front end OR the backend.

But what do you need in order to *know* you've got it all under control? Here are some tips and lists to help you keep your WordPress website running smoothly so you can be free to focus on what you're really great at — serving your customers!

SECTION ONE

Website Essentials

Essentials Your Website Must Get Right

There are some general points that apply to all websites, WordPress and otherwise. These are the kinds of things you need to have in order to be taken seriously online and build trust with your website visitors.

1. Does every page on your website have a clear purpose and Call-to-Action?

The goal of a website is usually some type of conversion action – a direct sale, lead generation, subscription, contact form submission, phone call, etc. The design and content of each page should clearly convey the main message of that page to the visitor.

A confused website visitor won't take the action that you want them to take. They may even distrust your site because of the confusion, even if the design is visually appealing from an aesthetic perspective (this is why so called "ugly websites" can still be very effective).

Does your home page ask the visitor to Sign Up, or Buy Now, or Find Out More, in a clear unambiguous manner? If you're not sure,

take a start out by having them sign up to your email list and figure out your best call-to-action.

Learn more about Call-to-Action and website conversions [with this free guide](#). If you'd like an expert opinion, find out more about [professional website reviews here](#).

2. Does your site have a professional appearance, and work in a variety of different browsers?

A business site may need to project a certain image, depending on the market you are serving that could be a certain gravitas (e.g. legal and financial services) or frivolity (e.g. gaming or child focused). Decide what image you are projecting and ensure that the appearance reflects this and is appropriate to your visitor demographic.

Is your site design clean and professional or cluttered and overwhelming? Do you really need all of that text, or those social sharing buttons on every page?

Remove unnecessary elements that distract from your website's main focus. If you are familiar with your website back end you can do a lot of this yourself. Check out [“Don't Make Me Think” by Steve Krug](#), one of the best selling and most practical books on website design.

3. Does your site work well on mobile and other devices like tablets?

I strongly recommend using what's called “responsive design”. That's where you have a single website that works (i.e. responds) to all screen sizes and devices (the alternative is where you have separate mobile and desktop sites). There are some arguments both for and

against this approach, but I believe that the positives of responsive design far outweigh the negatives and it has fast become a new standard for websites. With Google's latest changes identifying mobile friendly websites it's almost essential. Test your site for [mobile-friendliness here](#).

4. Do you have an informative and interesting About page?

After the homepage, the [About page](#) is typically the most visited page on a website, so make yours professional and engaging.

The About page should allow visitors to see the human side of your business, demonstrate your business personality and passions, and clearly show your competence in serving your market.

Start by talking about your audience and their needs, not your business. This may seem counter-intuitive, but remember that people focus on themselves and their own problems first and foremost and demonstrating that you have their needs in mind sets you apart.

Other elements to use on your About page are:

- the story of your business and the people behind it
- real photos of you, your team and/or your offices or premises (do not use stock photos here, they stand out a mile)
- customer testimonials with real names and photos or logos if possible
- your business address and contact details
- your business legal information (registration number, tax number, directors, etc)
- a video about the business - and your customers

5. Do you have a blog, and is it updated regularly with content relevant to your customers?

Your blog helps drive traffic to your website, establishes credibility and authority in your field, and builds an audience. Some tips to get you started:

- Quality is important, it's better to have a fewer but higher quality posts than lots of mediocre posts
- Be on-topic to your customers and the problem you are serving for them
- Pick an interesting topic, don't be boring
- Go BIG with your titles, they are the single most important element of the post (check out [CopyBlogger's Headlines templates](#))
- Each post should have at least one picture
- Make the text easy to read: short sentences and paragraphs, use of bullet points and numbered lists, and check for typos and grammar errors
- Be careful of weird characters if pasting from a word processor
- Don't duplicate lots of content from other blogs or articles – it is ok to quote to create discussion, but make the quote less than 20% of the entirety
- If it's very *infrequently* updated, first consider removing the dates from the posts (here's [a quick tutorial](#) on how to do that!), and next start thinking about blogging more frequently!

Do you have a completely empty blog? My rule of thumb is that everyone should seed their blog with at least 3 decent blog posts when

starting out: one strategy is to have a short introductory post of ~300 words, a commentary of 300-500 words with some photos, and one decent in-depth post of over 1,200 words demonstrating expertise in your area of focus.

Want more help with blogging? Check out this [free blogging cheat sheet](#).

6. Speed: The Single Change That Can Get You 40% More Visitors

Did you know that slow-loading websites cost retailers over \$2 Billion in lost sales each year? Are you “leaving money on the table” with your website right now because of an issue like page loading time? Most websites are.

Nowadays, speed matters a lot. It's good for your SEO, and better for your visitors — [stats show](#) that **40% of people abandon** a website that takes **more than 3 seconds** to load, and a **1 second delay can result in a 7% drop** in conversions!

How long do visitors need to wait for typical pages to load? The faster the better; any little changes you make can help as even the most minor changes can add up quickly!

Slow load times can be caused by too many (or too large) images on a page, bad web hosting, bad coding, or even too many plugins.

For images, compressing and resizing them with [kraken.io](#) or [webresizer](#) is a great start.

If you suspect a plugin is slowing your site see the section below! Advanced tip: you can get a [detailed picture of your site loading time](#) to help track down problems. See this [website performance optimisation case study](#) for more options in speeding up your site.

Website Hosting and Speed

Good website hosting is essential, and is a topic for a book all to itself, but here's some quick rules of thumb that can help when choosing a hosting provider:

- Don't spend less than \$50/year on hosting (any less and they're not charging enough to deliver a quality service)
- Don't use a company that advertises on TV
- Don't use a company that is regularly listed in the many Top 10 Hosting Companies lists you'll find online (their position is rarely on merit)
- Don't use a company that offers Unlimited Disk Space or Unlimited Bandwidth (there's no such thing as an infinite size hard disk - you'll find that there's a so called "Fair Use" policy in their terms and conditions)
- Don't use a company that is less than 2 years in business

As I said, these are rules of thumb rather than hard and fast rules. Talk to other business owners and find out where sites that load fast for you are hosted.

I host WebsiteDoctor.com over at [SiteGround](#), and I do recommend them, but shop around yourself to see what's available.

One final tip related to hosting: I find that it's better and safer to buy your domain name from a domain name company, and buy your website hosting from a different company, ideally who specialise in website hosting. (I've heard the comparison of "get your car new tyres from a tyre centre, but use a full garage for service and repairs".)

You can buy the domain and hosting from the same company, and it will save you a tiny amount of time — and maybe even save you \$10 if they include the domain in the hosting fee — but you do run a small

(perhaps tiny) risk of having your domain name held to ransom or even hijacked by unethical providers, and in my opinion that's a good enough reason to keep them separate. Your domain is the single most important online business asset, keep it safe.

7. Do You Have Nice URLs?

Does your website have nice page addresses — called URLs or Permalinks?

For example, does your Blog live at *www.example.com/blog* and your About Us page at *www.example.com/about-us*?

Or are you stuck with an ugly and unfriendly default like *www.example.com/?p=1431* in the address bar?

If so, [set your permalinks](#) in the WordPress settings — I recommend "*Post name only*".

Advanced: if you set a custom structure of */blog/%postname%* you can have your blog posts appearing off *www.example.com/blog*, while your regular pages appear off *www.example.com/* — it's a bit of a hack but it's worked for years.

SECTION TWO

WordPress Tips

WordPress.com and WordPress.org

Starting out with WordPress, people are often confused by two very similar sounding things: WordPress.COM and WordPress.ORG.

In fact these are two very different things, and knowing the difference between them is important.

WordPress.com is a commercial website that provides free & paid website hosting services.

Use the WordPress.com hosting company only if you choose specifically to host your site there.

Hosting your website with WordPress.com is appropriate if you have very limited requirements for your website. Your website will be on the WordPress.com servers and subject to their restrictions. Be aware that many of the WordPress features that you'll read about in this book and elsewhere won't be available to you on WordPress.com.

WordPress.org is a non-commercial website where you can download the 100% free WordPress software.

Use the WordPress.org site to download the WordPress software.

For 99% of business owners who want to use WordPress and all of the incredible features it has available, you should be using the WordPress software from WordPress.org, but hosted elsewhere.

This is often referred to as “self-hosted” WordPress, and theoretically you are responsible for putting the software on your hosting and setting it up. In practice, most hosting companies already have the WordPress.org software downloaded and ready to be installed at the click of a button.

If someone has recommended that you use WordPress, it’s almost certain that they meant the WordPress.org software. Anywhere I reference WordPress in this book without the .com suffix, I’m talking about the software.

Choosing between WordPress.com and WordPress.org

The decision boils down to a trade-off between freedom and convenience. If you want a hands-off website with significantly less features and choices available, go with WordPress.com hosting. If you want a powerful and flexible website where you have to take more responsibility on your own shoulders, but you have the ability to maximise the potential of your website, choose WordPress.org.

Why I recommend WordPress

I’m sometimes asked why I use and recommend WordPress as a CMS — here are some of the reasons:

- It's free, for personal and commercial use. There are other systems with less features that sell for 6 figure licence fees!
- WordPress is very popular which means there are more design templates (called Themes) available, more add-ons (called Plugins) available, more programmers and designers all around the world who know WordPress, more documentation, help files, how-to videos and books like this one!
- WordPress is easier for non-technical users than all of the other powerful CMS's. One of the most important things for me is that a business owner can log in and edit their website quickly and easily without needing to email a web developer and wait 2 weeks.
- WordPress is a very powerful and flexible system with almost every feature you may need.

For balance, I would not use WordPress if:

- Building a very large ecommerce site with over 1000 stock items (this is an arbitrary figure and it depends on the project, but 1000 is my rough rule of thumb).
- Building a fire-and-forget website that will be left unmanaged — without updates and maintenance — for a long time. WordPress needs TLC — see later in this chapter.
- Specialised tasks like help-desk ticketing or project management task tracking (although there are plugins and themes available for these!)

WordPress Themes

Software like WordPress that is used to run websites is referred to as a Content Management System or “CMS”.

One of the major advantages of a CMS is that it separates out the different elements or components of a website behind the scenes.

For example, you could say that a website is broken down into four major components:

1. Content - the text, images, video, documents and other information that makes up the bulk of the website
2. Design - the design framework or template that determine how the Content is displayed
3. Functionality - tools and automated systems that add some kind of functionality to the site
4. Backend - the part that ties it all together behind the scenes

The advantage of having clearly segregated elements like this can be seen the first time you switch between two designs at the click of a button - all your content is still there but you have a whole new website design.

In WordPress, the design part is called a “WordPress theme”.

Getting a theme for your site

You can get a WordPress theme for your site in several ways:

- Use an off-the-shelf free theme
- Buy an off-the-shelf professionally designed “premium theme”
- Hire someone to design and create a “custom theme” specifically for you

Free themes

The [WordPress.org theme directory](#) is an official repository with over 2,000 free themes. You can access this via the WordPress.org website, or from within your WordPress website by going to *Appearance -> Themes - Add New*.

If using the WordPress theme directory, I recommend choosing a theme that's been last updated in 2013 or later from this directory as they will have more modern features and designs, and be coded better under the hood.

Premium theme marketplaces

The premium theme marketplaces sell WordPress themes from many different designers and because of the scale and diversity there's usually something for everyone.

The [Envato Themeforest](#) marketplace is the 800-pound gorilla in the room with nearly 6,000 themes ranging in price from \$35-60 (mostly at the \$45-50 mark).

The [CreativeMarket](#) marketplace has over 2,000 themes available mostly priced from \$50-150.

The [MojoThemes](#) marketplace is a bit smaller with around 1,000 WordPress themes, and these are priced around \$40-50.

Independent premium theme shops

These are many theme designers who sell their own themes independently of the marketplaces above. Sometimes they'll have a

single theme that they concentrate on, sometimes they'll have a range of themes.

Some examples include [ElegantThemes](#), [WooThemes](#), [StudioPress](#) and [OptimizePress](#), but that's only the tip of the iceberg, there's so many I can't include more than a handful here. Search for "WordPress theme <*your-business-niche*>" in a search engine you'll find a lot of options.

Custom themes

If you want to get a custom theme designed and coded for your website, the costs will be significantly higher than buying a premium theme, usually somewhere between \$500-\$2000. The benefit is that you'll end up with a design that is custom crafted and built specifically for your needs.

Costs will vary from project to project, small brochure-type sites will have very different requirements to large sites with lots of functionality, etc. I've written an [extensive blog post on this topic here](#).

The alternative is to buy a high quality premium theme, and customise that. This is quicker and less expensive, but less flexible than a fully custom build.

Tips on choosing a theme

Themes from the premium marketplaces are often very high quality in terms of design aesthetic. On the other hand, they're often so crammed full of features that they're slow and ponderous when installed on your site. Their creators are often more concerned with the visuals and adding more features — responding to market demands — but neglecting crucial issues like page load speed.

Premium themes are often highly dependent on quality imagery. This

looks great in with the stock photos on the demo site, but can mean that it's difficult to replicate that look when you're installing it on your own site and don't have photos of the same calibre to use.

One other thing to be aware of with premium themes is that they can sometimes be so heavily feature-laden that they are very complex to set up with hundreds of options buried deep in configuration screens. It can be worthwhile to hire the theme creators or a freelancer who is an expert in that particular theme to configure your site for you.

Custom themes can be awesome when they're properly designed and coded, but that requires a serious investment.

As a general rule, steer clear of free themes that are sourced from 3rd party sites outside of the WordPress.org theme directory, as they are often poorly coded and sometimes even a security risk. Don't use pirated copies of premium themes (or plugins) as they sometimes contain code to allow hackers access to your site.

My preferred balance of quality vs. cost is to get a premium theme from an independent theme shop. These are usually a good balance of high quality visuals, under the hood coding and speed. For example, the current theme on WebsiteDoctor.com is a StudioPress Genesis based theme with some design customisations.

WordPress and Plugins

I'm often asked "how many is too many plugins"? The answer is simple: one bad plugin is too many! The secret to using a lot of plugins for your business WordPress site is to add them one at a time, and get familiar with them and how your website and hosting react.

As a rule of thumb, I like to keep it under 20 active plugins, even down as low as 3-4 when possible. (Advanced tip: you can check your plugin performance with [Plugin Performance Profiler](#) to see how much each one is slowing down your website page load times, and consider disabling the bad culprits).

For your website security, always download plugins from the WordPress.org [plugins website](#) unless it's a premium plugin you've bought from the creators — using the plugin search directly inside your WordPress install automatically does this.

Essential Plugins Every Website Owner Needs

Here are the plugin categories I consider "essential", and some options for each one.

SEO

It's nice to have a plugin that takes care of the small SEO details that can be tricky. Many themes claim to be SEO-friendly, but very few theme designers have the depth of SEO knowledge that the top SEO plugin creators have, so I always use a plugin. I recommend Yoast's [WordPress SEO plugin](#), another good alternative is [All-in-One SEO plugin](#).

Contact Form

I like to offer an easy way for site visitors to send me a message without forcing them to open an email client.

A great free option is [Contact Form 7](#), which has a really simple contact form out-of-the-box, but also gives you the option to create detailed questionnaires to get all those important details from prospects.

If you're looking for something a bit more fully-featured with integration for CRMs or email lists, then I recommend [GravityForms](#) which is a paid plugin with a huge amount of options and supported

services.

Anti-spam

All bloggers know the pain of dealing with spam comments — the installed-by-default [Akismet](#) is a great solution. It's no longer free for commercial use, so you can also consider a simple but effective alternative like [Growmap Anti Spambot Plugin](#), or even a full blown commenting solution like [LiveFyre](#) (which I prefer to [Disqus](#) because LiveFyre writes the comments to your database).

Caching

My first tip on caching is that it's better to have high quality website hosting with no caching plugin (i.e. a professionally setup VPS) than low quality hosting and a caching plugin. (See above for hosting recommendations.) But many people are starting out on shared hosting so a caching plugin can help increase site performance.

Here's what I recommend to those folks: the two big guns of the caching plugin arena are [W3 Total Cache](#), and [WP Super Cache](#). Both are good, and I'd recommend both equally. I'll also add is that I've had difficulty using caching plugins with membership sites and any kind of protected content - in those situations it's far more important to have good hosting.

Advanced tip: if you're running your own server (e.g. VPS) then nginx with batcache can provide extremely fast WordPress performance as it cuts out MySQL which is normally the bottleneck in speed terms. You can get even more speed if you use HHVM instead of PHP, talk to a server admin about setting that up.

Backup

A lot of people use WordPress plugins for backup so I'll mention that here. I recommend that a WordPress plugin is not your only method of backup as if something goes wrong with WordPress your site doesn't get backed up! Personally, I use a service called [CodeGuard](#) which backs up all of my website files and databases every day, and can even email me a list of changed files.

If you do want to use a WordPress plugin ensure it backs up both parts of your site - the files and database - on a scheduled basis, and very important: you also need to ensure it doesn't fill up your entire hosting disk quota within a week or two, so ensure it deletes older backups automatically! There are a few different options available, my favourite options are [BackWPup](#) and [BackUpWordPress](#) — just remember to check the schedule and keep an eye on disk usage!

Advanced: [WordPress Backup to Dropbox](#) needs a little more setup, but you get offsite backup, which is really nice.

8 More Helpful Plugins

I really like these plugins which either provide a better experience to the visitor, or make life easier for the site owner:

[Broken Link Checker](#)

This free plugin emails you when it finds broken links (note: this is a server intensive plugin, so if you find your site running a bit slower, consider switching it off again).

[Subscribe To Comments](#)

This free plugin allows visitors get email updates about replies to their comments.

[Thank Me Later](#)

This free plugin sends thank you email to commenters at a scheduled time period after their comment.

Twitter Embed

This free plugin easily embeds tweets in your posts and pages by posting the tweet URL on a line by itself.

Yet Another Related Posts Plugin

This free plugin creates a list of relevant posts at the bottom of the current one.

Feedburner

This free plugin provides some nice options for RSS feed management.

Thrive Leads

This paid plugin helps you build beautiful and effective email list subscription forms.

SyntaxHighlighter Evolved

For the techies, this free plugin displays theme and plugin code in the Editor section with nice syntax formatting, great for when you need to make some quick code changes on the site.

How to Avoid Having Your Website Hacked (90% of Site Owners Don't Do This)

This one is simple: update your WordPress, Plugins and Themes regularly.

In fact you should stop reading this for a minute and go add a recurring weekly item in your calendar to check and update if necessary.

It's easy – all you need to do is login to the Dashboard and click the Update buttons until everything has been updated.

Some people are wary of breaking their site with an update. However, **it's almost always better to update when you see the update icon than not to update.**

Let me say that again: it is almost always better to update when you see the update icon. The only exceptions are if you know for sure something on your site is incompatible and will break, or if your web developer told you specifically not to update (and if they did tell you that, ask them why and get a second opinion on it)!

I mentioned earlier that WordPress needs TLC. I see WordPress sites that haven't been updated in years — it's hugely insecure, in fact **you're almost guaranteed to get your website hacked.** It also means you're missing out on new features. So keep WordPress updated regularly.

Test or development site side-by-side with live site

A slightly more advanced technique is to have a test website running in parallel with the live “production” website and test all changes there first.

Ideally this staging site (sometimes known as a test, development or “dev” site) is running in parallel to the live site and has all the same plugins and themes, and you test new plugins and WordPress updates there first.

(Typically there's no need to write new blog posts on the staging first, although some organisations have a policy of publishing all website changes to the staging site and checking before pushing the change to the production server).

Many web developers will set up a development site as part of a web design project so you could ask them to leave it in place for you to use

for staging when they're finished the project – it shouldn't increase development costs, apart from a small fee to have them show you how to use it.

If you don't have a staging site, you can create it yourself, here's a quick overview:

1. Create a subdomain called “dev” or “staging” in your hosting control panel
2. Install WordPress on it
3. Export your posts and pages with Tools – Export
4. Import the output file from the Export step onto the new WordPress site with Tools – Import (you may need to install the free plugin)
5. Install the same theme and plugins.
6. Set "Discourage search engines from indexing this site" to on in the Settings-Reading option screen on the dev site (but not the live site).

You can now test plugins and updates on your dev site before the live site.

Some hosting companies like SiteGround and WPEngine have staging built in and make this very easy.

Don't Update WordPress Core Instantly – Wait a Few Days

I like to **follow 4-5 days behind on major updates** to avoid bugs often encountered by early adopters, so if I see WordPress 5.0 released, then I'd hang on for a few days to see if a v5.0.1 was forthcoming (and if it is, I'd update to that immediately).

Update All Plugins Including Inactive Plugins

Always update Plugins when there's a new version available. **Inactive plugins can still be a security risk so make sure update them** if you have any that you haven't removed (which I recommend doing).

Delete or Update Inactive Themes

Update the built-in themes (TwentyFourteen, etc) when available **unless** you have customised them and you are not sure whether or not you are [using a child theme](#) (you should almost always be using a child theme). Check with [your developer or local WordPress expert](#) if you're not sure.

3 Simple Ways to Fix Problems Yourself and Avoid Calling in an Expensive Web Developer

If you do run into trouble after updating WordPress, here's how to troubleshoot some common issues.

First, check if it's the theme

1. Switch to a different theme (e.g. TwentyFifteen) temporarily to see if your theme is the problem (don't worry, your customisations and settings will be saved for when you switch back to your regular theme).

2. If your site works with the new theme, then your theme is broken somehow - time to talk to the theme author or a WordPress expert. If the site doesn't work, move on to the next step.

Next, debug your plugins

1. Disable all your plugins and see if that solves the problem.
2. If it does, start re-enabling them one-by-one.
3. When you encounter the problem again - then the last one you switched on is the culprit.
4. Look for a fix on the plugin forum, or delete and replace it with another.

If you're still getting problems after changing to a default theme and disabling all your plugins then it's time to contact your hosting company and ask if there are other issues that could be causing the problem.

Getting a "White screen of death" where you can't log in?

If you can't access the WordPress admin dashboard and instead you see a blank white screen, try following the solution in [this video](#). WordPress is an incredibly powerful and flexible system that offers almost infinite possibilities. If you follow these tips you'll be using it like an expert in no time at all!

SECTION THREE

Your Website Planner

Creating Your Website Business Plan

After reading the information above, you might have several ideas to improve parts of your website. You might even be considering transforming the entire site.

If you're like most business owners, you'll find the questions in this section useful in getting your thoughts in order and down on paper to help you capture your vision for the project. It's sometimes useful to think of this as a business plan for your website.

Some of the questions address the same topic from different perspectives, that's deliberate to help with the brainstorming & planning process – try and answer as many of these you can for yourself, but skip on if you feel it's duplicating too much.

You can download an [editable Word document version of this questionnaire](#).

What's your company name, and domain name for this website?

What do you want to achieve with your website?

What are your main reasons for making changes or commissioning a new website?

Describe the products/services/information your site will provide:

What's your timeline - when do you need your website changes complete by?

What is your specific reason for these dates? E.g., tradeshow, product launch, feeling of urgency to get started, etc?

Do you have a budget range for this project? Web designers will ask this as it enables them to guide you toward a solution which is appropriate, and can work with you to adjust the scope of your project to ensure that it meets your financial expectations.

In order of importance what are the business objectives for your site (e.g., improving sales rate, increase customer satisfaction, reduce time searching)

What is your measure for success, and what are you hoping to achieve? (E.g. 20% increase in sales, reduction in support calls, etc)

What aspects of your current site work well and why are they successful?

What's not so great and why do you think that is?

How many visitors is your site currently getting? Do you have access to any analytics (visitor tracking)?

Who's coming to your site, or who do you want to come to your site? Describe the different types of visitors to your website.

How do you think your audience currently perceives your company and the services you offer?

What do you imagine people using your site for? What will they want to do there?

Why will people choose your site over others?

Outline any ideas for features you have for your site

How do these features support your business goals and the goals of your user?

People are coming to your new site for the first time. How do you want them to feel about your company?

Who is your competition? To get a wider perspective, have a look at the websites of the top 3 businesses in your niche in your own country and two others e.g. I'd look at 3 competitors websites here in Ireland, 3 from the UK, and 3 from the USA.

What works for them in terms of design and content? What doesn't?

What Call-to-Actions are they using on their sites? Subscribe to their email lists and see what content they send you on. Can you use similar concepts in your online marketing?

Have you seen any other sites recently that you've liked the visual design of? What did you like about it?

Aside from the features above, what else do you want your site to do?

Do you have an online marketing plan or strategy in general?

Do you have a social media plan or strategy?

Do you need help in implementing and running your social media?

Where are you currently active online in terms of social media and where do you plan to be active?

Where are your ideal customers active on social media?

Moving from Planning to Implementation

Answering the questions above should give you a lot of ideas for your website; the next step is to take action.

1. Start by rewriting your notes as a step-by-step project plan, with a schedule and budget.
2. Prioritise the tasks as you prefer – by cost, time or ease to implement.
3. Decide if you want to make the changes yourself or if you would rather hire a professional.
4. If you're making the changes yourself, consider using a staging site as mentioned in Section 2, and start work!
5. If you'd prefer to hire a professional, contact developers in your local area or post your project plan on a site like [Freelancer](#).
6. Test your changes: look over the whole site for typos, broken functionality and design errors that might have been introduced.

Remember that a website is a live asset; it can be changed at any time. Don't feel that you have to make all of the changes at once.

SECTION FOUR

About

About the Author

Alastair McDermott is an entrepreneur and online business consultant specialising in increasing online sales for small businesses. He has been building websites and software since 1996.

Alastair podcasts and blogs at WebsiteDoctor.com.

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