

5 mistakes to avoid when building your website.

It is astounding to think that there are 1.11 billion websites on the internet right now¹. This means the odds of anyone randomly finding *yours* is slim to none.

You might wonder if it is still worth having a website, then. Actually, *not* having a website could cost you dearly. For example, if someone wanted to do business with you, but can't find your website, you could send them to the next competitor they do find in their search results.

Other big mistakes can be deciding to solely use social media as your online presence or paying annually for an expensive hosted website platform where you 'squeeze' your business into a pre-fabricated template. These 'cookie-cutter' websites are usually expensive, offer no individual design or branding and typically provide a poor user experience.

So what's the alternative? With some simple planning and preparation, you can create a customised website with an effective design and layout, as well as the important functionality to gain online sales, leads or bookings. To help you navigate this minefield and avoid the most common website mistakes, here are 5 potential pitfalls and how you can easily avoid them.

Mistake # 1 - Using a hosted website platform.

As mentioned, using a hosted website platform – such as Shopify, Wix, BigCommerce or Squarespace – can ultimately waste you hundreds if not thousands of dollars. Statistics show you have 10-20 seconds² to engage your website visitors and a bland, generic website without strong branding or content just won't do that. Your website needs to be as unique as your business is – consider it an *extension* of your business. It needs to match your business image and offer content to a potential customer the same way you would **in person**. A custom-designed website created especially for your business will better achieve this, and ensure your money is spent wisely. Additionally, when considering costs, it is critical to take into account the total number of hours it will actually take you to set up your website (e.g. customise the design, write engaging SEO-friendly content, setup payment processors, etc.) and how many additional necessary features (such as shipping rates, subscription services, etc.) you will need to add to the total annual expense when considering their monthly costs.

One final warning about using hosted platforms – you effectively do not own your website. With software like WordPress, you can easily backup and export your website to any web host you choose. But when a website is built on a hosted platform, you will find it very difficult to transfer and get it up and running elsewhere

¹ Siteefy website, accessed 20 November 2023, <<https://siteefy.com/how-many-websites-are-there/>, 25th Aug 2023>.

² Nielsen Norman Group website, accessed 20 November 2023, <<https://www.nngroup.com/articles/how-long-do-users-stay-on-web-pages/>>.

without big bills from the hosting company or a web developer.

Mistake # 2 – Having no target demographic.

It might seem obvious, but who are you aiming to attract to your website? Is it a particular market segment such as women aged 50 to 65 years or a particular profession or trade? Is it a special location or country, such as customers located in Australia? Becoming 100% clear on *who* you want to attract to your website will ensure greater success. For example, a hair care company targeting hairdressers as their demographic need to design a website that projects style, beauty and 'on trend' imagery; which in turn builds customer confidence and trust in their products. As another example, if you wanted to target 20-30 year olds, focussing on embedded video content and interactivity to allow interested buyers to experience the product would be most effective. Without first considering your target demographic, you will end up creating a website that is aimed very generally at anyone and everyone, with minimal success.

Mistake # 3 - Designing a website without a clear purpose.

Another critical question to answer before building your website is what is your goal? You might answer, '*to make more money*', and while that is a noble ideal, you will need to know 'how' that is going to happen if you want to succeed! Consider instead what direct behaviour you want to initiate from your website visitors: do you want them to sign up to your mailing list or just buy your products or book services directly online? Do you want to get qualified leads so your sales staff can personally follow up and convert them to sales? Or perhaps you just want your website to serve as a virtual showroom, so potential customers don't have to visit your store in person? Only you, the business owner, know *exactly* what response you are aiming to gain from your website, and so these questions need to be answered before you even consider engaging a designer or choose a platform.

Mistake # 4 – Not including key information about your products and services.

I can't emphasise enough how big this is, especially when you take into account the brief time you have to 'wow' your website visitor. If you forget to include critical information that your customer has come looking for, they will leave to look for another website that *will* answer their question(s). Some real-life examples I have experienced include: toilet paper websites not specifying if their paper is suitable for all plumbing systems (FYI - this is crucial for a septic-tank system owner!); grocery websites not clearly listing ingredients, dietary or ethical information for their products; clothing stores without a measuring guide to ensure you order the right size first time around; and the list could go on and on.

To avoid this problem, try thinking like your customer (*not* like the business owner!). What might be the first thing your customers ask when they come to you to purchase? What concerns do they tend to have? What will make them purchase right there and then? What questions might your target demographic prioritise – do they care more about the cost of a product or its environmental and social impact? If you can come up with all the reasons a potential client or customer might have for *not* buying from you, you can quickly allay their fears right on your home page to get them to stick around.

Mistake # 5 – Expecting your website to be a stand-alone marketing tool.

Many websites are setup to *look* attractive, but finding what you need can be quite frustrating. To prevent this, your website needs to *mirror* the way your business operates so it can be more than just an expensive online catalogue.

Ask yourself these questions:

- Does your website assess potential customers' needs *before* leading them to relevant pages with goods or services for them to consider?
- Does your website answer potential customers' questions to help overcome initial objections and convince them to get in touch?
- Does your website expect customers to just purchase instantly online and if so, does this method suit your type of product or service?

For example, rather than just expecting website bookings, a massage therapist might be best first addressing some of the reasons people *don't* book massages. Similarly, a gym might focus on the top reasons potential members *don't* join, and address these online to gain leads or new sign-ups. If you present your information in the way your clients ask about it, you have the greatest chance of gaining a lead, sale or booking. If you don't, visitors will likely keep searching for a website that does.

Spending some quality time planning the layout of your new website is as important as laying a strong foundation for a house. The plans you come up with will help you choose the best designer or software for your needs and ensure you don't waste thousands of dollars on an ineffective website.