WEBSITE
PLANNING
GUIDE

AND WORKSHEET

Arleen West

WEB SERVICES

ARLEENWEST.COM

A website is not a set-it-and-forget-it type of thing. There are a multitude of things you need to think about such as how people will find you and how you will convince them that you're the business they should trust.

A good website is not one with all the latest features and design trends. A good website helps the visitor find what they're looking for so they can make an informed decision. This guide is meant to help you focus on what's important to help your website visitors get the most from the experience.

Use this guide with the accompanying worksheet to plan your website.

GOALS

When planning your website, the first thing you need to ask
yourself is what is the goal or purpose of the website? What are you hoping to
achieve? What will your business provide? All websites fall into one of two
categories.

- Direct Sales
- Lead Generation

Obviously, the ultimate goal of any business is to get more
sales, but how you make those sales depends on the type of business you
have. Let's examine the differences in each type of website.

Direct Sales: You list your products or services so visitors to purchase directly
from the website.

Lead Generation: Most websites fall into this category. The goal
here is to get the visitor's information so you can follow up with them. You
can do that by giving them something in return for their information – like a
newsletter signup, free quote, etc – or it even be a simple as providing a
contact form or phone number they can call.

You might have noticed I didn't list "blog" or "portfolio" above. That's because
those are types of websites that can be integrated into either of the website
goals or purposes I outlined. Those are ways for you to gain trust and authority
with your audience no matter what your goal is.

GOALS

Types of Websites

The type of website you choose will depend on the type of business you have and how you feel comfortable presenting your business. There are six basic types of websites. Website types can be combined. For example, a photographer could have a portfolio website where visitors could purchase prints of the photos.

There are no hard and fast rules when it comes to creating a website. What's important is the website meet the needs of the business.

- **Blog / Vlog**
- **Ecommerce**
- **Portfolio**
- **Membership**
- **Landing Page**
- **Marketing Funnel**

Blog / Vlog: A blog is typically a collection of articles, or posts, centered around a particular topic. Blogs allow an individual or a small company to show their knowledge and expertise in their field. A vlog is simply the video version of a blog. Some vlogs include the video with the transcript printed below which I'm a great fan of. Sometimes I'm just looking for one piece of information and don't really want to spend the time watching a whole video.

GOALS

Including a blog or vlog on your website is an excellent way to attract new clients or customers as it helps to build trust.

Ecommerce: This is a direct sales site. You list your products or services and visitors can purchase them directly.

Portfolio: A website to show off your previous work.

Membership: A membership or community site can be free or paid. It might start as a blog and evolve into a private community for people who share a similar interest. If you're selling courses or coaching a membership site is a way to provide extra features and benefits for your clients and students.

Landing Page: A one-page website. It could be a simple page with the pertinent info for your business or it could be a sales page for a specific item.

Marketing Funnel: A marketing funnel is a type of landing page. Typically you would use paid advertising to drive traffic to the page which may be offering something free for an email address or an item for purchase. Once people are in the funnel, they'd be on your email list where you'd be able to make other offers.

CONTENT

The type of content you use will depend on the type of website you choose which really depends on the type of business you have. (See how this builds on itself?)

Businesses selling physical products will want to use a lot of images and maybe some videos showing how the product can be used. Service based businesses may incorporate blog posts with industry news and advise in addition to listing the services.

PLATFORM

Choosing where to build your website is based on a number of factors including, who will be doing the work, which platform offers right features for the type of website you need, and your budget. There are lots of options. I'll cover the top options here.

Wordpress is the platform for roughly one-third of the world's active websites and there's a reason for that. The platform is highly flexible and customizable, and (basically) free. All you need to do is purchase a domain name and hosting and you can install Wordpress for free.

> **Pro Tip**
> *A Wordpress can be as simple as one page but offers the ability to add more features as your business needs change.*

Wordpress is, first and foremost, a blogging platform so it's optimized for that function, but the blog can be hidden making it work well as a regular website. With Wordpress, you can start small with only one page and extend it as your needs grow. Wordpress' capabilities can be extended by installing plugins. There are literally thousands of themes to choose from, categorized by business type. Almost all provide basic functionality for free with premium features available for purchase.

It's not the easiest of the website platforms to use, but it's the most flexible. You can install page building plugins that allow you to easily create pages with a drag-and-drop interface. Some hosting providers even include Wordpress page builders with some of their plans.

PLATFORM

Squarespace is a proprietary hosting platform. You can use Squarespace for any type of website. The designs are contemporary, and I'm told from people who use the platform that it's fairly easy to use. There are several pricing packages to choose from depending on your needs. Squarespace offers a free 14-day trial.

Wix is another proprietary hosting platform. It is similar to Squarespace except you can publish a basic site(s) for free. The free site will have the Wix logo and you won't be able to use your own domain name. What's nice with Wix is you can duplicate your website and test changes without damaging your live site. Wix offers ecommerce or membership sites with a paid plan.

Shopify is an ecommerce platform. It has everything you need to get a store up and running in an afternoon. Like Wordpress, you can purchase premium themes and extend the functionality through plugins or apps as they're called on Shopify, but it's not required. Shopify offers a two-week trial, after which there are two price plans to choose, depending on store volume.

There are tons of other easy website builders out there including Weebly, Webflow, Site123, and more. Your website hosting plan may include some sort of easy website builder. Remember, while these builders may seem like a quick, easy and inexpensive way to get a website, they are limited and may cost you more in lost business in the long run.

WORKFLOW

As I said at the top, a website is not a set-it-and-forget-it thing. There is maintenance that needs to be done regularly just to keep the website software secure and running smoothly. Also, a portfolio or blog needs to have new content added regularly. So who is going to do that?

If you're a **solopreneur**, or just starting out and don't have a big budget, you'll probably opt to do it yourself. Keep in mind that even with the easiest builders you'll need some basic understanding of website design, (HTML, CSS, and image editing) or you may wind up frustrated because some aspect doesn't display the way you like. Yes, answers to your questions are just a Google search or Facebook group question away but it's time consuming, and that means time away from your business.

If you have one or more **employees**, you could assign the website to one of them, but the same applies as above. Additionally, how would the added responsibilities of designing and maintaining a website affect their current duties? If you have the budget, it may be wise to hire a new employee specifically to deal with the website.

While it may seem expensive to hire a **professional designer**, consider how much your own time is worth. Can you afford to take time away from your business to create a website? A designer will help you clarify your vision and plan the type of website that works for your business and budget.

A good **compromise** may be to hire a professional to design and build the website, then manage it in-house. Be sure to invest in training so you can update and edit your website with confidence.

RESEARCH

Do some research into your competitor's to determine what you should include, or want to include and how you should present your information. Be really critical when you do this and ask yourself the following questions:

What do you like about your competitor's websites?
And what do you dislike?

In other words, view their website as if you were a prospective customer. How well are they conveying who they are, what they do, and how you can do business with them? What kind of value are they providing? How easy is it to find what you are looking for?

Now take a look at your own website with the same critical eye. What do you like? What don't you like?

Next, make a list of some words or phrases that describe your service or business. When doing this, don't just think about the obvious (like web design services) but think about how your product or service will improve the life of the customer.

Do a Google search using these words and phrases to see what comes up. Use tools like Google Search Trends, the Google Keyword Planner and Keywords Everywhere to validate and find related search terms.

These are the words you'll be using to rank in search so you want them to be the basis for all of your content and copy.

GATHER

- **Logo** - Make sure you have the original files from your logo designer so you can provide them to your website designer.

- **Brand Colors and design elements** - If you don't have it already, decide on a color theme for your website, and your brand. You may have gotten a palette from your logo designer. You'll need to pass the color codes on to your website designer so everything is uniform. Also provide any shapes or design elements that are specific to your brand.

- **Tagline** - Your tagline is a brief statement about what you do. Mine is *Online Success Starts Here.*

- **Images and video and content** - Gather all your images, videos, articles, testimonials and any other content you want included on your website. Put them in a folder so you can easily find them and share them with your designer.

- **Domain name and hosting** - Have your hosting platform and domain name decided upon and purchased.

- **Social media** - Have the links for all of your social media accounts ready.

- **Keywords** - What are the words and phrases people use to find your business when searching the internet.

WEBSITE PLANNING WORKSHEET

Goal (Purpose)

What are you hoping to gain from a website?

___ Direct Sales
___ Lead Generation

Website Type

How is your business best represented? You can combine types.

___ Blog/Vlog
___ Ecommerce
___ Portfolio
___ Membership
___ Landing Page
___ Marketing Funnel

Platform

How is your business best represented? You can combine types.

___ Wordpress
___ Squarespace
___ Wix
___ Shopify
___ Other

Workflow - Who will do the work?

___ Me
___ Employee
___ Outside designer
___ Combo - designer set it up, then maintain in-house

WEBSITE PLANNING WORKSHEET

What do you like about your competitor's websites?

What do you dislike about competitor's websites?

How well are they conveying who they are, what they do, and how you can do business with them?

How easy is it to find what you're looking for?

What kind of value are they providing?

WEBSITE PLANNING WORKSHEET

What do you like about your website?

What do you dislike about your website?

What are some words (keywords) you would associate with your business? How would someone look up your product/service in a phone book or on Google?

Design Elements Checklist

    ___ Logo
    ___ Brand Colors and design elements
    ___ Tagline
    ___ Images
    ___ Video
    ___ Content
    ___ Hosting Platform
    ___ Domain Name
    ___ Social media links
    ___ Keywords