



Guide to Building a Small Business Website

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GETTING STARTED

Building a website for your small business may seem overwhelming, but today's consumers expect brands to have an online presence. However, your goal should not be to have a website just for the sake of having a digital presence. It should be an integrated aspect of your overall marketing plan.

To begin, identify the purpose of your site:

- Are you starting a new business?
- Do you need to find new customers for your current business?
- Do you want to generate more sales?
- Do you want to provide a more engaging experience for your customers?

Next, know your target audiences.

Remember, your site is designed to attract potential customers. Therefore you need to know what their wants and needs are. Communicate to your customers using language and imagery that answers their questions. It should clearly articulate your business' value proposition so visitors know why they should choose you over your competitors. Be careful to avoid technical language and jargon. While this may be the way you discuss your value proposition internally, it may not be clear to site visitors and potential customers.

WEBSITE CONTENT

Web Address and Security

You will need to decide on a domain name for your site. Make sure that your website's URL is easy to understand and reflects your business. It is a good idea to brainstorm a few ideas in case one or more are already taken. You will also need to determine your top level domain (TLD), which is the suffix at the end of your web address, i.e. .com, .net or .biz. You may also want to register other domain suffixes at the same time to prevent another business from taking them and link those back to your main domain. For example, if your site's URL is www.mysite.com, consider also registering, mysite.net, mysite.biz, etc.

After you have registered your domain name, you will next need to find a host for your site. The host is a server that will store all of your public access data. Additionally, you will need to choose a content management system (CMS) to build your site. There are many do it yourself sites that can also be customized by a developer, if you chose to hire one. These include: WordPress, Squarespace, Wix and Get Your Business Online from Google. When choosing a CMS, consider the purpose of your page. Will you this be an eCommerce site, a blog, etc. This may help you choose the best CMS for that purpose.

Even if you do not have an eCommerce site or manage monetary transactions on your site, security is an important issue to internet users. Set-up your site as an HTTPS site and list the lock icon in the address bar to create trust amongst your users.

Text and Keywords

If you have not yet embraced the phrase, "content is king," you should now. Having strong and engaging content across media platforms will promote a successful digital marketing strategy. Knowing your audience is crucial to creating meaningful content. Consider how someone who has never heard of your business might search for companies like yours. What questions are they asking? What services/products are you supplying? Using this information, you can authentically create content that answers these questions and also makes your site more relevant to search engines.

Top Things to Consider When Developing Content

- Are you emphasizing the right text? For example, do you have a compelling header to grab a visitor's attention?
- Is there a strong call to action that is immediately visible?
- Is the page easy to read or skim to find the answers the user needs? Is the font large enough? Is the information broken into small-sized bites? Should you use a bulleted list, etc.?

Keywords that answer your audience's questions should be included within the text content of each page. Each page should answer a specific question or target a specific problem. It is recommended to focus on a key phrase or group of related key phrases that accurately reflects the topic of each page, within that page's text. This will help communicate the purpose and topic of the page to both search engines and visitors.

Including 400-700 words per page with approximately 4% (no more) of these words being keywords is considered good practice. Keyword "stuffing" is the practice of including multiple instances of your keywords to try to boost your rank on search engine results pages (SERPs). Google's algorithm can detect this practice and will penalize your site if you use this practice. That is why it is important to authentically include key words and key phrases in your text. This is also more user friendly and appears natural to visitors.

Architecture and Usability

The most important content of your site should be linked and emphasized on the homepage. This content should direct your site's architecture and drive your primary navigation. The primary navigation to be immediately visible and accessible on your homepage, and should provide easy access to information or services the visitor needs. Users will not click multiple times to find what they need, they will lose interest and go somewhere else where the information is more readily accessible.

Having said that, offering a search field in the top right corner of your page allows visitors to search for exactly what they need on your site. This can alleviate frustrations and help your site provide a more user-friendly experience.

Branding

Your webpage should have a similar feel to any other marketing materials you use. Make consistent use of your logo, preferred fonts and brand colors. You want to create a consistent look across mediums. Whether it is a website, social media, email or printed collateral, it should be easy for the user to quickly identify your brand and know what you represent. If you have a brand guide, follow these guidelines and update your guide to include digital media.

Similar to maintaining consistency between mediums, you should also ensure consistency between pages throughout your site. An easy way to do this, is to create a custom header and footer that are used on every page on your site.

Page Design

A current trend in website design is the use of the single-page site. While these sites are very appealing to the eye, they are probably not the best choice for small and new businesses. Having multiple pages on a site gives search engines more information about the relevancy of your site to a user's search query. This can help your rank and visibility on search engine response pages.

Additionally, use of media-rich technologies like JavaScript can allow you to add sliding banner images or other types of automation or animation on your pages. Creating an aesthetically appealing site is important. However, you should not rely too heavily on these technologies. Search engines are not able to "read" this information as easily, and it can be detrimental to your SEO when used too much.

Google now estimates that at least 50% of all web searches occur on mobile devices and in April of 2015, they instituted their Mobile-Friendly Update. After this update, any site considered non-mobile-friendly will no longer appear on SERPs when searching on a smart phone. Therefore, having a responsive design that is mobile-friendly is an important aspect of being found by potential customers.

SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION

Search Engine Optimization or SEO is the process of implementing website design and development practices to promote the visibility of the website in search engine's organic (unpaid) results. This does not include AdWords or pay-per-click advertising. A page optimized for search engines would show-up on the first SERP based on multiple queries for the page's product or information, not just the brand name. For example, if someone searched for sneakers, and you were an athletic shoe store, you would want to show up on the first page of results, so that potential customers could find you. This aspect contributes to why keyword research and use is so important.

To understand the importance of SEO, it is helpful to first understand how search engines work.

Search Engine Response Pages (SERPs)

Google is continuously adjusting their search algorithm to create a better user experience for searchers. For example, search queries have become more conversational, and Google has responded by becoming better at serving increasingly relevant websites based on these long-tail search queries. Therefore, it is important to optimize your page for these conversational queries in addition to singular keywords.

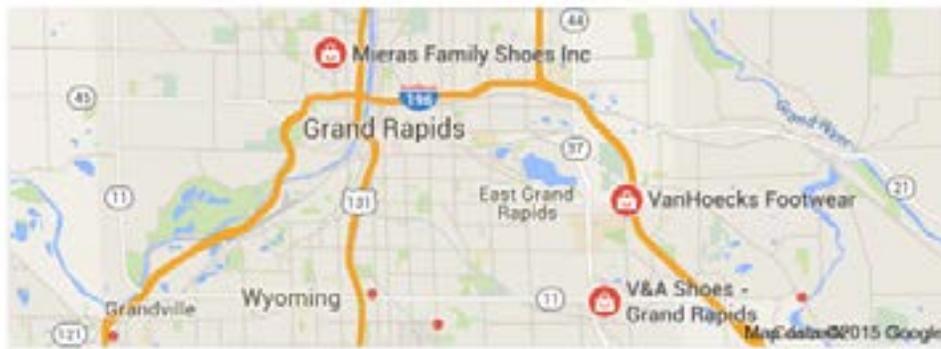
Additionally, Google regularly updates what their SERPs look like. They are now attempting to answer the query directly on the SERP in addition to providing sources (websites) for further information. One way they do this is by producing Knowledge Graphs of information that can range from a Wikipedia snippet to a table of local restaurants that includes addresses, hours and descriptions of the fare offered.

SERP Examples

General SERP Listing for Query "Chuck Taylor Sneakers"



Knowledge Graph from Google Query for "Where to Buy Shoes in Grand Rapids, MI"



Mieras Family Shoes Inc
4.3 ★★★★★ 6 reviews · Shoe Store
Leonard St NW
Open until 9:00 pm

VanHoecks Footwear
2 reviews · Shoe Store
E Paris Ave SE
Opens at 10:00 am

V&A Shoes - Grand Rapids
1 review · Shoe Store
28th St SE
Opens at 10:00 am

Knowledge Graph from Google Query for "Converse"

Converse

Shoe manufacturing company



Converse /ˈkɒnvɜːs/ is an American shoe company with a production output that primarily consists of sportswear and lifestyle brand footwear. [Wikipedia](#)

Founder: [Marquis Mills Converse](#)
Founded: February 1908, [Malden, MA](#)
Customer service: 1 (888) 792-3307
CEO: [Jim Calhoun](#)
Acquisition date: July 9, 2003
Parent organization: [Nike, Inc.](#)

Profiles

[Facebook](#) [Twitter](#) [Instagram](#) [LinkedIn](#) [YouTube](#)

People also search for

[Vans](#) [Adidas](#) [Foot Locker](#) [New Balance](#) [Zalando](#) [View 15+ more](#)

Structured Data Markup and Rich Snippets

Structured data is the technical name of a specific tagging vocabulary used to annotate the data included in the page's code. For example Google will read "(616) 555-1234" as a string of numbers unless structured data markups are added to the code to inform Google that this is a telephone number. Rich snippets are the text shown in search result pages as an outcome of structured data markups (see General SERP Listing above).

Importance of Rich Snippets: Rich snippets improve how search results are displayed and make it easier for searchers to find the best web content. Snippets differentiate your listing from the competition and help engines better understand the value of your content. This leads to better quality visitors.

No Guarantee from Google: Google supports rich snippets for reviews, people, products, businesses and organizations, recipes, events, music and video content. Google does not guarantee use of your markups, but it is beneficial for your website to be optimized with these pieces of information.

Product Markups: If you are selling online, you may want to include structured data regarding the price, product details and reviews. Note that product markups are only supported by Google if the main topic of the page is a specific product and the product is available for purchase directly on the page. Google does not support a category of products, list of products or product markup for pages that require a user to visit a separate seller's site or contact a seller offline to complete a purchase. See more on https://support.google.com/webmasters/topic/4599102?hl=en&ref_topic=4598337

Schema: Google, Microsoft and Yahoo created Schema as a standard language for markups and to make the crawl process easier. Be sure to follow the Schema guidelines at <http://schema.org/> when adding structured data.

Google Analytics™

This free web tracking service from Google must be set up on your website to collect analytics from your site. It is a very valuable tool that will provide insight into your site's traffic; who visits, where they come from and their behavior when they are there. Be sure you have a Google Analytics account setup and connected to your page.

HTML Tags

These tags are a part of the code of your page. They include Page Titles and Header Tags that help communicate the purpose and topics of your site to the search engine. Meta tags or page descriptions are also helpful in communicating the purpose of your page. Although page descriptions are not "read" by search engines, they help the end user understand your page's topic markups (see General SERP Listing above for an example of a page title and description).

Page Titles: Page titles should include both the company name and relevant keywords. For example, CNN has a page title that reads "Technology News - Computers, Internet, Invention and Innovation Tech from CNN.com." This is a case of subject, followed by brand. Apple's iPhone page reads "Apple - iPhone 5 - Loving it is easy. That's why so many people do." This is an example of <insert brand> followed by page subject. It is recommended that you optimize the title with the most important words first.

Page (Meta) Description: The meta description tag allows you to suggest how your pages should be described in search listings. If the page title is the equivalent to a book title, the Meta description would be the synopsis found on the back describing the book. The page description may not be a search engine ranking factor but it is a “display factor” which helps catch the user’s eye and may drive more traffic to your site.

Header Tags: While less important than good page titles and descriptions, H1 and H2, H3, etc. headings may define the topics of your page to search engines. Each page of your site should have unique header tags. Think of them as an outline of your content that communicates the importance of information on your page to both search engines and users. Headers should always use a hierarchy based on importance, the above being more important than the below.

H1: The H1 (H for header) tag is the most important header tag and each page on your site should have one unique H1 tag. H1 is the general topic, title phrase, or sentence on your page. The H1 header tag should contain information considered to be the theme of the page.

H2: H2 tags are not as important as the H1 tag but also provide information to the engines. You should use one or two H2 tags on each page of your site.

H3, etc.: Use as many H3, H4, H5 and H6 tags as necessary to emphasize subtopics or subtitles on your page. Think of them as a hierarchy based on importance; priority is highest on the top and decreases as you descend the list.

`<h1>Heading 1</h1>`

`<h2>Heading 2</h2>`

`<h3>Heading 3</h3>`

`<h4>Heading 4</h4>`

`<h5>Heading 5</h5>`

`<h6>Heading 6</h6>`

Alt Tags: Search engines cannot see your images so you must use alt tags to inform the engines of the topic of the picture. By using alt tags, you increase your odds of ranking higher and appearing in image searches by providing key words and signals to search engines. Also, alt tags make your images viewable by people who use screen readers or to those who browse with images turned off. Not all images need alt tags. If the image does not convey something of importance, you do not need to use an alt tag. In addition to alt tags, it is important to be descriptive when you name your graphics.

Creating descriptive, keyword-rich file names is crucial for image optimization. Search engines not only crawl the text on your webpage, but they also search for keywords within your image file names and your image alt tags.

Blogging

Search engines give more weight to sites with newer content, so updating content on your site regularly is important. The best way to do this is to maintain a blog. Successful blogs are updated more than once a week. However, at the very minimum, you should be creating new blog content once per month. Blogging also provides a venue to build an audience and inbound links as well as establish yourself as an expert in your field.

Social Share: Include social media buttons to make it easier for readers to share blog content.

RSS Feed: Install an RSS feed to allow visitors to subscribe to your content and receive updates in their RSS reader when new content is posted.

Blog Topics: Use customer questions, books you've read, workshops you've attended, industry articles, new products, and industry trends to spur your thinking.

Content Management: Be sure you have a high quality content management system and utilize appropriate tags (rel-canonical and nofollow) to mitigate duplicate content.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

301 Redirecting: To a search engine, “craigslist.com” and “www.craigslist.com” are not the same thing. Setting up a permanent redirect (also known as a “301 redirect”) allows you to get full credit for what’s on your site, no matter how it’s accessed.

Alexa Traffic Rank: The traffic rank is based on three months of aggregated historical traffic data from millions of Alexa Toolbar users and data obtained from other, diverse traffic data sources, and is a combined measure of page views and users (reach).

Alt Tags: The text that appears in place, when and where an image cannot be displayed. Alt tags can also help with your search engine rankings by increasing the keyword density (if you use your keywords in your ALT tags).

Anchor Text: The words that hyperlinks display when linking to another document or location in the web. Search engines use this text to help determine the subject of the linked-to document.

Broken Links: Dead hyperlinks on websites.

Inbound Links: Also known as backlinks are incoming links to a website or web page. In the search engine optimization (SEO) world, the number of backlinks is one indication of the popularity or importance of that website or page.

Keyword Density: This is a percentage showing the number of times your key word/phrase shows up throughout a single page of content, based on keyword/total number of words ratio.

Keyword Research: Finding viable (high search/ medium-low competition, medium search / low competition) keywords. These should be relevant to your site. Setting a minimum level of search volume should help you greatly narrow down your prospects.

Keyword Stuffing: The excessive use of keywords in titles, descriptions and/or content.

Meta Descriptions: A description is an abstract or summary of the web page. Search engines use these descriptions, or part thereof, when your site matches on a given search term and it has to show a small summary of your site.

Organic Keywords: An organic keyword is a keyword used to attract free traffic through search engine optimization. Organic keywords contrast with pay-per-click (PPC) keywords, which are bid on through paid search marketing campaigns.

Pay Per Click: PPC is a form of online advertising that revolves around the purchase of sponsored links on the pages of the search engines that display results. Google AdWords is an example of PPC advertising.

Rich Media: Various technologies used to enhance a recipient’s experience, such as streaming video or flash to interact instantly with the user.

Rich Snippets: Code markups that summarize the content of a page in a way that makes it even easier for users to understand what the page is about in the search results.

RSS Feed: Rich Site Summary or Real Simple Syndication is a family of web feed formats that leverages XML for distributing and sharing headlines and information from other web content (also known as syndication). RSS feeds allow the user to have new content delivered to a computer or mobile device as soon as it is published.

Search Engine Response Page (SERP): The listing of results returned by a search engine in response to a keyword query. The results normally include a list of items with titles, a reference to the full version, and a short description showing where key

Source Code Validation: An HTML validator is a quality assurance program used to check Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) markup elements for syntax errors. Syntax errors, such as open tags, extra spaces, or forgotten quotation marks, can cause a Web page to look drastically different than the creator intended, or render correctly in one browser, but not in another.

SSL: Secure Sockets Layer is a protocol for encrypting information over the Internet.

Stop Words: Certain words, such as “the,” “a,” “an,” “of,” and “with,” are so common and meaningless that a search engine won’t bother including them in their index, or database, of web page content. So in effect, the stop words on your web pages are ignored as if those words weren’t on your pages in the first place. Including a lot of stop words in your title tag waters down the title tag’s keyword density.

Title Tag: Title Tag is the ‘name’ of the page that you see at the top of the browser. The page title should be determined by the relevant contents of that specific web page. The contents of a title tag for a web page is generally displayed in a search engine result as a bold blue underlined hyperlink.