

Topic : Websites unraveled.

Your website is the cornerstone of our online marketing and your public persona. It communicates who you are as a business.

Let's face it everyone googles nowadays. If you are considering using a service or buying a product do you go and check out their website? This guide is going to look at everything we need to do to get our websites up and running to be our online persona, our online marketing, and our online 24/7 salesman.

Start with the end in mind! One of our favorite sayings. And it means that you need to understand what your site will look like before you build it. This is the most effective way of building websites. It gives you a plan and a timeframe in which to achieve it. If we don't set up a timeframe we never seem to get it finished, and if we don't create a plan then we don't know when we have finished. Once we have finished we need to maintain our site, schedule updates and not let it get tired and old looking. It doesn't mean that we have to redo our website every time we get bored with it, we just need to make sure that it continues to be functional and usable and finished!!

Let's start off by better understanding why websites are so hard to create and get finished. It is important that you understand that many business people struggle with their websites particularly if they are doing it themselves.

So why is building a website so hard?

Technology: Most aspiring small business people get stuck here. Getting a handle on the technology side of your business can be really overwhelming. But it doesn't have to be this way. Becoming a web programmer is probably not the best use of your time, but you do need to feel in control of your website and you do need to go PRO in all areas of your business, especially your website. It's going to bring up insecurity and fear and overwhelm and confusion and frustration. It still does with me and I have been doing this web stuff for over 10 yrs. I get frustrated when things don't work how I expect they will, but it happens all the time. But don't let the fact that it can be challenging be an excuse to quit or hide from it. It can be very straight forward and easy to get control over. Deciding on what you need your website to do, and how you are going to make that happen is easier than you think. Be prepared to roll up your sleeves and get down and dirty with getting this job done.

Such a big job: In our own mind we often think about our website as a huge job and it can be if we want to complicate things. But we can also break it down into small chunks and create a plan to get it done. We can get stuck on design, or functionality, or the fact that we don't think we like our branding, logo and so on and therefore we simply stop in our tracks and don't move forward. This is where it is so important to create a web site development plan to make sure the jobs get done.

Who what where why and how? All the questions we need to answer to make a plan.

Who will be responsible for building and maintaining your web site? What is your website going to make available to your clients? Where will you house your site? Why do you even need one? And how are you going to make it happen? If we develop a plan that we can follow, then we can easily have a great website up and running in no time.

I always like to start with the why. If we know our why then we have *our motivation* for getting the job done.

Why do we need one?

It's the first impression, people will look for you online. Everyone googles in today's world and people will check you out online before they contact you. you need to give them a great first look and feel of what your business is all about.

Showcase yourself and your message

You don't have to talk to people face to face to have your message of who you are and what you do heard. You can showcase your why here. You can blow your own horn without having to feel weird about telling the world how great you are.

Available anywhere anytime

Your website is open 24/7. Your business won't be. Some people google at all hours of the day and night and your website can give them all the info they need to make a choice about using your services.

Gain credibility as a business

Just a camera and a Facebook page does not make a professional photographer. It is expected in today's society that a genuine business will have a website. Its shows that they have invested in themselves and are more likely to be around in years to come.

Makes it easy to do business with you

Customer service is so important and the more information you can make available to a client the more comfortable they will be with using your services. So you can think of your website as giving wonderful customer service before ever even being in contact with a potential client.

Communication tool to speak directly with your customers

Marketing is all about communicating and what better way then on your website. You can use words, videos, Pinterest boards, a blog. So many ways to reach those that want to work with you.

Contact information

How is it best to contact you. and I don't just mean add a contact form. That takes the control away from the clients. That might want to email you directly, or phone you, or text you, or Facebook you. You need to have multiple channels of contact established and that should be easy to find on your site.

Build a list of potential clients.

You will often hear the term list building. This is building a list of potential clients that have given you permission to email or direct post to them. This is vital in building a solid base of previous clients as well as potential clients.

What is going to be included in our website?

What is going to be on your site is the next consideration. As a business we want our website to entice and attract our clients, we want it to give them all the information that they need to know in order to make a decision to work with us or contact us for more information. We need it to be easy to navigate and easy to read.

We need to create a mud map of how our websites pages relate to each other, what the purpose of that page is, and what content that we want on that page. This can be done without any consideration to the design of the pages themselves, this is structure, not branding.

Who is responsible for your site and where will it be created

Do you have the time and the technical skills to build your own site? Would it be better for you to outsource this process? What are the options?

You have 3 basic options when building a website:

- learn to do it yourself
- outsource the process
- use a premade service.

We will look at each of these options and work out what is best for your business.

How you will make all this happen?

A plan of attack will keep you on track and make sure you consider all the options while developing a plan for you.

You now know the theory behind building your website, but no amount of hoping and wishing will make it happen so it's time to get down and dirty with the details.

And remember we don't like to always have to start from scratch, so we are going to see what it is about our current position that we are not happy with. We will incorporate a new design and a redesign so you can always go back and reassess your web site down the track if that is what you want to do.

The must haves

One thing I have learned over the years is that there are some non-negotiable elements that work with every website:

Time to answer some basic foundation questions.

Showcase yourself and your message

What is my domain name?

Why are you designing/redesigning your website? What is the purpose for your web site?

Think about what your website will do for you as a business person. Go back and read over the section about why we need a website and write out here your motivation for having a website.

What is your business's message? (if you are not sure what that might be then think of 5 words that you want to come to mind when people think about your business. and why do you want them to think of those words)

Who is your target audience? (Not sure then do our ideal client anytime training <http://members.theseirlsmeanbusiness.com.au/index.php/anytimetraining/>)

Who are your competitors and is there things about their sites that you love? (think outside the square here and check out some of your favourite photographer's sites.) Look at navigation and structure, not the prettiness of the site. Something that sometimes is hard to do – separate the branding and design of the site with the structure of the site.

What are the top 3 keywords for your industry? If you could sum up where your business sits in the industry what would be the 3 key words that you would want to be googled for. You can brainstorm if you want then go back over the words you have written and find your 3 words from that.

What is my branding and style? What colours, fonts, logo, watermarks etc will you be including in your site. Branding is so very important. Consistency in colours, fonts, feelings, style is what people remember. It's something, like knowing your ideal client, that you need to understand as a professional business. many businesses have a branding guide that they use to make sure they consistently use their branding correctly. It's great when you have others helping you with your business because it is something that you can just hand over and they know they need to stick to the branding guide.

What is the first impression I want to give my target audience?

Your landing page is the very first impression that someone gets when they land on your site. What does that impression look and feel like? If you have a current site, then find out someone else's impressions of your current site by checking out <http://peek.usertesting.com/>, this is great for getting feedback once you create a new site as well.

How does my site currently convey a feeling of trust and authority?

“how does it what” I hear you say!! Are you demonstrating that you are knowledgeable about your field? That you are worthy of their trust, that you have authority to speak about your area of the industry?

You don't need anyone's permission to be an expert in your field. There are however some ways of being perceived as an expert.

Firstly, own it and declare it. You run a business so you must be good at what you do so say so!! “I am a photographer”, be loud and proud about it.

Share it! You love what you do and you have a gift that can be expressed only through you. Share what you do, why you do it and why it gets you out of bed in the morning smiling because you can't believe you are so lucky to be doing this for a living.

And Prove it!! Do you have testimonials, awards, been published or any other way of demonstrating trust in your brand and authority in your industry? This is one of the reasons we love the AIPP so much because the title of accredited photographer can be used in demonstrating your dedication to the industry. The use of the accredited photographer logo gives credibility to your business.

So what can you add to your site to build trust and demonstrate authority?

If you are redesigning

You might have a site that you think is ok but needs a facelift. Or you might just hate it and want to start from scratch but if you do have one then you already have a place to start. So don't trash it and start from the very beginning, do a little research into it before you make it over. **what about my site needs to change? What don't I like about it?**

what is my site not achieving at the moment?

Does the branding and style need to change?

Is your target audience changing as part of this redesign

Does your branding and content align with that audience?

What is missing?

Benchmark your current info for future assessment.

Number of visitors, bounce rates, time on site, top performing pages/keywords, new leads, pages that received traffic etc.

Content plan

So we now know why we need a website, and we have the motivation to build one. We might have had a look and learned from our old website and we have done some research into what we like, what we want to include and so on. It's now time to create a structure, a framework, a foundation to build on.

Navigation structure

Navigation structure is the key to planning a website. It works out how your visitor will flow around your site. It's all about connecting your visitors with the information they are looking for. We can take the information that we want to give our potential clients and group it into easy to understand chunks. This then creates our global navigation. The global navigational menu that is on every page on the site. This lets us move around the site without having to go back to the home page to find what we are looking for. It lets our customers find out what they want to know about us without them having contact us so it is very important that the flow of information around the site is easy to navigate. It will sell our business for us while we sleep.

Define which pages will be your main and secondary navigation, we have given you some ideas for your main navigation

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Home/L anding page<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Info<ul style="list-style-type: none">o o FAQ'so o About/meet the teamo Pricingo Contact Why use and accredited<input type="checkbox"/> Blog<ul style="list-style-type: none">o o photographero o<input type="checkbox"/> Portfoli FAQ's<ul style="list-style-type: none">o o What to wearo o Revealso Latest work oo Babieso Familieso Weddingso Corporate	Use the example to create your navigational structure here.
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Remember that you don't want to have a site that looks too busy but you also need to make it easy to find information quickly and easily. This navigation structure will be a guide and will be useful to you no matter what platform you decide on. It is also required regardless of if you are doing it yourself or having someone build it for you. This will guide you to ensure information is easy to access.

For redesigned sites

What stays, what goes what needs to be rewritten, what call to actions do I have.

Do an audit on your current site and write out all the navigational pages such as about us, contact us, portfolio, blog, client area etc.

Once we have the basic outline for the global navigation we can start to flesh it out a little further. For example, your contact page is generally expected to include your business name, your location or locations that you travel to, hours your open, your phone number and email address, social media links and so on. Sometimes it will also include a simple form to contact you. for each of the individual pages that you have decided you need to then decide what needs to go on that page. What is the purpose of that page? The blog is a little different and can be left out for now as we will talk about that a little more in depth later. But the most important thing to remember is what is the purpose of this page. Where possible only have the information listed once but then refer to that information in the content of your page. So as an example if you refer to contact information then link that piece of text to the contact us page.

It is sometimes easier to create the page content outside of the website initially so you don't get distracted by the website design. If you know that you need particular components it makes it easy to then copy and paste them into the website after. Even if you have someone build the site for you, populating the site with content will still be left largely to you to do.

Some of the things you will need to include are title, meta title, meta description, category, summary, the main text, plus any images or links to online media such as videos and the like.

You can create all the content for your site without ever going online. It's about what you are going to put up on each of your pages, not how the pages look and feel. I bet you are no starting to notice that I keep saying this over and over, content and design are very separate but easily confused when done together.

By creating all of this content off line you will be prepared when it comes to create your site because all of the content is ready to go. This is often a stumbling block for web designers and developers because they can build the web site, but they can't populate the content, they still rely in the client to provide them with the information that they need to do that part of the job. The more expensive web specialist hire in copy writers to then take that content and perfect it.

Functionality

Time to brainstorm about all the bells and whistle that you want on your site.

- Do you want a Blog?
- Will you be needing private galleries for online sales?
- Will you need a calendar to be able to book and accept payments for sessions and packages?
- Do I want to use video on my pages?
- What other products might I sell on my site?
- Does it have opt in to newsletter functionality?
- Is it mobile friendly?
- Can I change to my colours, branding and logo?
- Can I easily change the site content, navigation and layout?
- Do I want it to lead people to my Facebook page?

List everything that you want your website to do here.

Time to take it to the web! So what are your choices as far as getting it up online for the world to see.

We mentioned earlier you can DIY, you can outsource or you can use a premade service. Let's explain what is involved in each of these options.

DIY can be much cheaper but also very time consuming and a big learning curve for some. Let's also talk here about premade services because you still have to DIY these but there is less choice in what and how you do them.

DIY and premade services

Premade services are sites that will host your website for you and have templates that you can choose from and often a shopping cart for selling that is very easy to use. Great if you do online sales. Great if you have all your pages sorted and know what you are after. Great if you are not too fussy in which design you use and if you don't want to control the hosting of the site. But if these businesses' go bust or you want to move your site to a new company or platform then you have to start at the very beginning because you can't transfer your site out from these companies. If we want full control over what is ours, and we want to have control over the look and feel of our site, then this option might not be for you. You put your content in the hands of others and trust that they will be safe.

Some of the options for these kinds of premade services include Foto Merchants who do have a 14 day trial and if you want to save a few dollars use link <http://admin.fotomerchant.com/register?pc=TGMB15> It gives you the 1st year of your subscription for \$240 instead of \$336, other companies similar are bludomain, square space, zenfolio, photoshelter, just to name a few and there are new ones coming in to the market all the time. They all have many similar features but it will take some time to have a good look at each and do your research. Most have a 14 day free trial to go in and have a look around and see if you find the site easy to work with. You will be the only one who can decide what will work best for you. Each one will have some kind of learning curve so make sure you set aside some time to get it up and running.

If you are a bit of a control freak and also a bit of an it nerd like me then you will want to have full control over you own site. This means you will need to learn basics of html, css and usually a platform like WordPress. There are all sorts of fancy plugins that you can then add to your site as well as templates galore from so many different places online that you can incorporate into yours site. Your hosting service will have backups made of your site, but you will want to also keep your own so you can move your entire site to a new web host if your current one is not satisfactory.

WordPress can be confusing because there is a wordpress.com and wordpress.org site. the .com site will host for you and give you some control and is free and if you are on a budget this is a good option because you can pay a small amount and get your domain to work with it, however it still is owned by someone else. You can load WordPress on to your own hosted site and have much more control over the site, with the ability to easily move the site if necessary. There is more choice in templates and you can create your own design if you are really clever. You can get lots of plugins to do just about anything that you can dream of in WordPress, but learning how to incorporate those into your designs can be tricky. This guide is not here to teach you how to do WordPress but there is plenty of online information that will help you. <http://www.creativebloq.com/web-design/wordpress-tutorials-designers-1012990> has a list of great tutorials that will get you started.

This DIY is the do it all yourself version and can be very time consuming, very frustrating and a huge learning curve, but if you have the time and the interest in it then go for it I say. It can also be very satisfying to know that you have control over every aspect of the site. There are also lost of WordPress experts out there that you can hire to come in a fix up anything that you manage to mess up.

Finally, I just wanted to add that if you are not planning anything fancy then you can always get started with a blog page. You have a blog page plus pages that end up looking like a website. These are very restrictive but can do the job if you are on a tight budget. Check out blog.com, blogger.com, medium.com, Penzu.com, squarespace.com, wix.com or google free blog sites and see what might be new in this area.

Hire a professional

If you don't like the sound of any of these options so far then perhaps it's time to shop around for a web specialist. You will still need to give them plenty of information so they can build the site that you want but it will be much easier, you only then have to add the content and can leave the design and functionality up to them.

You will need to make sure you are very clear on exactly what you want before you hire them. Every extra thing you think of later will add dollars to the bill. So make sure you have a great plan before talking to anyone about what you need. Remember asking a website developer what his price is, is the same as asking a photographer how much they charge. It depends on what you want and need. And also remember that web designers and web developers are different. One designs the look and feel of the site while the developer codes and makes the design come to life.

Start this process by making a list of everything you want and need in your site. If you are a small business, by giving this to a web specialist, they will then have an idea of the size of your project. don't be offended if your project is too small for them, if they can't or won't work with you then ask for a recommendation. Ask to see some work or testimonials of their work. Don't be afraid to call the business that they have done work for and have a chat to them about their experiences. As them if they would hire them again, if they are happy with the work, what they most liked about working with them. Make sure you find out their exact involvement ie design vs development.

To make it easier for them to work with you it's a great idea if they are designing the site as well as doing the development, to screenshot a heap of sites that you like and that you don't and make notes about what you like and don't like about them. Create a Pinterest board that they can use to get an idea of the style you are after. Have clear site navigation ready to go. Write your web copy and gather all that you need for each page, and take note on special features that you like. Something like drop down search box, or pop up box that opens when someone goes to close a window. The more you can visualize what your site will look and feel like, the easier it will be for them to create it for you. Without direction they are clueless. They can't climb inside of your head to find out what it is that you like and dislike.

Interview them for the job. Ask them what was their favorite and least favorite project and why. Ask how quickly the job would be done, what their availability is like, what hours they work, what they are most talented at, if they maintain sites after they are built, if they do all the work themselves or outsource parts.

Once you think you have the right person ask them the following questions:

- What if I am not happy?
- Set clear deadlines
- Will you receive all files (particular with designers)?

- Will they need site credit?
- What is the payment schedule?
- In creative work, who owns the copyright.
- Will they train you to update the site or is there ongoing cost for them to do that for you
- Is your site backed up?
- Will they provide documentation should you get someone to maintain or change the site down the track?
- Will they host and track the site or do you need to find a host
- Will they test the site before it goes live?

Think of as many things as you can that might go wrong and clarify all of this before you start any project.

On a tight budget but want to outsource, contact your local college of graphic designers or web developers and pay a student to do it. But remember that you get what you pay for. You might save some money but you also will have to deal with less experience and more contact and control over the project.

What is a blog, when should we use one, and how we can use blogs for FAQ's?

Let's talk about other ways to use a blog feature on your website that is more than just a typical blog.

Let's think creatively about how we can use this feature that almost every website has as standard today. Some people love their blog. It is a creative outlet to showcase what they are doing but it takes lots of time effort and commitment to blog on a regular basis. All the experts tell us that we need to blog regularly in order for our blog to be interesting.

And I don't disagree with this concept. But blogs can be more than how we see them traditionally. Blogs don't have to have dates on them. You can turn this feature off at any time which means you don't know how old a post might be or how regularly you are posting.

We can use categories to create links on our navigation that auto populate. An example is the podcast category that we have on www.thesegirlsmeanbusiness.com.au. You can group information about your business on your site using this feature. So if you add your recent shoot sneak peaks to a category of recent work, you can then use that category to set up a navigational link to your category, making it easy for potential clients to find what they are looking for. You could do the same for products, or galleries or work.

Can you see where I am going with this?

You don't have to use your blog facilities in the traditional way, you can use the categories within blogs to create a single link to interesting information and relating articles. We can create pages that are actually a collection of posts about a single subject.

What is it that you clients are looking for? Is it easy to find on a blog. Wouldn't they appreciate it if you helped them find the most common questions that they have in an easy to navigate way. In today's online world we like to wander around and look at stuff, but we also love it when the stuff we are looking for is easy to find. Think like a potential client. What is it that they are looking to find out about your business when they come to your website? What can you help them find more easily by using blog categories?

Summary

You need to go Professional especially with your website.

Don't let the technology beat you on this one.

Don't let the challenges be an excuse to quit.

There are only 3 options that you have when it comes to your website.

- Learn to do it yourself and have full control over everything using a platform like WordPress.
- Find an all in one off the shelf solution like Foto Merchant.
- Hire someone to do it for you.

That is, it. That is all choices you have. So which of these options did you choose?

Once you make your choice you need to commit to getting the job done. If you choose to hire someone you still need to know what you want. If you are going to do it yourself, make time to dedicate to learning what you need to do. If you are going to use an off the shelf solution, make sure you spend some time getting it all set up and ready to go.

It won't happen unless you make it happen. We talked about the MUST HAVES. Must be mobile optimized. Must communicate who you are, what you do and why you do it. Must look like your brand Must give your contact information on every page. Must be small amounts of information, don't bombard with too much info No Music.

If you are an accredited professional photographer with the AIPP use the logo. That is what you pay your membership dollars for. Shout it from every possible spot you can and get as much mileage out of that logo as you can.

Think about your web site from a prospective client's point of view. Make it easy for them to use your site. What would they like to know about you and your business? Remember that it's nice for you to be really happy with how pretty the site is and how great a job it does demonstrating your brand, but it must be useful for potential clients to find out what they want to know about you.

Think about what you are looking for when you go googling for information. Functionality is the key to web site control. How we can organize our site to make this ease of use work for our clients. This is all in the navigation of the site. How will people get around and find stuff.

We use static pages for things that we don't change very often. We can use the blog features on our site, particularly the categories feature to add extra searchable info for the site, even if we don't want to have a blog.

And finally. Take it all in little bites. Think about your website as you would your house. You have lots of rooms to decorate and you might add on some extensions. Don't try to do too much at once or the whole job becomes overwhelming, one small step at a time. Work out what you need to do, make a list, and then work on it. Every time a client asks a question, turn it into a blog post and add it to a category. And before you know it you will have a fully functional, wonderfully branded website that you love.

Yes it will take work, but it will be well worth it.

80% of business's websites get looked at before a business is contacted so it needs to be your number one marketing piece when it comes to showcasing your business..... **so what is stopping you.**

Now I ask this question because this is important. If you can understand what is stopping you, then and only then can you work out a way to make it happen.

Is it time? Schedule it. Get up ½ hour earlier in the morning and spend 20 mins working on this project.

Is it the technology that is holding you back? Ask around and see if there are any tech gurus that can help you to get started. Join a Facebook group for help, search YouTube for how to videos.

Don't know what it should look like. Then work on your brand first. If you don't have your branding sorted, then the site might end up a mish-mash of stuff that you think looks cool together.

Is it the cost of setting up a site? Then learn as much as you can while you save up the dollars to get what you want.

Identify what is stopping you, and find a way to work around it. This is important. And finally if you want to be professional, you need to look professional and act professional. Having a professional looking and feeling web site is imperative to building trust and attracting people to your business.

The steps we need to take to get our website up and running:

What is your motivation?

Our site needs to look like our business:

What do we want to be known for?

What will be showcased?

What functionality do we need on our site?

What decision have we made about our blog?

What will the navigation look like?

What content do I need for each page?

What will use to collect data to list build?

How will I make this happen?

Example: Mels Website

The steps we need to take to get our website up and running:

What is your motivation?

To have a public space to showcase my work, my business, my services. 24/7. To demonstrate that I own a legitimate business. To make it easy for people to find out how to work with me and to get questions answered without having to contact me directly. This will be my main marketing vehicle. This will be how people will make a decision to work with me.

Our site needs to look like our business:

clean, simple elegant. White with hints of brand colour and use of logo and brand fonts.

What are the keywords we want to be googled for? Family Photography Adelaide

What will the first impression look and feel like? Professional, easy to find information, organised.

How will I convey a feeling of trust and authority? My including a page on accredited photographers, by highlighting my awards. My referring to myself as a master photographer. By including a link to “for photographers” and testimonials from clients.

What do we want to be known for? Natural relaxed family portraiture.

What will be showcased? Family, babies, pets.

What functionality do we need on our site? Nothing fancy. dropdown box and list building box.

What decision have we made about our blog? Will be used for information to do with sessions, and to highlight shoots.

What will the navigation look like?

- Home/Landing page
- Info
 - o Why use an accredited photographer?
 - o About o
 - o Pricing o
 - o Contact o
 - o testimonials
- Blog
- For Photographers
- Portfolio
 - o Bumps, babies and births.

- Families
- Weddings ○
- Corporate ○
- Weddings ○
- Animals.

What content do I need for each page?

Content will go under the following headings:

- Page title
- Page URL
- meta title
- meta description
- category
- summary
- the main text
- images
- links to video.

What will use to collect data to list build? Link to full pricelist

How will I make this happen? DIY Wordpress. www.melneumann.com

Individual global pages landing page, portfolio, for photographers, Blog and info pages will be created will all content prior to build.

Build and submit a site map to google <https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/183668?hl=en>