intermingle
the art of online communication

Everything you need to know to build your first website!

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Business Name

Deciding on your business name can be one of the most time consuming tasks. Once you have it narrowed down to a few possible choices it's important to run a few checks to make sure it's going to work for you. The first obvious check it to make sure no-one else has registered it – but before you run off to see if your name is available, I suggest you check the domain registry first. As this can save you a lot of toing and froing. If you can't get it as a domain, regardless of whether or not it's available as a trading name, your back to the drawing board – read on to the Domain Name section for possible domain name options and links for checking availability.

Australian Business Name Registrations

The best way (and most cost effective) to check and register your business name is through ASIC direct, there are a number of business name registrars online – they are all private enterprise and while their websites are a little simpler to use if you can persist with ASIC you will get a cheaper and reliable result and be registered for notifications and be able to update the information yourself as well as link it to the government/tax related portals. Follow this link - You don't need an ASIC key to register. If you don't have an existing ASIC connect account – register first, alternatively sign in and proceed from there.

Domain name

Gone are the days of the traditional .com, .com.au and .net domain name extensions. It's become increasingly difficult in this overcrowded space to get the name that suits you. But with the advent of new gTLDs (Generic top-level domains) the choice just got better! You can now choose from over 370 new domain name extensions, for example :-

.agency

.bargains

.coffee

.community

.company

.construction

.tours

So your domain would be www.yourname.tours or www.yourcafe.coffee for example (no .com or .com.au on the end) just the actual extension.

Prices vary and the registration cost for one year ranges from $30 to up to $100 with an average of around $50 – for specialist ones though you could pay up to $1,200 – i.e. .theatre is one of those high end extensions. You pay approximately the same price to renew every 12 months also. To view the full list of available domain extensions – click here, to get a quote on any of these domain extensions – just shoot us an email with your preferred domain address.

To check availability of a domain name I would suggest using www.netregistry.com.au to do your initial searches as they are authorized to register the most common gTLD's for anything not covered by them, [feel free to contact me directly](#).

Registering Multiple Domains

To protect your brand you might consider registering multiple domain names – the dotcom and the dotcom.au versions if you are operating in Australia the dotcom.au version is always the preference and the dotcom should be considered a bonus if you can get it. If you can only get the dotcom for a business name and you are running your business in Australia you could do a google search and see what business they are in. If they are similar to you, I would suggest you change your name to avoid sending your clients their way. If they don't have a website you could see if they are willing to sell the domain to you.

Another reason to register the dotcom.au version i.e. mybusiness.com.au as when you register a .com google automatically assumes that you do business in America and if you don't have a .com.au version of your domain that is your main site then you will need to ensure that your web developer 'manually' alerts Google to the fact that you do business in Australia and want to show on Australian searches.

A word of warning on registering and renewals – Domain name registrations are 'public' and as such once a domain name is registered*, these contact details are immediately stored and made available through a public WHOIS database, this is required as part of the rules and enforced by the regulatory body. So your full name, entity, contact information including phone and email are publicly displayed and available to anyone doing a search for your domain name. This can lead to 'unscrupulous' data mining and you may receive an official looking letter or email urging you to 'renew' your domain name or risk losing it, I've seen letters with costs ranging from $260 to $350. These letters are essentially SPAM and should be ignored. Only pay renewal fees to the original registrar that you bought it from in the first place or get your hosting provider to manage it for you as part of your hosting and you'll be confident of no interruptions to your service and secure in the thought that no-one else can take your domain name. Use a reputable registrar to ensure you are paying the best market rate and that the registration is legitimate.

Along with the SPAMMY registration emails you might also find you are targeted by Website Design Companies – who are also 'data mining' – they are now actually telemarketing and calling new domain name registrants and offering their services. Some I've experienced are quite aggressive so something else to look out for, it's no co-incidence they know you've just registered a new domain!

*with the exception of .com and .net extensions. For an additional fee you can purchase Domain Privacy on these extensions. Ask your registrar for this option if you want to protect your privacy.

Business Entity

Your accountant is the best person to advise you on the type of entity you should be trading under – i.e. sole trader, partnership, trust. Ensure your domain name and business name are registered under the correct entity at the time of registration as it could be costly and time consuming to change afterwards.

Engaging someone to develop your website

All website are not created equal and not everyone that says they can develop a website actually knows how to do it effectively, functionally and ensure that it can be found by google search. These are the most important things to ask your potential website developer :-

YOU WILL WANT TO GET A YES FOR ALL OF THESE QUESTIONS to avoid any issues down the track.

1. Will I be able to edit the website myself once you have built it? Will you provide training/instructions?
2. Will I be able to choose my own hosting provider or am I locked into you – i.e. can I move my website to a new host at any time? **MAKE SURE THIS IS A DEFINATE YES**
3. Do you alt tag the images you add to my webpages with my chosen keywords
4. Will you do key word optimisation and add meta descriptions for my copy as you create my pages
5. Do you submit a site map to google
6. Do you install google analytics and provide me with the login?
7. Do you suggest I get a google business listing and link it to my website? Can you create one for me?

   Bonus Question…

8. Do you link my site to webmaster search console and monitor it for me or provide me with access? (highly recommended)

Hosting & Email addresses

Every site needs to have a 'host' a provider that keeps the domain linked to their server and makes it available through the 'world wide web'. It's one thing registering, next is to make it live and available for people searching the internet. Your emails are also normally linked to your hosting account.

I would always suggest using your yourname@yourdomain to be consistent with your branding. Using yourname@hotmail.com or yourname@gmail.com is simply not professional when you own your own domain, a hosting plan will normally include up to 5 email addresses anyway so you may as well get your monies worth. If you are currently running your business on a iinet, westnet, bigpond email address this is more than likely tied in with your current internet plan. So you are tied to them to keep your emails running. By changing over to yourbusiness@yourdomain your

emails are separate to your internet plan and you can shop around for new internet providers for your business or home without it ever having to affect your emails again.

A note if you are wanting to link a Paypal account to your website to accept online payments, Paypal will not accept a generic email address – i.e. admin@yourdomain or info@yourdomain the best bet is to make it your name so ensure you get at least one email that Paypal will accept if you are planning on running mainly generic email addresses.

Speaking of money – how much should you pay for hosting? That really does depend on the functionality of your website and how far you want to go in protecting your business reputation online.

Basic Plans - no frills – no real protection from hackers and spammers, an indicative range would be between $12 and $20 per month on a shared server. Recommended for blogs and single or very low content websites with no online purchasing.

Pros – low cost entry point

Cons – if another site on the same shared server gets blacklisted for spam, you run the risk of having your reputation tarnished too as you all share the same 'IP' address and it's an IP address that gets blacklisted. Blacklisting can result in people not getting your emails right up to your site being blocked altogether by certain organizations.

Mid range - $25 to $35 per month, again on a shared server but they might offer some blacklist monitoring so they can keep an eye out for you, also some analytics reporting so you know who your website is performing in regards to number of visitors, some hosting accounts might offer backups and auto domain renewal (although this is rare) and you may get an SSL Certificate included for this price. This is highly recommended if you are selling anything through your site even if you connect to paypal for the payment transaction. If you are running a business or ecommerce site this would really need to be considered as your entry level.

Business Plans – likely to be around $35 to $55 per month, for this you'd expect automatic domain name renewal, analytics reporting, full hacker and malware protection and monitoring, SSL Certificates and backups on a daily/weekly/monthly rotation

Enterprise plans – upwards from $55 - recommended for full protection against hackers as would normally included full firewall protection from hackers, dedicated IP so you run on your own exclusive IP address, full backups and also software updates to keep you updated and protected from security risks in outdated software. If you are running a professional business website or a Social network where lots of members have login access and posting rights this would be the level I'd recommend.

Optional extras on most plans

You can always ask your hosting provider if they can add the 'extra' services onto your current plan to give you an idea of costs you might pay an additional :-

$5.00 per month for a dedicated IP Address

$75 - $300 per annum for an SSL certificate

$8 upwards for blacklist monitoring

$25.00+ per month for hacker/malware protection including firewall

$40 per annum for domain name renewal

Malware removal could be as much as $100 per hour if your site is infected. Your site could also run the risk of being 'removed' from your hosting providers server without warning making it difficult to restore and recover. Google will also penalize malware affected sites that could ruin your long term reputation online.

It's important to understand the risks and be informed when choosing your hosting partner. Cheap can sometimes be costly.

What about website systems where you can build your own site and hosting is included?

Companies like Squarespace, Wix and Weebly offer a template style drag and drop website builder that is free when you sign up for a hosting account.

This is certainly a popular option, check their hosting is satisfactory based on your requirements determined in the previous section on hosting. Other things to consider is that you are more than likely locked in.

Locked in to their hosting plans – not free to shop around to other providers if your not satisfied with their after sales service as if you stop paying your monthly fee – your site is lost. (Very few of these companies offer a site export option for you to export your site and take it to another hosting provider.

Locked into their functionality – you may find everything you want to do on your site might not be possible as you can't alter the 'code' of the site you are limited to their functionality and programming, you can't get a programmer to make custom changes. Some of them may have an app store with some additional options but again you can't make changes to how those apps work either.

Locked in to their email partners – you may find yourself having to sign up to Google Accounts and adding additional email addresses can become tricky and costly.

In most of these cases you also **Don't** own your content – they do! And you are basically held to ransom if you are unhappy with their service down the track, or something happens to them in the future. If you stop paying. You are back to square one – with no website content, you will need to start again from scratch.

If you get a reputable website developer to create your website you can shop around and move from host to host as you choose. You can decide on who hosts it based on the best hosting plan that suits your particular business needs.

Functionality should determine the Website framework

Basically each website has its own unique requirements and the functionality that you want and the features you want to provide your members or your visitors should determine the framework your website is built on. There are so many functions (some you may not have even thought

about) that you might want to include straight up, or introduce as your business grows. Ensuring you have a 'future' proof framework from the onset is critical to avoid costly rebuilds.

Consider some of these possible options

- Blog
- Events Calendar
- Image Gallery
- Video Library
- Podcast Audio Library
- Members Only Section
- Pay to access content
- Resource Library - ie. file library, pdf's, reference guides, product information sheets etc.,
- Newsletter integration & sign up forms
- Booking engine for appointments etc.,
- Directory of Services or Business Directory – locations of offices etc,
- Online Live Help Chat Function
- Offsite Links - link page to other sites?
- Gift Vouchers
- Discount Coupons
- Special offers/promotions
- Landing Page promotions
- Map/Location/Directions etc.
- Pricing Schedule Page
- Testimonials
- Affiliate Links/Marketing/Offers
- Share/Like/Email-Send to a Friend
- Reviews/comments
- FAQ Section
- Refunds/Returns Section
- Shopping Cart
- Specials/Special Order Section
- Ebay Store Integration

    To name just a few

In our experience getting the framework right from the start is crucial, even if you don't want some of these options straight away. Let your developer know you may want them in the future so they can ensure they get your site built with the best possible options for future growth.

Branding logo/website design

It's not enough to just send your website developer your logo, you will need to have your website 'theme' designed. You have a number of choices here, there are literally thousands of free/low cost themes out there available for your web developer to integrate quite easily for you. Take a look at Themeforest once you know your framework/development platform – i.e. wordpress, joomla, magento you can choose a theme right off the shelf. Just keep in mind others have chosen the identical theme, so your customers could run into a very similar looking website as a lot of them are 'industry' specific – i.e. wedding themes

If unique branding is important to you then you can engage a designer, your website developer may also have one in house. They should get you to fill in a design brief (showing them some of the [Themeforest](#) themes that caught your eye may also help them develop something to suit the particular style you have in mind). The benefit of this is that they can also provide you with all your branding, from email signatures, to newsletter templates, posters, business cards, fliers, landing pages etc., so you have consistent branding throughout your business.

If you want to 'manage' the design process hands on and engage the designer directly take a look at [99 Designs](#) – here you can post your project and the elements you want designed and graphic designers from all over the world apply and bid on your project. You choose and pay for the design you like. There are over 950,000 designers registered. Just be aware it's not necessarily going to be the cheapest option.

Copy (is king!)

Having good content on your site – i.e. 'copy' is soooo important! I can't emphasize this enough, if you have engaging content and good functionality you will stand the best chance of being picked up by search engines like google and bing and be on your way to getting your fair share of search traffic. Google is far less interested in the color of your logo and the gorgeous images you have (they can't see the colors and have no idea what the picture looks like) Google is only interested in TEXT. Text alternatives to your images & text alternatives to the special icons and buttons. It's so important to get all that setup right.

Engaging content keeps your visitors interested and done right will guide them through the buying process to have them buy your services or purchase your products. It's important to establish a natural flow and links to guide them through to the next obvious steps. "Calls to Action" and clear contact information and easy purchasing gives the consumer confidence.

If you are not a professional writer, if you don't like talking about yourself and you are not a great self promoter DO NOT write your own copy. I'm not going easy on you here.

Social Media suggestions (for the unsocial)

Social Media – i.e. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pintrest etc., are a great way to engage with existing & potential customers, it's a way of reaching a wider audience, your fans – friends and networks. Word of mouth referrals is still one of the top **'free'** advertising methods and your past & existing clients are a valuable resource. They won't necessarily visit your website out of the blue but they will engage with friends and family on their favourite social networks and when they do you have the opportunity to engage with them and remind them of your services and have them share and refer you to their friends and networks. An easy way to keep your website content current and manage your social engagement is to link your 'blog' page to your

facebook business page, so you update images and good news stories to your website blog and it automatically sends the story to your facebook business page, with the added bonus of a link back to your website. With the right website platform this is a piece of cake!

Images

The old saying 'a picture paints a thousand words' couldn't ring more true when it comes to your website images. Not only do they need to be clear, the right size (resolution) and represent your offering honestly but they go a long way to help convey your unique offering and send the right messages to your potential customers. They also play a very important role when it comes to search engine optimization (being ranked in search by Google). Your images need to be 'named' with your keywords and also have an alternative text added that helps describe what the image is in the case that they don't load in someone's browser. Images appear in search just like websites do and without the right naming conventions and descriptive text you could be missing out on leads.

Backups – self managed or paid service

You need to assume that at some point in time there is a good chance your website could get hacked (see more in DOS and Hacked sites section) in which case a recent backup of your site and database is going to be your savior! Without a backup – you would be looking at either a) rebuilding your site from scratch b) paying someone to clean up your site after a hacker has been let loose and remove all their injected code and infected files. Both costly and easily avoidable with a good/reliable backup system in place. Ensure you discuss backup options with your hosting provider, they could install a self managed backup plugin that you run yourself or for a small fee they could automate your backups and store them on a separate server to the one your site is hosted on to ensure your covered if your server malfunctioned or failed for any reason.

DOS (Denail of service – hacked sites)

Preventing attacks is much easier than cleaning up after one. There are a number of options available when it comes to protecting your site and putting up a line of defense against hackers. You should assume that at some point in time your website will be hacked. A good backup service and layers of security and secure passwords for your admin and emails is imperative.

Search Engine Optimization

This is without a doubt the **MOST** important aspect of your website. Without good practice search engine optimization your site won't appear in google search and potential clients and sales will be lost your competitors.

It's important to note, Google pays no attention to your actual images or your site colours and design, in fact all google sees is 'text' they are a text reader. View your site as text only and you will see what Google sees – that is why good copy is so important and your images are labelled and given text descriptions otherwise they will mean nothing to google in context to your site.

No two people will get the same results when searching for a keyword phrase. So if you are in Perth searching for 'wedding rings' and your partner is in Sydney searching for the same phrase – you will get completely different results. You will even get different results if you are sitting next to each other on different devices depending on your previous search history. So just because your website appears on the top of the list when you search for it on your office computer – it does not mean that is where it appears for everyone else.

Google uses 200 different algorithms to determine who appears in the google search pages for a given keyword.

To give you an example here is some of the criteria that google will use to determine if your website appears before or after your competitors and how high up it will rank you :-

- Age of the website (how long it's been live on the web)
- Online reputation of the hosting provider hosting the website
- Where the person that is searching is located in the world
- What their previous search history is of the person doing the search
- Site engagement – how long people spend on your site and the number of pages they visit compared to your competitors
- Bounce rate – if people leave your site quickly without clicking on anything
- How many other sites that link to your site and the reputation of those sites – sites with a bad reputation will adversely affect your result
- The flow of your copy and the relevance to your keywords
- Links within your site, so your page links to other page links throughout your website
- Good practice keyword placement i.e. in Page Titles, Headers and scattered throughout the text

Avoid reciprocal links - i.e. getting friends of yours with a site to link to you and you linking to them. Google knows is just a link exchange and gives it no value

Avoid keyword cramming – the old practice of listing off a swag of keywords at the top of a home page (hidden in code)

Don't put your important text in an image, be sure your copy is text.

Dedicate one page to each of your top keyword phrases. Don't try and cover all your keywords on one page. Your keyword should appear on average in short and long phrases and in the title of the page and header approx. 10 times.

Be sure to list your business on google business (google plus) this will also help with your rankings.

Youtube and facebook are also great tools to help boost your online profile and web presence.

Testing/Monitoring/Reporting/re-testing

Your website should be an ongoing work in progress, once you've got it live and have the basics in place you need to be monitoring your website visitors and all the stats and analytics available to you to determine where and how you can make improvements. Google Analytics (a free tool) is essential! You need to install the code on all your website pages. This will give you a good background on your user engagement and organic search visitor numbers, which keywords are working and which ones aren't. It's important to review, make changes and re-test on a regular basis. I would recommend at least every quarter.