



MYSMALLBUSINESSWEBSITE.COM

# **Websites 101:** ***Intro to Building Your Own Small Business Website***

By Lisa Li



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## A Bit About Me...

Hi, I'm Lisa Li, a web developer and graphic designer in Norman, Oklahoma.

- I've been building websites and designing graphics for over 20 years
- I graduated Southeastern Oklahoma State University in December 2023 with a bachelor's degree in Computer Science
- I started my business, Making The Impact LLC, in 2018 where I provide web development, graphic design, and marketing services
- I just lauched MySmallBusinessWebsite.com to help teach small business owners about websites, graphics, marketing, and video
- I live in Oklahoma, but I'm originally from Washington state





- I'm happily married to my awesome husband, Yawei, and I'm blessed with a wonderful teenage daughter

## Introduction

### Why this class?

- The purpose of this class is to equip you with the knowledge you need to know to make informed decisions about building your online presence.
- Help enable you to pursue your passions and ventures more easily by reducing your costs and saving you time, removing some obstacles standing in your way.
- You get straight-forward, easy to understand breakdowns of a complex topic, presented with honesty and insights about the current tools and services currently available at your disposal.
- I'm not here to sell you something, I'm here to help you :)

### Key takeaways

- I hope that you will end the class with a better understanding of what you need to build your own website, what it costs, the pros and cons of DIY and hiring help, and what you need to do.



## Domain Names

### What is a domain name?

A domain name is like a digital street address for your website that makes it easy to find. Some examples of domain names include Google.com, Yahoo.com, Microsoft.com, and ChatGPT.com.

All domain names have an extension like .com, .net, .org, or one of the newer endings like .ai or .life. There are many different types, but the most common ones and the ones most people are used to are those that end with .com, .net, and .org.

### How many domain names do I need?

Most likely one, but you can use one or more domain names with a single website. For example, if you had the domain names myfancywidgets.com, myfancywidgets.net, and buymywidgets.store, you can make them all point people to the same website. Many domain name registrars will encourage you to buy more domain names, even if you don't actually need them.

### How does it work?

Domain names are what people enter into the URL bar in a web browser to visit a website. People open a web browser on their device, and type in the domain name and it will direct them to your website.

You can also generate a QR code (it's typically a square shaped barcode looking thing) that people can scan with their phone and it will allow them to get to your website without typing in the domain name.

When people view your website, the domain name will show in the URL bar of the browser, regardless of whether they typed it or not. They could click on a link that goes to your website, click a button, or scan a QR code, and it will show the domain name in the URL bar.

### Where can I get a domain name?

There are numerous companies that sell domain names. They are called domain name registrars. When you "buy" a domain name, you are actually renting it for one year (or more if you pay for additional years).

The minimum amount of time you can buy a domain name for is 1 year. The typical cost for a domain name varies, especially since some domain name registrars will offer sales to lure you in. Some companies may even include a domain name with other services they offer you,



but there may be limits on how long they give you the domain name for (ex. First year may be free, then they charge regular price).

## How much do domain names cost?

On average, standard domain names with the .com, .net, or .org extension typically cost around \$10-15 per year on average, or around \$20-\$25 per year if you purchase it through web design companies.

If you decide to get a domain name like .info, .life, .store, or one of the many other types of endings, you may find the cost could be a few dollars or it might be over \$40 per year. Many domain registrars will offer deals for the first year for such specialty domain names. When they renew, you could find that it costs significantly more than you initially paid.

Premium domain names are typically thousands of dollars. They are considered more popular and of greater value due to their length and the keywords they use. Some examples of premium domain names could be smallbusinesswebsite.com, worldtravel.com, or popcorn.com.

Domain names can be bought and sold by individuals through a registrar or auction site. Some people are in the business of “domain flipping” – this means they buy up domain names that use keywords for the standard cost, then list it for sale for hundreds or thousands of dollars.

When you buy a domain name, you can sell it, but there is often a period of time you have to wait before you can actually sell it and transfer ownership of it to someone else.

**Pro Tip:** You can get an awesome domain name that is similar to a premium domain name by adding in a short or common word such as “go” or “my”. You could also use adjectives, locations, colors, moods, or styles. As long as it’s easy to spell, short, and easy to remember, you’re probably good.

## What is a subdomain name?

A subdomain is like a child of domain name. Here are some examples of subdomain names:

*mail.google.com*  
*drive.google.com*  
*ads.google.com*

Each subdomain above is a child of the google.com domain name. Each subdomain goes to a different website that runs software and performs a different function.

When you get a domain name for your business, you can have multiple subdomain names and they can point to different websites that you own, or they can be used for different purposes.

Companies that offer free website hosting or website builders with a free tier, will usually not allow you to use your own domain name, and will instead require you to use a subdomain of their company domain name. So you might be given something like





mybusinesswebsite.wix.com. It's less professional to use a subdomain in this way, but it can help keep your costs low when starting out and testing out your ideas.

## What is privacy protection?

It keeps your contact information private and reduces the amount of spam emails and calls you get after registering a domain name (YOU REALLY NEED THIS, trust me!).

When you register a domain name, you are required by law to put in your contact information. This information is typically published in a totally public directory that shows who owns what domain. The directory is called the WHOIS directory. You can look up the owner of any domain name for free, just do a search for "WHOIS lookup" and you will find websites that will allow you to search the records for any domain name.

When you get privacy protection, it prevents your contact details from being published as the owner of the domain and in its place, it puts the privacy protection company information. This layer of protection helps reduce the amount of spam and telemarketing calls you will get.

Privacy protection is something **many domain name registrars** such as Dynadot, Porkbun, and Hover **will include for free**, and others such as GoDaddy, will charge extra for.

Without privacy protection, your information will be exposed in the WHOIS directory, it is likely that your contact information will end up in countless marketing databases where it will be used and sold to other companies looking for contacts to send unsolicited messages to.

**Note:** *Privacy protection is great, but it only protects your contact details from being published in the WHOIS directory for domain names. Even with privacy protection, people can look up your name and/or business information and get your contact details elsewhere. From directories to data breaches, it is hard to keep your personal details private in this day and age.*

## ***Desperate Times Call for Desperate Measures: A Short Story***

You might be surprised at the lengths people will go, especially now in this economy, to try to get sales.

I don't want to scare you, but I was quite alarmed to discover that if you merely express even the slightest interest in building a website, or if you engage in online communities to just ask questions about how to build a website, people may track you down and try to flood you with offers to build it for you. Are web developers and designers that desperate now? It seems so.

I recently was reading posts in a Facebook group where people ask for help with websites and they can request offers from web designers if they want. One member had merely posted a question about how to build a website – they were not asking for offers.

Just that simple post led to unsolicited messages. Web designers in the group looked up the user's real name and found their phone number (likely through online directories) and began



sending them messages and calling their phone without permission. Very unprofessional and is one example of “blackhat” marketing strategies, which are unethical, invasive, and pushy.

### ***Privacy is a Thing of the Past***

I personally get tons of emails from web designers and companies offering web design and development services all the time and I delete those emails every time. It's rather ridiculous since I build websites for a living and here so many offer their services to me 😊.

I receive such emails because my email is shown publicly online in various places, my personal and business information has been exposed in numerous databreaches, and databrokers have collected and sold my data for marketing purposes. I've come to just expect that there is no real privacy anymore, not just on the Internet, but anywhere due to the prevalence and advancement of technology and mass data collection.

***FYI:*** *In case you didn't know, databreaches are where hackers break into websites and steal the data which they then sell on the black market in hackers forums. And databrokers are companies that legally collect and sell data they acquire through people signing up for services, requesting quotes or information, or other things (when you automatically accept the terms without reading them, this happens a lot).*

Alright, enough rambling 😊...moving on now..

## **Web Hosting**

### **What is a web hosting?**

Web hosting (or website hosting) is like digital property that you build your website on. It is similar to how you can buy or rent a piece of land to build a house or business on.

With web hosting, you get virtual space and it comes with a certain amount of resources you will have access to.

Some key terms to be aware of:

- **Disk space:** This refers to the amount of storage space you get for your website. Think of it like property boundaries. If you compare it to a physical property, it's like the square feet or the number of acres the property is – for websites, this is measured in Gigabytes (GB).
  - Most small business websites are fairly small and are typically less than 5 GB. If you find hosting with 10 GB, it is likely to be sufficient for your needs. The only exception to this would be if you have a lot of files (lots of photos, PDF files, videos, etc.) or if you plan to host multiple websites on the same property.
- **Bandwidth:** This is the amount of traffic and activity your website can have.



- Like with a physical property, if you have too many people at one time try to visit or too much activity, it can create congestion and create problems for you and your neighbors, and vice versa.

*Note: Many web hosting companies advertise “unlimited bandwidth” or “unlimited” this or that. Let’s get this straight - despite them claiming it’s unlimited, it actually does have limits. It’s just like an all-you-can-eat buffet. It’s not actually unlimited, you’re bound by whatever the resource and internal limits are within whatever service you order. The limits may or may not have any affect on your website, you can always contact the company’s support and sales team and ask them before ordering.*

## **How does it work?**

When people go to your domain name, they are taken to your digital property. The digital space is where all the files (think of it like materials your website is made of) are stored and made available to the Internet.

Web hosting is where those files are available to anyone around the world 24 hours a day, seven days a week. That means if someone wanted to learn about your business in the middle of the night, they can look up your website and learn about it immediately without being restricted to typical business hours and days.

Like with a property, there are parts of the web hosting that are locked from public access. It’s like having locked office room in your business. There can also be various security features and tools as well to help prevent attackers, such as firewalls (think of it like a security fence), and a lot more, monitors (kind of like security cameras), and other things that can help keep your virtual space safer.

## **Where can I get web hosting?**

You can get website hosting from a wide variety of companies. Some companies sell or give away web hosting with tools that you can use to build your own website. I

f you choose to use a website builder such as Wix, Squarespace, Shopify, or another platform, they include hosting so you can focus on building your website. With such convenience, typically comes greater cost. Such platforms may set you back \$20 or more per month.

For lower cost hosting options, you can purchase shared hosting and install a website builder such as WordPress. Many shared website hosting companies such as HawkHost (a personal favorite) uses software called “cPanel” that gives you tools to manage the hosting – like making it easy for you to install WordPress, create email accounts using your domain name, and create a free SSL certificate (more on that later). With hosting companies like HawkHost, you can get a small hosting plan for less than \$3 a month.



If you plan to build a website with WordPress and add the free shopping cart plugin called WooCommerce, you will need a more robust hosting solution. Companies like Hostinger and Siteground can provide you with more resources to support it for around \$5 to \$20 per month depending on which options and plans you get, and what hosting sales you take advantage of.

**Pro Tip:** If you want to save a lot of money, you can take advantage of some recurring coupon discounts on hosting. HawkHost has frequently had recurring discounts on their hosting plans making it one of the best deals I've found. Other companies may have similar discounts or other offers.

Before you buy hosting, you can save yourself time, money and stress if you:

- Make sure the hosting company has the features you need
- Read the reviews about their service, pay close attention to what people say about speed, uptime, support, and cost
- Make sure you know what their regular prices are – if taking advantage of a sale, make sure their regular prices are something you can afford in the future
- Choose a web hosting plan with server locations in your region (or the region of your target audience) as it can affect the website loading speed (closer = faster)

## What kind of web hosting do I need?

Most small business websites can use shared hosting plans (it's typically the least expensive of all the hosting types).

Shared hosting plans are kind of like an apartment building or a housing complex where you have your own space that is isolated, but within the same zone with others, and the utilities are shared. Like with the physical world, with shared hosting, you have neighbors and if one of your neighbors has a whole bunch of people visiting their property at once or is doing something that requires a lot of shared resources, it can create congestion or other issues for your website.

There are different types of hosting, all of which are typically more expensive and can be more complex to setup, so not covered here. But I will share what those types are:

- **VPS hosting** – it's kind of like living in a duplex but your neighbors are less likely to interfere with you
- **Dedicated hosting** – it's like having a mansion all to yourself
- **Cloud hosting** – it's like renting space in a modular building that can expand or contract according to your needs

If you choose a website building platform like Wix, Squarespace, Shopify, or LaunchCart, they take care of the hosting for you, so don't have the ability to choose what type of hosting you get.



**Note:** Whenever you sign up for website hosting, chances are they will try to upsell you on services you may or may not need.

## Email Hosting

### What is a email hosting?

Think of it like a mailbox you rent that you can use to get and send mail

Makes it so you can use your domain name instead of using a free service like gmail or yahoo

### Do I need email hosting?

It can give your business a more professional presentation online, make it easier for people to contact you, provide you with security so scammers can't as easily pose as your business

### Where can I get email hosting?

A lot of shared hosting plans INCLUDE free email hosting. They may have limits on how many email accounts you can create or how many emails you can send per day, but it is a great way to reduce your costs.

In most cases, using a shared hosting plan for your email accounts is sufficient, however, there may be times when an email hosting solution is needed. For example, if you plan to email schools or government offices, sometimes emails can get rejected. If that happens, you may need an email hosting plan so that your messages will go through. One of the best deals I've found for email hosting is a small business called MXRoute. Their prices are reasonable and their service is good. They do not allow you to use it for sending out bulk emails though.

In most cases, you should assume that if you plan to send out a mass number of emails (hundreds or more) you will need to use an email marketing service that does that. Most companies will limit how many emails you can send out from their email accounts, so you really need to use an email marketing solution if you plan to send out a lot of emails. There are lots of email marketing platforms, Brevo and MailerLite are just couple of examples.

If you use a website builder, you may need to purchase email hosting separately. If that is the case, most email hosting providers will charge you a fee per email account. That fee might be \$1 a month or it could be \$20 a month. Prices vary and some companies charge you annually and may try to lure you in with attractive low introductory prices.

If you want separate email accounts for different departments or staff for your business, MXRoute can be a less expensive solution than say using Google Workspaces or other email hosting plans.

Google and Microsoft email solutions may provide some fancy features that you might like or perhaps don't use or need. There are lots of options, it will ultimately depend on your needs and budget.



## IP Address

### What is an IP address?

You can think of an IP address as being similar to the latitude and longitude coordinates of a map that you can use to pinpoint a specific location in the world. In terms of your website, it is the specific address that takes people to the virtual property where your website is hosted.

### How does it work?

It works behind the scenes to help connect your domain name to your website hosting. When you buy website hosting (or email hosting), it typically has an IP address associated with it. When you get a domain name, you may need to enter the IP address you get from the website hosting or email hosting provider into the settings.

## DNS & Name Servers

### What in the world is DNS?

Think of it as the GPS of the Internet – it works behind the scenes directing internet traffic to where it needs to go. It makes it so that your domain name will take people to your website.

It is one component of a complex system that makes the Internet work. If you think of it like the physical world, you have properties, and cities, and different locations. You have streets (like the internet cables) connecting places so you can travel and go where you need to (like websites). DNS helps navigate the streets to get people to the right destination.

### What is a Name Server?

You can think of a name server as being like a contact list in your phone, where you have names that are associated with numbers that direct your call where it needs to go. A name server typically looks something like this:

ns1.hostingcompany.com  
ns2.hostingcompany.com

### Why is it important?

When you buy a domain name, you may need to set the DNS and/or Name Servers so that your domain name will point to your website hosting.



**If you buy a domain name and website hosting from the same company,** typically it will automatically set the DNS settings to what they should be.

**If you buy a domain name and website hosting separately,** then you will need to modify the DNS settings for the domain name.

How do you set the DNS for a domain name so that it will point to your website?

The exact steps varies widely and will depend on the companies you choose to go through. In most cases, the website hosting provider will give you the Name Servers or an IP address to enter into your domain name DNS settings.

Most hosting providers (or website builders) will give you 2 or 4 Name Servers to put into the DNS settings for your domain name. Usually you can simply copy the name server values and paste them into the appropriate fields in the DNS settings.

**Each domain name has its own DNS settings where you can:**

1. Create individual DNS records that control where traffic goes to different parts of your website (ex. Where your emails go, where people trying to visit your website go, etc.)
2. Enter in Name Servers for the web hosting company you use

In the first case, the one that would host the DNS records is the domain name registrar. In the second case, the one that hosts it is the web hosting provider. Sometimes it doesn't matter which you use, sometimes it does – every company is different.

In most cases, the easiest solution is to let the web hosting company host it, especially if you're using shared hosting and are hosting your email accounts with your website. The hosting company will typically set up the DNS to what it needs to be so that you don't need to change the individual records.

**Why is DNS important for you to know?** Your domain name will only point to your website if it is setup correctly. It is also important to know where the DNS records are hosted as there may be times when you need to add a record to verify that you own the domain name or to improve your email deliverability.

## SSL Certificates

### What is an SSL certificate?

It adds a layer of protection on your website, think of it like adding a padlock to your property to help keep out thieves and bad actors.



## Do I need one?

Yes, but you may not need to buy one. Most website hosts provide a free SSL certificate (typically it's called "Let's Encrypt") and it is usually sufficient for most small business websites.

If you are going to have a lot of personal information (ie. Social Security Numbers, etc.) processed through the website, then it is best to invest in a paid SSL certificate.

If you have an online store or if you are accepting payments through your website, you are likely going to use a payment processor (ie. Stripe, Paypal, Square, or another company) that accepts the payment details from the customer and processes the actual payment.

When you use a payment processor, your customer's payment details (credit card or bank details) are not stored in your web hosting plan. What will be stored is some transaction details, but not the full debit/credit card details or bank account information.

Payment processors have to use bank level security and high levels of encryption to try to prevent hackers and theft. So using the free SSL certificate on your website is typically fine – just so long as you use some other proactive security measures to keep your site and customer data safe.

## Website Builders

### What is a website builder?

If you were building a house, you would need materials, tools, and someone or something to assemble it. A website builder is like the materials, tools, and methods you use to build a website. You can hire someone to assemble it, assemble it yourself, or use technology.

There are different kinds of website builders, some require more work than others, and the cost can vary greatly.

There are 2 basic types of website builders:

1. Manual
2. AI-powered

Some examples of manual website builders would be platforms like WordPress, Wix, Squarespace, and others. However, due to the advancement and incorporation of AI into everything, those are and will be transforming into some kind of AI-powered solutions.

AI-powered website builders use artificial intelligence to take some information you provide it about your business and the website you want to build, and it creates a website for you automatically. Sometimes the results can be rather poor, other times it might be awesome, it varies, just like the skill level of web designers.





**Which solution is right for you?** It will depend on your project goals, budget, and timeframe. AI-solutions can be faster and easier, but have some drawback and limitations that other website builders don't have. Manual website builders take more time and work to assemble, but can have more features and greater levels of customization. The cost, features, limitations, and more varies widely.

## **How does it work?**

Website builders give you some kind of basic website that you can customize with your content, styles, graphics, and designs. It's sort of like a refurbished house. It uses a combination of templates, common features, your desired colors, and other details to try to craft a website that you can use.

The exact way it works and is controlled can vary widely. Every website builder is different, some are easier than others. But all will create some kind of website.

## **Which website builder should I use?**

It depends on your needs and budget. Each has different features, limitations, and costs (both short-term and long-term). It's probably going to cost you at least \$20 per month, probably more. While some website builders have free tiers, they are usually very limited, don't allow you to use a domain name with it. If you need certain features, then you may have to pay for a more expensive plan to get access.

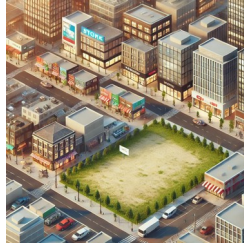
The most popular website builder is WordPress because the software is free and opensource. It's typically easy to install on most shared web hosting providers, or it may come preinstalled if you choose a WordPress hosting plan. But there are many others and there are now many AI-powered website builders to choose from as well. Each has pros and cons, different limitations and features, and other factors you may need to seriously consider.

## How It All Works Together



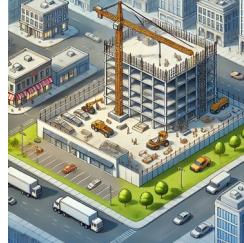
### Domain Name

*(it's like a street address where people will find your business)*



### Website Hosting

*(it's like a parcel of land you build on)*



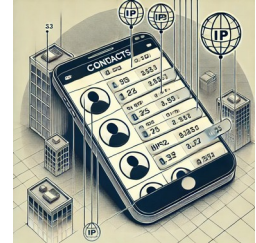
### Website Builders

*(it's like the materials, tools, and equipment you build with)*



### Email Hosting

*(it's like where you send and receive your mail)*



### DNS & Name Servers

*(it's like the GPS of the Internet that runs behind the scenes)*



### SSL Certificate

*(it's like a padlock to help protect your property)*

When you build your own website, there are technical terms that you need to be aware of and I've tried to simplify the meaning and put it into something you can understand. It just scratches the surface, but it should help make it less intimidating and scary for you.

Much of what holds people back is the fear of the unknown. Big and scary technical terms can be so intimidating that people quickly give up.

The 6 things above are the basic components for what you need to build a website. They will give you a solid foundation to build on.

## Online Shops

### What is an online shop?

It is a digital storefront where people can purchase your products and/or services online. With an online shop, a customer can select the products they want from a store and add them to a



virtual shopping cart. Once they are ready to order, they pay for it online (typically through a debit or credit card, or another payment method).

Online shops are typically created using an ecommerce platform (ie. Shopify, LaunchCart, etc.) or added to a regular website through a plugin or extension added to the site (ie. WooCommerce, Ecwid, etc.).

## What is the difference between a regular website and an online shop?

Regular websites usually provide information or serve some other kind of purpose, while an online store primarily sells physical or digital products.

A website can be an online shop and an online shop can be a website. They are basically the same thing (at least in my opinion). Online shop or an online store, refers to a website's ability to handle online orders and payments.

Many online shop platforms will allow you to add content pages such as an About or Contact page to your online store, so it is a website but with the capability of handling online orders.

## Which online shop platform should I use?

There are a lot of options. As with website builders, they all vary in cost, features, functionality, limitations, etc.

If you have a WordPress website, you can use WooCommerce or Ecwid. However, there are downsides to doing this – primarily with resources, so you will need faster hosting that can run it.

If you don't have a WordPress website, you can easily use an ecommerce platform like Shopify or LaunchCart to build your website with online shop functionality.

## How Much Does a Website Cost?

Short answer, anywhere between \$0 and \$10k+... seriously the sky is the limit.

***Did you know... the US government paid over \$800 million for the Obamacare website, and what's worse is that when it launched it didn't even work right. Ouch!***

The real cost of your website depends on your goals, needs, budget, tools, and methods you choose.

Answering these questions will help you understand what your website will cost...

- *Are you going to build it yourself or hire someone?*



- *What features does your website need?*
- *What are your long-term goals for the website?*
- *Which website builder has the features you need and also fits your budget?*

For reference, most of the websites I've built, I typically charge somewhere between \$400 and \$1500~ using shared hosting, free SSL, a standard domain name, and WordPress. It depends on the amount of work involved and the features required. Sites that require more customization or special features can cost more.

## **Where can I get a free website?**

There are lots of free website builders you can use for free to create a very basic website. These free website plans are really more of a trial and the company's goal is to encourage you to upgrade to a paid plan. This means that the features are limited, you likely will need a paid plan to be able to use your own domain name and build out the site the way you really want it.

Another option you can look for are **free web hosting plans**. Such companies are becoming rare, but they do exist. They typically offer a limited free hosting tier that provides you with some space to build a website on. With such hosts, you may be able to install WordPress and give you access to features that the other website builders such as Wix won't give you.

### ***However, there are serious downsides:***

- Huge limitations on the hosting plan features can cripple the ability for your website to function properly (ie. email restrictions may prevent the server from sending out any emails like for password recovery, update notifications, etc.)
- Upgrading may be more costly than if you start with a paid plan through a hosting company like HawkHost
- Your site may be more likely to get hacked – *it's like moving into a really bad neighborhood with a lot of crime*

It's possible to build an entirely free website with these options. The real question you should be asking is should you?

Both options will use some kind subdomain name, which is fine for personal projects, but bad if you are trying to run a business and want to be taken seriously.

HawkHost is one of the least expensive web hosting companies and one I've used for years. Their cheapest hosting plan is less than \$40 per year and if you buy a domain name through one of the companies with free privacy protection, it might cost you around \$60 a year or so. It's a worthwhile investment if you are willing to put the time and effort into learning how to build your own website with WordPress.



## What can make a website expensive?

Many factors can affect the cost of your website:

- Web hosting
- Domain names (how many, what kind you get, etc.)
- Website design if you hire a designer to customize the look of your site
- Templates, if they're not included
- Plugins or extensions to give your website more features
- Website builder or tools you use to build the website
- Marketing costs to promote your website
- Hiring help from a freelancer or agency

There are a lot of factors that influence the cost and there's no one-size-fits-all solution. Your choices will ultimately affect how much you pay.

### ***Features, Customizations, and Functionality***

If you need specific features or functionality, you might want those directly available through the website, or you might find it more cost-effective to use third-party services.

Some businesses require certain features be added to their website. Some want their site designed to be more unique. Depending on your needs and what platforms you choose, such things might dramatically increase your costs.

### ***DIY and Hiring Help Costs***

If you choose to go the DIY route and something goes wrong, it could be costly hire a freelancer or agency to repair and fix it. However, you can reduce your costs by building all or parts of your website yourself and then hiring help for specific tasks.

If you choose to let someone handle everything for you, it will cost you more upfront, but should provide you with a website that you can edit yourself and expand on later.

**Note:** *Every web designer is different – some may restrict your access, make it difficult for you to transfer out, or simply be difficult to work with. It could hinder your ability to take over control of the site later.*



## DIY Steps to Build a Website

### 1. Plan your website

- Determine your budget, purpose, required features, goals, and time/effort commitment
- Consider your long-term goals and what features you may need later

### 2. Research website builders and hosting companies

- Look into the website builders and companies that meet your budget and goals
- Some hosting companies include a free domain name (be careful, it may only be for 1 year)

### 3. Buy a domain name

- Choose a domain name that is easy to spell, memorable, short, and related to your business
- Domains with .com and .net are best – they've been around the longest and what people are most used to

### 4. Buy the website hosting

- Once you buy website hosting, they may send you details like the IP address, Name Servers, etc.

### 5. Connect the domain name to the website hosting

- If you bought hosting and the domain name from the same company, it should automatically be connected (skip to the next step), otherwise...
- Go to the place you bought the domain name and enter in the Name Servers and/or other details - the exact steps to do this vary (depends on the companies you choose for your domain and hosting)

### 6. Start building your website!

- Install a website builder like WordPress or if using a website builder, use the tools they provide to build your website



## Future of Website Development

### Mass tech layoffs + the advancement of AI

For the past few years, there have been thousands and thousands of people working in tech that have been laid off from their jobs. Personally, I believe that the market is flooded with talent – it's a buyer's market with tons of people eagerly competing for your business.

### The AI Revolution: Faster, Easier, and Stunning Websites

Thanks to AI, websites are now faster and easier to build than ever, lowering the cost and making it more user-friendly for the general public. You don't need to know how to code to build a website anymore.

It's possible to build a website with just a few clicks and a bit of information, and it can be created instantly.

No waiting for days or weeks. No being dependent on web designers or developers. You get instant results and if you don't like something, you can simply make it regenerate it as many times as you need (or whatever is allowed by the platform you use).

There is no question or doubt about it - AI is revolutionizing the entire industry.

With the rapid advancement of AI tools and powerful software solutions, you don't need a technical background or design skills to build a simple website or online store for your business.

Web developers and graphic designers like me are being replaced for faster, more efficient and cost effective solutions. Many (myself included) are adopting AI technology to try to work more efficiently and work faster, aiming to produce better and more effective results than under human power alone.

Most (if not all) businesses are incorporating AI into their business practices and solutions to cut costs, be more efficient, and improve their effectiveness. Even if a business isn't consciously using AI, it is working behind the scenes in the devices and software you use.

There is no turning back or stopping the AI revolution and the permanent changes it is having on our society and the world.

## Hiring VS DIY

Regardless of whether you choose to hire someone or go the DIY route, there are advantages and disadvantages for each choice.

DIY has a learning curve and requires the investment of your time and energy (ie. taking this class) to learn how to do it. While hiring is more convenient and let's you hand the virtual keys to your website over to an experienced driver that can take you where you want to go.



## DIY (Do-It-Yourself)

If you're willing to take the time and make the effort, DIY can be very rewarding. It can dramatically lower your costs and give you control over your success. You can take action to start implementing your ideas and business ventures without the obstacle of needing hundreds or thousands of dollars to pay for a website. With website builders, it's possible to create a website instantly using templates or AI in less time.

### Advantages:

- Lower cost
- More control

### Disadvantages:

- May take more time and effort
- The result may not be as effective in getting sales or may not look as good

*Note: My online classes are designed to tackle these 2 disadvantages!*

## Hiring

When you hire someone, it will typically take time to plan, build, design, and customize it to your liking. The result will be tailor made to your needs and may have a better and more professional presentation. However, it can often come with drawbacks that people don't typically think about.

### Advantages:

- More likely to get a professional website
- Convenient - saves you time and effort

### Disadvantages:

- Less control
- Higher cost

One thing to keep in mind when hiring is what happens in over the long-term. Many businesses have had the challenge of making changes to their websites but can't because they've lost contact with the one who built it. From lost logins to having no idea how to make changes, there are all kinds of problems that can arise that might surprise you.





Another common issue is getting ownership over the domain name and hosting that was purchased on their behalf. Some companies give their customers a hard time if they try to leave and take their business elsewhere, holding their domain names and/or hosting or other services hostage.

## **Don't Worry, I've Got You Covered**

So whether you choose the DIY route or hire someone, I am here to help and lend you my expertise, skills, and experience. When it comes to websites

## **Freelancers VS Agencies**

### **Freelancers**

The Internet means you not only have access to talent locally, but anywhere. Regardless of where they may be located or the value of the currency, the good designers and developers who know their worth will charge the typical US rates even if they are in a third-world country.

Some freelancers are highly skilled, others are not, regardless of where they are from. There are some very talented people overseas, and some designers in the US that are just awful, and vice versa.

If you choose to go with someone overseas, there may be a language barrier, tax implications, or legal challenges that can cause issues for you. Exercise caution and do your research.

#### **Advantages:**

- Lower cost compared to an agency
- Lots of freelancers to choose from

#### **Disadvantages:**

- May lack long-term support
- Work quality may be poor

### **Agencies**

When you go through an established business or agency, you may pay more, but the quality of the work tends to be more thorough and better than what you would get from a freelancer. This isn't always the case though, I'm sure there are exceptions.

#### **Advantages:**



- Typically better results
- Long-term support

**Disadvantages:**

- Much higher cost
- May push you to buy features and services you don't need

## Where to Find Help

When you are stuck, have a problem or question, or otherwise need help with your website, you have a lot of options. You can find freelancers or hire an agency, or you can get help with the online classes and tutoring at [MySmallBusinessWebsite.com](http://MySmallBusinessWebsite.com).

### Freelancers

You can hire freelancers directly, use a platform like Fiverr, or use the design competition websites.

- Freelance sites like:
  - Fiverr
  - Upwork
  - Freelancer
  - Toptal
  - PeoplePerHour
  - Guru
- Design competition websites like DesignCrowd or 99Designs where you set the prize and take your pick of the design submissions

### Agencies and Businesses

There are businesses and marketing agencies, and countless companies that offer website design services. If you're looking for an agency or business to help you, try:

- Local chamber of commerce website
- Network referrals
- Business directories
- Footer credits for websites you like
- Business review sites



## Be Careful of Scammers

### Spam Emails & Messages

- Amazing website or not, you will get emails and messages from people offering you all manner of services – they may or may not be legitimate
- You are likely to receive many emails from people overseas with various service offers
- People have been scammed by people posing as web designers who then take the money and run – this may surprise you, but web designers can get scammed by fake clients too!

### Trustworthy Businesses will:

- Have a portfolio of past work
- Provide details about what services will be provided and what exactly is being offered
- Have support and contact details
- Have reviews/testimonials
- Be able to demonstrate knowledge and answer your questions
- Have a functional website with a legitimate domain name
- Be a legally registered business entity

## DIY With AI Website Builders

Some examples of AI Website builders:

**Unicorn Platform:** Easy AI website builder

**ZipWP:** Creates a WordPress website for you in 60 seconds

**CodeDesignAI:** Create a website with their AI tools and export it to host it anywhere

**AppyPie:** Creates websites and apps with AI

## Website Builder Advantages and Disadvantages

### Advantages:

- It's super quick and easy



- Usually does most of the work for you, including the content

### **Disadvantages:**

- May be difficult to move your site later
- Platform limitations or may lack features
- Long-term cost may be higher than other options
- May be difficult to customize

## **Saving Time & Money**

### **Use AI Tools**

- Whatever you do, AI can make things faster and easier
- Generate content for websites, social media posts, product descriptions, and more
- Get step-by-step instructions or information on a wide variety of topics
- Brainstorm ideas and get feedback
- Generate scripts and materials
- Come up with marketing strategies specific to your business

### **Use free tools & resources**

- WordPress.org is a free website builder that is widely supported on most web hosting platforms
- Use free stock media sites like Pixabay or Pexels for images, videos, and other media that you can use on your website and in your marketing materials
- Use open-source (free) software and online tools to edit graphics and videos for use on your website

## **Design & Content Strategies**

Below are some quick tips on putting together an effective website design and creating content that will help attract people to your site.

- Responsive design
  - Make it look good across devices

- Easy and clear navigation
  - Keep menus and links simple and easy to understand
- Use traditional layouts and pages that people are used to
  - This helps make it easy for them to use the site (you want it as easy as possible to get sales)
- Include links throughout the content to make it easy for people to get where you want them to go
- Use multiple links with a call to action instructing people what to do
  - Take out the guesswork and make it clear what people need to do to
- Make your website content easy to read
  - Break up large blocks of text
  - Organize your content, use clear headlines and lists
  - High contrast (dark text with light background or light text with dark background)
- Use words your audience looks for
- Craft your content to include the keywords your target audience is looking for
- Create content that delivers value
- Compress & resize images
  - Improves website loading speed
  - Use AI editing tools like Hotpot AI
    - You can easily remove backgrounds and edit photos with AI
- Use real photos and videos
  - Real photos and video more effective than stock or AI generated ones
  - Use your own high quality photos whenever possible
- Make sure your homepage has a compelling headline and call to action
  - Use good visuals (backgrounds, colors, etc.) that complement the message
- Video has been proven to have much higher conversion rates
  - Having a great video on the homepage can increase sales
- You must market your website constantly
  - If you build it, people WILL NOT come **UNLESS** you invest time in marketing!





## Media Resources

### Free Resources

- Pixabay: Free stock photos, videos, and audio
- Pexels: Free stock photos and videos
- Unsplash: Free stock images
- Videezy: Free videos and motion graphics

### Paid Resources

- Storyblocks: Download unlimited photos, videos, and audio files
- Canva Pro: Large library of stock photos, videos, and design templates with a user-friendly graphics editor
- Envato Elements: Large library of stock photos, videos, music, and design templates

## Q&A

### Can I change my domain name later?

Short answer, no.

Once you buy a domain name, you have it for a year or more (depending on the term you bought it for). You can't change the domain name, even if you have a typo!

Domain name registrars don't give refunds, but if you really don't want it, you can try to list it for sale after a period of time.

The good news is that you can own multiple domain names and have them point to the same website, but one domain serve as the primary domain for the website.

### Is it worth having multiple domain names?

- It can be beneficial, but it's not required.
- Some reasons you might want to use multiple domain names:
  - Target keywords people are looking for
  - Use the domain names for different purposes
  - Get different domain extensions such as .com, .net, .store, etc.



- Use for email marketing
- Use for branding or marketing efforts
- Prevents others from buying the domains and posing as your business
- Your domain name is commonly misspelled, so owning the misspelled versions that point to the correct spelling can prevent you from losing people

## **Are premium themes or plugins worth it?**

Yes, if it...

- Provides features you need or want
- Is well maintained and kept up-to-date by the developer
- Is highly rated
- Doesn't slow down your website or hinder your website's function or performance
- Is reasonably priced
- Looks and works like it's supposed to across devices
- Doesn't break parts of your website when it is installed

## **What is SEO and why is it important?**

SEO (Search Engine Optimization) makes it easier for search engines like Google to index your website for certain keywords. When a website is indexed, it can show up in the search results when people search for a business, topic, or question.

The algorithm which determines what order (rank) the websites appear in the search results is kept secret, but it is influenced by the text content and keywords in the site.

SEO can help drive free, organic (people naturally looking online) traffic to your website, and free traffic means you can lower your marketing/advertising costs (woohoo!).

## **How long does it take to build a website?**

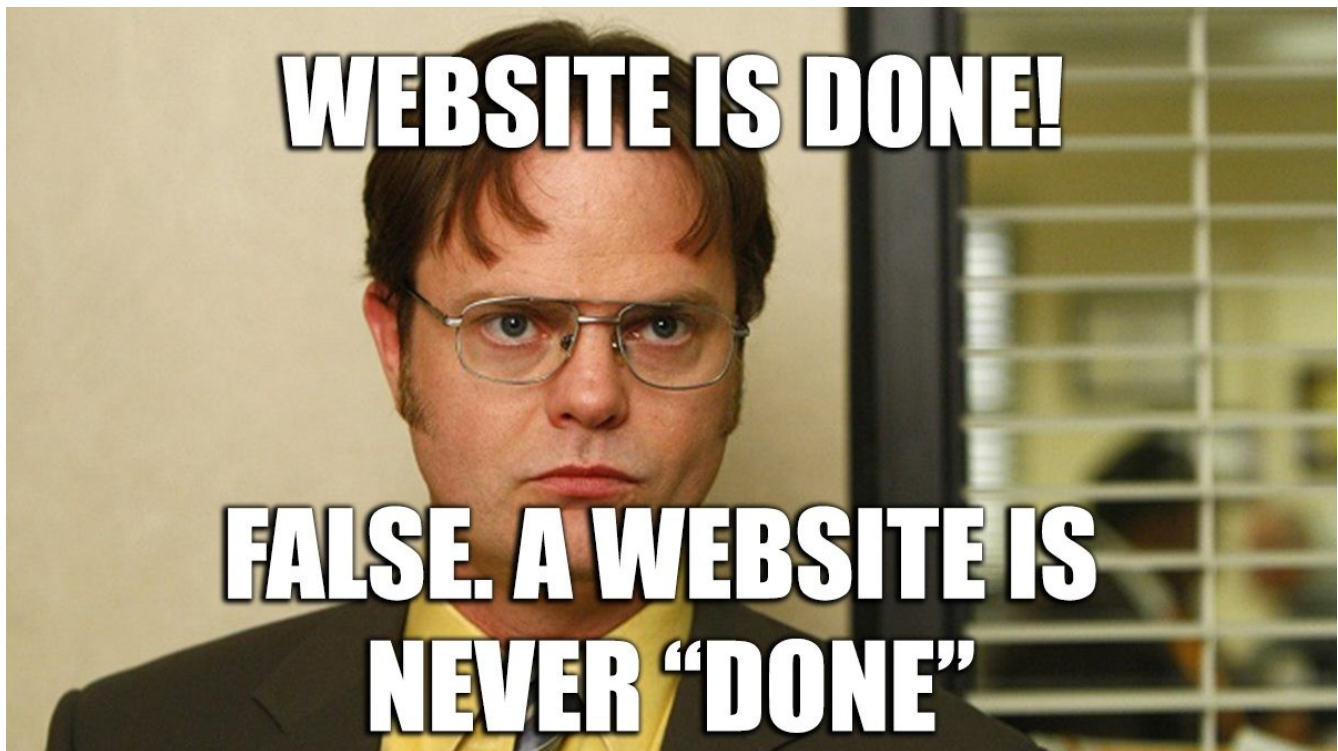
The amount of time it takes varies greatly, but typically it will take a few days to a few weeks, but complex and/or custom websites can take months. In the old days, it was normal for a website to take 2 or 3 months or longer to build. Thanks to website builders like WordPress and many others, that time has been dramatically reduced.

DIY solutions can use templates to create a website instantly – the initial setup usually doesn't take that long. The most time consuming part of building a website is putting together the pages of the site, creating content, and styling it.

AI websites can generate websites rapidly within minutes, whereas an agency or freelancer may take a lot longer. With hired help, the amount of time varies and can depend on their workload, experience, their tools and resources, and numerous other factors.

The methods, tools, amount of content, graphics involved, technical setup, design, and numerous other factors can all affect the amount of time required to create a website. Even a simple website can take weeks to put together and launch.

Even when a website is considered complete, there will always be some kind of changes that need to be made.



**Pro Tip:** If you want to improve your search engine rank, add fresh content to your website regularly, especially targeting keywords your audience is looking for.

### **Can I build a website without coding?**

Yes, there are numerous tools and website builders that you can use to build a website, customize it, and make it look the way you want all without having to type a single line of code.

Most website builders and AI website builders have user-friendly controls that make it easy for you to customize the colors, styles, and look of the website so long as what you want fits within the template limitations.





**PSSST... want to know a secret?** *If there is something you need to customize on your site and you can only do it with code (like in HTML/CSS), you can use AI tools like ChatGPT to help generate whatever code you need to style specific components to make your website look the way you want. If you pay the \$20/month to get access to the added features of ChatGPT, you can take a screenshot of your website, tell it what you want to do, and ask it to generate the code for you and within seconds it will! You can even ask it for step-by-step instructions for where to put the code and how to use it – this works especially well if you're using WordPress!*

## What happens if my site goes down?

Sometimes websites go down and you just need to wait it out. Web hosting companies typically advertise a 99.9% uptime guarantee. 99.9% uptime means the website will be online 24/7 99.9% of the time. There may be times when it goes down temporarily where it might be out for a few minutes every now and then.

If your website is down for an extended period of time, there may be a technical issue, domain name problem, billing issue, maintenance, or another cause responsible – you may need to contact your website hosting provider or the website builder platform for assistance. Before panicking, always check for service status notifications and maintenance notices.



*Oh my goodness! Wow! You've reached the end!*

Thank you for reading this very lengthy little book of “notes” for Websites 101!

This is honestly just the tip of the iceberg, but with this information you should be more equipped and informed so you'll be better able to make good decisions when it comes to your website. At the very least, you should have learned something, especially since I'm giving away trade secrets and the like.

If you like this information and want more, please tell people about [MySmallBusinessWebsite.com](https://www.mysmallbusinesswebsite.com) so that I can bring you more brutally honest information to help you and others succeed in this crazy and chaotic world.

Oh, one more thing. Please do me a little favor.. please don't share this little note book - I don't want an angry mob of web designers bashing down my door. 😊

Live long and prosper! ✌️