

HOW TO BUILD A



Better Website

A first impression can make a world of difference in your company's ability to attract new customers, even online. Your website may be the first or even the only impression potential customers get of your business before deciding whether to make a purchase.

A simple page noting contact information and basic details about the products or services your company offers isn't enough. A good business website can stand in for a salesperson, providing a visitor with all of the information he or she needs to make a purchasing decision or recommend something to a friend.

How to pick a hosting company

Before thinking about what your business's website will look like, or what information will be on it, you need to select an Internet hosting service.

A web hosting service, such as [Aplus.net](https://www.aplus.net), can offer integrated solutions, including domain names, website set up, mobile and online marketing, and more. But the most important role of a hosting service is to guarantee your site will be



The screenshot shows the Aplus.net website homepage. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for "Live Chat", "Support", "My Cart (0)", and "Login". The Aplus.net logo is on the left, and the phone number "1.855.791.8966" and a search bar are on the right. Below the navigation bar is a blue menu with options: "GET A DOMAIN NAME", "HOST A WEBSITE", "BUILD A WEBSITE", "GET BUSINESS CLASS EMAIL", and "GET WEB TOOLS". The main content area has a green background with the heading "Get a Domain Name!". Below this is a search bar with the text "Enter the domain you would like here..." and a dropdown menu set to ".com". A "Search" button is to the right. Below the search bar is a promotional message: "Did you know 9% of all domain names are .NET? .NET has the credibility that comes with experience, to help your business grow. It has all the stability and brand recognition of .com but with more availability. Don't let someone else buy your domain name as a .NET, protect your business today!". At the bottom, there is a section titled "Get Your Business Online Today With Our Web Hosting Options" featuring an image of server racks. Below the image, it says "Free setup, Free domain and Easy Build Apps. Business Hosting Plan start at just \$9.95/month." and a "Learn More" button.

accessible even if it's inundated with visitors. Selecting a hosting company isn't just a matter of finding the cheapest option; there are a variety of factors at play. [Hongkiat](#) has collected points to consider before choosing your hosting company including:

1. **Price** – Take a look at features first, then compare prices.
2. **Area of focus/specialties** – Make sure the hosting company understands and adheres to your customers' needs.
3. **Tech specs/limitations** – The cheapest options won't necessarily have the RAM, space or processing power that you need. Envision your website's needs, now and in the near future, and assess from there.
4. **Tech support** – Does the hosting company offer support? Do you think you'll need it?
5. **Features/add-ons** – Is there extra incentive?
6. **Customer reviews/satisfaction/reputation** – Research various hosting companies and get a feel for what current or former customers are saying.

“For the most part, you get what you pay for,” notes [Andy Hayes](#), a creative web producer who works with clients to improve their web presence. “I recommend looking for specialized hosting that will help you keep up on software versions, security, malware, etc. You aren't in the website business, so leave that part to someone else.”

Depending on the technical abilities you and your team have, it may be worth choosing a hosting company that not only has a good record of keeping sites up and running, but will fix any potential technological

problems. That way, you won't need to call in your own technical support in a crisis.

How to pick a domain



Once a web hosting company is selected, the next step is choosing a domain name or web address. This is a deceptively simple process. Many hosting companies also can sell you a name, but web addresses are a lucrative business for some business opportunists.

You want to get your company's name as your domain, preferably with a .com extension, as Moz explains in [this article](#). However, there can be fierce competition for some names that include common terms or phrases when you consider that the competition for domain names is global.

Exactly how much you should spend on a preferred domain name is up to you, but experts recommend spending at least a little extra money if it will help customers easily find you online.

If the perfect domain name is already taken or out of your price range, there are a wide variety of other extensions available, including .biz and .info. You can also choose a variation of your company name if having a .com extension is important to you.

How to pick a design

In the past, businesses had to find web designers who could create an attractive site design as well as write the code that made it function. If the site owner needed to change the copy or update the text on the site, he or she would have to go back to the web designer for each little change. That could prove to be both time consuming and costly.

Now, most sites are built by using content management systems or CMS, which allow you to add content without having to touch the code. These systems have been developed so you can update and add content quickly and easily. Updating a site built on a CMS can be as simple as logging into the system and typing in your changes.



Selecting a CMS should be the first step of the design process. That decision will guide which designers will work on your site as well as how easily you'll be able to update the site. Your choice of a CMS can even drive which hosting company you can use.

[WordPress](#) is one of the most common CMS choices, but there are hundreds of options depending on what type of site you need to publish. Some other options include [Perch](#), which is geared toward small sites that

need be deployed quickly, or [Squarespace](#), which bundles design tools with content management options.



After selecting a CMS, the look and feel of the website needs to be considered. If you want to save some money, many content management systems offer hundreds of pre-built designs, which are also referred to as themes. Wading through the options can be daunting, but lots of things need to be considered when selecting a theme.

Creative web producer, Andy Hayes notes the difficulty of design: “The most important thing is to choose an overall theme that gives you the ‘feeling’ that you want your site to have. Should it feel bright and open? Should it feel cozy and warm, like a cafe? Should it feel confident, professional and strong? Start with the feeling and look for colors and fonts that help reinforce that feeling.”

But if you’re looking to develop a long-term business plan online, a designer can provide a personalized site with all of the accoutrements necessary to make your site an important part of your business. Design is, at the end of the day, a matter of personal choice. You’ll want to hire a designer whose work fits your aesthetic, and is able to create a site that caters to your customers or potential clients, plus all of your technological needs.

For Kelly Azevedo, founder of She's Got Systems, using WordPress is a priority. But one of her clients recently had some unusual requests and Azevedo decided a mix between a pre-built site with some customization from a designer would be the best way to go for this particular website.

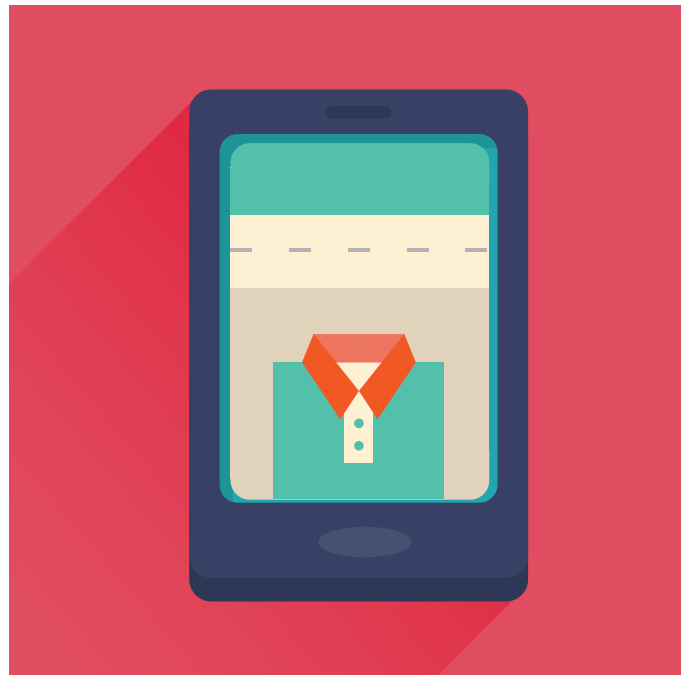
Is responsive design necessary?

Responsive design is an approach to website design that guarantees a website will look good across mobile devices, tablets and computers of all types. Smashing Magazine has written a guide and gathered articles specifically about [responsive design](#).

Responsive design can seem like a luxury, but it's more important today when you consider how many people visit websites via a mobile device.

Even if a customer pulls up your website on a mobile device in order to find your address, you need to make sure that the mobile visitor can easily navigate your site. Otherwise, he or she could quickly move on to a company that provides a mobile-friendly site.

You need to specifically look for a designer or a website theme that adds responsive functionality to your site. WordPress provides many themes



available for purchase that provide responsive designs. Unless a designer specifically tells you that he or she is building responsiveness into your site, you can't assume that a new design will add that capability to your site.

What content does your site need?

Exactly what content makes sense for your site depends on the original purpose of the website. If your main goal is to sell a specific product, you'll obviously need content about that product. But do you need a blog or a newsletter? Videos on how your product works?

In general, most sites should have certain pages, which Bourn Creative has listed in this [article](#). A contact page is a must. Visitors should be able to easily contact you, and having more points of access can make your business more credible to potential customers.

"About" pages have become somewhat standard, and should describe your company, how it got started and possibly the mission statement. Although many companies will divide their "about" pages into information about their teams, the business itself and other interesting details. Your options for other pages can vary dramatically, based on your industry and goals.

Azevedo notes that too much content though, can be a problem.

"The only content we wanted on the site was what the clients, media and strategic partners needed. The overall goal was to capture leads and click-throughs. We've always kept it pretty streamlined but kept the site simple

with the right balance of information about the company and our services, resources for leads such as testimonials, media contributions and blog posts.”

Choosing website content for marketing purposes adds another level of difficulty to building your site. Company blogs are popular because they improve search engine rankings for sites and can help you to build deeper connections with prospects. However, blogs and other content marketing efforts can require an investment of both time and money. If you can't make the investment while still guaranteeing that the core site is well-written and persuasive, make those central pages your priority.

How to make your site easy to find

Optimizing your website for search engines such as Google is still an important part of building traffic for a website.

Search engine optimization, or SEO, is the process of making your website and the content on it easy for automatic web crawlers to find, read and index so that search results for relevant topics and phrases will display your website's pages. SEO can be very technically involved for large enterprises or as simple as tagging content



appropriately in a CMS. If tagged correctly, articles or pages about topics your customers care about can be easily found in a web search. This guide goes more in-depth on the [mechanics of SEO](#).

But search engines are giving way to other portals to the web. Hayes points to social media as key in leading people to your website. Hayes suggests considering what's important to your industry — Angie's List? TripAdvisor?

“Search engines and consumers alike look to social media for reviews and recommendations. Go social. And that doesn't just mean Facebook,” Hayes says.

You need to go where your audience is and that includes going local. If you need to attract customers who are in the same geographic area as you, focus should be shifted to specialized strategies, making sure that you rank as well when someone searches on a map for your products, such as Google Maps.

Some SEO agencies even specialize just in local SEO, such as [OrangeSoda](#).

Content also plays a crucial role, related to social media. Good content, both onsite and

The screenshot shows the OrangeSoda website homepage. The header features the OrangeSoda logo (orangeSODA ONLINE MARKETING WITH YOU) and contact information: Sales Team: 877-555-4401, Customer Service: 877-639-3459, and a Login link. A navigation menu includes Services (Local Online Marketing), Blog (Learn And Grow), Partner (Recall The Soda), About (Secret Syrup), and Contact (Reach Out). The main content area has a large heading "Get Fresh Customers" with the subtext "Local online marketing starting at just \$475." and a "Start Now" button. Below this is an illustration of a town with a central building labeled "Your Business". The footer contains a testimonial from Jeff Drugmand, Owner of Seamless Gutters, with a video player and a quote: "Online marketing has helped our company by driving more traffic to our website and in turn has helped create more leads. Read on". There are also sections for "Become a partner." (Take credit for our work. We'll add our services to) and "Let's get social." (Get more fans, likes, and customers with our). A "RECENT BLOG POSTS" section lists "10 Mobile Marketing Statistics that Will Blow Your Mind" with a "Read on" link and "What is Internet Marketing?" with a "Read on" link.

off, provides fuel for the social media fire. A great blog post or a useful ebook gives social media users a reason to point to your site. Search engines take the content you publish into account when determining your search result rankings, along with social media, adding to the return on the investment you need to make into your online promotions.

Mistakes to avoid

Whether you're building a new site or revamping an existing web presence, it's crucial to avoid common mistakes that pop up in every web design project.

Hayes says user experience is one of the trickiest areas to get right.

“You need to get out of your own head and understand your customer's perspective. Most sites are organized in the way that makes sense to the business owner, not for a customer who doesn't know the business. Most sites use insider language and terminology that isn't welcoming or clear for new customers,” Hayes says. “Build for (the) customer, not for yourself.”

Getting both content and design right is a question of finding the approach that helps you connect best with visitors to your site. Since your goal is almost certainly to convert visitors into customers, that connection is key.