Websites explained

For many small business owners or managers, investing in a website is a daunting prospect. Whether it's your first website or a replacement one, you could find you've made an expensive mistake if you don't know what to look for, or what questions to ask.

We've written this simple guide to help you and to explain some of the processes involved.

How much does it cost?

This is the first question everybody asks and there's no easy answer. The cost depends on the size of your website (the number of pages) and what 'bells and whistles' you want added to it.

Essentially, it's much the same as going to your local supermarket. The more shopping you put in your trolley, the more you'll pay at the checkout. If you have a small budget, you have to put fewer things in your trolley.

Your chosen web developer will need information such as the number of pages you want, whether you want an online shop and a picture gallery, or whether you want people to be able to sign-up for email newsletters. Perhaps you need a private clients' only area – the scope of your website needs to be established before you can be given a realistic price. If the specification isn't determined at the beginning, you could find you're faced with extra charges you hadn't bargained on, or a site which doesn't do what you need.

All the websites WEB-right builds are designed to grow with your business or organisation. You can start with a small basic site and, as your needs grow and you have more money in your budget, you can add more pages and bells and whistles. This saves you having to start again if you find you need a bigger site with more refinements further down the line.

Why do you need a website?

People look online for almost everything. Google is the first place people go in search of information and to research their options. You probably do that yourself, whether it's from your PC or a smart phone.

People look for information before they buy so they can make an informed decision. Some are looking to buy their chosen product there and then.

Before the internet, as consumers we would look at adverts in newspapers and magazines when we wanted to buy something. Now, the first place we look is Google. And if you're not there and your competitors are, guess where that prospective customer will go?

The same principal applies even if you are not selling products or services. If you want people to find out about your club, society, or exhibition, then you need to be online.

Cheap websites!

A word of warning! We regularly see and hear people saying they want a cheap website, and there are plenty of people eager to build you a cheap website.

When it comes to websites, like most things, you only get what you pay for. Your website is a shop window or marketing tool for your organisation, and must earn its keep. If it doesn't help you generate more business and help increase your sales or visitors, there is no point in having one. If you want steak for dinner, you wouldn't buy a pack of supermarket value mince.

While finding someone offering to build a website for £100 might seem a great deal, there's a good chance you will be wasting your money, or that necessary 'extras' will cost you a lot more. Of course there are some exceptions, but a cheap website will typically look unprofessional, have the same design as hundreds of others, be badly built, and won't do the job it's intended for.

How long does a website last?

Websites go out-of-date, so when you invest in a website, it won't last forever.

Changing fashions

Website fashions change and in time your website will start to look dated. Unless you're a slave to fashion, this might not worry you greatly. But if your site is old, you might want to give it a new look - this could mean starting all over again.

WEB-right's websites are designed using a flexible platform which separates the design from the content. Your site can easily be updated, saving you the expense of starting again. The look can be changed completely, perhaps to make it more contemporary, without affecting the information your site already contains.

Website security

Security is one of the most important reasons for updating your website. Website hacking is a big problem and sites built on older systems are more at risk. A hacker can hijack your website, infect it with viruses, use it to send spam emails without your knowledge, or use it as a platform for attacking other computers. They can do a lot of expensive damage to your site and your reputation.

Many people think that only large company websites are a target, but this is not the case. Websites, large and small, experience hacking attempts from automated systems located all over the world.

The websites we build have their applications updated during the year, and have security software as part of their build. We also offer enhanced security updates which significantly reduces the risk of your site being hacked.

Types of websites

It's very important you can update your website yourself. If you can't, it either gets out of date or you will have to pay your web developer to make changes for you. This can get expensive. A few years ago, most websites couldn't be updated unless you had specialist skills and expensive professional software. Today's websites are different.

CMS website

Nowadays, most websites use a CMS (content management system) so you can update them yourself, without worrying about breaking the site.

All the sites built by WEB-right are built on 'WordPress', which is an easy to use online CMS system. You can update your site yourself without the need for any software - all you need is an internet connection. You can make the updates from a PC or Mac, or even from a tablet. We give you a guide to using the system and we are just a phone call away if you need help.

You might come across website systems called Joomla and Drupal. Although these use a CMS and you can update them yourself, they are considerably more complicated to use and update than the WordPress system. If you have good technical skills, these systems might be suitable for you. But if not, we wouldn't recommend them.

Mobile 'optimisation'

To appeal to all your visitors, websites need to look good and work well on mobile phones – this means they require some mobile optimisation. More and more people, particularly the younger generations, are using phones and other mobile devices rather than computers to search online. If your site isn't mobile-friendly, your visitor will pretty soon give up and go elsewhere. A site that isn't mobile-friendly can be almost impossible to see or read on a phone screen!

If you have an existing website and access to your visitor statistics (e.g. Google Analytics or StatCounter) take a look to see how many of your visitors are using 'mobile browsers'. If a high percentage of your visitors are using mobiles and your site doesn't work properly, you will be losing a lot of opportunities.

The percentage of mobile traffic is likely to vary depending on what business you're in. Consumer-type businesses selling to the public (e.g. online shops and tourism venues), are likely to have a higher percentage of mobile traffic than an office-based service company. This is quite logical. If your prospective customer works for a business and is likely to spend most of their day in an office sitting at a PC, that's what they'll use to search Google.

On the other hand, when that office worker goes home, he/she is likely to switch to their iPhone or Android if they want to shop or research online for their own personal needs.

Some website developers will charge you extra if you want mobile optimisation. All the sites built by WEB-right include, as standard, mobile optimisation.

If you're buying a new website, be sure to ask about mobile optimisation, if there is a charge, and how much it will be.

Google and mobile websites

There has been a lot of scaremongering about Google and websites that aren't mobile friendly. You might have been told that websites will vanish from all Google's listings completely if they can't be viewed on a mobile. That is rubbish!

What Google HAS changed is the way it ranks sites when someone searches on a mobile. If your site doesn't pass Google's 'Mobile-Friendly Test' and if it's difficult to view on a mobile, it will fall down the rankings in all Google searches conducted from a mobile device. But your site will still be found as normal if that person searches on a computer.

Buying a domain name

If this is your first website, you will need a domain name. This is the name of your website, e.g. www.mywebsitesname.co.uk. Domain names are sold by online website companies such as www.simplereg.com or www.123reg.com.

When you go online to buy your domain name, the system will check your chosen name hasn't already been taken by someone else. There are millions of websites, and millions more names

are already reserved, so it might not be easy to find a name you like. You can add hyphens (for example, www.web-right.co.uk) or you can use a combination of words, letters and numbers which will help.

When you buy a domain name, be aware, you don't own it for ever. Your domain name has to be renewed, normally at yearly or two-yearly intervals. If you don't remember to renew it, your website will vanish from the internet until you pay the renewal fee.

The domain registrar (the company you bought the name from) will send you email reminders before your renewal fee is due. But if you don't see them or you ignore them and you don't pay your renewal, your website will disappear. Eventually your domain name will be put back into circulation and could be bought by someone else.

It's not just small businesses that forget to renew their domain names. Not that long ago, Halfords forgot and their website vanished! They paid the renewal fee once they realised what had happened and their website was restored, but it probably cost them tens of thousands of pounds in lost sales while it was down!

Website hosting

All websites have to be 'hosted'. Think of hosting as paying rent for your website to 'live' on the internet. Hosting prices vary enormously from very cheap (yes, cheap again and the same applies) to very expensive. Your hosting is normally paid annually in advance, or monthly, depending on your hosting company.

Beware of cheap hosting offers. Although it might seem like a good deal to only pay a couple of pounds a month, you need a service that's secure, reliable and provides you with good support. If there is a problem and your website goes down, you don't want to wait for days or even weeks to have it fixed.

Some web developers and hosting companies charge large sums of money for hosting. We've come across companies charging in excess of £500 a year to host one small website. If you have been quoted for hosting and you think it's expensive, ask exactly what you're getting for your money and do some like-for-like price comparisons.

Although WEB-right provides hosting, we only host sites we build ourselves and this is done though a reputable British company with UK-based servers. Our annual hosting charges depend on the size of your website and how busy it is. Our average fee is normally between £90 and £150 a year. The cost of your first year's hosting is included in the price you pay for your website, along with the security updates and backups, so there is nothing more to pay until year two.

Beware of using a domain registrar or hosting company based overseas (or with their servers overseas). It could be more difficult to get support and a reliable service. If you use your website to store personal data of any form, the latest Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) have additional clauses where data is stored outside the EU or UK.

SEO (Search Engine Optimisation)

You might have heard the term SEO. It stands for search engine optimisation. This is the 'process' of making your website work so it's found by Google and the other search engines.

SEO is a big subject and there are a lot of myths surrounding it. It is not as technical or scary as a lot of people will have you believe. The most important part of SEO is the writing on your site (known as copywriting) and it will be covered later in this guide.

SEO traps to avoid!

When it comes to SEO there are a lot of cowboys and unscrupulous people about. If you don't know anything about SEO or websites, it's easy to get sucked in. It could cost you a lot of money and, in some cases, cause damage to your website and your reputation.

1. Website owners regularly get emails from SEO companies offering their services. **DELETE them**! These are spam and if you take them up, you will be throwing your money away. In the worst case scenario, these companies can damage your website so badly that Google will blacklist it.

2. Some web developers will charge you a fee to list your website with the search engines. **DON'T pay it!** Google doesn't need your website to be listed and you shouldn't pay for this. Google will find your site quite easily on its own.

3. Some unknowing or unscrupulous people might suggest you put 'invisible' text on your website to help the SEO. They will tell you to add text written in the same colour as the background so it can't be seen. While the human eye might not be able to see this, Google's systems will. So please **DON'T do this**. Your site could be penalised or even blacklisted if you do.

If you work with someone on your website's SEO, make sure they are reputable and know what they are doing.

Using photographs on your website

Photos are a great way to brighten up your website - they make the pages look interesting. If you sell products, having photographs is essential so customers can see what they're buying. If you are a service company, photos can be a little more difficult. For example, what sort of picture would an accountant use? Pictures of spreadsheets and tax returns would be pretty dull! Service companies often use abstract images or sometimes landscapes of the area where they're based.

Be aware, you must own or have permission to use any photographs or images on your website. You cannot just copy pictures off the internet or other people's websites. This is called 'plagiarism' and is theft of someone else's 'intellectual property'. Copying without permission will get you into trouble. When you're caught (and the likelihood is, you will be), you could face legal action.

Hire a professional photographer

In an ideal world, the best photographs are ones which are exclusive to you and taken by a professional photographer. But we appreciate not everyone has the budget to pay for photography.

Taking photos yourself

If you take photos yourself, don't just take one or two – take dozens! That way you have a better chance of getting some really good ones. Before you take the photos, take a long, hard look at the background and make sure there is nothing in it to spoil the pictures. We see a lot of otherwise good pictures spoilt by empty coffee cups, kid's toys or waste paper bins (or worse) in the background!

Using an image library

There are image libraries online where you can buy photographs to use on your website. Although you 'buy' the images, you don't actually 'own' them. Instead, you pay to use them under license. The license is specific to you, so you can't give the images to other people.

Prices vary, but www.123rf.com is low cost and has a good selection. You'll find plenty more if you shop around the internet.

Copywriting for websites

As we mentioned earlier, the copy (the words on your website) is the most important part of your site's SEO. The copy is also very important to the people visiting your website. That's what tells them what you do and how your products or services will benefit them.

When it comes to writing copy, you have two choices:

- Using a copywriter
  You can engage the services of a specialist copywriter to write the copy for your website. WORD-right, WEB-right's copywriting service, specialises in SEO copywriting and has a proven track record helping sites perform well.
  SEO copywriting is a skilled and time-consuming job and this can cost you as much as the website itself. However, it will make a significant difference to your site's performance. It will also save you a lot of time and hassle!

- Writing your own copy
  Many website owners opt to write their own copy because they either don't have the budget for a copywriter, or they don't know there are such services available.
  If you decide to write your own copy, you might find it hard to know what to write about and how to go about it. It is also likely to take you quite a long time.
  Please be aware, like photographs, it is against the law to copy and paste content from someone else's website to put on your own.

Copywriting training

WEB-right's sister company Copywriting Training Ltd (CTL) can help if you decide to write your own website copy. CTL runs affordable short copywriting courses which are delivered completely online.

One of these courses is SEO copywriting. This course will teach you the basics of SEO and how to go about writing for your website. The cost of the course is just £115.00 and you have access to the course material for a year. Because the course is delivered online, you can sign-up and start it at any time.

If you don't know how to go about writing the copy for your website, this SEO copywriting course will make it easier for you.

Engaging us to build your website

WEB-right has been building effective small business websites since 2009 and has a wealth of knowledge and experience. Included in our services are:

- Affordable websites to grow with your business
- SEO support
- SEO copywriting

Spread payments

If you engage WEB-right to build your website and you commission our copywriting service, a spread payment option* is available. This allows you to budget for your site by paying a fixed amount each month by Direct Debit. Ask us for more information. You can phone us on **02392 503742** or email enquiries@web-right.co.uk.

*Terms & conditions apply.

Finally …

If you're considering having a new website and there is anything you're not sure about, give us a call. Advice costs nothing and we're happy to help.