

What To Ask Your Website Company

**Getting a Website
That Actually Works
For Your Business**

Dave Cross



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business

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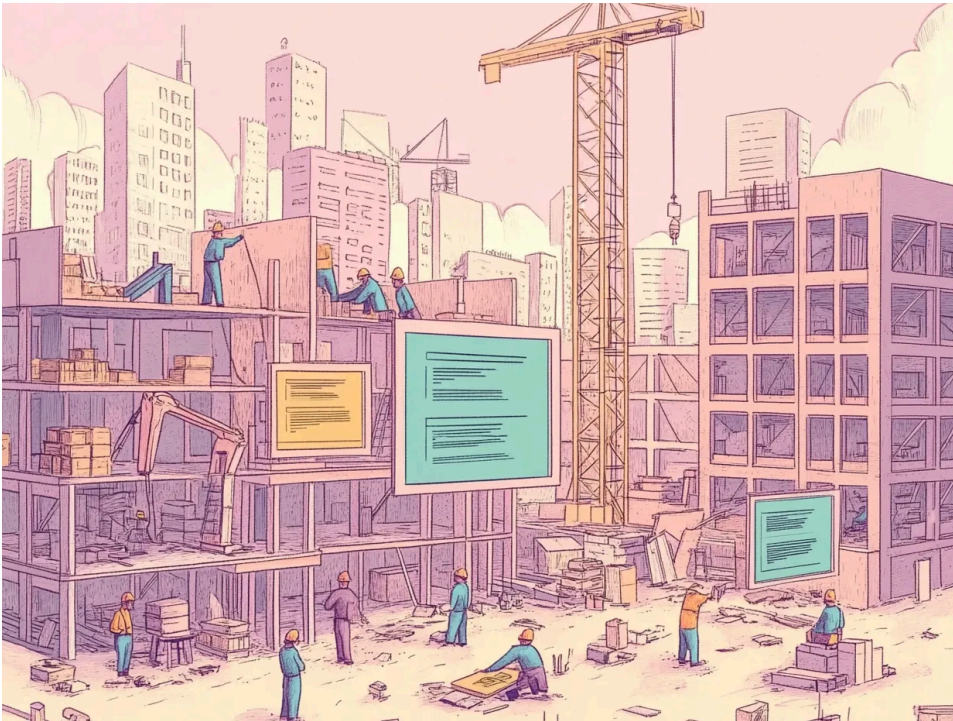
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What to Ask Your Website Company

Getting a website that actually works for your business

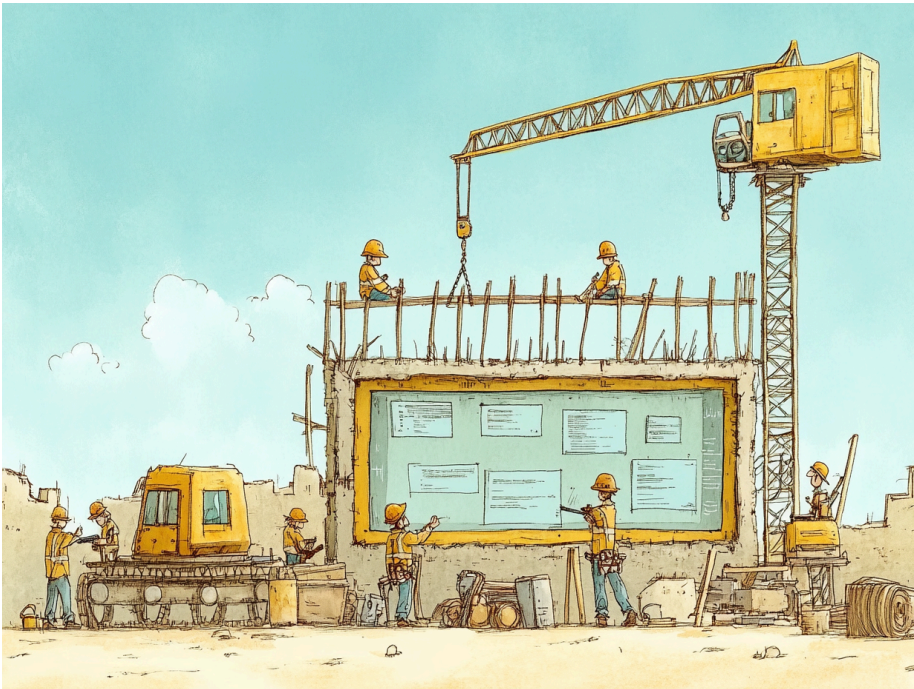


If you're a small business owner looking to build or improve your website, you might not know where to start. With so many web design companies, platforms and pricing models, it's easy to feel overwhelmed—or worse, to make an expensive mistake.

This guide is designed to give you the knowledge and confidence to make an informed decision when choosing a website provider. Whether you're setting up a new site or revamping an existing one, these articles will walk you through the key things to consider, the questions to ask, and the red flags to watch out for. By the end, you'll be ready to hire a website company that delivers a site that works for your business, your budget, and your long-term success.

Introduction

Why You Need to Ask the Right Questions



If you're a small business owner looking to build or improve your website, you might feel overwhelmed by the choices available. There are countless web agencies, freelancers, and DIY tools—how do you know

which one is right for you? And more importantly, how do you make sure you're not wasting time and money on something that won't work for your business?

Many business owners have found themselves in situations where they:

- Paid for a website that doesn't generate any leads or sales.
- Struggled to update their own website without paying extra fees.
- Discovered too late that their site wasn't mobile-friendly or optimised for Google.
- Were tied into long-term contracts they didn't fully understand.

This guide is designed to help you avoid these pitfalls by giving you the **right questions to ask** before committing to a web company.

How This Guide Will Help You

This series of articles will break down the key aspects of getting a website built in **plain English**. No jargon, no technical overload—just the essential things you need to know to make informed decisions.

By the end of this guide, you'll:

- Understand what makes a website successful.
- Know what to look for in a web development company.
- Be able to compare different quotes and services with confidence.

Each article will focus on a specific topic, such as choosing the right platform, SEO, security, pricing, and ongoing maintenance. Throughout, we'll include **practical questions you should ask** any potential website provider.

Who This Guide Is For

This guide is for **small business owners** who:

- Need a website but don't know where to start.
- Have a website but aren't happy with how it's performing.
- Want to ensure they're getting value for money from a web company.

You don't need any technical knowledge—just a willingness to ask the right questions.

Next Steps

Before diving in, take a moment to think about what you need from your website. Is it to attract new customers? Sell products? Provide information? Knowing your **goals** will help you make the best decisions.

Coming Up Next:

Defining Your Website Goals – Understanding what your website needs to achieve and how to measure success.

Stay tuned and get ready to take control of your website project!

Defining Your Website Goals

Why Every Website Needs a Clear Purpose



Before you even think about hiring a website company, you need to be clear on **what you want your website to achieve**. Many small business owners rush into getting a website built without a clear strategy, and the result is often a site that looks nice but doesn't actually help the business.

Your website is an investment, and like any investment, it should bring you results. But what kind of results? That depends on your business goals.

Common Website Goals for Small Businesses

Here are some common goals that small business websites should aim for:

- **Generating leads** – Encouraging potential customers to contact you.
- **Selling products or services** – Running an online shop.
- **Providing business information** – Helping people find your location, contact details, and opening hours.

- **Building trust and credibility** – Showcasing testimonials, case studies, and company information.
- **Educating customers** – Offering helpful content, blog posts, or FAQs.
- **Encouraging bookings or reservations** – If you run a service-based business.

The clearer you are on your website's goals, the better your web company can build something that meets your needs.

Questions to Ask Yourself

Before speaking to a website company, take a few minutes to consider these questions:

1. **What is the primary purpose of my website?** (Lead generation, sales, information, etc.)
2. **What action do I want visitors to take?** (Fill out a contact form, buy something, call me, etc.)
3. **Who is my target audience?** (Age, location, interests, online behaviour.)
4. **How will I measure success?** (More enquiries, increased sales, better brand recognition.)

5. **What content do I need?** (Do I already have text and images, or do I need help creating them?)

Questions to Ask Your Website Company

Once you know what you want from your website, you can ask potential website providers the right questions:

1. **How will you design the site to help achieve my goals?**
2. **What features do you recommend based on my business type?**
3. **Can you provide examples of websites you've built for similar businesses?**
4. **How will the website encourage visitors to take action?**
5. **Can you help with content, or do I need to provide everything myself?**

Avoiding the “Looks Nice but Does Nothing” Trap

A common mistake is focusing too much on appearance and not enough on functionality. A visually stunning website is **useless** if it doesn't convert visitors into customers. Make sure your website is designed with a **clear purpose and user journey** in mind.

Next Steps

Once you're clear on your goals, the next step is choosing the right **platform** for your website. Some businesses need a simple website they can update themselves, while others require an advanced e-commerce solution. We'll cover this in the next article.

Coming Up Next:

Choosing the Right Platform – Understanding whether WordPress, Shopify, Wix, or a custom-built solution is best for you.

Choosing the Right Platform

Why the Platform Matters



One of the biggest decisions you'll make when getting a website built is **which platform it will be built on**. The

platform affects how easy it is to update your site, how flexible it is, and how much it will cost in the long run.

If you don't choose wisely, you could end up with a website that's difficult to update, expensive to maintain, or completely unsuitable for your business needs.

Common Website Platforms

Here's a quick overview of the most popular website platforms for small businesses:

1. WordPress (Most Popular)

- Best for: Businesses that need a flexible, customisable website.
- Pros: Huge range of plugins, good for SEO, can grow with your business.
- Cons: Needs regular maintenance, can be complex for beginners.

2. Shopify (Best for E-commerce)

- Best for: Online stores selling products.
- Pros: Secure, easy to use, includes payment processing.
- Cons: Monthly fees, limited flexibility outside of e-commerce.

3. Wix & Squarespace (Best for Simplicity)

- Best for: Businesses needing a simple, easy-to-maintain website.
- Pros: No coding required, drag-and-drop builder, includes hosting.
- Cons: Less flexibility, harder to scale if your business grows.

4. Custom-Built Websites

- Best for: Businesses with very specific needs or high traffic.
- Pros: Fully tailored, can be optimised for performance and security.
- Cons: Expensive, requires a developer for updates.

Questions to Ask Yourself

Before choosing a platform, consider these questions:

1. **Will I need to update the website myself?** If so, you'll want something user-friendly.
2. **Do I need to sell products online?** If yes, e-commerce platforms like Shopify might be best.
3. **What's my budget for setup and ongoing costs?** Some platforms have monthly fees, others require hosting and maintenance.
4. **Will I need advanced features in the future?** If your business will grow, choose a scalable platform.
5. **How important is SEO?** Some platforms (like WordPress) are better for search engine rankings than others.

Questions to Ask Your Website Company

When speaking to a web company, ask them:

1. Which platform do you recommend for my business, and why?
2. Will I be able to update the website myself? If so, how?
3. What are the ongoing costs for hosting, maintenance, or subscriptions?
4. Can I move my website to another provider in the future if needed?
5. What are the pros and cons of the platform you're suggesting?

Avoiding Lock-In

Some web companies build sites on **proprietary platforms**, meaning you can't move your website elsewhere if you're unhappy. Always ensure your website is on a platform you can control and move if necessary.

Next Steps

Now that you have a better idea of which platform might work best, the next thing to consider is **how your**

website will be found online. A great-looking site is worthless if nobody visits it! In the next article, we'll look at **SEO and performance**—how to make sure your site ranks well in Google and loads quickly for visitors.

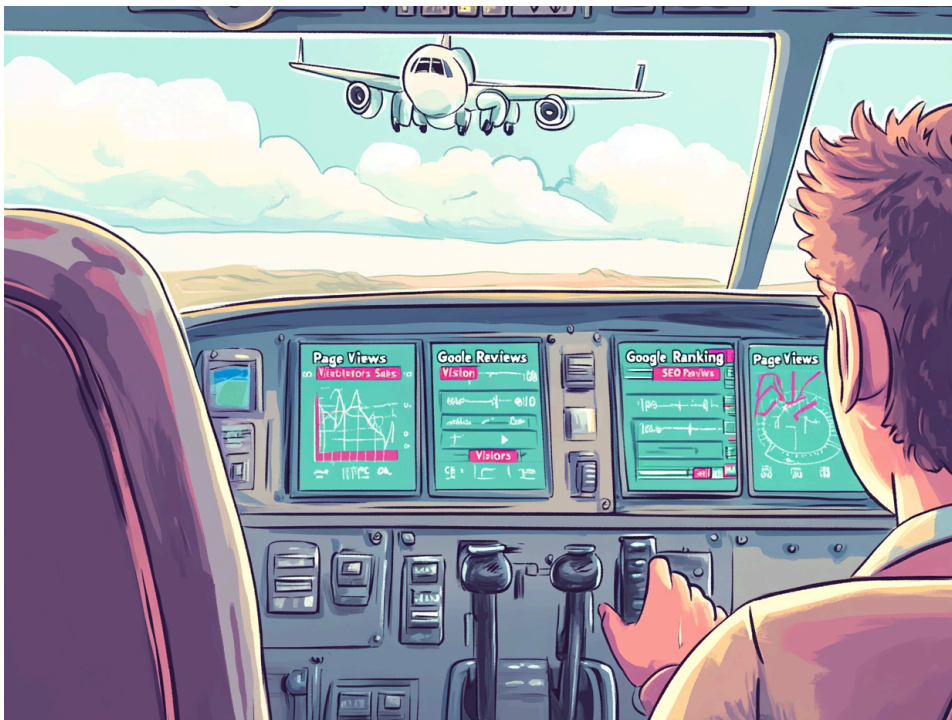
Coming Up Next:

SEO & Performance: How Will My Website Be Found?

– Ensuring your website appears in search engines and performs well for visitors.

SEO & Performance

Why SEO and Performance Matter



Having a website is pointless if no one can find it. Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) helps your website appear in Google searches, while performance ensures your site loads quickly and works well on all devices.

Many small business owners assume that just having a website means they'll start getting visitors. Unfortunately, that's not the case—your site needs to be **optimised** to show up in search results and load quickly enough to keep visitors engaged.

Key SEO Essentials for Your Website

Good SEO isn't about tricking Google—it's about making your website **relevant and useful** to your audience. Here are some essential SEO factors:

1. Keyword Optimisation

- Your website should include the words and phrases your customers search for.

- Example: If you're a plumber in Manchester, your site should mention "plumber in Manchester" naturally in the content.

2. Mobile-Friendly Design

- More than 50% of web traffic comes from mobile devices.
- Google ranks mobile-friendly sites higher.
- Your site should be easy to read and navigate on phones and tablets.

3. Page Speed

- If your site takes more than **3 seconds** to load, visitors may leave.
- Factors affecting speed include hosting quality, image sizes, and unnecessary scripts.

4. Clear Site Structure

- Google favours sites with clear navigation.
- Each page should have a clear **title**, relevant **headings**, and **internal links**.

5. Local SEO (For Local Businesses)

- Ensure your business is listed on **Google Business Profile** (formerly Google My Business).
- Include your business name, address, and phone number **consistently** across the web.

Questions to Ask Yourself

Before discussing SEO with your website company, consider:

1. **Who are my target customers, and what will they search for?**
2. **Is my business local, national, or international?**
Local businesses need different SEO strategies.
3. **Do I plan to write blog posts or update content regularly?** Fresh content helps with SEO.
4. **How important is speed and mobile-friendliness to my audience?** (Hint: It's very important!)

Questions to Ask Your Website Company

When speaking to a web agency, ask them:

1. **How will you optimise my site for search engines?**
2. **Will my site be mobile-friendly and fast?**
3. **What tools do you use to track website traffic and SEO performance?** (Google Analytics, Search Console, etc.)
4. **Will you set up basic SEO features like page titles and descriptions?**
5. **Do you offer ongoing SEO support or advice?**

Avoiding SEO Scams

Some companies promise to “get you to #1 on Google” for a fee. **Be cautious!** SEO takes time, and no company can guarantee top rankings. Instead, focus on long-term strategies like **quality content, site speed, and local SEO.**

Next Steps

Now that you know how to get visitors to your site, the next step is ensuring **your website is secure and well-maintained**. A hacked or broken website can damage your reputation and business. In the next article, we'll cover security, backups, and long-term website care.

Coming Up Next:

Website Security & Ongoing Maintenance – How to keep your website safe, up to date, and running smoothly.

Security & Ongoing Maintenance

Why Website Security and Maintenance Matter



A website isn't something you build once and forget about. It needs regular maintenance to stay secure, function properly, and avoid costly downtime. Many small business owners assume that once their site is live, their job is done—but failing to maintain your website can lead to security breaches, broken features, and even loss of business.

Key Aspects of Website Security

1. SSL Certificates (HTTPS)

- SSL encrypts data between your website and visitors, making it more secure.
- Google **prioritises** secure websites in search rankings.
- If your site doesn't have SSL, visitors may see a **"Not Secure"** warning in their browser.

2. Regular Software Updates

- Websites built on platforms like **WordPress** need frequent updates to prevent hacking.
- Plugins, themes, and core software must be kept up to date.

3. Strong Passwords & User Access Control

- Weak passwords are a major security risk.
- Limit admin access to only those who **need** it.

4. Backups (Just in Case!)

- Regular backups ensure that if something goes wrong, you can restore your site.
- Ideally, backups should be **automatic** and stored securely **off-site**.

5. Malware Protection & Monitoring

- Some websites get hacked without owners realising.
- Security plugins or services can help monitor for suspicious activity.

Key Aspects of Website Maintenance

Keeping your website in good shape means more than just security—it also includes performance and functionality:

- **Checking for broken links** – Avoid frustrating visitors with dead links.
- **Ensuring forms and features work properly** – Contact forms, payment systems, and interactive elements must function as expected.
- **Updating content** – Outdated information can hurt credibility and SEO.
- **Checking speed and performance** – Slow sites drive visitors away.

Questions to Ask Yourself

Before discussing security and maintenance with your web company, consider:

1. **Who will be responsible for keeping my website updated?**
2. **What happens if my website gets hacked or goes offline?**
3. **Do I need to update my own content, or will someone do it for me?**
4. **How important is uptime and security for my business?** (E-commerce sites, for example, need extra protection.)

Questions to Ask Your Website Company

When hiring a web company, ask them:

1. **Will my website have an SSL certificate, and is it included in the cost?**
2. **How often do you update the website software, plugins, and security settings?**
3. **Will my website have automatic backups? Where are they stored?**
4. **What security measures do you implement to prevent hacking?**

5. Do you offer ongoing maintenance services, and how much do they cost?

Avoiding “Set It and Forget It” Mistakes

Many business owners think security and maintenance are optional—but they’re essential. A neglected website can lead to downtime, security breaches, or poor performance, all of which can harm your business.

If your website company **doesn’t mention security or maintenance**, that’s a red flag!

Next Steps

Now that you know how to keep your website safe and running smoothly, it’s time to think about **content and user experience (UX)**. A well-maintained website is great, but if the content and design don’t engage visitors, you won’t get results. Our next article will cover

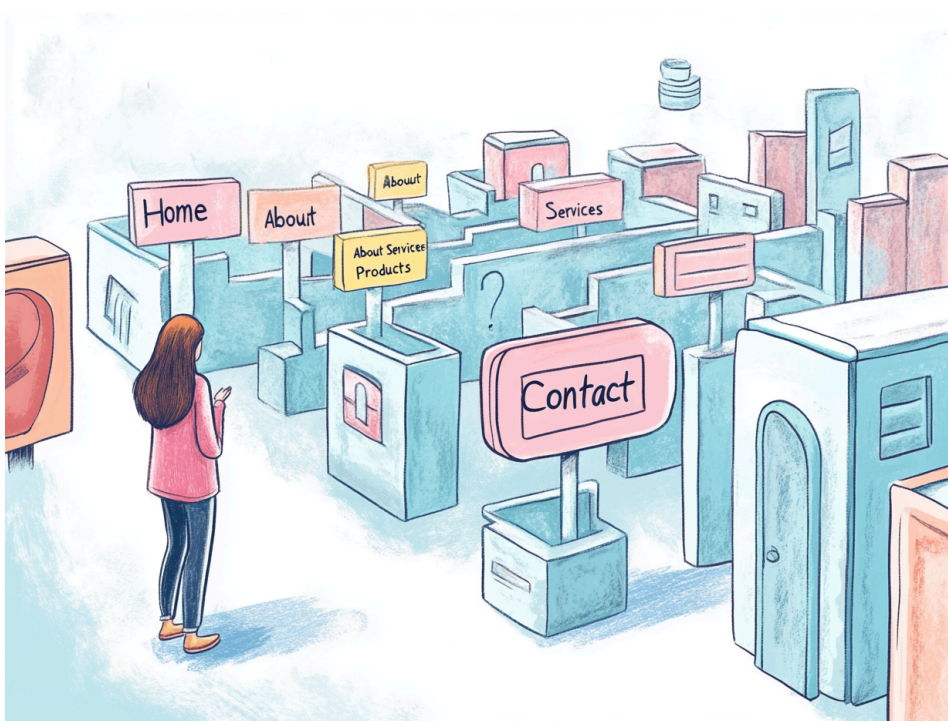
how to create a website that's easy to use and full of useful information.

Coming Up Next:

Content & User Experience (UX) – How to create a website that's clear, engaging, and effective.

Content & User Experience (UX)

Why Content and UX Matter



A beautiful website is useless if visitors can't find what they need or don't understand your message. Your

website's **content** (text, images, videos) and **user experience (UX)** (how easy it is to navigate and use) are crucial for converting visitors into customers.

Many small business owners focus too much on looks and not enough on **clarity and usability**. A good website should be **easy to read, simple to navigate, and designed with your audience in mind**.

Key Aspects of Content

1. Clear, Concise Messaging

- Visitors should instantly understand **who you are and what you offer**.
- Avoid jargon—write as if you're explaining to a customer in person.
- Use **headings and bullet points** to break up text and make it scannable.

2. Calls to Action (CTAs)

- Every page should guide visitors to take **action** (e.g., “Call us”, “Get a quote”, “Buy now”).
- Make CTAs **visible, clear, and easy to click**.

3. High-Quality Images & Branding

- Use professional images that reflect your business.
- Avoid generic stock photos—customers prefer **real, authentic images**.
- Ensure images are **optimised for fast loading** (large files slow down websites).

4. Trust Signals

- Display **testimonials, case studies, awards, and client logos** to build trust.
- If you’re selling online, include **secure payment badges**.

5. SEO-Friendly Content

- Use relevant keywords naturally in your content.

- Each page should have a unique **title and meta description** to help Google understand your site.

Key Aspects of User Experience (UX)

1. Simple, Logical Navigation

- Visitors should find what they need in **3 clicks or fewer**.
- Keep menus clear and simple—avoid too many options.
- Important pages (Contact, Services, Shop) should be easy to find.

2. Mobile-Friendly Design

- Your site must work well on **phones and tablets**.
- Text should be readable without zooming.
- Buttons and links should be **easy to tap**.

3. Fast Load Speed

- Slow websites lose visitors.
- Optimise images, use fast hosting, and limit unnecessary features.

4. Accessibility for All Users

- Follow accessibility best practices (e.g., **alt text for images, readable fonts, colour contrast**).
- Make sure users with disabilities can navigate your site easily.

Questions to Ask Yourself

Before discussing content and UX with your website company, consider:

1. **What key information must be on my website?**
(Services, pricing, testimonials, etc.)
2. **What action do I want visitors to take?** (Call me, book an appointment, make a purchase?)
3. **Do I have high-quality images and written content, or do I need help creating them?**

4. Does my target audience browse on mobile, desktop, or both?

Questions to Ask Your Website Company

1. Will you help with content, or do I need to provide everything myself?
2. How will you ensure the site is easy to navigate?
3. Will the website be fully mobile-friendly?
4. Can you optimise images and pages for fast loading?
5. How will you make sure the site is accessible to all users?

Avoiding Common Mistakes

Many websites fail because they:

- Use **too much text**—people skim, they don't read!
- Have no **clear call to action**, leaving visitors unsure what to do next.

- Are **cluttered or confusing**, making people give up and leave.

A simple, well-structured site **with clear messaging and easy navigation** will always perform better than a flashy but confusing one.

Next Steps

Now that you know how to structure your content and UX, the next step is ensuring your website works **for e-commerce or service bookings** (if relevant). If you're planning to sell online or allow customers to book appointments, you need to get the right systems in place.

Coming Up Next:

E-commerce & Payment Systems – What to consider if you plan to sell products or take payments through your website.

E-commerce & Payment Systems

Why E-commerce & Payment Systems Matter



If your business sells products or services online, you need a **reliable, secure, and user-friendly** e-commerce system. The wrong setup can lead to **frustrated customers, lost sales, and security risks**.

Many small businesses rush into setting up an online store without considering **how payments will work, what platform to use, or how orders will be processed**. This article covers the key factors to get it right.

Choosing the Right E-commerce Platform

The best platform depends on what you're selling and how much control you need. Here are the most common options:

1. Shopify (Best for Simplicity)

- All-in-one solution with hosting, security, and payment processing built in.
- Easy to set up and manage.
- Monthly fees apply.

2. WooCommerce (Best for WordPress Users)

- A plugin for WordPress that turns your site into an online store.
- Flexible and customisable, but requires more setup.
- You'll need to manage hosting, security, and maintenance.

3. Squarespace & Wix E-commerce (Best for Small Shops)

- Simple, beginner-friendly options with built-in store features.
- Limited flexibility compared to Shopify or WooCommerce.

4. Custom E-commerce Solutions

- Fully tailored for businesses with unique needs.
- Higher cost and requires ongoing developer support.

Key Considerations for Selling Online

1. Payment Methods

- Most platforms support **Stripe, PayPal, and credit/debit card payments**.
- Some businesses may need **Apple Pay, Google Pay, or Buy Now, Pay Later options**.

2. Security & Compliance

- Your website must be **PCI-DSS compliant** to process card payments securely.
- An **SSL certificate (HTTPS)** is **essential** for security.

3. Checkout Experience

- A **smooth, easy-to-use checkout** reduces abandoned carts.

- Offer guest checkout—forcing account creation can lose sales.

4. Managing Orders & Inventory

- Does the system track stock levels automatically?
- Can you manage refunds and returns easily?

5. Shipping & Taxes

- Can the system calculate **shipping costs** and **VAT/taxes** automatically?
- Does it integrate with delivery providers (Royal Mail, DPD, FedEx)?

Questions to Ask Yourself

Before choosing an e-commerce system, consider:

1. **What products or services am I selling?**
(Physical, digital, subscriptions?)

2. **Do I need a simple store or a fully customised e-commerce solution?**
3. **Which payment methods do my customers prefer?**
4. **How will I handle shipping, returns, and customer service?**

Questions to Ask Your Website Company

1. **Which e-commerce platform do you recommend, and why?**
2. **Will my store be secure and PCI compliant?**
3. **How will the checkout process be optimised to maximise sales?**
4. **Can the system handle VAT and tax calculations automatically?**
5. **What are the ongoing costs for my e-commerce setup?**

Avoiding Common Mistakes

Many small businesses struggle with e-commerce because they:

- Choose a **platform that's too complex or too limited**.
- Neglect security, putting customer data at risk.
- Have **slow or frustrating checkout processes**, leading to abandoned carts.
- Don't plan for **shipping, tax, and order management** properly.

A well-planned online store makes it easy for customers to buy from you while keeping things simple on your end.

Next Steps

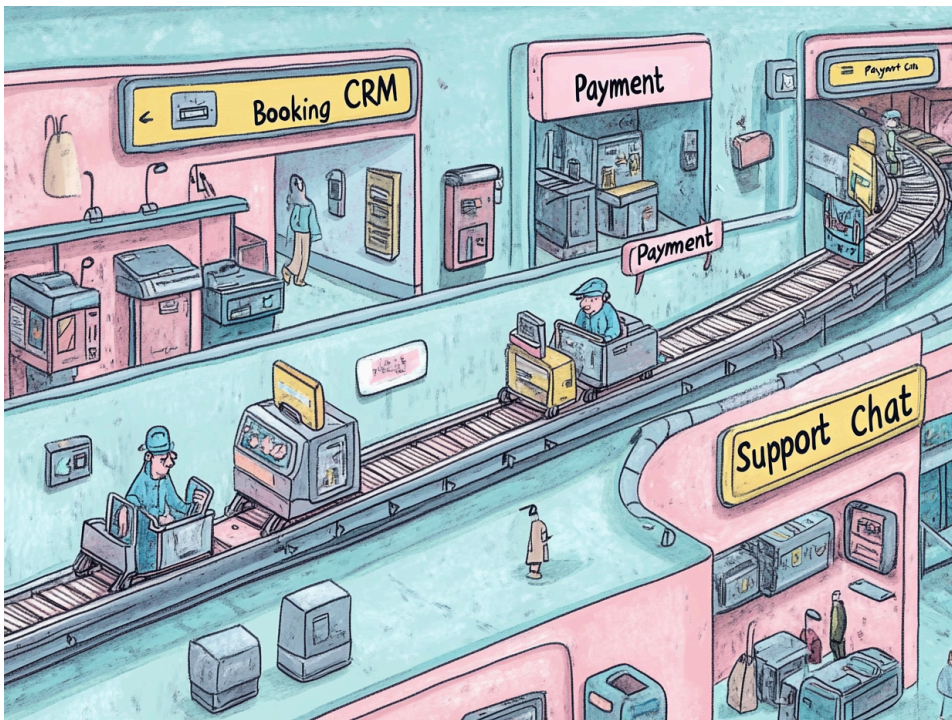
Once you have an e-commerce system in place, you might need to **connect it to other tools** like your CRM, email marketing platform, or booking system. The next article covers **website integrations and automation** to help streamline your business.

Coming Up Next:

Integrations & Automation – How to connect your website to other systems and save time with automation.

Integrations & Automation

Why Integrations & Automation Matter



Your website doesn't operate in isolation—it should work **seamlessly with the other tools you use** to run your business. Whether it's capturing leads, handling bookings, or automating customer follow-ups, **integrations can save time, reduce errors, and improve efficiency.**

Many small businesses don't realise how much manual work they could automate with the right setup. A well-integrated website can handle tasks like:

- Sending contact form submissions straight to your CRM.
- Adding customers to your email marketing list automatically.
- Syncing online bookings with your calendar.

Common Website Integrations

1. Customer Relationship Management (CRM) Tools

- Automatically store and manage customer details.
- Popular options: **HubSpot, Salesforce, Zoho CRM.**

2. Email Marketing Platforms

- Connect forms to services like **Mailchimp, ConvertKit, or Brevo** to grow your email list.
- Send automated welcome emails and follow-ups.

3. Booking & Appointment Systems

- Allow customers to schedule appointments online.

- Popular options: **Calendly, Acuity Scheduling, SimplyBook.me.**

4. Payment & Invoicing Systems

- Automate invoicing and payment processing.
- Popular options: **Stripe, PayPal, Square, Xero.**

5. Social Media & Advertising Tools

- Sync website content with **Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, or Google Ads.**
- Track visitors with Facebook Pixel and Google Analytics.

6. Chatbots & Live Chat

- Provide instant customer support via **Tidio, Drift, LiveChat.**
- Chatbots can answer common questions automatically.

Key Benefits of Automation

- **Saves time** – Reduces manual data entry and repetitive tasks.
- **Improves customer experience** – Faster responses and smoother processes.
- **Reduces errors** – Less risk of missing important leads or bookings.
- **Increases efficiency** – Your website works 24/7, even when you're not available.

Questions to Ask Yourself

Before discussing integrations with your web company, consider:

1. **What tools do I already use (email marketing, CRM, booking software)?**
2. **What tasks am I currently doing manually that could be automated?**
3. **How important is it for my website to collect and organise customer data?**
4. **Do I need real-time notifications for new leads or bookings?**

Questions to Ask Your Website Company

1. Can my website integrate with [specific tool you use]?
2. Will form submissions be automatically stored in my CRM or emailed to me?
3. Can my site automate appointment bookings and payment processing?
4. What automation options can you recommend to save time?
5. Will integrations require ongoing maintenance or extra costs?

Avoiding Common Mistakes

Many businesses miss out on **huge time savings** because they:

- Rely on **manual processes** when automation is available.
- Choose a website platform that **doesn't support integrations**.

- Don't set up proper tracking, missing out on valuable customer data.

A well-integrated website makes your business more efficient and improves the customer experience.

Next Steps

Now that your website is set up to work efficiently with your business tools, it's time to talk about **pricing and ownership**. Many small business owners don't realise that they might not **own** their website—or they get hit with unexpected costs. In the next article, we'll cover **how to avoid hidden fees and ensure you truly own your website**.

Coming Up Next:

Pricing & Ownership: What Are You Really Paying For?

– Understanding website costs and avoiding hidden fees.

Pricing & Ownership

Why Pricing & Ownership Matter



Many small business owners get caught out by **unexpected costs, hidden fees, or unclear ownership** when hiring a web company. Some discover too late that they **don't even own their own website**—it's locked to a platform or agency, making it difficult to move or update.

Understanding **what you're paying for and who controls your website** is crucial to avoid surprises down the line.

Understanding Website Costs

Website pricing can vary widely depending on complexity, functionality, and the provider. Here are the main cost factors to consider:

1. Upfront Costs (One-Time Fees)

- **Website design & development** – The cost to build the site.

- **Domain name** – The website address (e.g., mybusiness.co.uk). Typically paid annually.
- **Hosting** – Where your website lives online. Some platforms include it, others require separate hosting.
- **SSL certificate** – Provides security (some hosts include it for free).

2. Ongoing Costs (Recurring Fees)

- **Hosting fees** – Monthly or yearly, depending on provider.
- **Maintenance & updates** – Keeping software/plugins up to date.
- **Support & troubleshooting** – Some agencies offer this as a monthly service.
- **E-commerce fees** – Platforms like Shopify charge transaction fees.
- **Marketing & SEO tools** – If using premium plugins or services.

3. Additional Costs to Watch Out For

- **Custom features** – Extra functionality (e.g., booking systems, membership areas) may cost more.
- **Stock images & content creation** – If the agency provides images or writes content, there may be extra fees.
- **Email hosting** – Some website packages don't include professional email accounts.

Who Owns Your Website?

1. Do You Own the Domain Name?

- The domain should be registered in **your** name, not the web company's.
- If they register it for you, make sure you have full access.

2. Can You Move Your Website?

- Some platforms (like Wix, Squarespace) don't allow you to migrate your site elsewhere.
- Custom-built websites on WordPress or similar platforms are usually **more portable**.

3. Do You Have Admin Access?

- You should have **full access** to your website's backend.
- Some companies restrict access so you have to pay them for every change.

4. What Happens if You Stop Paying?

- Does your site get deleted, or can you keep it?
- Some agencies charge a fee to transfer the website to another provider.

Questions to Ask Yourself

Before signing a contract, consider:

- 1. What's my total budget (including ongoing costs)?**
- 2. Do I want to manage my own website, or will I need ongoing support?**
- 3. Am I comfortable with the platform, or will I rely on a developer for changes?**
- 4. What happens if I want to switch providers in the future?**

Questions to Ask Your Website Company

- 1. What's included in the quoted price, and what's extra?**
- 2. Who owns the domain name and hosting account?**
- 3. Will I have full admin access to my website?**
- 4. Are there any ongoing costs I need to be aware of?**
- 5. Can I move my website to another provider if needed?**

Avoiding Common Mistakes

Many business owners regret their website deals because they:

- Didn't read the **contract or terms of service** carefully.
- Assumed they **owned the website**, only to find out they didn't.
- Were **locked into high ongoing costs** they didn't expect.
- Chose a cheap deal that led to **poor support or hidden fees** later.

Next Steps

Once you understand pricing and ownership, the final step is making sure you're **choosing a reliable web company**. The next article will help you spot red flags and avoid common pitfalls when hiring a website provider.

Coming Up Next:

Red Flags: How to Spot a Bad Website Company –

Avoiding unreliable providers and making sure you get a good deal.

Red Flags & How to Spot a Bad Website Company

Why You Need to Watch for Red Flags



Not all website companies are created equal. Some provide excellent service, while others **overcharge, underdeliver, or lock you into restrictive contracts**. Many small business owners have been burned by web companies that disappear, deliver subpar work, or make it difficult to update or move their website.

Knowing the warning signs **before** you commit can save you time, money, and frustration.

Red Flags to Watch Out For

1. No Clear Pricing or Hidden Fees

- They can't give a **straight answer** about costs.
- They offer a very cheap starting price but have **hidden add-ons** for basic features.
- They insist on **long-term contracts** with **no clear way to exit**.

2. You Don't Own Your Website

- They **register the domain name in their name, not yours.**
- Your website is locked into **their custom system**, making it impossible to move.
- They refuse to give you **admin access.**

3. Poor Communication & Support

- Slow to reply to emails or messages.
- No clear process for support or maintenance after launch.
- No documentation or training on how to use your website.

4. No Portfolio or Real Client Reviews

- They can't show **previous work** or only show **generic templates.**
- Reviews seem **fake or overly generic.**
- No **case studies** or references from real businesses.

5. They Guarantee You'll Be "#1 on Google"

- No one can guarantee top rankings on Google.
- SEO takes time, and any company promising **instant results** is likely using **spammy techniques** that could get your site penalised.

6. No Security or Maintenance Plan

- They don't mention **SSL certificates, backups, or security updates**.
- No plan for keeping your website **updated and secure**.

7. They Won't Explain Things Clearly

- They use **too much jargon** and avoid answering basic questions.
- They make you feel **stupid for asking questions**.
- A good web company should explain things in **plain English**.

Questions to Ask Yourself

Before signing a contract, consider:

1. **Do I feel comfortable with their level of communication and transparency?**
2. **Have I checked their previous work and reviews?**
3. **Do I fully understand what I'm paying for?**
4. **If I need to move my website elsewhere, can I?**

Questions to Ask Your Website Company

1. **Can I see examples of websites you've built for businesses like mine?**
2. **Who owns the website and domain name once it's built?**
3. **What happens if I need support after launch?**
4. **Are there any hidden fees or ongoing costs?**
5. **How do you handle security and updates?**

Avoiding Common Pitfalls

Many businesses regret their website choice because they:

- Chose the **cheapest option** without checking the details.
- Didn't read the **contract** before signing.
- Assumed **they owned the website**, only to find out they didn't.
- Got **stuck with a bad provider** and couldn't easily switch.

A reputable website company should be honest, transparent, and helpful. If something feels off, trust your instincts and look for a better option.

Next Steps

Now that you know how to spot a bad web company, the final step is **making an informed decision**. The next article will **summarise everything** and help you put together a final checklist before hiring a website company.

Coming Up Next:

Conclusion: Making an Informed Decision – A final checklist to ensure you choose the right website provider.

Conclusion & Final Checklist

Making an Informed Decision



Choosing the right website company is one of the most important business decisions you'll make. A good website is an **investment that helps your business grow**, while a bad one can be a waste of money and cause endless frustration.

By now, you should have a solid understanding of:

- What your **website goals** should be.
- The **best platform** for your business.
- How to ensure your site is **SEO-friendly and high-performing**.
- The importance of **security, maintenance, and ownership**.
- How to avoid **scammy or unreliable web companies**.

Final Checklist Before Hiring a Website Company

Before signing any contracts, go through this checklist to ensure you're making the right choice.

1. Business Goals & Strategy

- ✓ I know what I want my website to achieve (e.g., leads, sales, bookings).
- ✓ I have a clear idea of what pages and features I need.
- ✓ I know how I will measure the success of my website.

2. Choosing the Right Platform

- ✓ I understand the pros and cons of WordPress, Shopify, Wix, or a custom-built site.
- ✓ I know whether I want to **manage the website myself or rely on a developer**.
- ✓ I've checked that my website can be **moved to another provider if needed**.

3. SEO & Performance

- ✓ My website will be **mobile-friendly and optimised for search engines**.
- ✓ The website company will set up **Google Analytics and Search Console**.

- ✓ My website will load **quickly** and follow SEO best practices.

4. Security & Ongoing Maintenance

- ✓ My site will have an **SSL certificate (HTTPS)**.
- ✓ The company has a **plan for updates, backups, and security**.
- ✓ I understand who is responsible for **maintaining my site after launch**.

5. Content & User Experience

- ✓ My website will be **easy to navigate and accessible to all users**.
- ✓ Calls to Action (CTAs) will be **clear and visible**.
- ✓ I have a plan for **creating or updating content** on my site.

6. E-commerce & Payment Systems (If Applicable)

- ✓ My website will use a **secure and reliable payment system**.
- ✓ Shipping, tax, and order management are all set up

correctly.

✓ The checkout process is **fast and user-friendly**.

7. Integrations & Automation

✓ My website can connect to my **CRM, email marketing, or booking system**.

✓ I understand how **automation can save me time**.

✓ The website company can set up **any essential integrations**.

8. Pricing & Ownership

✓ I know the **full cost** of the website, including ongoing fees.

✓ I will own **my domain name and website** after launch.

✓ I have full admin access and control over my website.

9. Choosing the Right Website Company

✓ They have **good reviews and a portfolio of real client work**.

- ✓ They communicate clearly and **explain things in plain English.**
- ✓ There are **no hidden fees, long contracts, or vague pricing.**
- ✓ They offer **support or training** for managing the site after launch.

Final Thoughts

Getting a website built can feel overwhelming, but by **asking the right questions and understanding your options**, you can make a smart, informed decision. A good website isn't just about looking nice—it should be a valuable tool that **supports your business growth and goals.**

If you follow this guide and checklist, you'll be well-prepared to work with a website company that delivers **great results, fair pricing, and long-term value.**

What's Next?

Now that you have all the information you need, the next step is to start conversations with website

providers. Use this guide as a reference, take your time to compare options, and don't be afraid to ask **plenty of questions**.

Good luck with your website project!

About the book

About the author



Dave Cross is a long-time software developer, writer, and consultant with over 30 years of experience helping businesses of all sizes get the most from the web. He has worked with organisations across a wide range of industries, building and improving practical, sustainable, and user-focused websites.

Having seen far too many small business owners misled by confusing jargon or opaque pricing, Dave created this guide to demystify the process of building a website—and to empower you to make smart, informed decisions.

You can learn more about Dave and his work at davecross.co.uk. If you need clear, honest advice or practical help with your website, he'd love to hear from you.

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