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How to Build a Website for Your Small Business

Build a small business website that actually gets you customers — not just an online brochure nobody acts on.

4-day guide · 4 chapters · Self-Directed Learning Framework

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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Every guide on this site is produced with the Self-Directed Learning Framework: instead of an article that explains a topic at you, it turns the topic into a structure you work through — each chapter with one outcome, a starting action under twelve minutes, the minimum you actually need to know, a worked example, a checklist, and exercises using your own situation. No filler, no re-reading required.

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Deciding What Your Site Actually Needs to Do

> **Outcome:** "I can state, in one sentence, the single action I want a visitor to take — and every page decision from here follows from that."

Micro-start (under 12 minutes)

Finish this sentence right now: "When someone visits my site, I want them to ___." If you wrote more than one action, cross out all but the most important.

The minimum you need to know

A business website's most common failure isn't bad design — it's trying to do everything at once, so a visitor leaves without doing anything. Before any design or page-building starts, decide the one primary job: get a phone call, get a booking, get an online sale, or build enough trust that someone contacts you later. Everything on the site should serve that one job; a secondary goal (building an email list, showcasing past work) can exist, but never compete with the primary one for the visitor's attention on the homepage. This single decision also tells you what to measure — if the job is phone calls, success is a phone number that's easy to find and click, not how many pages someone views.

Worked example

Worked example: picking one job from several options. A local plumber could aim for phone calls, online booking, or quote requests. After thinking it through, phone calls win — most of their current customers call rather than book online, so the whole site is built around making the phone number impossible to miss, rather than splitting attention across a booking form nobody would use yet.

Checklist

- [ ] One single primary action for visitors written down in one sentence
- [ ] Any secondary goals identified but confirmed as not competing with the primary one
- [ ] A way to measure the primary action chosen (calls, form fills, sales)
- [ ] The primary action matches how your actual customers currently prefer to reach you

Exercises

1. Write your one-sentence primary goal and read it to someone else — ask them what they think the website is for.
2. List any secondary goals and mark which page (not the homepage) each belongs on.

The Pages Every Small Business Site Needs (and the Ones It Doesn't)

> **Outcome:** "I have the minimum set of pages a small business actually needs, without extra pages competing for attention or taking weeks to build."

Micro-start (under 12 minutes)

Write down four page names: Home, About, your offer (Services or Products), Contact. That's the starting list — resist adding more right now.

The minimum you need to know

Four pages cover almost every small business: Home (states what you do and for whom, in one glance, with the primary action from Chapter 1 front and center), About (who's behind the business — a real photo and a few honest sentences build more trust here than a polished paragraph with no face attached), Services or Products (a clear list, plain language, prices if you're comfortable sharing them — vague descriptions make people hesitate to call and ask), and Contact (phone, email, address if relevant, and nothing else competing on that page). Things to deliberately skip at first: a blog (only worth it if you'll actually keep writing), a testimonials page (fold two or three real quotes into the homepage instead of a separate page few will click), and a FAQ (add it later, once you know what people actually ask). A small, complete site beats a large, half-finished one for both visitors and search engines.

Worked example

Worked example: a four-page bakery site. Home: "Custom cakes and daily pastries in [town]" plus a phone number and a photo of the shop front. About: the owner's photo and three sentences on how the bakery started. Services: a simple list of what's offered with a starting price range. Contact: phone, address, hours — nothing else. No blog, no FAQ yet — those can come once the core site is live and working.

Checklist

- [ ] Four core pages identified: Home, About, offer page, Contact
- [ ] Home page states what the business does and for whom, immediately
- [ ] About page includes a real photo, not a stock image
- [ ] Services/Products described in plain language, not vague marketing phrases
- [ ] Blog, testimonials page, and FAQ deliberately deferred, not built prematurely

Exercises

1. Draft your Home page's first sentence stating what you do and for whom.
2. List your services or products in plain, specific language — no vague marketing phrases.

Making It Look Credible and Easy to Contact

> **Outcome:** "A stranger landing on my site for the first time can tell this is a real, trustworthy business, and can contact me in one click."

Micro-start (under 12 minutes)

Time yourself: how many clicks does it take a visitor to find your phone number or email from your homepage? If it's more than one, that's today's first fix.

The minimum you need to know

Strangers decide whether a small business site is trustworthy within seconds, based on a handful of specific signals: real photos (of the owner, the workspace, the actual product) instead of generic stock imagery, a visible and specific address or service area rather than vagueness about location, a professional email address matching your domain rather than a free webmail address, and — if you have them — two or three genuine customer quotes, ideally with a first name attached. Contact friction kills conversions quietly: a phone number that's an image instead of clickable text, a contact form instead of a visible phone number for a business where people prefer calling, or a contact page buried three clicks deep, all lose visitors who would have reached out if it had been one click easier.

Worked example

Worked example: fixing one friction point. A site originally had its phone number only on the Contact page, three clicks from the homepage. Adding the same number, as a tappable link, into the header on every page meant a mobile visitor could call directly from wherever they landed — no fix to the design, no new page, just removing friction from an already-existing piece of information.

Checklist

- [ ] Real photos used instead of generic stock images, especially on About
- [ ] Specific address or service area stated clearly, not left vague
- [ ] Professional email address matching the domain, not a free webmail address
- [ ] Phone number clickable (tel: link) and visible from every page, not buried on Contact only
- [ ] Two or three genuine customer quotes included, if available

Exercises

1. Time how many clicks it takes to find your contact info from the homepage, and fix it if it's more than one.
2. Replace any stock photo on your About or Home page with a real one.

Getting Found: Basic Local SEO and Going Live

> **Outcome:** "My business is set up to show up in local search results, and the site is live with the basics that matter for being found checked off."

Micro-start (under 12 minutes)

Search your own business name on Google right now and see what currently shows up — this tells you exactly what needs fixing first.

The minimum you need to know

For a local business, the single highest-impact SEO step isn't on your website at all — it's claiming and completing your Google Business Profile (name, address, phone, hours, category, photos), since this is what actually shows up in local map results and "near me" searches, often before your own website does. On your site itself, the basics that matter: your business's name, address, and phone number should be written as plain text (not only inside an image) somewhere on the page, consistent with how they appear everywhere else online (a mismatched address between your site and your Google listing actively hurts local rankings), and each page's title should mention what the page offers plus your town or service area. None of this requires technical SEO knowledge — it's consistency and completeness, not tricks.

Worked example

Worked example: a local SEO pass before launch. Before launch, the Google Business Profile is missing entirely — claimed and filled in with matching name, address, and phone to what's on the new site, plus five real photos. The homepage title is updated from a generic "Welcome" to "[Business name] — [Service] in [Town]", directly naming what the business does and where, instead of requiring a visitor to read the whole page to find out.

Checklist

- [ ] Google Business Profile claimed and fully completed
- [ ] Business name, address, and phone consistent across the site and the Business Profile
- [ ] Name, address, phone present as plain text somewhere, not only inside an image
- [ ] Page titles mention the offer plus the town or service area
- [ ] Site tested on phone and computer before announcing it's live

Exercises

1. Claim or check your Google Business Profile and confirm every field matches your website exactly.
2. Rewrite your homepage's page title to include what you offer and your town or service area.

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