



..... *The Ultimate*

MARKETING TOOLKIT



Hi there,

Running a business is equal parts exhilarating and demanding. With new or unexpected challenges popping up all the time, it's nice to know when you're getting something right.

That's where The Ultimate Marketing Toolkit can help.

Whether you're looking for inexpensive marketing ideas, or you have some questions about getting a website created, we've covered it here. And if you don't find what you're looking for, get in touch. We'd be glad to help you out any way we can.

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Definitive Marketing Checklist

THE DEFINITIVE MARKETING CHECKLIST includes just about everything you could need to get your marketing engine up and running or switch it into high gear. Don't worry, not everything will apply to your business, and not everything has to be done right away. Identify your top priorities and take baby steps.

Strategy & Messaging

- Determine goals and objectives**
Guide all your marketing efforts
- Determine key performance indicators**
Metrics you will measure
- Perform a SWOT Analysis**
Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats
- Identify target audiences**
Who you will target
- Define buyer personas**
Detailed profiles of your target audience members
- Write vision and mission statements**
Your aspirations and purpose
- Create competitor profiles**
Characteristics and habits of your top competitors
- Create an editorial calendar**
Determine what you will talk about in your marketing communications and when they will be released
- Write your brand promise**
The unique value you offer
- Write your brand essence**
The experience you provide customers
- Write your overview statement**
Simple overview for marketing materials
- Write an elevator pitch**
How you and employees will introduce your company
- Write product/service descriptions**
Features and benefits of your offerings
- Compile FAQs**
Get ahead of your customers
- Write policy or position statements**
Be clear and concise
- Create an annual marketing plan**
A comprehensive outline of marketing strategies and tactics built around your goals

Social Media

- Set up social media profiles**
Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+ and any other relevant sites
- Determine social media strategy**
What you'll post, how you'll interact, and when
- Create graphics and messaging for social media pages**
Eye-grabbing header images and consistent descriptions
- Set up automated social media management platform**
Schedule posts in advance

Customer Retention

- Set up CRM software or customer database**
Manage your relationships
- Create customer referral program**
Incentivize referrals
- Create a customer loyalty program**
Encourage repeat purchases
- Create VIP customer programs**
Reward your most valuable customers
- Create a customer onboarding campaign**
Get new customers started off on the right foot
- Implement a customer feedback system**
Know what you're doing right and where to improve

Visual Branding & Collateral

- Design logo**
Keep it simple and memorable
- Take employee headshots**
Handy for your website, promo materials and proposals
- Photograph products/services**
Useful for all future marketing materials
- Establish brand color palette**
Your colors can be as identifiable as your logo
- Establish typography/font standards**
Consistency is key
- Create business cards**
A business staple
- Create brochures, flyers or postcards**
Include with orders, hand out at events or mail to prospects
- Create promotional items**
Branded products to use at tradeshow or as giveaways
- Create a presentation**
Be ready for a sales presentation or product demo
- Create thank you notes**
Few things are as memorable as a handwritten note

Marketing Tactics

- Launch website**
One of the most important marketing tools
- Use marketing automation**
Automate highly targeted email, direct mail and text messaging campaigns
- Determine keywords and search engine optimization strategy**
Help people find your website
- Build public relations campaigns**
Manage your reputation
- Send direct mail**
Letters and postcards targeting prospects
- Create ads (web, social, magazine, radio, TV, etc.)**
Strategically placed where your customers are
- Host a webinar**
Demonstrate your expertise
- Use gamification**
What can you turn into a game?
- Sponsor a charity or community event**
Everyone wins
- Hold a contest**
Create excitement and build relationships
- Host an event**
Workshops, community activities, seminars, auctions
- Create email marketing campaigns**
Target prospects, onboard new customers, nurture past clients
- Produce videos**
Product demos, FAQs, behind-the-scenes, teasers, intros...the possibilities are endless
- Build pricing packages or tiers**
Give customers the right options
- Collect testimonials/case studies**
Build credibility
- Start a blog**
Own the conversation and drive traffic
- Write a guide**
Share what you know
- Create an infographic**
Engaging and shareable
- Create coupons, discounts or promotions**
Activate sales
- Claim online listings on Yelp, YP and similar sites**
Ensure accuracy and respond to comments



25

Easy,
Low-Cost
**Marketing
Ideas**

YOU HAVE A LOT on your plate. You need marketing strategies that are going to be simple and affordable, while delivering results. Start with these 25 tactics designed to do just that.

1

Focus on providing value, not self-promotion.

Simple can be the most effective.

Start an email newsletter.

An email newsletter that provides useful content for readers can be an excellent brand-building and revenue-generating tool. You can offer exclusive content and deals to newsletter subscribers. Everyone likes to be part of something exclusive, so give your subscribers something you wouldn't offer other customers.

Make it easy for people to sign up for your newsletter. Put a sign-up sheet at your checkout counter and sign-up forms on your website.

Here are some additional tips to keep in mind:

- Send on a regular basis.
- Focus on providing valuable content for readers, NOT talking about your business.
- Keep it brief. Many successful newsletters break their content into chunks, with headlines and a photo for each section. This makes it easily scannable for readers.
- Share ideas that relate to your industry.
- Use a professionally designed template. Make sure yours looks polished by having a professional designer create a customized template, or use an existing template from an email service provider.

Hold a contest.

Your contest doesn't have to be complicated. It could be something as simple as asking blog readers to leave a comment, and the best response gets one of your products for free.

Best-selling author, speaker and blogger Jon Acuff will often tweet that he is at a certain gate at an airport, and the first person to find him gets a free copy of one of his books. It's fun, and couldn't be much simpler.

Contests can easily sound scammy, so be careful here. Make sure your copy steers clear of anything that sounds too good to be true, such as "you may have already won!" and "win a trip to fabulous Jamaica!" We're just too programmed to ignore hype like that.

2

Create tiered packages of your services or bundle products.

Numerous pricing studies have shown that consumers can be highly influenced by the way a product or service is presented. Consider presenting your offering in tiered packages, such as a basic, mid-level and premium. Most customers may select the mid-level option, but simply having the premium-level option can raise your average sale amount.

You can also offer two or more related items as a bundle at a slightly discounted price to raise your overall ticket amount.

3

Start your own business blog.

While a business blog requires a commitment of time and resources, the returns can be well worth the investment for a few primary reasons:

4

Blogs help you get found by potential customers.

Search engines, like Google, love blogs because they provide fresh, keyword-rich content for your site.

Search engines also like authoritative, credible sites. The way search engines can tell a site is credible is by seeing that other sites are linking to it. Other websites will often link to your business blog if you are known for providing useful, interesting content.

Blogs demonstrate your expertise in your field.

You want to be seen as a thought-leader and expert in your field. Your blog gives you an opportunity to solve problems for customers and build trust within the community. Potential customers can clearly see your skill and knowledge, giving them confidence to do business with your company.

Blogs are a public relations vehicle.

Blogs are also a chance to take part in conversations about your brand. Should a public relations incident occur, you now have a platform to offer your perspective. If you do not begin sharing your own voice now, other sources of information will rise to the forefront, and you won't get input in the conversation.

Blogs encourage customer engagement.

Your business blog is like your company's face to the world. More personal than a corporate website, it can humanize your business and prompt significantly more engagement with your brand.

It's a platform to invite readers to further engage with your brand. You can offer additional content like webinars, white papers and consultations to get prospects into the sales process.

*Search
engines
love
blogs.*

Write a blog article for another website.

5

Bloggers are always looking for high-quality content to post on their websites. You could be just the one to provide that for them.

In most situations, if a blog uses your article, (often called a guest post) they will allow you to include a byline that references your business and includes a link to your website. It's a win-win: they get quality content, you get access to a new audience.

Look for blogs that attract your potential customers. Be sure your article fits with the type of content they typically post, and that it would appeal to their audience. It's important to do your due diligence in this stage. If you are off-topic or your content is not up to par, you risk your credibility and relationship with this outlet.

Get notified about reporters looking for sources.

6

Write an article for an industry publication.

Now that you're creating content for your blog and other blogs, another potential outlet is industry publications.

Check out <http://www.helpareporter.com>. If you sign up for this free service, you'll receive emails with leads from reporters from a range of media outlets looking for sources on every topic under the sun. You can then respond to them, and potentially be featured in their publication.

7

Write a free guide or white paper.

By this point, with a blog, guest posts, and articles in industry publications, you're accumulating quite a bit of premium content. It's time to publish this insight as a free guide or white paper.

Writing a guide on a topic that is of interest to your customers is another great way to showcase your expertise and generate leads for your business. For example, a landscaping company might create a guide to the best native plants for spring. An appliance retailer could create a guide about how to choose appliances for a budget-friendly kitchen remodel.

When your guide is complete, you can promote it via your website, blog, email list and social media. In order for people to access your guide, you can require them to provide their name and email address or subscribe to your email newsletter. Another win-win: they get valuable content, you get leads.

Start a customer database.

If you don't have a database of your existing and potential customers, start one today. For any marketing campaign to be successful, it must be targeted and consistent. It's nearly impossible to do that without a database of your customers and targets.

Your database can start very rudimentary — a simple spreadsheet will do. You may wish to upgrade to a more complex solution over time. A few free options are available, such as Hubspot CRM, and many paid options are available, such as SugarCRM and Salesforce.

As you enter information into your customer database, you will begin to see opportunities for highly targeted marketing and sales initiatives that you might not have otherwise been aware of. You will also be able to keep track of important dates, like anniversaries and birthdays, that warrant personalized communication from you.

8

Create an infographic.

Infographics are a visual representation of complex data or processes. They have become all the rage recently, with companies coming up with fun and unique ways to illustrate all kinds of ideas.

9

Infographics are some of the most sharable and linkable content there is. Posting an infographic on your website or blog is “link bait.” That means other websites and blogs are likely to link to it and share it on their own sites, increasing your business’ exposure and website traffic.

Think about topics for your infographic. It can be anything your audience would find interesting. A real estate agent could create an infographic about local home prices and sales data. A nutritionist could create an infographic about dietary statistics or facts. A home security company could create an infographic about crime data and trends. The possibilities are endless.

*Video is powerful,
and every business
can use it.*

10

Make a video.

There are a hundred statistics about why incorporating video into your marketing strategy is a good idea. The point is: video is powerful, and every business can use it to their advantage.

If you sell tangible products, video is the perfect medium to demonstrate how they work or what they look like in more detail. If your business involves “selling yourself,” such is the case for real estate agents, consultants, personal trainers, etc., an introduction video is an excellent way for potential customers to get to know you. For any business, answering frequently asked questions in video format can be highly engaging.

Run an email campaign.

11

Email marketing is a highly cost-effective marketing method. The key is to provide valuable content in every communication.

Take a look at MailChimp (<http://mailchimp.com>). They offer a free plan for customers with less than 2,000 subscribers. Even after that point, pricing (with MailChimp as well as other providers) is very affordable.

Think about what you could include in a campaign. You could promote a guide you published, an event you’ll be hosting, a contest you’re holding, or a popular blog post you wrote.

Speak at a trade show or industry event.

Notice it doesn’t say have a booth at a trade show. While that is of course an option, being a speaker or panel member can be a much more cost-effective method of marketing.

The trade show floor is often filled with mostly other exhibitors, and opportunities for meeting potential customers can be limited. Being a speaker at a class or workshop that is part of the trade show, however, gives you a chance to demonstrate your expertise. There may even be several additional benefits that come along with this, such as being featured in the program and getting free access to networking events.

12

Ask your best customers for testimonials.

Customer testimonials can dramatically increase conversions. People simply tend to believe what others say about you more than what you say about yourself.

There's a good chance that you have loyal customers who would be more than willing to provide a positive testimonial about your business. Reach out to them and ask.

The good thing is, after you have their testimonial, you can use it in a variety of ways. Put it on your website. Include it in sales letters and proposals. Use it anywhere a positive word from a satisfied customer could make someone else feel at ease about purchasing from you.

13

Customer testimonials can dramatically increase conversions.

14

Host an event.

Hosting an event is a great way to bring your prospects to you. It's an opportunity to meet many of your potential customers face-to-face, and make a connection that isn't possible through email or phone calls.

"Lunch and learn" events, which include a speaker from your industry — and lunch for attendees — can be very popular.

Consider partnering with another business that provides complementary products or services to help reduce costs and add value. Industry organizations also make great sponsors, as they can help promote the event.

Host a webinar.

15

A webinar, or online presentation, is like an event that doesn't require attendees to leave their desk.

Webinars give you an opportunity to demonstrate your expertise on a subject, and gather leads who may be interested in your business. You can be the one providing the content on the webinar, or you can invite another speaker to give the presentation, while you serve as the emcee.

You can even record your webinar and use it as additional content on your website.

Add value without adding significant costs.

16

Give away value-added products or services.

To help you stand out from your competitors, give away products or services that add value to your offering, but don't add significant costs.

Imagine an apartment complex that offered free car washing. A gym that offered free massages. A clothing store that provided free tailoring.

The additional business you gain from providing these value-added products and services should easily offset their costs.

Join local community clubs and organizations.

Being an active member of the community is not only the right thing to do, it's one of the best marketing tools you have.

You're giving back to your local community and helping your fellow citizens, and at the same time meeting a variety of new people who could be valuable contacts for your business. They may be potential customers, or other business owners you could partner with.

They may be members of the media or other service providers, and a relationship with them could be of great value to both of you later on.

17

Do something for charity.

Here's yet another way to do something positive for your community and your business.

Think of a way to give back that relates to your business function. For example, a salon could provide free haircuts to nursing home or homeless shelter residents. A human resources company could host a free resume clinic for job searchers. An artist or musician could give free classes to underprivileged kids at a community center.

18

Promote your service or event on social media and your blog. Look for PR opportunities from local media outlets. Your charitable efforts gain support, and so does your business.

Sponsor something.

Sponsorships are another way to give back to your community while also having incentives for your business.

You're likely to get hit up for sponsorships on a regular basis. From t-ball teams to golf tournaments, everyone is looking for donors. While it would be nice to be able to donate to every worthy cause, limited budgets mean you have to be much more judicious with your spending.

Look for sponsorships where your potential customers are likely to be gathered.

For example, when AIGA, an association for professional graphic designers, holds an event, it is often sponsored by a local printing company. That's a perfect match. Many graphic designers make their living by creating things that need to be printed, and they frequently recommend their preferred printer to their clients.

Look for sponsorships with the greatest potential impact.

For example, if you are asked to sponsor an event, there may be several sponsorship options. Being the "breakfast sponsor" means a sign with your business name is up for an hour or two. But being the "t-shirt sponsor" means your logo goes on shirts that are worn throughout the year.

19

20

Create a customer referral program.

Your satisfied customers can be your best sales team. Reward them for sending business your way with a formal customer referral program. Let your customers know that every time they refer a customer to you, you will reward them in some way. It could be with a discount on their next purchase, or a gift card to their favorite restaurant.

Your satisfied customers can be your best sales team.

Audit your online presence and claim your listings.

21

You may have hired a professional web designer to give you a well-crafted business website, but are you paying attention to the listings other websites are creating about your business?

Websites like yelp.com and yellowpages.com automatically generate listings for local businesses and anyone can add information and reviews. Many times these listings may even come up before your own website. If the information isn't complete or accurate, it could cost you.

Most websites that provide this service allow business owners to "claim their listing" and add and edit information. You can also respond to user reviews. This is your chance to publicly thank supporters and rectify customer service issues.

Send handwritten thank you cards to clients.

24

In the age of email and social media, getting a handwritten note is so rare that it almost never goes unnoticed.

Make a habit of sending a simple thank you card to your customer after you complete every job. They are almost guaranteed to read it, and may even keep it on their desk for a while. It will leave them with a positive impression of you and your company, increasing their propensity to work with you again in the future.

22

Launch a postcard campaign.

Postcards can be a lower-cost form of direct-mail marketing because they are cheaper to mail and print. They may even be more effective, since people don't have the option of not opening the envelope to read the message.

Postcards can be used for a variety of purposes. You could use them to notify VIP customers of exclusive access to an upcoming sale. You can remind clients of an appointment. You could promote an amazing discount.

Create a customer loyalty program.

23

Your most likely source of income is customers who have already bought from you. Increase their likelihood of buying again with a customer loyalty program. It doesn't have to be anything complicated. A simple punch card will do.

Be remarkable at what you do.

25

Overdeliver.

The single greatest thing you can do to generate more business in the future is overdeliver on your promises to the customers you have now.

Be remarkable at what you do. Your customers will refer their friends and family. They will leave positive reviews. They will give you great testimonials. All you have to do is what you say you're going to do, and then a little bit more.

6 Tools Your Business Can't Live Without

SAVE TIME, COMMUNICATE BETTER AND STAY ORGANIZED with these six business tools. Added bonus: all are free or very affordable, and live in the cloud for easy access.



Slack

Drastically reduce the number of internal emails you send and receive every day by getting your team on Slack, a simple but powerful messaging app. Built around individual conversations or “channels” that you can organize by team, project, department or topic, Slack aggregates all communication and makes it real-time, archived and searchable. Plus: emojis, animated gifs and a \$0 price tier. Enough said.



Asana

Keep projects moving and catch to-do items before they fall through the cracks with Asana. A project and workflow management tool, with Asana your entire team can assign, track, schedule and prioritize tasks among employees. Commenting and file uploading keep information organized and at your fingertips. That feeling you get when you check off all your tasks for the day? Priceless. Coincidentally, that is also the cost for teams with 15 or fewer members.



Autopilot



Get the marketing power of a Fortune 500 company with the budget of a neighborhood lemonade stand. Autopilot is a powerful marketing automation tool that lets you send targeted, personalized emails, post cards and text messages based on customer behavior. Track your customers' activity and automate their journey with tools like promotional and follow-up emails, welcome post cards, reminder text messages and more. Autopilot can also function like customer relationship management (CRM) software to organize your clients, prospects and vendors, or integrate with Salesforce. With plans starting at just \$5/month, it's a no-brainer.

Buffer



Love it or hate it, social media cannot be ignored. Effective social media management and engagement is a 24/7 operation, but that doesn't mean you have to keep over-caffeinated interns posting, pinning, and liking well into the night. Buffer allows you to schedule posts in advance, analyze engagement data, and determine the ideal times to post for maximum impact using their Optimal Timing Tool. Start with a free account, then upgrade if needed to get additional features for a small monthly fee.

Join.me



From hosting a meeting of remote workers to training a client or subcontractor on technical information, there is no easier tool for screen sharing and video conferencing than join.me. When you're ready to start your meeting, head to join.me, get your meeting access code, and send it to the participants so they connect to your conference directly. Forget sending emails with elaborate meeting instructions and links. The free plan is a great place to start, and an affordable monthly fee gets you even more functionality.

Google Docs, Sheets, Slides & Forms



Put an end to the edit-save-send cycle with Google's answer to Microsoft Word, Excel and PowerPoint. Google's online document solutions make collaborating with your team on documents, spreadsheets and presentations a breeze. Documents, which are saved automatically, can be accessed from anywhere, and team members' suggestions or edits are immediately captured. With Google Forms you can send and manage surveys and questionnaires. Best of all, get started for free.



Everything You Need to Know Before You Hire a Web Designer

Do I need a website?

The short answer: yes. In this day and age, the legitimacy of your business is questioned if you don't have a professional online presence.

Now the caveat: not every business needs to drop 50 grand on a custom-designed website with professional photography and all the bells and whistles.

There is a happy medium depending on the needs of your individual organization. The important thing to think about is the actual value a website will bring.

If your website will be a major source of your revenue or you're a cutting-edge tech company, then having a website that facilitates that and projects the right image is crucial.

On the other hand, if you're a small company that gets most of its business from drive-by traffic, a simple site may be all you need.

I have Facebook and Twitter accounts. Is that enough?

Facebook, Twitter and other social networking sites are a good start, but they're not the same as having your own website that you control. There are some downsides:

- You're restricted to operating within their constraints, whether that's the number of characters you can put in one tweet, the number of friends you can have, or even the end user license agreement for content uploaded to the site. Formats and interfaces change frequently, and it's up to you to keep up.
- You don't have the ability to easily add features as your business grows, like incorporating an online storefront or blog. Even if you are able to, it will likely be via a third-party app that you have very little control over.
- As impossible as it may seem, these sites could shut down at any time and take your online presence with them. Or, they could just get really lame (think: MySpace).
- You're limited to interacting with people who have these accounts. It may seem like everyone has a Facebook account, but believe it or not, you could have potential customers who will not.

What about free (or cheap) website services?

Sites like Etsy and Squarespace that allow you to build a website on their platform for free or very cheap can be a great option when you're getting started. But they also have some factors to keep in mind:

- Your website is often required to display the branding of the company providing the service.
- Again, it's rare, but these sites could shut down at any time. A more likely scenario is that they stop making updates to their platform or are slow to adopt new technology so your website seems out-of-date.
- There are typically some constraints to what you can do with your site. It may be how your page design can be altered, the number of pages you can add, what features are available, etc.
- Your site may be based on a template that can be used by any other users, meaning your website might look identical to others.
- Some visitors may question the size or scope of your business if your only online presence is on a free or bargain website service or template. This may or may not be a factor for your business.
- On the flip side, many of the free website services, such as Etsy, have a loyal base of users and do quite a bit of promotion themselves. Your site can gain additional exposure from simply being a part of the network.

The Bottom Line

If you want people to take your business seriously, you need a website. But that doesn't mean you have to break the bank to get one.

What are my goals?

Whether you're revamping an old site or hanging your digital shingle for the first time, getting a new website is exciting. It's fun to try out new ideas. Experiment with a fresh look and feel.

But too often buying a website becomes all about fonts and colors and photos rather than achieving your business objectives.

Before you get to what your website should look like, start thinking about your business and marketing goals, and how your website factors into your strategy to reach them.

It's critical to begin your website development process by doing some strategic exploration. Answer questions like:

- Who are your target audience members? What are they like? What are their needs, wants and motivations? How will you communicate your benefits and features to them? How tech-savvy are they?
- Who are your competitors? How do they position themselves? How are you better or different?

- How will you position yourself through messaging and design? Are you the high-end, luxury choice, or the practical, budget-friendly option?

Your answers to questions like these should guide your entire website development process.

The Bottom Line

Your website isn't just about a cool design. The important thing is to clearly define your goals, audience, messaging and brand positioning. After you have done that, decisions like design, organization and content become much more purposeful.

Do I need a mobile site?

Until recently, most websites have been designed to look best on a large desktop or laptop screen and work with a mouse. But now that more and more people are using mobile devices like smartphones and tablets to access the Internet, sites must be reworked to accommodate users with smaller screens using a finger to navigate. In fact, many web developers support a "mobile first" mentality, which means creating websites with mobile use as the primary concern, with the desktop version being secondary.

Because tablets and smartphones are ubiquitous, your site needs to work well on mobile devices.

Mobile Sites vs. Apps

First, let's talk about what a mobile site is exactly. A mobile website is just a website that has been optimized for browsing on a mobile device like a cell phone or tablet. It's like a different formatting of your regular site, and it works on any device. Users don't have to do anything special to access it – the site recognizes when a user is on a mobile device and adjusts accordingly.

On the other hand, an app is a software program that is written for a specific device, and is accessed through an app store. Users must go to the app store, then download the app in order to use it. Sometimes apps can be used with or without Internet access. Apps only work on the platform they are created for. For example, an app made for iPhones will not work on an Android phone. Apps are typically more expensive to develop.

In most cases, a mobile site is the better choice. It is much more cost effective and typically takes much less time to be developed. Also, because a mobile site works on all platforms, it is more future-proof. If a single platform goes away or undergoes a major update, a mobile site is not affected, while an app may stop functioning correctly or become obsolete.

Responsive Design vs. Mobile-Specific Development

"Responsive design" is a development technique that is used to dynamically adjust your website for the size of the screen it's being viewed on. For example, a multi-column website may be reformatted to be one column so that it fits more naturally into a portrait-style screen. Because screen space is at a premium on mobile devices, content that is not absolutely necessary, like some graphics, may be removed.

With responsive design, only one website is created, and it is programmed to automatically adjust based on the size of window being used. The layout reconfigures, images and text resize, and content may be removed or added. If a site is responsive, you can see this demonstrated when you resize the browser window on your desktop or laptop computer.

Responsive design is a recent trend in mobile development and is quickly becoming standard. For many projects, it is the preferable option because it optimizes for mobile users while still using the same internal structure and content of the desktop site. Today, any website developer should provide a mobile solution.

Mobile-Specific Development

Occasionally, some websites — e-commerce sites or sites with an extremely large amount of content or advanced functionality — may require a distinct mobile version that is quite a bit different from the desktop version. In these rare cases, you may need to treat your mobile site as its own project with a separate budget.

The Bottom Line

You can't ignore mobile users. The more distinct your mobile site will be from your desktop site, the more development time and costs involved.

Do I need a content management system?

What is a content management system?

A content management system, or CMS, allows you to edit and maintain your website without any specialized technical knowledge. Content management systems vary widely in complexity. Some provide only basic editing capabilities, like editing text, adding videos or adding products to an online store. Others allow you to more drastically modify your website, including changing colors and logos and adding or removing pages.

Which content management system should I use?

There are many content management systems available. Some are free to use, while others have one-time or ongoing fees. Popular third-party systems include Wordpress, Joomla, Drupal, ExpressionEngine and Squarespace. Some web developers use their own content management systems that they have developed. Each CMS offers it's own set of pros and cons.

In most cases the developer selects the CMS they are most comfortable with that offers the features you need. You should ask to see a demonstration of the system you will be using.

The Bottom Line

Most of the time, a CMS adds upfront costs to your website, but can save money in the long run by reducing maintenance and editing fees.

Ask your web developer what CMS they will use and find out what features it offers. If they will not be using a CMS, ask how updates will be made and what the approximate cost will be.

How does my website get online?

What is web hosting?

In order for your website to “live” online and get found by visitors on the Internet, it has be uploaded to a server managed by a web host.

Some web teams offer web hosting services as part of your website package. Others will recommend a third-party hosting service that will meet your needs.

Typically, your web developer will take care of this process for you or will assist you with setting up your hosting account.

Expect to pay a monthly or annual fee for hosting. Budget hosting accounts are your cheapest option. However, these accounts are on shared servers, meaning website speed and reliability may be decreased at times. There may be other limitations to these budget accounts as well.

If you have a website with a large volume of traffic or optimal speed is crucial, you may need to look into web hosting packages with more options that may require a larger investment.

What is a domain name?

Now that your website has a place to live on the Internet, it needs an address, so people can find it. Your domain name, or URL, is an easy-to-remember address for your site.

Domain names can be purchased from numerous websites, such as GoDaddy, Hover and Network Solutions. You can also go to these websites to check what domain names are available for purchase.

Once you know what you want your domain name to be, it's a good idea to purchase it right away to ensure you reserve it. They are going fast and it is getting harder and harder to find good domain names.

If you do not already have a domain name when you begin working with a web team, they may coordinate purchasing it for you. Just make sure that the domain is registered to you — so you are the owner, not the web company.

What is search engine optimization?

Why have a website if no one can find it? That's where search engine optimization comes in.

Search engine optimization, or SEO, is writing, building, organizing and updating your website so that it is found by people using search engines like Google and Bing.

The goal of search engine optimization is for your site to be listed in the results (as close to number one as possible) when a person types a relevant keyword phrase into a search engine.

There are a number of factors that influence your search engine rankings: keyword use, page titles and descriptions, file names, site organization, freshness of content, social activity and more. Your developer should set up your site using current SEO best practices. Before beginning your web project, be sure to clarify the process for determining and targeting keywords, writing copy, page titles and descriptions, and naming image files, as these are all important for effective SEO.

It's a good idea for whoever is updating and maintaining your website to be familiar with basic SEO best practices. This ensures your site will maintain or improve its rankings.

Should I pay for extra search engine optimization?

A good web team will build your site in such a way that basic search engine optimization is included. This means that a few essential things are done:

- The URL structure of the site is logical and organized.
- HTML and CSS best practices are followed, including organization and use of headings.
- Primary and secondary keywords are identified and targeted.
- Page titles and descriptions are used.

Beyond these essentials, it may be necessary to pay for additional search engine optimization if you are looking to increase traffic to your site through organic searches.

Your web team can conduct a thorough keyword analysis to determine what keywords you should be targeting, based on how many searches a keyword gets versus how competitive it is.

The biggest driver of search engine results is strong content. So it may also be prudent to employ a copywriter to write website copy using the keyword research, and even contribute content on an ongoing basis.

Finally, search engine optimization is a continuous process that involves constantly tweaking keywords and content, analyzing, testing and expanding your site. If continually growing organic traffic is a major goal of your site, you should definitely consider contracting a web team to provide ongoing search engine optimization and content building.

The Bottom Line

Getting found online is the whole point of having a website, and search engine optimization is the first step in making that happen.

Ask your web team what type of search engine optimization is included in their quote, then determine if you need additional support.

How much is a new website going to cost?

The majority of professionally designed websites can cost anywhere from a few thousand dollars to tens of thousands of dollars. That doesn't narrow it down much, does it? Keep reading.

The biggest chunk of your budget is going to be spent on design and development, but there are also some ongoing costs to

consider. You may also want to consider specialty services, like copywriting and search engine optimization.

How are websites priced?

Most web teams use either hourly or project-based pricing.

Hourly proposals will outline the different phases of the process and estimate the number of hours to complete each phase. Hourly rates can be anywhere from \$50 to \$200 per hour, with independent freelancers on the lower end, and full-service agencies on the upper end.

Project-based proposals also detail the various components of the project, and give one total fee. The primary advantages of this method are that you know your final price (as long as the scope of the project doesn't change), and the web team is encouraged to work efficiently.

What are the design/development costs?

There are three primary factors that affect the design and development costs of a website:

- **Features and functionality**
As you would expect, the cost goes up as features and functionality are added. The more interactive or advanced the features are, the more expensive they will be.
- **Web team rates**
Some web teams will have a minimum threshold. Others may have a few price points that accommodate a range of budgets. The team's hourly rate will also heavily affect the final price.
- **Budget**
If you have a predetermined budget for a web project, many web teams will be able to find solutions that work within it.

So the cost of your new website depends more on your budget, the website's features and who you choose to build your website than any set going rate.

What are the ongoing costs?

The ongoing costs of a website will include:

- **Domain name**
Registering a new domain name runs about \$15 - \$30 a year. If you must purchase a domain name from an individual or company that has already registered it, the cost could go up significantly, to a few hundred or even a few thousand dollars.
- **Hosting**
"Budget" or shared hosting may be as little as \$10 a month or even less. Premium hosting can be more expensive, anywhere from \$50 to \$250 or more per month.

- **Maintenance**

Maintenance costs are more of a moving target, depending on exactly what maintenance you need. Some web teams will charge for maintenance at their hourly rate (\$50 - \$200 per hour), while others price based on the project scope.

What are the additional costs?

Depending on your needs, you may want to consider purchasing specialty services.

- **Copywriting**

Like web teams, costs for professional copywriters can vary widely. Many charge by the hour, with hourly rates ranging from \$50 - \$150 per hour. Some copywriters may charge by the page, at \$100 - \$500 per page. Similar rates apply for ongoing web content, like blog posts and press releases.

- **Search engine optimization**

Once again, search engine optimization is priced both by the hour and by the project. Hourly rates typically range from \$75 - \$300 per hour. Because SEO is an ongoing process that must continually be tested and adapted, monthly retainer packages are common. These are available in virtually any price range, from a few hundred a month to a few thousand a month.

How much should I budget for a website?

Before you start thinking about the budget for your website, consider what value it will (or you want it to) bring to your organization.

Will your site generate thousands of dollars of income every month? Will it bring in dozens of new leads each week? Or is this a short-term project with only a small amount of traffic expected? If you expect your website to bring a significant amount of value to your organization, this is not the place to skimp. On the other hand, if the website is a nonessential piece, this may be a place to trim the budget.

It's worth saying though, this is a situation where you get what you pay for. Be aware that sacrificing the budget could mean sacrificing quality.

The Bottom Line

Websites are an investment. Determine how much value a professional website will bring your organization and invest accordingly.

Who should I get to build my website?

From online services that let you build websites yourself or auction off the job to the lowest bidder, to your friend's nephew who builds websites on the side...it seems like everyone is making websites these days. With all these options, how do you choose one to build your website?

There are pros and cons to every option. Let's explore a few.

- **Do-It-Yourself or Template-Based Websites**

These can be attractive because the price is right — often free or very low. The challenge is that you're on your own, relying only on your personal expertise in design and development. It can be a very frustrating experience, and the time spent working on it detracts from other higher-value activities you could be doing.

- **Auction Sites**

Sites that auction your project to bidders are also appealing because you know you're getting a low price. Be cautious though, as your website is not necessarily a place you want to be looking exclusively for low prices. Many designers only solicit work on these sites when they're low on other opportunities, and most top-tier designers/developers will not be found here. Be clear on the site's policies for quality control and deadlines before beginning a project.

- **Independent Freelancer**

Independent freelancers can be a good option in many situations. They often have cheaper rates than a full-service agency. Be sure to communicate about schedules and deadlines, as many freelancers may work other jobs. Sometimes this may work to your advantage, if their schedule is more flexible or they have faster turnaround times. A drawback of freelancers could be that they are not specialized in all facets of design/development, and there is no structured oversight or quality control. Experience levels of freelancers also vary dramatically.

- **Full-Service Agency**

Full-service agencies typically produce very high quality work, as specialists perform work on different sections and features. They have an established presence and portfolio, and likely more oversight or quality control measures. They also have the most expensive rates, and turnaround times may vary depending on their current workload.

Remember, the strategic exploration you do at the beginning of your web project is arguably the most important step. You will want to ensure that your web team has a process for completing this strategic planning as part of the project. Without it, you risk spending money on a website that doesn't help you accomplish your business and marketing goals.

How do I find the right fit?

No matter what option you go with, the most important thing is to choose a web team that is **the right fit for you** — a web team that will be your partner throughout the entire process.

Here are a few ideas for identifying the right fit:

- **Visit their website.**
What do they say about themselves? Does it resonate with you?
- **Look at their portfolio.**
Do you like the other things they've created? Just because they haven't done a project exactly like yours in the past doesn't mean it wouldn't be a good fit. But, if they have a distinct style that doesn't jive with you, maybe you should look elsewhere.
- **Communicate by phone or email.**
You can tell a lot about someone's communication style in just a few short exchanges. If it doesn't feel right from the beginning, it's probably not going to get better.
- **Meet in person if possible.**
Nothing beats sitting face-to-face with someone to know if you're on the same page.

Discussion Guide

Before you begin your website project with a web team, it's important to know exactly what you're going to get for your investment. The following discussion guide will help you know what questions to ask up front.

Planning

- What is the project's timeline for completion? Can the deadline be met?
- How will you learn about my specific business needs? What is your strategic discovery process?
- Who will purchase the domain name? Will it be registered to me? Who will renew it?
- How will hosting be handled and what are the costs?
- Who will be working on my site?
- Who will be my point of contact? How and when can I reach them?
- What is and is not included in the quoted rate?

Content

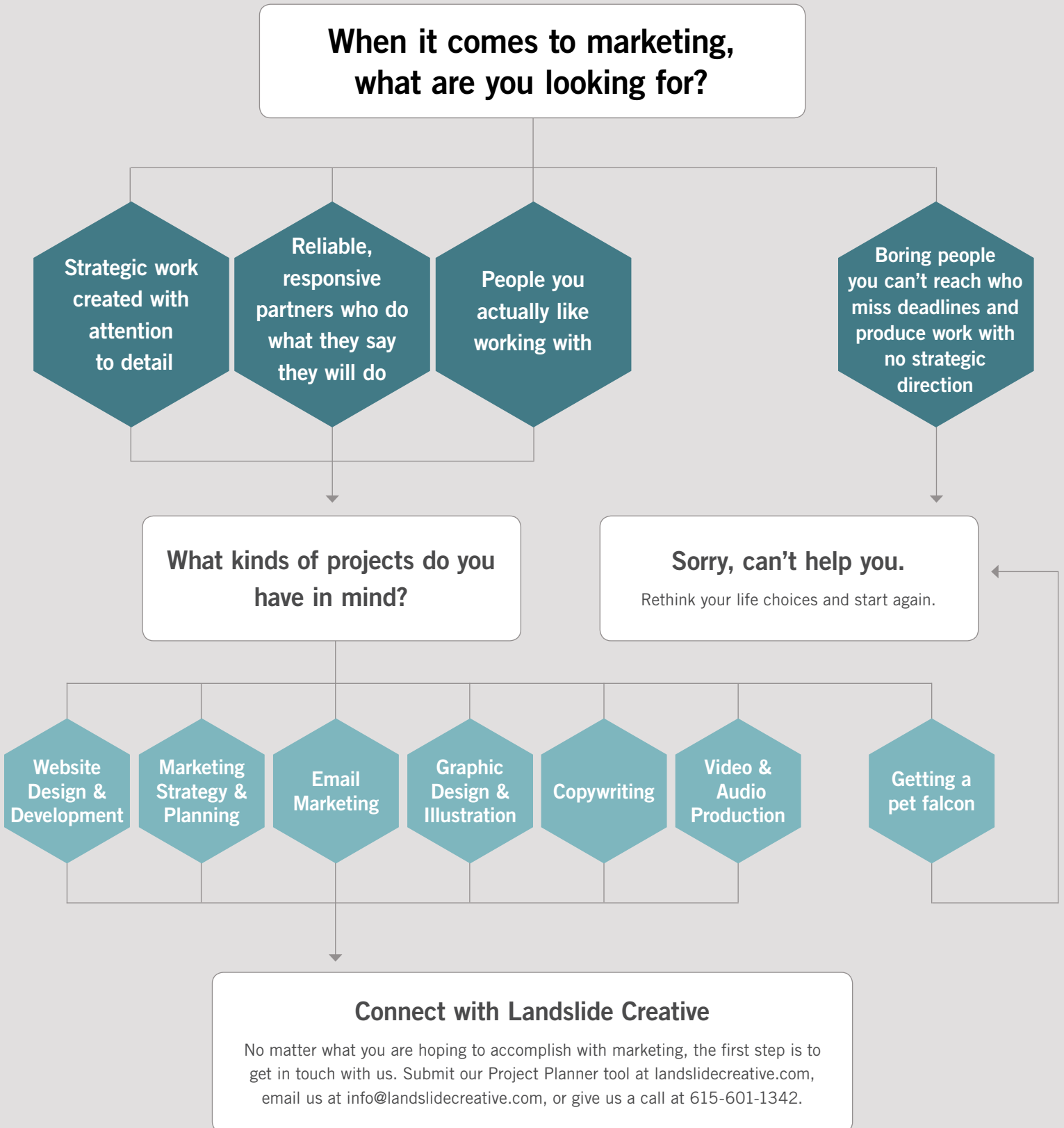
- Who will provide photos, graphics, content and copy?
- What search engine optimization will be performed?

Development & Maintenance

- What content management system will be used? How will content be edited/added/deleted?
- How will you address mobile devices?
- How will maintenance be requested and performed? What are maintenance costs?
- How will backups be managed?

What's next?

SO YOU MADE IT through The Ultimate Marketing Toolkit. Now what? This handy-dandy flow chart can provide answers.





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