How to Set Up a Business Website
in 15 Steps or Less

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Based on more than 20 years of experience as an Internet business lawyer, and as the co-owner of several successful ecommerce companies, I recommend the following steps[1] to quickly set up your business website.

1. Identify Products and/or Services.

If you already have a successful brick-and-mortar business, stick with what you know by selling the same products and services online as you already sell offline to the extent feasible.[2] If you do not have a profitable business offline, find products and/or services already being sold online that (a) you like, and (b) the entry level product or service is already being sold for between $99 and $199[3] at other websites by others.

2. Domain Name Registration.

Register (lease) a search engine-friendly domain name at a registrar (e.g. GoDaddy) for a minimum of 5 years that relates to the niche for that product or service. Be sure that it doesn't infringe upon someone's trademark. For example, CocaColaCollectibles.com would be a problem because another company owns the trademark "Coca Cola." On the other hand, SodaCollectibles.com would not violate a trademark, and it would be search engine-friendly if you planned to sell vintage soda signs, bottles, machines, etc.

3. Host Selection.

Select a host for your website (e.g. HostGator) and point the domain name in your account at the registrar to your server(s) at the hosting company. Your hosting company should not be the same as your registrar because that gives too much control over your business to one company in case of a dispute.

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[1] The recommendations in this short guide are not legal or other professional advice. They do not create an attorney-client relationship. Perform your own due diligence and seek professional counsel before implementing any of the strategies or tactics in this guide.

[2] Some products and services sold offline simply can't be sold online because it's unprofitable (e.g. shipping large items internationally) or illegal (e.g. there are restrictions on selling tobacco and alcohol online) to do so.

[3] $99 to $199 is a good price range for an entry level product or service because the amount converts as a minor purchase yet you do not need many conversions to make four to five figures in monthly sales.

4. WordPress Installation.

Log into your account at the hosting company and install WordPress as the content management system (CMS) for your site. WordPress can handle content for your whole site, not just the blog. Just download a free copy of WordPress and then upload it to your server(s) at your hosting company. Here are links to some helpful WordPress lessons, tutorials, and guides.

- WordPress Lessons
- Getting Started with WordPress
- The WordPress Dashboard
- WordPress Guides
- WordPress Tutorials

5. Theme Selection.

Select a theme for your WordPress site and install it. Although there are many free themes out there, you will find that most are not maintained and may break over time because the developers don't update to match new versions of WordPress. For this reason, consider investing in a premium theme from a reputable company that's known for maintaining themes (e.g. StudioPress, DIYthemes, and Headway Themes).

6. Plugin Installation.

Install these WordPress plugins or equivalent plugins that perform the same functions. Although there are paid premium versions for some of the following plugins, the basic version of each is free.

- Fast Secure Contact Form by Mike Challis
- Wordfence Security by Wordfence
- Yoast SEO by Joost de Valk or SEO Ultimate by Jeffrey L. Smith et al.
- AddToAny Share Buttons by micropat
- W3 Total Cache by Frederick Townes or WP Super Cache by Donncha O Caoimh et al.
- Akismet by Automattic
- Maintenance by fruitfulcode
- WordPress Database Backup by Austin Matzko or other database backup plugin

7. Social Media Accounts.

Set up free social media accounts where you can post valuable content that links back to your site. These may include:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Google+
- Linkedin
- Pinterest
- Tumblr
- Instagram

Be sure to setup your Gravatar.com account and upload a picture as your WordPress user profile picture will be pulled from Gravatar.

8. Affiliate Program Signups.

If you are going to sell someone else's products or services as an affiliate (in exchange for a commission), sign up for affiliate programs (e.g. Amazon Associates, Commission Junction, ShareASale) so that you'll have access to affiliate promotional content (links, banners, etc.) to add to your website.

IF YOU ARE ONLY SELLING PRODUCTS AND SERVICES ONLINE AS AN AFFILIATE, SKIP STEPS 9 AND 10 (GO TO STEP 11).

9. Payment Processors.

If your website will handle purchases of products or services, you will want to set up at least two payment processors (including PayPal.com) that can handle payments for purchases made on your site. Other processors to consider are Authorize.net, Stripe, and Amazon.

10. Shopping Cart.

If you are selling products and services on your website, get a shopping cart. WooCommerce is very popular because it is designed to integrate with WordPress and easier to use than many shopping carts. Other options include 1ShoppingCart and InfusionSoft. Make sure the shopping cart you select is compatible with your payment processors.

11. Autoresponder Service.

Sign up for an email autoresponder service and create your first email list. Popular email services include: AWeber, Constant Contact, MailChimp. Do not import email addresses you have (e.g. on business cards, found on other websites, etc.), and start sending out unsolicited commercial email (spam). Emailing spam can violate federal and state laws.

12. Create Carrot & Initial Emails.

Create an incentive (a "carrot") for someone to sign up for your email newsletter autoresponders. The carrot can be a special report/white paper as a downloadable PDF file, a helpful checklist, or a short video. The topic should be related to your entry level product or service. Write the initial emails for your autoresponder service, including the message that delivers the hyperlink for the carrot after someone subscribes to your email list.

13. Install Opt-in Boxes.

Add email autoresponder opt-in boxes on your site. Do use double opt-in. Your autoresponder service will provide you with the code to copy and paste on your site to install these opt-in boxes or you can use one of the many WordPress plugins available. It's common on WordPress sites to have a lightbox popover and a static opt-in box in a sidebar.

14. Image Sources.

Select your sources for images to put on your site (just because a photo or graphic is found online doesn't mean you can recycle it on your site – that's often copyright infringement). Wikimedia Commons has some free images. *Some* (not all) of the images in the U.S. Library of Congress' photo archives can be used because they are in the public domain. Quality stock photos can be licensed for a minimal fee from 123RF.com, iStockphoto, dreamstime, etc.

15. Website Legal Documents.

For a business website, at a minimum you'll want to have a Privacy Policy and Terms of Use on the site. Some sites also require a Returns/Refund Policy, an Affiliate Program Agreement, and other legal documents. Ideally, you'll want an experienced Internet business lawyer to prepare customized website legal documents for your site. However, if you cannot afford an attorney, you may want to invest the professional grade Website Legal Forms Generator software.

Bonus Recommendations

In no particular order of priority, here are some additional things you may want to do as part of growing your business online.

Automate Social Media Posts

It's time-consuming to share content in social media and link back to your site unless you automate the process. Automation tools you can use include:

- WP to Twitter plugin by Joe Dolson
- IFTTT
- Zapier
- Buffer

Multiple Site Management

If you are operating more than one WordPress site, you'll save time by using ManageWP as a dashboard where you can access those sites and update them.

Press Releases

Sending out press releases is a great way to build authoritative links back to your website and your social media profiles. A great press release distribution resource is KissPR.com (formerly Submit 123 PR). Just make sure the content of your press release is legitimate and relates to your business.

Back End Products and Services

Always be thinking of back end products and services to sell to purchasers of your entry level products and services. These can be upsells, cross-sells, or down-sells that complement the initial purchase. These additional purchases will likely make your business website more profitable because it's easier to sell to an existing customer than try to go find a new buyer.

Effective Email Marketing

If you want to learn effective email marketing (i.e. emails that convert into sales) to your lists, you should sign up for Ben Settle's list and ideally subscribe to his Email Players Newsletter.

Membership Sites

If you're running a membership site (free or paid), you should get membership software to install on your website. Popular options include WooCommerce Memberships, Groups for WooCommerce, s2Member, aMember, WishList Member, and MemberPress.

Affiliate Tracking Software

If you decide to run your own affiliate program (you pay a commission to affiliates who generate sales for you), you should get an easy-to-use tracking program (e.g. iDevAffiliate) because most shopping carts either don't have the features you'll want or are too difficult to use.

Business Insurance

If you already have business insurance, homeowner's insurance, or renter's insurance, talk with your agent about additional coverage for your online business. You may also want to check out TechInsurance.com.

Business Entity

To protect personal assets in case of a lawsuit, many entrepreneurs set up a business entity as a liability shield. In the United States, the most popular form of entity these days is a limited liability company. The second most popular is a Subchapter S corporation. An experienced business lawyer who understands ecommerce can help you set up the entity that's right for your business.

To learn more about business websites and how to protect yourself online, go to MikeYoungLaw.com.

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