

Start by Assessing the Current State of Your Website

An important component of your business strategy must be your online presence. Whether you're an entrepreneur just starting out or an established business, your customers will expect to find information about you through your website. Let's start with **a list of questions**, which will help prioritize any necessary improvements.

Website Check-Up

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| When was the initial date of your website development? | |
| If more than 1 year ago, how frequently is it updated? | |
| Can you, or other employee, make content changes (text, images, and photos)? | |
| • If yes, what types of changes do you make? How often? | |
| • If no, does your web designer or someone else make changes? | |
| Do you have a business logo? | |
| Do you currently sell anything on your website? | |
| • If yes, how many items do you currently sell? | |
| • If yes, would you like to sell additional items? How many? (10, 100, 500+) | |
| • If no, would you like to start selling online? | |
| Is your website mobile responsive? Does it function correctly on all size devices (i.e. cell phone, tablet, laptop)? | |
| Have you viewed your website and clicked through your webpages on your cellphone? | |
| Do you have Google Analytics on your website? Do you review it? | |
| • If yes, how often do you review your Google Analytics? | |
| Have you updated your website regarding COVID-19 information, however it may be relevant to your product or service, or business location? | |

Homepage Review

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| Is your logo on your homepage? Is the size the correct scale? | |
| Is your contact information easily accessible? Phone number, email, physical location address | |
| Can a user quickly & easily determine what your business is? | |
| Does your homepage make a good first impression? | |
| Is your website menu/navigation clearly visible as a dropdown or across the top? | |
| Can a user easily navigate from the homepage to other pages to find what they need? | |
| What do you want your potential customer to do on the homepage? Visit another page or contact you? | |
| Do you have a contact page with your full business information? | |
| Do you have a method to easily obtain email addresses? | |
| Do you update your images/photos more than 4 times per year? | |
| Is your website secure? | |
| Do you have any broken links? | |
| Does your website work on all browsers? (i.e. Chrome, Firefox, etc.) | |
| Is your website backed up? | |

Helpful Tools & Tips

1. [Find out if your website is mobile friendly](#). Simply input your URL to find out.
2. [Find out how quickly your website loads](#). Simply input your URL to take the speed test.
3. Review the [12 Critical Elements Every Homepage Must Have](#) and see how your homepage compares.
4. Dive deeper with [HubSpot's Website Audit Checklist](#) for Optimal Conversions
 - Do an analysis of your website with the [HubSpot Website Grader](#)

Decide on Next Steps

Where do you land? Based on your responses to the questions above, it's time to decide on next steps and prioritize your website improvements.

- I'm ready to update my website! I need some **minor updates** to optimize my site.
- I'm ready for a whole new website! My current site is **outdated**.
- I'm ready for a brand new website! I **don't currently have a one**.
- I'm ready for a brand new website! I want to start **selling online**.
- I'm **not ready** to update my website at this time

Review Options for Updating & Building a Website

Whether you just need minor updates or a brand new website, there is a spectrum of options for you to choose from. Our goal is to provide you with relevant information along with helpful resources and guidance as you make this important business decision.

Common Website Platforms

Squarespace - simple and beautiful website building and hosting, and allows users to use pre-built website templates and drag-and-drop elements to create and modify webpages.

WordPress - WordPress started as a blogging tool and has evolved throughout the years into a powerful website builder and a robust content management system (CMS). Option to add WooCommerce to sell online through WordPress.

Wix - Wix provides customizable website templates and a drag-and-drop web site builder that includes apps, graphics, image galleries, fonts, vectors, animations and other options. Users also may opt to create their web sites from scratch.

Weebly - Weebly's free online website creator uses a simple widget-based site builder that operates in the web browser. All the site elements are drag-and-drop, and it automatically generates a mobile version of each website.

Shopify - Shopify is a commerce platform that allows anyone to set up a free online store and sell their products. It offers online retailers a suite of services including payments, marketing, shipping and customer engagement tools to simplify the process of running an online store.

BigCommerce - a top e-commerce platform which allows you to create an online store. Its features include customer groups and segmentation, search engine optimization (SEO), web hosting, and more.

Do It Yourself (DIY) Website

Benefits of DIY

- Less expensive (\$) than hiring an expert
- Learn & understand the technology to make updates moving forward
- Manage all aspects from start to finish

Challenges of DIY

- Much larger time commitment than hiring developer or team
- Less accountability - you are the only one to blame for delays!
- Limited functionality if not tech savvy

What costs to expect with DIY

- Costs to consider: domain name, hosting, platform
- Your TIME is the biggest cost!

Small Team (1-3 People)

Benefits of Small Team

- Often less expensive than agency
- Often more personal, 1:1 relationship
- Often quicker turnaround time than agency
- Several trusted, local options in VT

Challenges of Small Team

- Fewer resources than full team/agency
- Could be located outside of Vermont
- Often juggling multiple projects at once

What costs to expect with Small Team

- Costs to consider: domain name, hosting, platform.
Tip: Some web design firms will offer to host your website
- Smaller web development teams will either build a flat-fee proposal with hourly charges after a certain number of hours. OR propose "up to X amount of

Who is this option right for?

- A DIY website is best suited for a tech-savvy entrepreneur. This person is comfortable with web-based platforms, has an understanding of digital 'best practices' and has time to dedicate to building a website.
- That said, a simple DIY website (up to 3 pages) can be appropriate for a business owner looking to share basic information. Again, this person needs to have time to dedicate to building, reviewing and updating a website.

hours per month" depending on the project.

Who is this option right for?

- A small team is most appropriate for a business with more than 3-5 pages on their website.
- Small business owners that are organized and understand what they want from their website will have the most success with a small web development team.
- Small web development teams are usually wearing multiple hats (graphic designers, account manager, developer), so the more clear you can be the better the outcome will be.
- While the team may do periodic updates/maintenance, small business owners should be ready to learn and master the technology to make updates in the future.

e-Commerce Web Specialist

Benefits of e-Commerce Specialist

- It's best to set things up correctly from the start!
- Can get complicated to manage alone
- Longterm investment for future business growth
- Avenue to relationship with other specialists (i.e. Amazon commerce)

Challenges of e-Commerce Specialist

- Often juggling multiple projects at once
- Could be located outside of Vermont
- May not fully understand your business

What costs to expect with e-Commerce Specialist

- Costs to consider: domain name, hosting, platform, additions plug-ins, shipping & taxes

- May charge a premium for skills/knowledge
- Would want to maintain relationship for future tech support
- Remember, the more prepared you are the more seamless the process will be.

Who is this option right for?

- Small business owners that see e-commerce as integral to their business.
- If you're planning on selling more than 5 items on your website, it's best to work with an expert to set things up correctly from the start
- While you will likely have ongoing support, the small business owner must be ready to learn and understand the technology to make updates

Web Development Agency (3-5 People)

Benefits of Web Development Team

- Often more custom solutions
- More resource/services available than smaller team or freelancer
- Often established relationships with other vendors/May have specific industry expertise

Challenges of Web Development Team

- Often more expensive than freelancer or small team
- "Back end" may be too complicated for non-expert to manage, will require on-going maintenance

What costs to expect with Web Development Team

- Costs to consider: domain name, hosting, platform, on-going maintenance fee

- A web development agency will either build a flat-fee proposal with hourly charges after a certain number of hours. OR bill hourly (each month) based on level of client engagement.

Who is this option right for?

- Small business owners that require and can afford on-going website maintenance.
- This is especially relevant for businesses with quickly changing products/inventory, complicated shipping, etc. where a web expert is important for trouble shooting.
- Small business owners that can make the most of additional services (graphic design, online marketing, etc) will benefit from working with an agency

Be Prepared! Collect What You Need

No matter which route you choose, there is a baseline list of items you'll need to get started and make the process more efficient. If there's anything on the list that you're unsure about, don't hesitate to [ask your VtSBDC Advisor](#).

Use the box on the right to "check" the items you already have and identify what you need.

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| Business logo files (vector, Illustrator) | |
| Number of webpages needed + title/subject for each (i.e. Home, About, Portfolio) | |
| Content for all website pages | |
| Clear call to action (CTA) - what do you want the user to do on your site? | |
| Domain login information (if already existing) | |
| Hosting login information (if already existing) | |
| Website login information (if already existing) | |
| Google Analytics login information (if already existing) | |
| Business contact information | |
| Links to social media channels | |
| Images (original or purchased stock photos) | |
| e-Comm: Product Stock Keeping Units (SKU) | |
| e-Comm: Product images with consistent background | |
| e-Comm: Product descriptions | |
| Content Management System (CMS) login information (if applicable) | |
| Budget (one-time project vs monthly maintenance) | |

Why invest in a website now?

There has never been a more important time to invest in a website for your small business. A website not only provides credibility but also allows you to reach infinitely more people, at any time of day. As the digital landscape continues to become more competitive, it's important for you to have a professional and effective website that clearly highlights your value proposition.

Questions? Reach out to your regional VtSBDC advisor: www.vtsbdc.org