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HOW TO SUCCESSFULLY LAUNCH YOUR WEBSITE

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White Paper

How to successfully launch your website

Launching or relaunching a website is an exciting time for your business. It is often the culmination of weeks or months of hard work. But it's this climax that creates anxiety for any business owner. You're putting your brand out there and you want to make sure everything goes smoothly.

I created this guide so you can successfully launch your website. Simply follow the steps and enjoy a stress free website launch.

What do you want your website to do for you?

- The best websites are those that have a clear purpose.
- They showcase your business.
- They answer a user need.
- They allow action.

But a successful website launch will look beyond the basics. I think web design is more than a template. It's not about your code. Modern web design should create a great user experience. For everyone.

You need to start at the beginning and ask yourself, what do you want your website to do for you?

Background

The first step is to gather any information you have on your business.

- Do you have a mission statement or an about us section?
- Have you documented the services or products you supply?
- Do you have any existing marketing materials?
- Do you have a current domain name and any social media accounts?

This is a useful exercise as you will be able reuse this information as content on your website.

Goals

Identifying your goals is actually harder than it sounds. I recommend you start with aspirational goals and then create more specific goals as you become more comfortable with the exercise.

- Specify what the website is for (and other digital channels / social media if relevant)
- Provide an explanation of current problems the project should aim to overcome (e.g. a poor or unsupported content management system, confusing site structure, too many users turning to phone or email for help)

You can split this exercise into business goals and user goals (user need). This helps you identify what you need the website to do for your business. You should also develop an understanding of how the website will be used by your audience. Be specific, and be honest.

Intended audiences

The key to marketing is knowing your customers. For your website to be a success you need to identify your audience.

- Think about the types of people (including your staff) the site needs to serve. Try to be as specific as possible.
- Do you have any insight into what users want and who they are? Do you have access to analytics, user surveys, research findings, feedback, public enquiries etc?
- What don't you know about your customers, but want to? Can this project fill those gaps?

Style and tone

- What words or phrases describe the impression you want to give your website visitors about your business?
- What other websites do you like? What is it about them in particular? Don't just stick to your sector. Your competitor might have a great website, but it doesn't mean you can't do better.

Content

- What content do you want on your website? e.g. business services, blog, product information, video, audio, images etc.
- If you have an existing website, how much content needs to be migrated?
- Don't underestimate this task. Content can be very resource intensive. Your content is the most important aspect of your website. Consider creating a content plan for your website. This will give you time to prioritise your content. For example, what content is required for launch, and what content can be published after?

Functionality

What do you need the site to be able to do?

Do you need a search function? Are you going to enable comments on your blog? Are you going to allow your customers to register an account? Are you going to offer an email subscription etc.

- Prioritise these into essentials, nice to have and for the future.
- What accessibility level are you trying to attain?
- The site must be responsive and work on multiple browsers / platforms.

This is a critical piece of your planning. If you don't need it today, it doesn't mean you can't add it later. Be realistic. Your ambition could outgrow your budget.

Known constraints

- Is there anything likely to make building or running the site difficult: e.g. needs to be editable on mobile; organisation is going through change.
- You want to keep your budget under control. You need to be clear about this upfront. However, you may be surprised at what can be developed for less than you think. And indeed, your developer may be able to maximise value for not much more than your current budget. It's important to ask and communicate about your cost concerns.
- What if you are changing domain names? Make sure you include 301 redirects in any schedule of work. This is really important for your SEO.

Timescales

Key question: when do you need it by?

There is never a standard answer to this question either. A one page website can take longer than another one page website. Every site is different, with a different objective and requirement. Small business sites are generally quite fast. Large websites will typically take many weeks.

Hosting and ongoing support

- Do you need web hosting? Maybe you already have your own hosting arrangement.
- Who is going to maintain the site? Security updates are critical and should be regularly applied.
- Do you need training on how to publish to the site?

Logo

Do you have an existing logo?
If so, what format can you supply it in?
Or do you need one created for you?

Email

Do you already have email for your domain? If so great.
If not, ask your web developer to set that up for you.

What address should the contact form go to?
For example: info@yourdomain.com; hello@yourdomain.com;
sales@yourdomain.com etc.



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WEBSITE PRE-LAUNCH CHECKLIST

Before launching your website it's good practice to make sure you have remembered to do everything that you had intended to do.

This is where your pre-launch checklist comes in.

Are you ready to launch your website?

Disclaimer:

While this is the checklist I use, each new website I create follows a slightly different path. As such, this checklist can change depending on the nature of the project.

Please use this checklist as inspiration and feel free to customise it.

Let's get going!

Your website pre-launch checklist



Content

A website isn't a website without real content.

Lorem ipsum is really handy when you're copy and pasting placeholder text. But it looks really unprofessional on a 'live' website. So please check each of your pages to make sure the content is as you intend.



Spellchecker

Nothing screams unprofessional or 'dodgy' than a website with typo's or basic grammatical errors. Your website reflects you and your business. Please take the time to proof your content.



Content Design

We're big fans of designing content to meet a user need. Before you launch your site, make sure that your content does what you intend it to do. Check that buttons perform the right actions. Check that your forms are working. Check that you have included calls to actions in the appropriate places.



Links

The web is built on links and your website will have links to various pages. Make sure they go to the right place. Is your sitemap correct?

Your website pre-launch checklist



Contact Page

Not only does a contact page provide your website with legitimacy, but it should also be a valuable sales channel.



Do you have downloadable resources?

Make sure anything that you want to download, actually downloads. Also make sure that your downloads have an easy to read naming convention. For example, im_add231.pdf should be pre-launch-website-checklist.pdf



404 page

All of our websites come with a 404 page already configured. However, please make sure that your 404 page is customised to represent your brand. 404 pages are also a good place to place dynamic content (such as your blog), a search box and suggested pages.



Analytics

Have you included an analytics tag?

Your website pre-launch checklist



SEO

You'll want to make sure that your website is indexable by search engines. Also make sure that your content has the correct meta tags and descriptions and is set up for your keywords. Highly.Digital make sure all our client's websites are SEO friendly before launch.



Speed

Test your website with services like GTMetrix and Google PageSpeed. Most websites will load in a few seconds, but what you are really testing is page size. You want to make sure your web pages are as small as possible.



Image Optimisation

The easiest way to reduce page sizes is to reduce the size of any images used. This is also a good reminder to make sure those images have Alt tags and have proper names.



Favicon

This is the icon that shows up in the browser tab. It gives your site a unique look. It's quick and easy to add. Make sure it's there.

Your website pre-launch checklist



Online Store

It might seem obvious, but if your store can't accept payments, it's not an online store. So, check that the payment gateway is working and connected to your account.



Store emails

Confirm that any automated emails are configured correctly and customised to represent your brand.



Legal

If you are a company, displaying your company number and VAT number adds trustworthiness to the site.



Privacy Policy

Is your privacy policy page 'live'? Is your data handling procedure GDPR compliant?



Terms and conditions

This is a mandatory recommendation for your online shop.



Cookie notice

If you use cookies (most sites will), you should display a cookie notice.

Nearly There

Now that you have everything in order, what about the future?

Backups and Security

Have you a backup procedure?
How do you know your site is secure?
Who has access to the site?



Promote your site

Now that you have a website (phew, finally) what are you going to do to promote it? You need a content plan and a social media strategy.





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THANKS FOR READING

If you need any help with your website or digital marketing please get in touch.

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