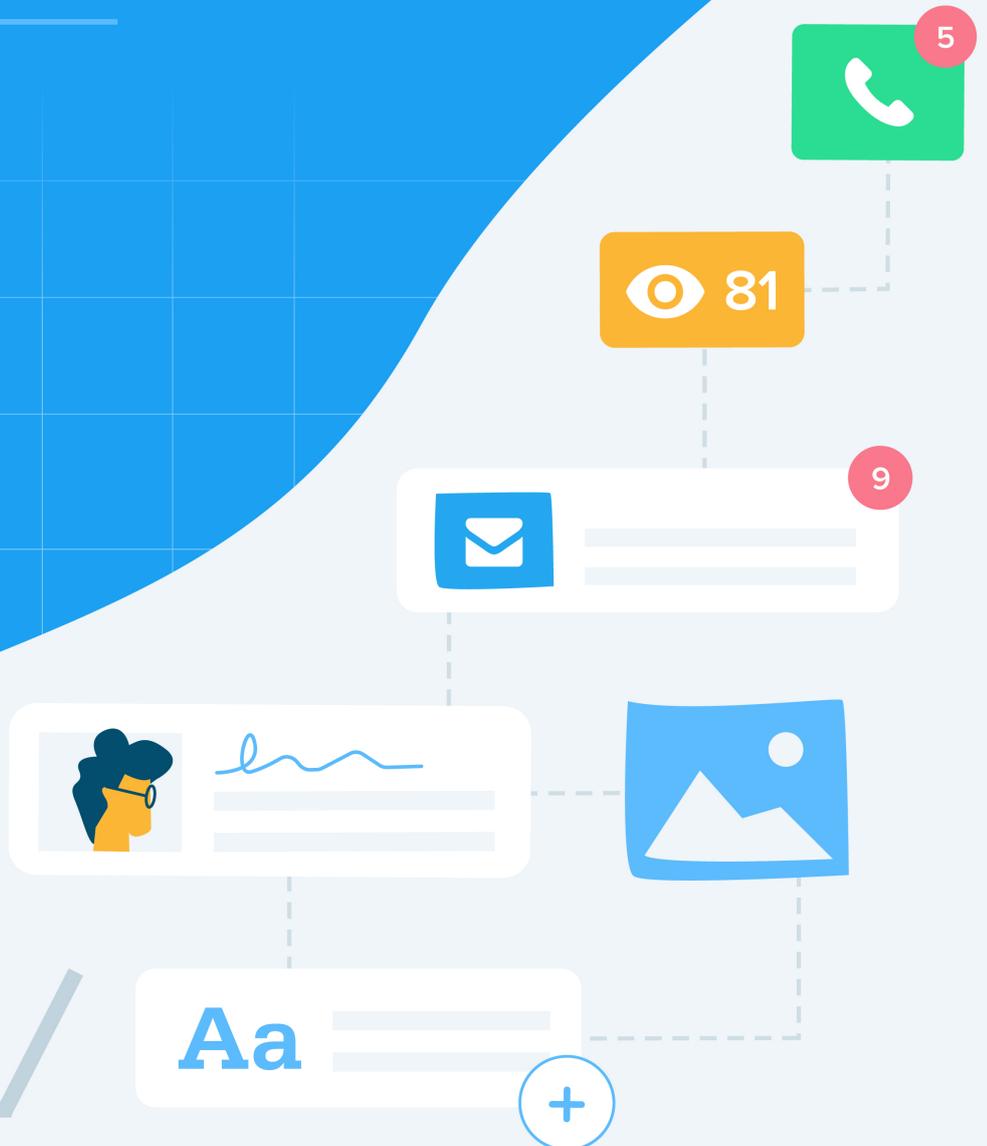


ROCKETSPARK

Building a website click by click

THE BEGINNER'S GUIDE



Brought to you by the creators of Rocketspark

Website builder and ecommerce software for non-techies

www.rocketspark.com

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Preface: Click by Click

“How are we going to pull this off, Bill?” That was Walter Chrysler’s question to architect William van Alen as he stared at the blueprints for the ambitious Chrysler Building. It’s a good question. How do you take 3,826,000 bricks and turn them into the world’s tallest brick building? “It’s simple, Walt”, said Van Alen as he took off his tortoiseshell glasses and flashed a wry smile at the famous car manufacturer. “Brick by brick.”

Okay, so I maybe-sorta-definitely made that story up. But, apocryphal or not, maybe you can relate to Walter Chrysler here. I can. I remember that fateful moment I decided to leave the security of paid employment and go full-time with the then-fledgling Rocketspark. Yes, I was excited—big time!—but also daunted. How do I build a successful website (and company)?? Brick by brick. Or, better: click by click.

A lot of hard work lies ahead. Building a successful website might be the hardest thing you’ve ever done in business. But don’t let that faze you. Just break the process down into manageable chunks. We’ve been maintaining a blog for some years, and we’ve amassed a wealth of high-quality, well-researched information about building and running websites. This guide is like a “greatest hits” of our blog, with all the best stuff updated, reworked, and organised into ten easy-to-follow stages that walk you through the web-building process from start to finish.

Take heart: you got this! Since launching our website builder in 2009, we’ve seen huge numbers of regular people—people like you—realise their dreams by building their own websites, transforming good ideas into very successful businesses. Our name, Rocketspark, comes from our firm belief that a great website can ignite a business, propelling it to stratospheric heights.

I’m confident that’ll be you. It’ll take time and effort, but you’ll make it. Click by click.

- ***Grant Johnson, Rocketspark co-founder***

Before You Begin (It Takes Grit, Guts, and Get-Up-and-Go)

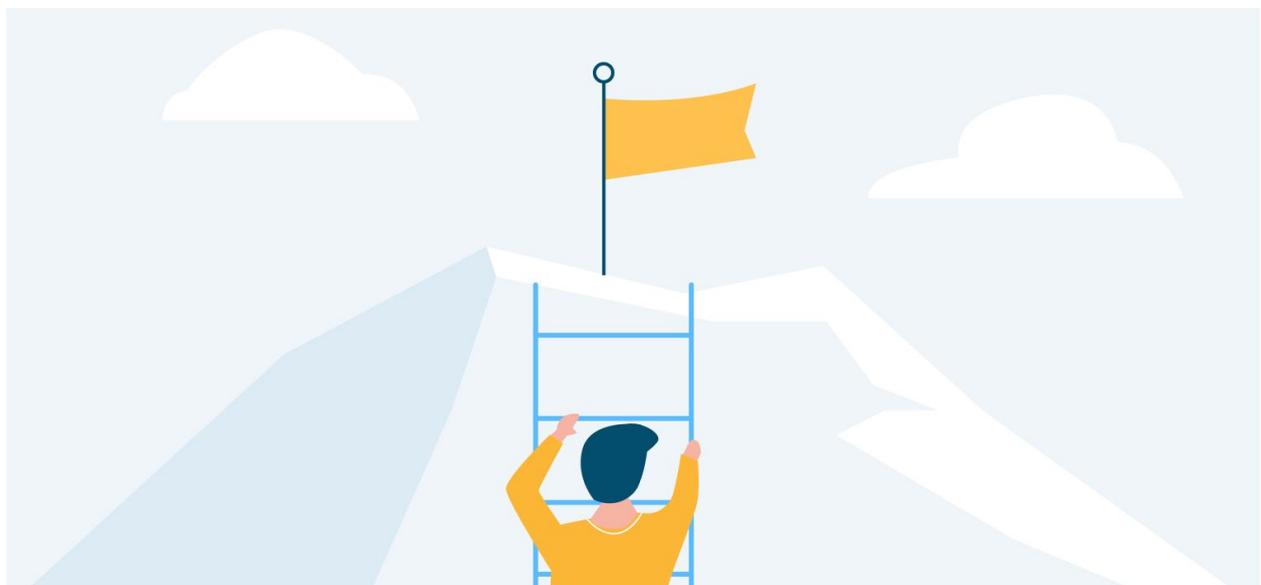
Do you want the good news or the bad news?

Okay, the bad news: Succeeding online is perplexing and time-consuming. Running a successful startup can be overwhelming enough, let alone the prospect of launching a website ready to conquer the internet!

Now, the good news: We've made it simple. A successful website really boils down to a few straightforward things. At Rocketspark, we've noticed that the clients who flourish online are those that do the basics well. This book is all about nailing those fundamentals.

We've broken the whole process down into 10 stages. Note that we didn't say steps. These aren't quick little steps—as if success were just a hop, skip, and a jump away. It just ain't that easy. Nope, we've called them stages, like the stages of the epic Tour de France. It takes grit, takes guts, takes get-up-and-go. But it's not neurosurgery; it just takes stickability. More elbow grease than brain power.

Do the fundamentals well. Yep, it'll take effort but remember our mantra: click by click. Just keep chipping away, and you'll be rewarded with an outstanding website.



Introduction: How a Website Benefits Your Business

Well, you've made it this far into the book (congratulations!) so it's safe to assume that you already believe in the value of a website for your new venture. Nevertheless, it'll help if we take a quick look at some of the reasons a website is important.

Benefits for Service Businesses

We started working on Rocketspark in 2008, smackbang in the middle of the financial crisis that was wreaking havoc all over the world at the time. Dumb idea? You might think so, but it actually worked in our favour. Not only did it give us laser-like focus in creating a sustainable business model, but a lot of talented people who had lost their jobs were looking to start businesses (and websites!) of their own, many of which are service businesses.

One of the main objections to getting a website that we hear from service businesses is that all of their business comes through word-of-mouth. Granted, word-of-mouth is the holy grail of marketing. Research from web usability experts the Nielsen Norman Group shows that [92% of customers trust word-of-mouth above all else](#), so if you've got a strong reputation, then you're onto a good thing. But you still need a website to capitalise on that positive buzz.

Word-of-Mouth Referrals Will Check Your Website First

The way word of mouth referrals play out has changed. Research conducted by online customer service experts, Synthetix, shows that [91% of consumers will check a business's website before calling or emailing](#). But if you don't have a website? They might not call at all. So even after receiving a glowing recommendation from a friend, most people nowadays will check your website before making contact with you.

Referrers Don't Bother with Contact Details Anymore

Remember when you used to actually commit phone numbers to memory? [Nobody remembers phone numbers anymore](#). So these days people don't give out contact details when they're recommending a business. More often than not, they'll give your web address or tell them to "just google it". And as for the phonebook, those mostly end up straight into recycling. So if you get a phone call, more often than not they've nabbed your phone number from your website.

You're Not the Only Option

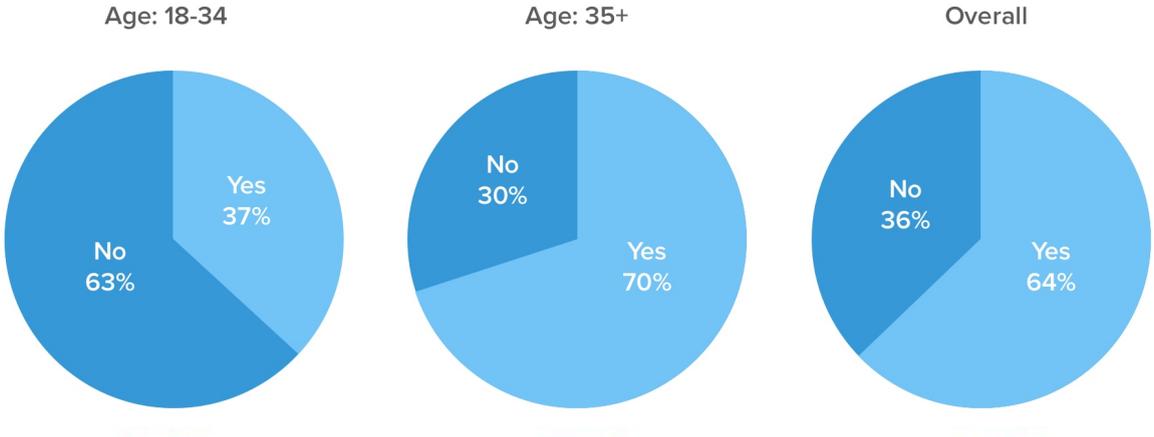
In the social media age, it's becoming increasingly common to ask your Facebook friends or Twitter followers for service company recommendations. [85% of brand followers on Facebook recommend brands to others](#). In the old days, someone sniffing out somebody to do a job for them might've received just one recommendation from a friend, but now they might get three different companies or providers recommended to them. The competition can be fierce and not having a website might mean you lose customers to your competitors.



No website? You're Losing Leads!

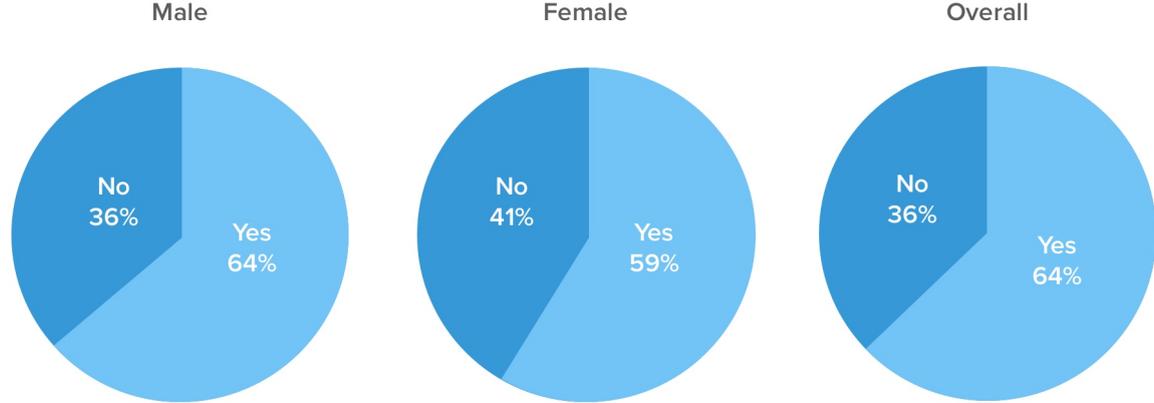
Now more than ever, a company website is one of the basic trust validators people consider before making contact with a service provider; it's how they determine your legitimacy. In an online survey we conducted in the UK, we found that 36% of consumers wouldn't use the services of a tradesperson in their home if they didn't have a website. And that percentage skyrockets to 63% for respondents aged 18–34, an age group who more or less grew up with the internet. So, by not having a website, you effectively eliminate over one-third of your potential market, or two-thirds if you're targeting the young adult demographic. A website is fast becoming a "must have" even for businesses reliant mostly on word-of-mouth—a trend that is only going to continue.

Would you use the services of a tradesperson in your home if they didn't have a website



While we can't tell from this data whether more females than males are likely to arrange for tradespeople to visit their home for services, it's worth noting too that females (41%) were less likely than males (36%) to use the services of a tradesperson who didn't have a website.

Would you use the services of a tradesperson in your home if they didn't have a website



For you statistics wizards, the sample size was 200, so there is a statistical margin of error to take into account. You can see the [full results here](#).

Benefits for Brick-and-Mortar Retail Businesses

Even if you're in retail with a physical brick-and-mortar shop, a website is still important. Why? Obviously, it lets shoppers see what you offer without having to come into your store, and—this is a big one—it tells people where to find you. There are less obvious benefits too. By connecting a point-of-sale system like Vend to your e-commerce website, you can sell the products from your physical store online with minimal extra effort, thereby expanding your reach. Some of our clients taking this “bricks-and-clicks” approach have customers that come into their store armed with a shopping list of products that they've already seen on the website but still want to examine the products in person and purchase in-store.

Benefits for Online-Only Retail Businesses

Well, duh. It goes without saying that, if you're selling online only, then you really need a website! That's just a no-brainer.



[GET MORE AT OUR WEBSITE](#)

rocketspark.com/how-to-start-an-online-shop

We've got another book written specifically for those in online retail. If that's you, check out *Getting started with E-commerce - The beginner's guide to starting an online shop*.

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Some of the biggest decisions you'll make come before you even start building a website. Things like your domain name—that's your website address—and finding the right focus for your site are crucial. So don't rush this stage. Get off on the right foot and you'll be setting yourself up for success.

Beginning with a Brief

You wouldn't build a skyscraper without a blueprint. You wouldn't make a soufflé without a recipe. You wouldn't assemble a flat-pack bunk bed without those impossible-to-decipher instructions apparently written in advanced Klingon. And so you shouldn't create a website without a brief. Here's how.

Finding Your Focus

Focus is a crucial ingredient for success in any area. Things only work effectively and reach their potential if you zero in like a laser to get the job done. The same goes for designing and developing websites. It might be tempting to just jump right in and improvise as you go. But giving yourself the time to first find your focus—identify the goals you have for your website, nail down what makes your organisation unique, figure out the key parts of your site—will enable you to be more deliberate in all aspects of design and development.

There's no one-size-fits-all approach to developing a business website. Why? Because every business is different. That's why it's important to get a website that is the right fit for your business.

Whether you've hired a professional or you're creating your website yourself, a good design brief is a must. A good brief helps you gather your thoughts on what you are wanting to achieve with your website and what you want in terms of design. In other words, it gives you focus. It also gives the designer focus too, because it makes clear to them how to really "sell" your business and highlight your company's strengths.

This is Not Arts and Crafts

Imagine the website you want. How would you describe it? Often when thinking what we want in a website, we tend to automatically start talking about colour, pictures, layout—visual stuff. But this is a little foolhardy. If you're buying a car, is all you consider the colour? Of course not. You want a car that has the right handling, acceleration, and fuel economy (as well as the right colour!).



Yes, the visual dimension of a website is absolutely crucial to establish legitimacy and increase trust, but it's not the only factor. You need to look under the hood. That means thinking carefully about the messages you're wanting to put out to visitors, how you can persuade them to stay on your site longer, how to entice them to contact you, or even buy from you.

Rocketspark's early years were built on designing websites for clients so we learnt firsthand the importance of a good brief. We've refined our brief over time and it's a handy tool you can borrow for your own startup. You'll see that the Rocketspark design brief focuses on questions about your business and what you're wanting to achieve with your website beyond just making it look nice.



[GET MORE AT OUR WEBSITE](https://rocketspark.com/design-brief)

rocketspark.com/design-brief

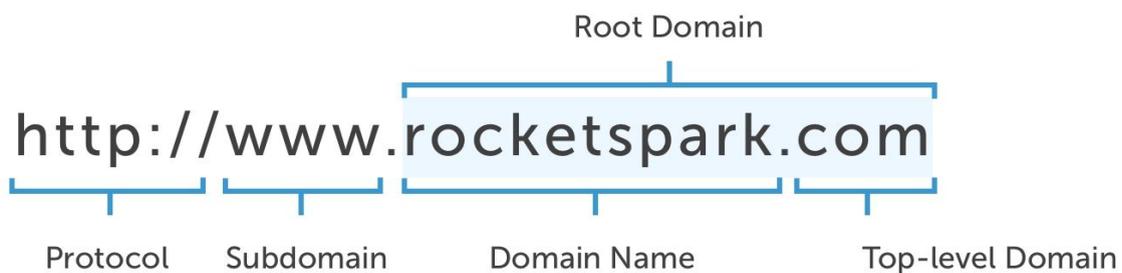
We've made our design brief available. Check it out for some ideas.

Choosing a Domain Name

What’s in a name? Quite a lot, when it comes to making your mark on the internet. There are a whole slew of factors you need to weigh up when picking a domain name for your business’s website.

Introduction to Domain Names

Put simply, your domain name is your stripped-down internet address (URL). Your URL is made up of several bits, of which domain name is just one. For instance, our domain name is rocketspark and our root domain name is rocketspark.com (but, to keep things simple, we’ll just use refer to both “domain name”).



And just like choosing a brick-and-mortar location for your business, your domain name is not only where customers will find you; it can also function like an advertisement. A well-chosen domain name will help existing customers find you easily and draw new customers in.

Choosing Between Brand or Keywords

There’s no magic formula for picking the perfect domain name. There aren’t many clear-cut rules—just guidelines with advantages, disadvantages and trade-offs aplenty. So be prepared to give some thought to the process and make some tough calls. The first of these decisions is settling on what type of domain name you want—brand-oriented or keyword-oriented? Brand-oriented domains are constructed around the business name or some variation of it. Take our website, for example, which

is brand-oriented: rocketspark.com. Our country-targeted rocketspark.co.nz and even the fictional iloverocketspark.com would also qualify as brand-oriented.

Keyword-oriented domains include keywords that are likely to be typed in when a potential customer is looking for whatever goods or services you provide, without specifically looking for your business (or even being aware that your business exists!). Searchers might type in something like “website builder ” or “how to build my own website,” so your domain name could be websitebuilder.co.uk or buildmyownwebsite.com.au.

So which is better? Well, there are pros and cons to both. To figure out what’s best for your business, you need to think carefully about searchability and credibility.

Searchability: How Easily They Can Find It

Once upon a time there were big benefits to keyword-oriented domains in terms of search engine optimisation; domains that had a keywords, rather than a brand name, tended to dominate search rankings. Problem was, lots of spammy websites taking this approach, so that a domain crammed full of keywords became associated with low quality. So since late 2012, when a Google algorithm update began penalising low-quality domains that match a search phrase exactly (a.k.a., exact match domains [EMDs]), keywords in a domain name are not as beneficial to search rankings as they used to be. As a result, the average search ranking for EMDs [drop from #13.4 to #26.6](#). This doesn’t mean that a domain with keywords will hurt your ranking. For example, cheapflights.com is a high-ranking EMD, but that’s because it’s a high-quality site. But using keywords in your domain isn’t quite the ranking powerhouse it used to be.

So the pendulum has swung towards brand-oriented domain names. Nevertheless, using keywords in your domain name can still help users find you in search engines. If you can find a keyword-oriented domain that matches (or at least gets close to) what your potential customers are likely to be typing into a search engine, that can be a useful tool in attracting people to your website.

If you use keywords, keep them to a minimum. The reason Google doesn’t put as much stock in keywords in domain names as it used to, is because of the proliferation of very shady domains comprised of long strings of keywords (often including several hyphens).

Make It Memorable

Is your domain name easy to remember? Customers are probably going to see your domain name on your business card, on your company car or on a TV ad and later have to type it in from memory. A brand-oriented domain could be a big plus on that front. Likewise, is your domain name easy to say? This is a big deal when it comes to customer word-of-mouth.

Keep it simple

Quirky, “creative” approaches—hyphens, numerals and “domain hacks”—usually won’t help in terms of clarity. Even the famous URL shortening service Bitly uses now bitly.com rather than bit.ly. One advantage of brand-oriented domains is that not all customers will use a generic search phrase, like “best bookstore.” Often they’ll search for a specific business, assuming they already know your business’s name. And let’s not forget the obvious: the most famous websites and biggest companies use brand-oriented domains: apple.com, wikipedia.org, bbc.co.uk, trademe.co.nz—and it works just fine for them!



Credibility: How Likely They Are to Click It

Searchability is only half the story. Just because your business appears in the search results doesn’t mean the user will necessarily click on it. Research conducted by Microsoft uncovered something interesting about searcher behaviour: credibility (of a domain name) trumps ranking. In other words, a searcher is more likely to click a result that’s listed in 8th position in the search results (or even 15th position—only 52% of Google users click on page one) if they deem the domain name more credible than a result in 3rd position that has a domain they feel lacks credibility.

Brand domains are often more credible because they give the appearance of legitimacy. Keyword-oriented domains can go either way on this. Short keyword domains, like books.co.uk, are extremely credible. But often those short, punchy domain names are tough to get because they've already been snapped up (if you're desperate for a domain name that's already taken, you can always try buying it off the owner—but be prepared to shell out quite a bit of money for it). A long, convoluted domain name lacks credibility; users probably won't click on athingthatletsyoubuildyourownwebsite.biz. The average length for a domain name is about 12 characters, but generally the shorter your domain, the better.

Using Multiple Domain Names

So, as far as credibility goes, either a brand- or a (short, relevant) keyword-oriented domain will do the trick. But perhaps you've had a brainwave: Can't I have two domain names—one brand- and the other keyword-oriented—and point them both to the same website? Yes, you can, but tread carefully. It's not quite the best-of-both-worlds solution that you might think it is. Search engines may treat it as duplicate content, two websites with the same information or they might take issue with the type of redirect you've set up, and penalise you. There's potentially a trade-off.



[GET MORE AT OUR BLOG](https://rocketspark.com/blog)

rocketspark.com/blog

We cover the muddy issue of using multiple domain names for your website.

Building Credibility

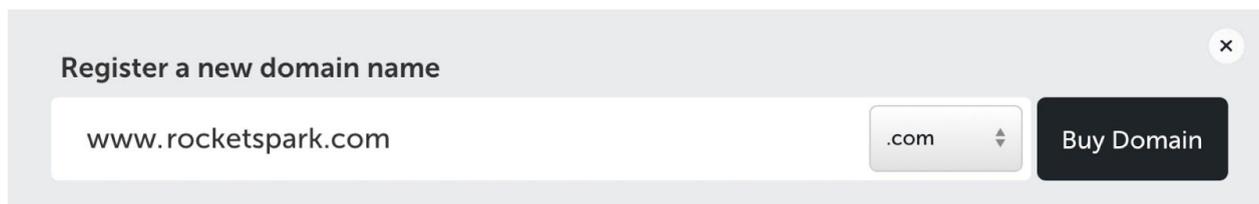
There are other ways to ensure the credibility of your domain name, maximising your chances of being clicked on. Take hyphens, for instance. The overuse of hyphens is a credibility-killer, because hyphen-heavy domains have long been a favourite ploy of spammy websites. Here's the golden rule: one hyphen in your domain name is absolutely fine; [two or more hyphens is a no-no](#).

Hybrid Domains: Brand and Keywords

So, have you decided yet between a brand-oriented or keyword-oriented domain? If you're torn, you could consider combining both into a single hybrid domain name. For instance, rocketspark-websites.com combines a business brand name with a keyword that could potentially be searched.

Domain Suffixes (TLDs): .com etc.

An absolutely crucial component of your domain name is the bit at the end: .com, .co.uk, .net.nz etc. In tech lingo, this is referred to as a Top Level Domain (TLD) and it's vital to how customers will perceive your business. No doubt, .com is king of domain names. It screams credibility and [75% of all domain names end in a .com](#).



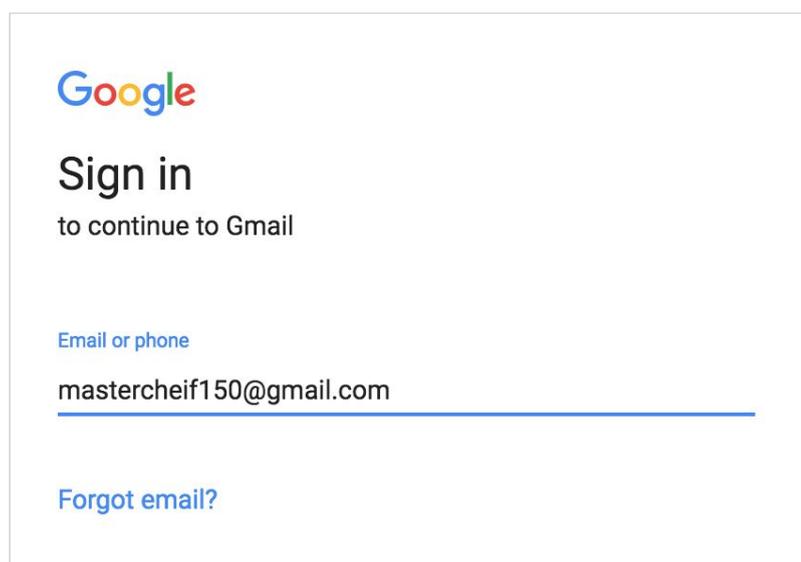
The screenshot shows a domain registration form with the following elements:

- Title: Register a new domain name
- Input field: www.rocketspark.com
- Dropdown menu: .com
- Button: Buy Domain

But .com TLDs aren't for everybody; they tend to belong to American or companies in international markets (Rocketspark uses a .com because we operate in multiple countries). That's fine if that's what you are but if not, you risk looking foreign or just plain pretentious. [Studies suggests that over 80% of users recognise country-specific TLDs \(ccTLDs\)](#) as being tied to a particular country, so if your business caters to a national or local clientele you should look at getting a ccTLD i.e., something that ends in .uk, .nz, or .au etc. While .com (or, by extension, .co.nz/.co.uk/.com.au) is most credible, .net and .org, and their country-specific equivalents, are also very respectable. Nowadays, there are countless TLDs to choose from (Fancy a .ninja? How about a .sucks?) but once you move beyond the basics, the credibility of your domain name is likely to plummet—so stick with these tried-and-true TLDs.

Email Domain Names

Getting the right domain for your email address might seem trivial, but if your email address looks unprofessional, you could be losing customers. Worst of all, you won't even know it, because they won't have contacted you in the first place!

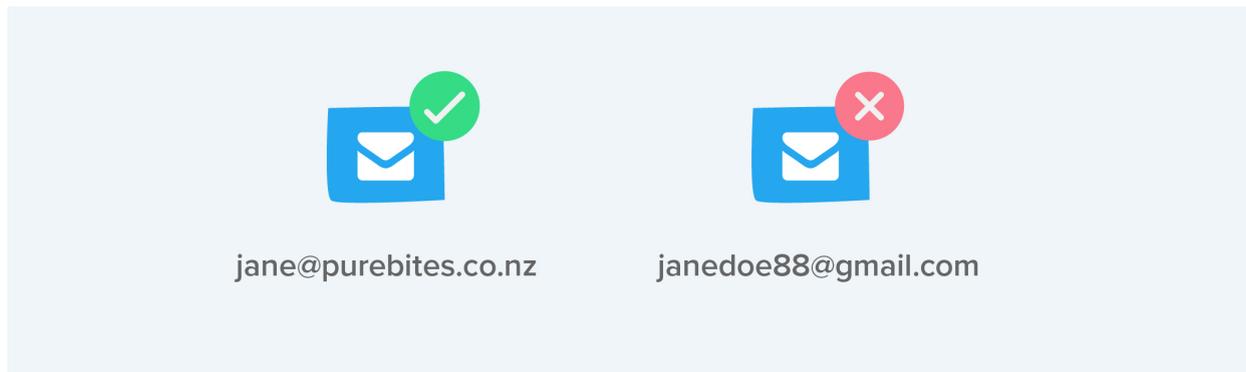


The Problem with Generic Email Domains

A lot of small businesses, even if they have a decent website, opt to keep their old, personal, generic-domain email address e.g., smith.family99@xtra.co.nz, smithyboi32@yahoo.co.uk. Bad idea.

It's important you have an email address that uses your website domain e.g., support@rocketspark.com. But why go to the hassle of changing your email? As the saying goes, if it ain't broke, don't try to fix it—right?

It may actually be more “broke” than you think. Let's say you're planning a wedding and you want some tasty food treats for your guests and you end up at the website www.purebites.co.nz. You're impressed with their site, so now it's time to get in contact with them. Who would you rather deal with: janedoe88@gmail.com or jane@purebites.co.nz?



The second one, right? It all hinges on trust. The personal email address looks less professional which will lead potential customers to start second-guessing: Is this business legitimate? Can I trust them to arrive on time?? Will they burn the vol-au-vents??? Wedding catering is not something you want to take a risk on. On the other hand, the address with a business domain conveys professionalism, reassuring a potential customer that this is an honest, established business they can rely on.

The Evidence in Favour of a Business Domain

I'm not making this up. Google surveyed businesses that started out life with a personal email address who then switched to an address with a business domain later on. [60% of these businesses](#) reported an increase in customer engagement and [42% reported an increase in sales](#) as a result. That's a massive result for something as seemingly minor as changing a few letters after the "@" symbol. But that's because, in actual fact, it's not minor—the domain instills trust.

At Rocketspark, we sometimes find customers, kitted out with a slick new website, still holding on white-knuckled to their old email address. But if you care about building trust, boosting customer engagement and ultimately selling more, the writing's on the wall: it's time to let go of the old email address and upgrade to one that uses your domain name.

Getting a Business Domain Email Address

There's no doubt: an email address with your business as the domain is far superior to a generic email domain. The only question left to answer is how to get one:

From Your Website Provider

Many website providers will include email as part of their service. Some also promote appealing offers of a crazy-high number of email accounts, but make sure you read the fine print; there's often a single data limit that applies across all of the mailboxes and the website combined. They can quickly fill up and even fail to receive incoming emails if the inbox is full.

From Google (G-Suite Business Solutions)

If your web firm doesn't offer email, then one option you have is to sign up for [G-Suite Business Solutions](#) (formerly Google Apps for Business), which includes Gmail (i.e., Google email) but using business-domain email addresses instead of the usual @gmail.com. You have to register your domain separately and setup is a little complex. It's not free but it's good value and an excellent email service.

From Microsoft (Office 365)

Another option is to use Office 365, a Microsoft service you can purchase on a subscription. There are various plan levels ranging from a nice email service to a full subscription service for all of the Microsoft Office suite of products. Office 365 nicely syncs your email, contacts and calendar across all of your devices.



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We've got more information about domains, including how to juggle multiple domains as well as resolving domain ownership disputes.

The Importance of a Logo for Your Business

Some businesses might wonder if they really need a logo. This is especially true of businesses relying on word-of-mouth. But just as these sorts of service businesses need a website (discussed above), they also need a logo.

A logo is a combination of text and/or visual imagery that typically serves two purposes: (1) it tells people the name of the company, and (2) it creates a visual symbol that represents your business. Some logos have powerful symbolic association connected to people's memory. For example, the Nike "swoosh" logo is so familiar that they no longer need the brand name to be recognised as Nike.



A Logo Lends Credibility

Potential customers are more likely to do business with you if you have a well-designed logo. A professional logo builds trust. On the other hand, if your logo looks like it was designed in Microsoft Word, people will question how well you are able to deliver your core business products/services.

Logo Basics

Make the Text in Your Logo Clear and Readable

Everyone hope to be the next Coca-Cola or McDonalds, but in reality, one of the most important characteristics when starting out is that the text of your company name in the logo is clear and easy to read. It could appear on vehicle signage, building signage, posters, or some other place where the logo is seen at a distance. Make sure it can be read and recognised.

Use the Logo Consistently

When large global brands get a logo designed they often issue large brand standards documents, covering things like: variants of the logo and when to use them; “do”s and “don’t”s in terms of modifying the logo; what should and shouldn’t appear near the logo; and how the logo should appear in all sorts of different scenarios. These documents can be dozens of pages deep, detailing every hypothetical scenario you can possibly imagine. That’d be overkill for most small business logos, of course, but these large brands understand something that we all need to know: if a brand’s logo is used inconsistently, consumer trust can be damaged. Be really consistent with how you use your logo.



Simplicity Means Versatility

Your logo could appear in a variety of contexts: on screens, business cards, letterheads, pull-up banners, vehicles, shop signage, product packaging, newspaper adverts, to name just a few possibilities. Logos with lots of fine detail, gradient colours, a kaleidoscope of different colours, or photographic content are likely to look quite different across these various contexts. Your printers, painters, and publishers will all use different technologies, making it difficult to match the colours exactly. This is why the world’s most powerful brands usually stick to a simple palette: three main colours or less, solid (not gradient).

Visual is Memorable

It might take you a few decades to become the next Amazon, but having a memorable element in your logo is ideal for all businesses. Some businesses do this by using a unique font or tinkering with part of the text so that's it's not just a standard font. Other businesses achieve this by adding some sort of illustrated icon alongside the text part of the logo, which can even be used by itself without the text (e.g., Nike often leaves its "swoosh" naked, a privilege they've earned over time by the public's endless exposure to the logo's textual and visual components together). If you're wanting a sleek, minimalist logo, just using a modern looking font with a pop of accent colour is a good option.

Getting a Logo

The best way to get a logo is to have it professionally designed. Although there are cheap online logo design services, from our experience the best value and service is from small local graphic designers or print shops. By going for a small freelance graphic designer or print shop with an in-house designer, you're going to avoid paying thousands that you might pay with an ad agency or large design firm, yet still get a quality logo with personal service. These small design businesses are also excellent at creating slick business cards and print materials (you may even get a package deal, combining your logo and promotional material design for a low cost). And a big plus is that it'll help you nail that brand consistency.

Choosing a Designer

Make sure you view examples of their previous work—and you like it! A large, impressive logo portfolio is a good sign. Find other nearby small businesses with great logos and ask who they used. If you're a new small business, you don't need to spend thousands on logo design. If you think the price you've been quoted might be too high, ask around to see what other people paid.

By the way, this brings us back to the issue we started this Stage 1 section on: the brief.

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The Difference Between Images and Words

The Time Factor

Types of Video

The preparation stage is done. Now it's time to figure out your content, the actual words and images that will make up your site. This is the part where paralysis can set in. Uh-oh, what on earth should I put on my website?! Don't worry—follow our advice and you'll be well on your way to crafting top-notch content.

Writing Your Website Copy

It's a funny thing, writing. Thanks to compulsory education and the invention of the movable-type printing press, most of us can do it. If you're reading this, chances are you can string together enough words to form a semi-coherent email or scribble a few well wishes on a birthday card.

So why is writing website content so darn hard?



Writing is Daunting

It should be the easiest thing in the world. You learnt it as a kid. Just squiggles on a page. And yet, it's tough. Our clients' websites constantly get bogged down in the development stage because they can't for the life of them write a few words about something in which they're experts, namely their own business.

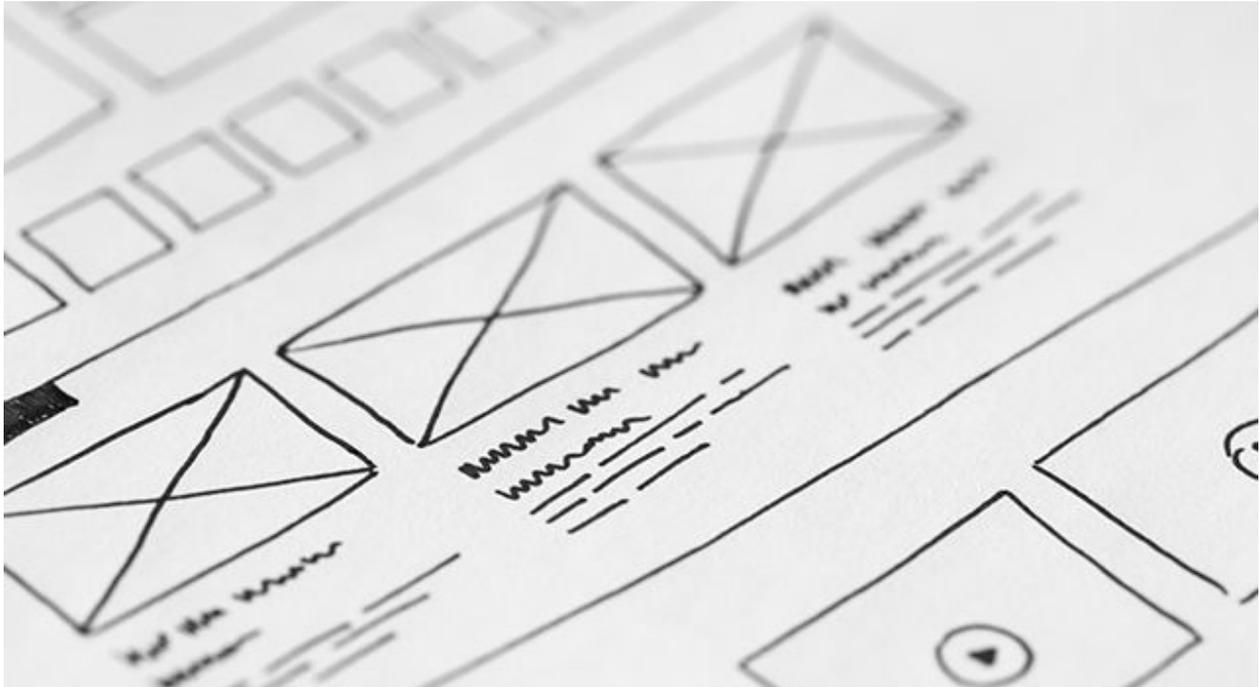
Bestselling author Steven Pressfield says there is a mysterious force, Resistance, that faces everyone undertaking a creative task—writing, painting, or origami-folding. However you explain Resistance, every writer and artist can vouch for its existence ([and whole movies have been dedicated to it](#)). Pressfield notes that the young Hitler dreamt of becoming a painter, pouring his inheritance into his arts education. “Ever see one of his paintings?,” Pressfield asks. “Neither have I. Resistance beat him. Call it overstatement but I'll say it anyway: it was easier for Hitler to start World War II than it was for him to face a blank square of canvas.”

The same goes for a blank page. That innocuous 13-inch screen becomes suddenly monolithic. You start to wonder if you'll ever get this done. But we have good news: you can write your website copy (“copy” is just a hoity-toity [way of saying “text”](#)). Below, we'll show you how to write good content for your website.

By the way, just two more things before we begin: we're focussed here on writing for the web in general. We look specifically at writing for blogs in Stage 6. Also, bear in mind that writing for the web is unique, because it requires writing in a way that will bump your website as high up the Google search rankings as possible. Check out Stage 5 for more on that.

Structure

It's important to organise and structure your content. Remember: this isn't Joycean, stream-of-consciousness prose, so don't spew whatever comes to mind out onto the page in random order. Instead:



Make it Easy to Scan

For almost twenty years, web usability experts [NNG have been preaching the importance of making your writing scannable](#). Readers should be able to get the gist from a quick glance rather than having to read closely and carefully. Specifically, use lots of headings, sub-headings, numbered and bulletpoint lists, emphasised text (don't go overboard!) and [“chunking” \(breaking content into small, manageable bits\)](#). If reading a novel is like getting lost in the woods, reading web content should be like having an over-eager tour guide who's constantly pointing out things and just won't shut up.

Be Concise

The best scribes can write with economy. Being succinct is another of [NNG's cornerstone principles of web writing](#). But that's easier said than done, so how?:

1. Be clear on the point of this particular webpage, paragraph and sentence (keep in mind what you're ultimately trying to say)
2. Edit your work repeatedly, mercilessly cutting away any fat

Let the Topic Determine the Length

Despite the importance of brevity, long-form copy often works better than skimpy content. We realise this is counterintuitive, but it's a fact borne out by plenty of research. [Webpages with upwards of 1,500 words often rank highest in Google.](#) Which presents the web writer with a conundrum: short (yay, concise!) or long (yay, higher ranking!)? The answer is simple: if the topic deserves detailed, in-depth treatment, go long. If not, keep it brief.

Put Your Most Important Ideas First

The more important it is, the earlier it should appear. This is a good rule of thumb for web content in general (e.g., research shows that [users pay 84% more attention to information “above the fold”](#)) but also applies specifically to how you structure your copy. NNG recommends using an “[inverted pyramid](#)” structure, where you give your conclusion in the introduction. That makes sense...to a point. Don't let your zeal for giving pole position to the key idea(s) trump the logic—or drama!—of your writing.

Style

Nailing your structure is important, but it's not everything. The best web writing isn't only functional; it's beautiful as well. Indeed, one of the joys of reading—and, yes, even writing—is appreciating the beauty and plain ol' fun of language. With that in mind:



Charm Your Audience

Business website copy isn't meant to be neutral and objective; it should be persuasive. But since "persuasion" sounds a little too much like "coercion", we prefer to think of it as charming your audience: less gun-to-the-head, more chocolate-coated-and-covered-in-sprinkles. How? Your writing should be trying to motivate the audience (e.g., to buy your product, sign up for your emails, contact you for a quote, or even just keep reading), but shouldn't be a hard-sell. Back your product but don't overhype it.

Use Objective Language...Sometimes. [Real estate researchers have made an interesting discovery](#): in house listings, emotive language like "fantastic" and "spacious" correlates with lower sale prices, while neutral language like "granite" and "maple" correlates with higher prices. Why? Subjective words are unconvincing. "Fantastic" is an opinion, but "granite" is a fact (suggesting quality). This is partly why [NNG recommends using objective language](#). But tread carefully: facts-only writing can turn dull very fast, so our advice is to blend objective and subjective language so that it's equal parts credible and compelling.

Find Your Voice

"Voice" is your copy's tone, how it sounds or feels. Since it's essentially your writing's "personality", it should match the personality of your business. [NNG helpfully demystifies tone by breaking it down into four metrics](#):

1. funny vs. serious
2. casual vs. formal
3. irreverent vs. respectful
4. enthusiastic vs. matter-of-fact

What tone works best? That'll vary from one business to another, but NNG's testing revealed that, on the whole, "casual, conversational, and moderately enthusiastic tones performed best". Better to err on the side of friendly and human than cold and corporate. So don't just copy-and-paste the corporatese from your mission statement!

Bookend Paragraphs with Snappy Sentences

Good writers have Sprachgefühl, an intuitive sense of how good writing sounds. Problem is, a feel for language is difficult to teach. So here's a quick-and-dirty tip for constructing little paragraphs that snap, crackle and pop: start and finish your paragraphs with a sentence or phrase that has a lil' sizzle (i.e., is funny, clever, ironic, colloquial, or punchy). Even dull, utilitarian lines will sound right—or at least better—when sandwiched between a couple of sexy sentences.

Read, Re-read, and Edit

Nothing says “amateur” like spelling and grammar errors. In their rush to churn out content, even major newspapers—traditionally bastions of proper literary style—are regular offenders. Fortunately, it's an easy fix: read and re-read your work. Pore over it with a fine-tooth comb (reading it aloud can also help you identify problems with tone and style). And, if possible, put your writing aside for a day or two and come back to it. With a little distance, problems—orthographic or stylistic—will jump out at you.

Process

“There's a secret,” says Pressfield, “that real writers know that wannabe writers don't, and the secret is this: It's not the writing part that's hard. What's hard is sitting down to write.” Even seasoned writers—who know the above principles inside-out—have trouble actually doing it. So:



Set Small Targets

In her celebrated book about writing, [Bird By Bird](#), Anne Lamott, suggests “short assignments” as one way of fighting through Resistance. Don’t sit down to write your whole website (or even whole webpage), in one go. Just try to write one paragraph. Heck, even one sentence is an accomplishment. And once you get the ball rolling, you might find you can write a lot more.

First Write for Sense, Then Write For Style

Sometimes what paralyzes us before the blank page is the pressure, usually self-inflicted, to be brilliant. Rather than trying to write crackling prose from the get-go, dedicate your first draft to the more modest goal of simply making sense. Freed from the need to be Keats, you can focus instead on constructing a clear, logical, and comprehensive piece. Then, on your second go-through, focus on style: choose better words, vary sentence lengths, and work in a few jokes.

Let “What’s My Point?” Be Your Guide

Sometimes you get lost. You come to the end of a thought or get mired in a complex explanation or find yourself on some unexpected excursus—and you’ve got no idea what to write next. How do you find your way again? By asking yourself: What’s my point? Maybe even write that point in BIG FAT LETTERS at the top of your page. Knowing your overarching point is like marking an “X” on your map (or, to update the metaphor, dropping a pin on your Google map). It keeps you on track and, when you come off, helps you get back on.

The Value of Using Quality Images

Remember when connecting to the internet sounded like R2D2 getting a colonoscopy (beeeep-teeeeeeek-shhhhhhhh-zhzhzhzhz)? That was the bad ol’ days of dial-up, when loading images on a webpage took foreeeeeeeeever. Thankfully, with super-speedy internet connections nowadays, we can get images quickly (and get [our unboxing videos](#) at lightning speed—phew!). That’s why users want images with their web experience. Scratch that; users expect images. But not just any sort of images either. It’s not enough to stuff your site full of crappy pictures, like a kid cutting out magazine

photos to pad out a school assignment. Your images need to be high quality. But what makes a high quality image? Here's three things to think about when adding images to your site.

Why Photos matter

Let's back up a moment. Sure, images have become a standard part of the web experience—but why? Two reasons:

1. Photos are interesting
2. Photos make us feel

+64 7 444 5016



[Home](#) [About](#) [Services](#) [Blog](#) [Contact Us](#)



It's not rocket science: photos are more visually appealing. What would you rather look at: black squiggles on a white page (text) or a dynamic, bacchanalian, polychromatic display of eye-candy pyrotechnics (photos)? Thought so. Of course, the internet is still heavily reliant on text, but images break that text up into manageable chunks. Yes, deep down we're all just little kids who want books with lots of pictures and minimal words.



But images can also do certain things that words can't. While text is great for efficiently conveying a lot of information, images are great at delivering an emotional punch. Simply put, photos make you feel. To be sure, words have their own strengths—precision, economy, factuality—but nothing is quite as evocative as a well-crafted, well-chosen image.

The Problem With Stock Photos

Most of us understand the appeal of a professional photograph over a rough-n-ready homemade snapshot taken on your phone. Most of us also understand that hiring a professional photographer is likely to cost big bucks. If only there was a way I could (legally) get professional images without having to pay premium prices...Guess what: you can. It's called stock photography.

There are lots of stock image databases on the internet that allow you to get your hands on the right photo just by typing in a search query ("baby wearing bowtie and beaglepuss") and paying a fee (or even get them gratis). Seems like the perfect solution, right? Wrong.

Here's the problem with stock photos: everybody can tell it's a stock photo. ["To see a stock image is . . . to know you're seeing a stock image."](#) says writer at The Atlantic Megan Garber. After countless thousands of visits to meticulously preened, stock-heavy corporate websites, we've all become blackbelts at identifying stock images. The three telltale signs you're looking at a stock photos according to Garber are "prettiness, preciousness, pose-iness". That seems pretty accurate, but whatever the reasons, we can all smell stock photos a mile off.

But does it matter that people can tell? According to eye-tracking studies (where they monitor what parts of a webpage people actually look at—and the parts they ignore) conducted by web-user experts NNG [users completely ignore stock photos](#). That's right—those glossy, slick, carefully-crafted images shot by Leibovitz-wannabes fail to capture any attention. So, yes, it matters.

Use Real, High-Quality Photos

So what does work? Real, high-quality photos. By which we mean photos specific to your business, featuring your people and your products. In the aforementioned eye-tracking studies, NNG found that, while users completely overlook stock photos, they do look at non-generic images.

Chinese researchers have also found that [images with people in them often work better than photos without people](#) (e.g., a photo of somebody wearing your headphones will trump a photo of the headphones all on their lonesome). It's about trust. When a website visitor is able to see your staff's faces, your brick-and-mortar shop, and your branded company cars, it proves to them that you're a legitimate business. Their trust increases, because they realise that you're actually the real deal, not a con artist with a website.



What what sort of photos actually work? NNG specifically cites the following as [the right kind of images to be using on your website](#):

- Information-carrying photos (i.e., not purely decorative filler)
- Staff photos (of your actual staff)
- Product photos

Yes, stock photos are professional-looking but they're not fooling anybody. No business has staff that gorgeous, no science lab has labcoats that clean, no university has students that smiley. But high quality photos of actual people? Those pictures really are worth a thousand words.



Using Video on Your Website

Chances are, you've watched an online video today. The vast majority of users watch online videos (e.g., [80% of New Zealanders, 76% of Australians](#)). Over one-third of Americans watch video content daily. And get this: YouTube appears now to have surpassed traditional broadcast TV as the [most-watched platform in the US](#). The internet is becoming—nay, has become—a videographic medium.

Creating videos for your website might sound like a lot of work and, admittedly, video production takes more time/money than simply writing something. But, used well, video can be a powerful tool to generate more web traffic and, ultimately, more sales.

The Benefits of Web Video

Video Improves Engagement

Anecdotal evidence alone is probably enough to convince most of us that video is more engaging than plain text, but have you ever wondered why? Psychologist Susan Weinschenck identified [four reasons we're suckers for video](#):

1. We're hard-wired to pay attention to faces.
2. Information is conveyed through tone of voice.
3. We "catch" emotions off others.
4. Movement grabs and holds our attention.

Not only does video improve engagement but it helps memory too. [Retention rate for visual information is up to 65% versus just 10% for textual information.](#)



Video Increases Trust

E-commerce relies on trust, and video is a great way to boost trust. There's a serious amount of legitimacy implied by video, even when the video isn't even watched. ReelSEO conducted some research and discovered that [merely offering video increased conversions, regardless of whether or not users actually watched the video](#). Seems odd, we know, but offering video shows that you believe in your products and that you're willing to invest in your website experience. In other words, it shows that you're trustworthy.



Video Improves Search Rankings

If you've ever wondered how you might get your website to show up on page one of Google's search results, video might be part of the answer: [video is 50 times more likely to rank well than a plain-text site](#). How do you help your video rank well in Google? This is a question about search engine optimisation (SEO). Video SEO is similar to ordinary SEO—all the usual tips and tricks apply. You need to use keywords in the video's titles, descriptions, and tags. Creating a transcript of your video can give you an SEO boost too. To learn more, read Stage 5, where we tackle SEO.

Video Increases Conversions

If you're selling online, then this is the biggie. Video marketers Invodo run regular reports on video statistics. Their most recent research shows that site users are [1.9 times more likely to buy a product after watching a relevant video](#) than when they didn't. In other words, video almost doubles your odds...or even better—Invodo customer [stacksandstacks.com found that using video increases sales by 144%](#). If you're serious about selling through your website, you need to consider using video.

When Not to Use Video

There's a lot of hype around video that's not always accurate. There's a pseudo-scientific figure that's often trotted out in support of video content: [one minute of video is worth 1.8 million words](#). That's wrong. The guy credited with this specious "fact" (he has a PhD so, hey, it's gotta be true!) has apparently arrived at the figure by multiplying the number of frames in a minute's worth of video (1,800 [30 frames x 60 seconds], as if you could absorb each frame individually!) by 1,000, based on the highly unscientific notion that a picture is worth a thousand words ([scientifically, a picture is worth 1.5 words](#)—at least, when it comes to memory). So don't believe the hype about video.

There are times that text is the way to go. It's all about knowing when to use what. As media theorists will tell you, [the medium matters just as much, if not more, than the information it conveys](#) (and, as web marketing expert Neil Patel discovered, [getting it wrong can be costly](#)). Different technologies affect us in different ways, to the point of even altering how our brains work (see, for example, [Nicholas Carr's piece in The Atlantic, "Is Google Making Us Stupid?"](#) His answer: Yes). In other words, the text and video on your website aren't just neutral, passive communication channels that convey identical information—they actually do different stuff with that information.

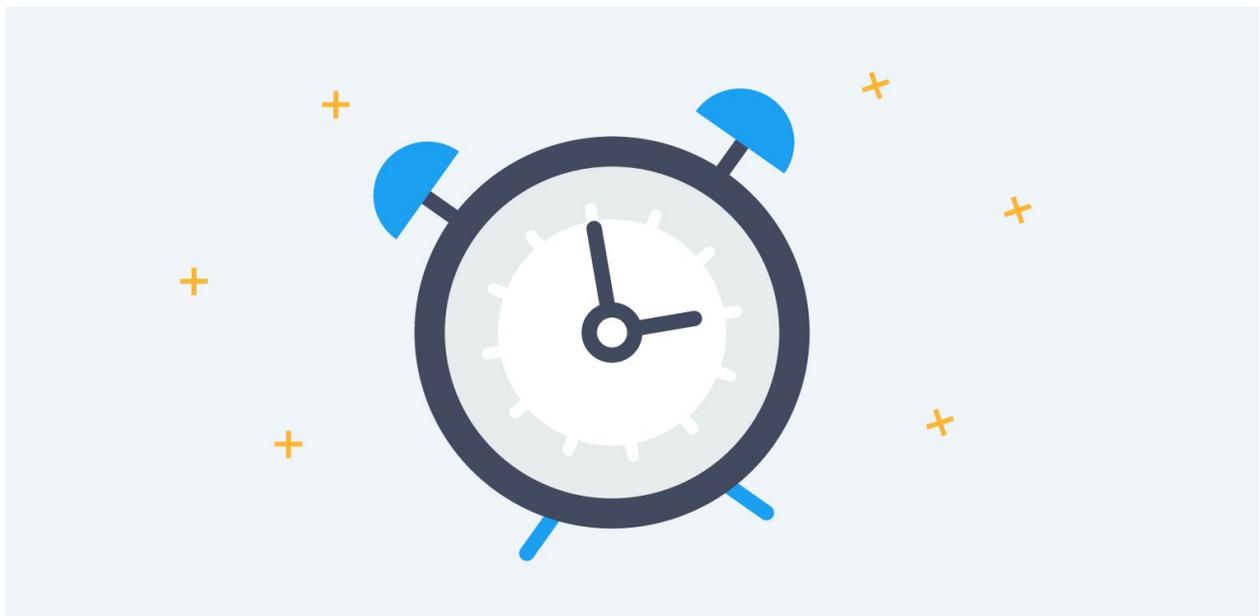
The Difference Between Images and Words

What do images and words do differently? Put simply, video makes you feel; text makes you think. Visual media tends to be more emotive, which is why video is ideal for sharing customer stories or highlighting the user experience—seeing and hearing makes your website visitor feel something, which in turn might just compel them to convert.

Textual media tends to be more analytical, so it's a great way to deal with facts and data where the point is to communicate the essential information rather than convey a whole experience, like product specs and prices. Of course, these aren't hard-and-fast distinctions and many web videos combine both, like videos that present words and stats in a visually interesting way. But these are genuine tendencies, so whenever you're deciding between text and video, ask yourself: what's the goal of this information?

The Time Factor

There is a more mundane consideration here too: time. Text can be scanned, skimmed and skipped—great when you're in a hurry (which, let's face it, is pretty much always). Video usually requires a time commitment that users are not always willing to invest. [Most adults read between 250 and 300 words per minute but speak just 150 words per minute.](#) If you're trying to get a lot of information across, text is often more efficient. And, of course, sometimes the best solution is to offer both text and video.

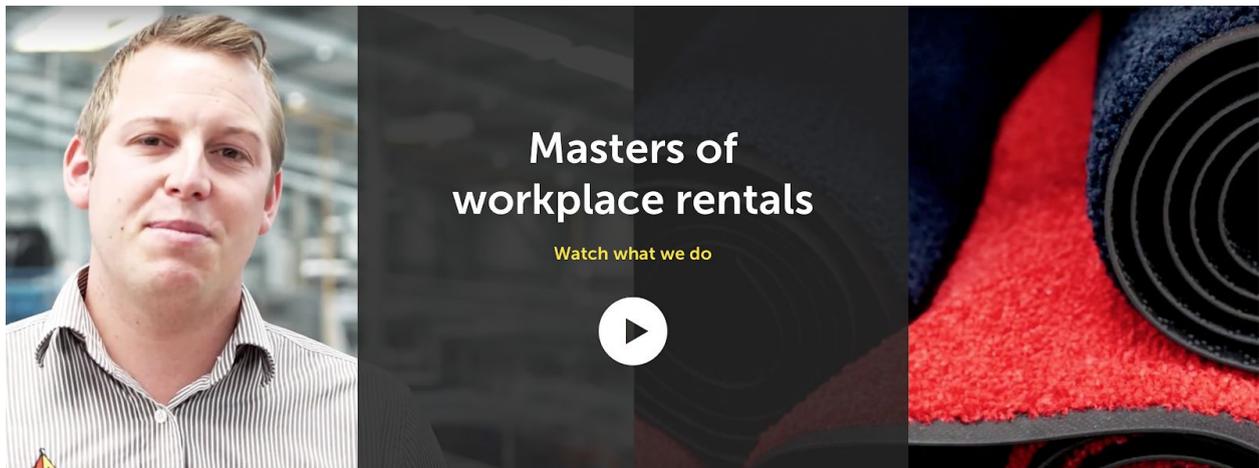


Types of Video

But there are times when video just can't be beat. So what kinds of content work well on video? Here's just a few ideas:

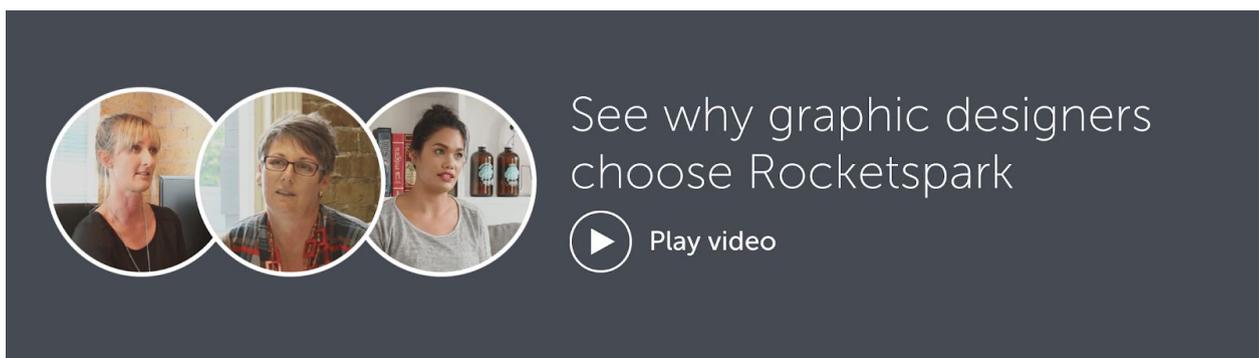
Introduction to Your Business/Telling Your Story

These videos are a close cousin to TV advertisements. This is where you as a company really sell your sizzle. You'll usually find these videos on the homepage, introducing visitors to what you're all about as a business. Check out the video on the homepage of [Rob May Builders](#) and [Kilgravin Lodge](#) for inspiration. However, getting a professionally made video isn't always in the budget, which is why sometimes you have to take the DIY approach. Video hosting platform [Wistia](#) has some great [help guides](#) for getting that perfect shot.



Customer Testimonial

In an age of spin, people are naturally wary of a business's self-promotion—they're more likely to listen to other customers' experiences. That's why testimonials are so valuable. Video testimonials are particularly effective because viewers can actually see the customer and know that you haven't just made up a quotation and falsely attributed it to them! Check out [Xero's video testimonials](#) for inspiration.





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We look at the importance of testimonials and how they build trust between you and your potential customers.

Step-by-Step Instructions

Nobody likes reading long, bamboozling instruction manuals. So why not try video instead? And because the video has a fairly utilitarian purpose, it doesn't necessarily have to be fancy (though bear in mind that, done well, a video could double as a selling tool). Kiwi baby gear company Dimples are [an example of no-frills instructional videos](#) that are bound to be useful to their customers.

“Viral” Media

By “viral”, we don't mean insanely popular—though, admittedly, that's what it usually means—but simply the kind of content that's fun, fascinating or feel-good (and that you hope will become insanely popular). BlendTec's [“Will It Blend?” videos](#), where a lab-coated company founder pulverises iPhones to smithereens in their high-powered blenders, was a big hit. A few years ago, the [Ice Bucket Challenge](#) (used by/for various health-related charities) is an example of how you can get your audience involved. Obviously, replicating the success of those campaigns will be well-nigh impossible. But the point still stands that, in the age of viral media, you as a company have full license to let your hair down, kick off your shoes and have fun.

This list is by no means exhaustive; you may find other uses for video on your website. So long as you're selective and mull it over carefully before using video, then you're free to use it for all sorts of content.



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We dive in the issue of using other people's content or images, on your website.

STAGE 3

Designing the Homepage

41 Why First Impressions Matter

- The Importance of a Positive First Impression
- The Halo Effect: First impressions Last
- The Role of Visual Appeal

43 The Essentials of an Attention-Grabbing Homepage

- The Main Heading
- Explaining Why They Should Choose You
- Making it Visually Interesting
- Urging Them to Take Action
- Writing for Skimmers
- Measuring the Impact

When you think of a website, you usually think of the homepage. It's your site's shop window, the place to show off your brand, your product, and your attitude. That's why we've dedicated this whole stage to getting this single webpage right. Sure, it's just one page of your site, but it's the most important.

Why First Impressions Matter

How long does it take for someone to decide they like—or don't like—your website? 50 milliseconds.

That's 0.05 seconds. 1/20th of a second. Faster than [the blink of an eye](#). That's what [researchers at Carleton University \(Canada\)](#) found when asking volunteers to rate websites after being given split-second glimpses. In other words, science has proven what every pimple-faced, metal-mouthed, four-eyed teenager whose crush doesn't notice them knows already: first impressions matter.



The Importance of a Positive First Impression

In the classic Star Trek series (and the recent J. J. Abrams reboot), there was an ongoing clash between Spock's logic and Captain Kirk's intuition. There was something so cool about the way Spock could, in a crisis, calmly intone, "This is highly illogical." But as much as we may fancy ourselves as possessing the half-Vulcan's unrelenting rationality, the Carleton study proves that we're hardwired to go with our gut. We're more Capt. Kirk than we are Mr. Spock.

The Halo Effect: First impressions Last

Of course, the fact we make snap judgments is hardly breaking news—we all know our tendency to judge a book by its cover. But what is particularly interesting is this: users' first impressions don't change very much over time. The Carleton researchers found that those initial evaluations made at hummingbird-speed remained remarkably stable even after being given more time exploring the websites.

Blame the halo effect. Nobel-winning psychologist Daniel Kahneman explains it thus: "If you like the president's politics, you probably like his voice and his appearance as well. The tendency to like (or dislike) everything about a person—including things you have not observed—is known as the halo effect" (Thinking, Fast and Slow, Daniel Kahneman, p.81). And the halo effect doesn't just apply to people; it applies to websites as well. Make a good first impression and visitors to your site are likely to remain favourable towards it. Make a bad first impression and they'll be gone in a flash—and they won't come back.

The Role of Visual Appeal

And what are these lickety-split judgments based on? Looks, of course! Yes, we really are that shallow. Researchers at the University of Patras (Greece) found that [other aspects, like usability and credibility, are not as influential in forming first impressions as visual appeal \(and novelty\)](#). For most of us: ugly website = lousy company.

You might be wondering: what does the look of my website have to do with the quality of my wares? Well, not much. You might have a sub-par website and still provide an

outstanding product. But your potential customers don't know that. They don't get to see your business from "the inside" like you do—all they see is the "shop window". And if they don't like what they see, they'll assume the worst.

Web browsing is a form of information foraging, which is a sciency way of saying that [we search for information the way animals search for food: lazily](#). Or more generously, to quote Jakob Nielsen of NNG, we want "[maximum benefit for minimum effort](#)." It takes effort to explore a website, especially a poorly designed one. Most people simply won't bother. They'll just move on to a competitor with a hot website.

And, besides, it's not entirely groundless. Companies that take pride in their website are also more likely to take pride in their product. So there is at least some logic to first impressions. Even Spock prefers sexy.

The Essentials of an Attention-Grabbing Homepage

More often than not, first impressions are made on the homepage. It makes sense then to design the homepage with a little extra care and attention. A good homepage will entice visitors to stay on your site longer and learn more. A bad homepage will drive them away within seconds.

Nailing an attention-grabbing homepage doesn't have to be brain surgery. We can even boil it down to a pretty simple formula: catch users' attention with quality images, tell them what you do with a big, punchy heading, make it clear why they should choose you, and invite them to take the next step. And well-designed homepage will do all of these things in under ten seconds.

The homepage is often the first page on your website people see. And if it's not working, it's the only page they'll see. That's because if they can't immediately get a sense of what you're about, they'll leave within seconds (resulting in a [high bounce rate](#)). Opportunity wasted. Here's how to grab—and maintain—users interest with your homepage.



➔ Minden Heights, Luxury bed & breakfast accommodation Te Puna, just outside of Tauranga



Minden Heights Bed and Breakfast is a relaxing getaway destination. We provide luxury accommodation in the Bay of Plenty with impressive panoramic views of Mount Maunganui, Matakana Island, Motiti Island and beyond. Located in Te Puna just outside of Tauranga.

SEND US AN ENQUIRY

The Main Heading

Since users are so inclined to leave a website within just seconds, it's vital you immediately let them know they're in the right place. That means you should tell them what you do in the main heading—the line of big, bold text that immediately jumps out at them. The shorter you can make your main heading (while still clearly explaining what you do), the better. Don't waste precious space, or time, with filler like "Welcome to my website". Get straight to the point. (Headings are also important for your search rankings, which we'll cover in Stage 5.)

There are some mistakes users commonly make with their homepage headings. Some of the biggies are:

- Having several headings the same size, diluting visitors' attention and confusing their focus
- Making the heading too small to grab visitors' attention
- Not including any key search terms in the heading
- Not having a heading at all and just going straight into paragraph text



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We offer some guidance on using headings correctly, which isn't just about design but also about SEO.

Explaining Why They Should Choose You

Making a positive first impression is crucial, but it's not the only thing that matters. You need to build on it by explaining to users why they should choose you. Effective homepage text not only tells people what you do, but also why they should choose you.

Think about what makes your business special. What makes you unique? What have you got that your competitors don't? What are your specialist skills? Have you been in business a long time? Won awards? Including this kind of information on the homepage will help you stand out from the crowd.

But everyone knows businesses like to go on about how great they are. So a particularly powerful tool is external validation i.e., getting other people to say how great you are. Here are a few different external validation tactics:



Client Testimonials

Letting your clients explain why they recommend you can create a stronger impression than something that you say about yourself. Generating business from your website is very much about creating trust. Testimonials are a brilliant way to do this.

		
Joanna Monteith Cloud Software Implementation	Jono McCullough Rob May Building	Christine Stevenson Accounted4
Love Rocketspark! They are so helpful and the website builder is far better than any I've used previously.	I just think Rocketspark does a great website. The process has been easy because they're easy to deal with.	We wanted a website that was original, vibrant, easy to navigate and to update ourselves... and that is what we got!



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We've written about the benefits of testimonials, particularly how they boost trust.

Case Studies

Case studies are like customer testimonials on steroids, going into more detail about how you've helped a specific customer. Potential customers will be looking to find someone that has the experience to instill them with confidence. A good format for a case study is:

1. Client: Who did you help?
2. Problem: What was the issue they had?
3. Solution: How did you help them resolve that issue?
4. Outcome: How did it turn out?
5. Opinion: What does the customer have to say about how you helped them?



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rocketspark.com/case-studies

We've created a number of case studies about Rocketspark clients. Check them out for inspiration.

Qualifications and Accreditations

It's helpful to show your potential customers that you're qualified to do the job. If you have an accreditation to use a particular product or are a member of a professional body, let them know! These can be clear signals that set you apart.

Customer Reviews

In these days of TripAdvisor, Uber, Ebay and AirBnB, you might already be familiar with the concept of online reviews. Sure, it's bold but, if you believe in your product or service, having customers rate and review you can be an incredibly powerful way to show off the quality of your product or service. By using an independent rating service you'll be sharing all the reviews, warts n' all, on your site—a move that can build some serious trust. Provided you're consistently performing at a high level, your good reviews will far outstrip your bad ones. Some services (e.g., TripAdvisor) even provide badges for sustained quality and you can embed these badges onto your website—another great way to harness external validation.

THE BEST 'TRUE ADVENTURE' EXPERIENCE IN NEW ZEALAND

North Island guided canyoning trips through some of the most beautiful landscape New Zealand has to offer.

Not just the best canyoning trip in New Zealand, but the best 'true adventure' experience in the country! The Canyonz expertise and enthusiasm for outdoor adventure they will guarantee your experience is positively mind blowing. Canyonz is ranked one of New Zealand's top activities on TripAdvisor and has been awarded the Certificate of Excellence 4 years running.



[VIEW REVIEWS](#)

Awards

If an expert panel of judges deem you to be a leader in your industry—and give you an award to prove it—that'll accolade can be a major trust builder. Pretty obvious, right? We don't like to brag...but we will. In 2015, Rocketspark won a Xero Add-On innovation award, an honour that provided both credibility and publicity, leading to new customers and new partnerships. So if an independent authority recognises your excellence, make sure you cash in on your cachet—let your site visitors know about the award.

Making it Visually Interesting

The fact that it takes a measly 0.05 seconds for users to form their first, and lasting, impressions of your site, then it just goes to show how important it is to make your homepage eye-catching. Quality images and nicely laid-out content will grab your visitor's attention.

There are many elements to creating a great first impression and they all work together. Sometimes just a subtle tweak—how an image aligns or a block of text wraps—can be the difference between ordinary and excellent.

A Quality Logo

We've already discussed (in Stage 1) the importance of a good logo and how to get one. A professional logo shows that you care about your appearance, pay attention to detail, and generally take pride in your work—all traits that reflect well on your products and services.

A Quality Image

Don't overdo it with images. Rather than several small images, one large image or slideshow of large images usually packs more instant visual punch. As we saw in Stage 2, people can smell stock photos a mile away, so if you can avoid them, do avoid them! People want you: real images of your business, your work, your staff, your customers. They'll trust you more, which means you'll be more likely to convert visitors to leads. (If you need to use stock images, try [Unsplash](#), [Pexels](#), or [Stock Snap](#)—they're high-quality and, best of all, they're free.)

It pays to have pictures of your and your team—and, as we noted in Stage 2, there’s good science behind why people trust images with people more than those of objects alone. Remember, in personal service industries, your word-of-mouth referrals are there to learn about you, so it makes sense to show them your face. The developers of Basecamp, the project management software, [A / B tested various homepage styles and found that featuring real people had a measurable impact on conversion rates](#).

Somewhat surprisingly, what a person looked like did not make a significant difference. The images they experimented with were of friendly-looking people of various shapes and sizes, yet they all yielded results that were within just a few percentage points of each other. Far better then to use real (and realistic) people than glossy images of professional models.



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We tackle textual issues, including when to use uppercase, lowercase, and centre-aligned text.

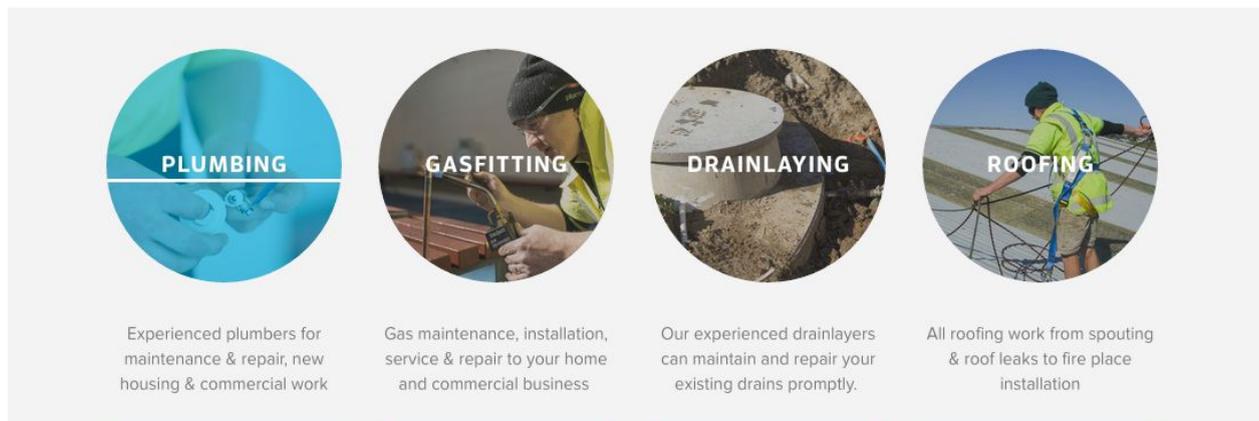
Structure

The structure of your homepage plays a key role in creating a strong first impression. Structure is all about thinking about the customer’s journey through your website. We’ll go into more depth about structure in Stage 4.

Subtle Details

Design quality is often in the detail. Even minor changes to a design can have a disproportionately large impact, lifting the perceived quality of your site significantly. Attention to detail gives off the impression of quality and professionalism, although they may only be consciously noticed when missing. Here are a few trade-secret little tweaks that we use to polish a design.

- **Hover Effects.** Subtle hover effects can make a website feel a little more sophisticated without being too distracting for the user, with the added benefit that the hover effects also encourage a visitor to click.



- **Picture Overlays.** Picture overlays (a layer of colour) can be used to mask the quality of poor images or used to make the text on a picture stand out. The overlay can also make the images on the page appear more uniform.
- **Shapes.** Occasional use of shapes can add a nice touch, intended to draw attention to an item such as a team photos.
- **Image Alignment.** Aligning pictures to be the same height and to line up nicely with the text will make your page look sharper. Fix sentence “orphans”, those single words that appear on a line all by their lonesome, by rewording it.



- **Favicon.** A [favicon](#) is a tiny unique icon that appears in the URL bar of a user’s browser when they visit your site. Sure, it’s a small thing, but it’s one of those details that can really raise the professionalism of your site.

Urging Them to Take Action

A call-to-action invites a visitor to do something: contact you, visit your online shop, or simply keep reading through your website.

The Call-to-Action Button

Website visitors are an impatient bunch—after all, they’ve got millions of other sites they could be looking at!—so it pays to make taking action easy. If they have to think too much about what to click on, they won’t—they’ll just leave your site.

Unsure which option is right for you? Tell us what you need



Contact our Cambridge Accountant Business Manager, Christine Stevenson direct on 07 827 5192 ext. 847. She'll discuss your requirements and put you in partnership with the right accountant or advisor to ensure your needs are accounted for.

[Contact us for an initial consultation >](#)

This is why the call-to-action button is so effective. If your website navigation menu is like a map of the pages on your site, a call to action button is turn-by-turn directions. It suggests to the visitor what they need to do next, taking the guesswork out of the equation. It's a "less is more" approach: the fewer choices you give a site visitor, the faster it is for them to navigate through your site. Three call-to-action buttons is okay; two buttons is better; one button is best. Limiting yourself to just a couple of buttons makes it crystal-clear what the most effective course of action for them is.

Every time we design a site at Rocketspark, we aim to understand and anticipate the typical user journey so well that the navigation menu isn't needed during a user's first visit to the site. Ideally, a first-time visitor can see and do everything they need just by following the call-to-action buttons. For example, a restaurant website might have a call-to-action button to view the menu and another button to make a booking.

Using Call-to-Action Buttons Throughout Your Site

Once you have an effective call-to-action button on your homepage, visitors will be navigating to other pages on your site. Don't let a page be a dead end! For every page of your website, ask: What page do I want them to visit next? Then design your subsequent calls-to-action accordingly. By doing so, you're providing signposts to guide your visitors through your website.

Bear in mind that visitors won't always be ready to make contact right off the bat; they might need to warm to the idea first. Once they've sufficiently warmed, however, that is where you should put a call-to-action button inviting them to contact you (or simply put

your phone number). Depending on the kind of business you're in, potential customers might be ready to make contact with you after visiting your About Us or Services pages—put the contact call-to-action there.

Don't make visitors go around in circles. In other words, don't have a call-to-action button that takes them back to the page they were on immediately prior. Granted, it's not always easy to know the order in which people will navigate your website and there will be some variation, but simply trying to guide people through your site with calls-to-action will make a huge difference.

Be aware that your homepage might not be the first page a person visits. Other pages of your website can [get indexed in Google](#), meaning that they are all potentially the first page a visitor might see. So it's important to ask the following questions for every page: Is this page engaging? Is there a call-to-action prompting the visitor to take action?

Want quality? Contact us for a quote

REQUEST A QUOTE

Using Descriptive Text on Call-to-Action Buttons

What should you write on the call-to-action button? "Click Here" or "Find Out More" won't do the job, because they're vague and don't entice. The button text should give them a strong sense of where this button will take them. So, in a punchy, single line of text, tell them what they can expect to happen once they click. Describe in a few words what the visitor can expect to find if they click the button. Framing it as a question (e.g., "Why choose Rocketspark?") or being specific (e.g., "View our website services") is likely to be far more effective. And if you can work into your button text search engine-friendly keywords (i.e., the phrases your potential customers are most likely to be searching for in Google etc.), this can really help with your search engine optimisation, even with internal links (see Stage 5 for more information on search engine optimisation).

Other Calls-to-Action: Social Media and Email Subscribe Forms

 Find us on LinkedIn

 Find us on Youtube

You might also like to use a call-to-action inviting your visitors to subscribe to your email newsletter so you can add their email addresses to your database. Another effective call-to-action is a button that [links to your social networks like Facebook](#), Twitter, LinkedIn, etc., and inviting them to follow you. Both of these calls-to-action give you the chance to have ongoing contact with your visitors, potentially turning a one-time visit into a long-term relationship.



[GET MORE AT OUR BLOG](#)

rocketspark.com/blog

We've got more on buttons, specifically how much text to use and how to create buttons on the Rocketspark system, along with some advice for making an excellent contact page.

Writing for Skimmers

People browse websites by skimming or scanning the content. So it's crucial that you make your text scan-friendly: short-ish paragraphs with lots of clear headings (make sure the first heading is bigger than the other headings so that it's the first thing people read). If you don't have clear headings, confronting your readers with a solid wall of text, they'll be daunted and will leave.

Measuring the Impact

How do you know what's working on your homepage (and what's not)? One way is to measure different designs using [Google Analytics](#). Tweak it, then check in back in with Analytics to see if it's made a difference. It's worth the effort. A more effective homepage will reduce your [bounce rate](#) (when they get your homepage and are like "Nope, I'm

outta here!”), increase time spent on your site, and boost the number of pages per visit—all stuff you can measure with Google Analytics. Just keep a track of what changes you made and when, so you can compare your “after” statistics with the “before”. It’s worth checking out the flow visualisation tool in Analytics too, which lets you see how people are flowing through your website.

STAGE 4

Structuring Your Website

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There's a lot more to a website than the homepage. Once you've hooked your visitors in with your homepage, they'll want to see more. This is about creating a customer journey, making it easy for users to find what they're looking for in as few clicks as possible. The webpages you include, the navigation method you choose, the length of your pages—these are all crucial parts of creating a website your users will love.

Choosing Names for Your Pages

As we learned in earlier, it takes a user just a 0.05 seconds to decide whether or not they like your site. Quickly engaging the user is essential if you want to convert them from being a visitor to being a customer. Similarly, making their decisions (e.g., Where should I click? What page should I visit next?) easy and intuitive will help you hook them before they disappear back into the ether of the internet. That's why the names you give your webpages really matter.

The Limits of Short Term Memory

How many things can an average human hold in their working memory? Some researchers put [the average number of items able to be held in short-term memory at a time at seven; others suggest it's as low as four](#). So somewhere in between four and seven seems to be our limit. Put eight or more pages on a website's navigation menu, and we max out. Does not compute. By the time you get to the eighth item on the menu, you've forgotten the first. It makes sense then to make the page-count on your menu seven or fewer.

Although some people prefer to just click the main call-to-action on the page (see Stage 3), the main navigation menu is still a popular way to get around the website. On an older version of the Rocketspark homepage, none of the calls-to-action linked to our Pricing page, yet this was still our second-most visited page. How? People were getting there solely through the main website navigation menu.

Selecting Page Names: What Do Visitors Want to Know?

There's another good reason for limiting your page-count. Lots of first-timers cram every single piece of information about their company on their website. Rookie mistake. Too much unnecessary information just adds clutter, getting in users' way and delaying them in making contact with you. By restricting your navigation menu to a maximum of seven pages, you are forced to focus on the content that's going to be most effective at converting visitors to leads.



[GET MORE AT OUR WEBSITE](#)

Support.rocketspark.com

We've got instructions for changing your page names as well as some suggestions for picking page names that work.

Grouping Related Information

Another common mistake is to put each piece of information on a separate page. Every time someone has to click to another page, it increases the likelihood they'll leave your site. That's why it's better to group related information on the same page. If someone comes to your About Us page to find where you're located, they might also be interested in your company profile, or who your staff are. Don't be afraid of making pages a little longer. Scrolling is a really comfortable, automatic action for even inexperienced users. As always, use clear headings. Not only will highlight each chunk of information, clear, regular, and descriptive headings will also draw visitors down the page, since most visitors scan headings rather than reading paragraphs.

The Problem with Drop-Down Menus

Ever since the ground-breaking, poor-selling Apple Lisa computer (1983) featured a newfangled menu bar as part of its interface, using drop-down (a.k.a. pull-down) menus has become second nature. More recently, drop-down menus have transcended their operating system origins to become nearly as common on the internet.

But does their ubiquity mean drop-down menus are the best way to design your site's navigation? Nah-uh. [Website navigation is an evolving facet of the web, with new and improved practices emerging fast.](#) In fact, at Rocketspark, we don't use drop-down menus at all—and for good reason. So why avoid drop-downs?:

1. Awkwardness. For novice, [drop-down menus can be awkward and frustrating.](#)
2. Touchscreen Issues. They don't work well on touchscreen devices, because you can't hover your mouse over it.
3. Option Overload. The drop-down creates too many options, forcing the the user to think even longer about where to click.

Minimising the Available Options



Did that last one, the one about too many options, surprise you? It's counterintuitive. The allure of a drop-down menu is that it lets you frontload a lot of options on the homepage. Conventional wisdom says that the more options you have, the happier you'll be. But

psychologists have discovered that having too many options actually demotivates customers. Researchers from Columbia and Stanford found that [consumers offered less choices \(of jam flavours in one study, chocolate flavours in another\) were significantly more likely to purchase the product after testing than those that were given lots of choices](#). This, according to psychologist Barry Schwartz, is the [paradox of choice](#). It's why you stand paralysed for ten minutes staring at the 175 salad dressings available at your supermarket. Sometimes less really is more. Case and point: the iconic, California-based In-N-Out Burger has just three burgers on its menu and yet [it's the second-most popular fast food chain in the US](#).

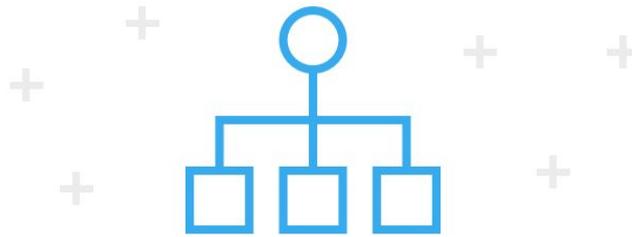
Mega-Menus: The Exception to the Rule

We're prepared to make one exception to the "no drop-downs" rule. Mega menus, a particular type of drop-down, are unique among their peers because, well, they don't suck. They're large pane-like menus that let you include images, group pages into sub-categories and all sorts of other things that garden variety drop-downs just can't do. NNG have found that mega-menus perform well.

It's a bit like giving your user a sneak peek of another (miniaturised) page without requiring them to click and wait; it's not actually a separate page of course—it's still a drop-down menu—but its increased functionality means it works a bit like one. "Given that regular drop-down menus are rife with usability problems, it takes a lot for me to recommend a new form of drop-down," says Nielsen, referring to their mega-menu testing. "But...mega drop-downs overcome the downsides of regular drop-downs." And that's why we've been willing to break our own rule by [creating a mega-menu for this client](#).

Great Navigation Without Drop-Down Menus

We don't use drop-down menus at Rocketspark and, frankly, we don't miss them. As we've created our own website builder we could certainly have created a function for creating drop-down menus, but we decided it against it because they're so fraught with usability issues. Though it's a step in the right direction, ditching drop-downs doesn't automatically guarantee perfect navigation. Stellar webpage design takes work. Here's a few things you should do to ensure your drop-down-free navigation works a treat:



Engage in Information Architecture

Losing drop-down menus means losing the possibility of dumping a whole pile of options on the homepage navigation. That might sound like con but, believe us, it's a pro. As classical composer Igor Stravinsky once said paradoxically, "The more constraints one imposes, the more one frees one's self." As we discussed above, limiting the number of choices your website visitor has forces yours to be strategic. Rather than overwhelming your visitor with countless options on the homepage, it's better to give a few well-chosen menu options that lead to other logically-related options on the next page. That way, there's no stalling or head-scratching on the homepage trying to decipher the slew of options. Web designer Jamie Freeman is spot-on when he says, "[two easy clicks are better than one intellectually and physically challenging click](#)". This is information architecture. It lets your visitors journey through your site effortlessly.



[GET MORE AT OUR BLOG](#)

rocketspark.com/blog

We offer a few thoughts on how to start thinking about your visitor journey here, as part of a larger post on website building. Just follow the links!

Use Clear and Intuitive Names

Don't be too clever. [That's NNG's advice when it comes to choosing your page names.](#) Giving your pages unusual, exotic or jargony names just paralyses your users into indecision. Instead, go with tried-and-true labels. Don't say "Life Solutions"; say "Services". Don't say "Future Horizons"; say "Jobs". That's right—be boring, be unoriginal. Your visitors will thank you for it. (Of course, clear labeling requires categories/pages to be [specific with minimal overlap](#), which is part of your information architecture.)

Get Sticky Navigation

Looking for better menu design ideas? Sticky navigation, where the navigation bar “sticks” to the top of the window as you scroll down the page, remaining visible and clickable from all points, might be just the ticket. This lets you go to another page without having to scroll back to the top of the page. [Check out this client’s sticky navigation](#) (scroll down the page to get the effect). Web design magazine Smashing found that [sticky menus made site navigation 22% faster than conventional navigation](#). Not only that, 100% of users in their usability study expressed a preference for the (otherwise identical) website with sticky navigation—without even noticing it was there! In other words, sticky navigation does what all great design does: it gets out of the way. You can make sticky drop-down menus of course, but the stalling effect of a drop-down defeats the whole purpose of having a sticky menu: fast, effortless navigation.

Page Length: Long Trumps Short

We are the ADD generation. If we want political news, we’ll take it in [9-second soundbites](#). When a celebrity dies, we expect our [eulogies in 140-character tweets](#). And reading a book?? Well, [TL;DR](#).

Which makes it all the more surprising that, when it comes to page length, longer is better. We know you just got distracted by that Facebook ping that just came in, so let’s say it again: when it comes to page length, longer is better.

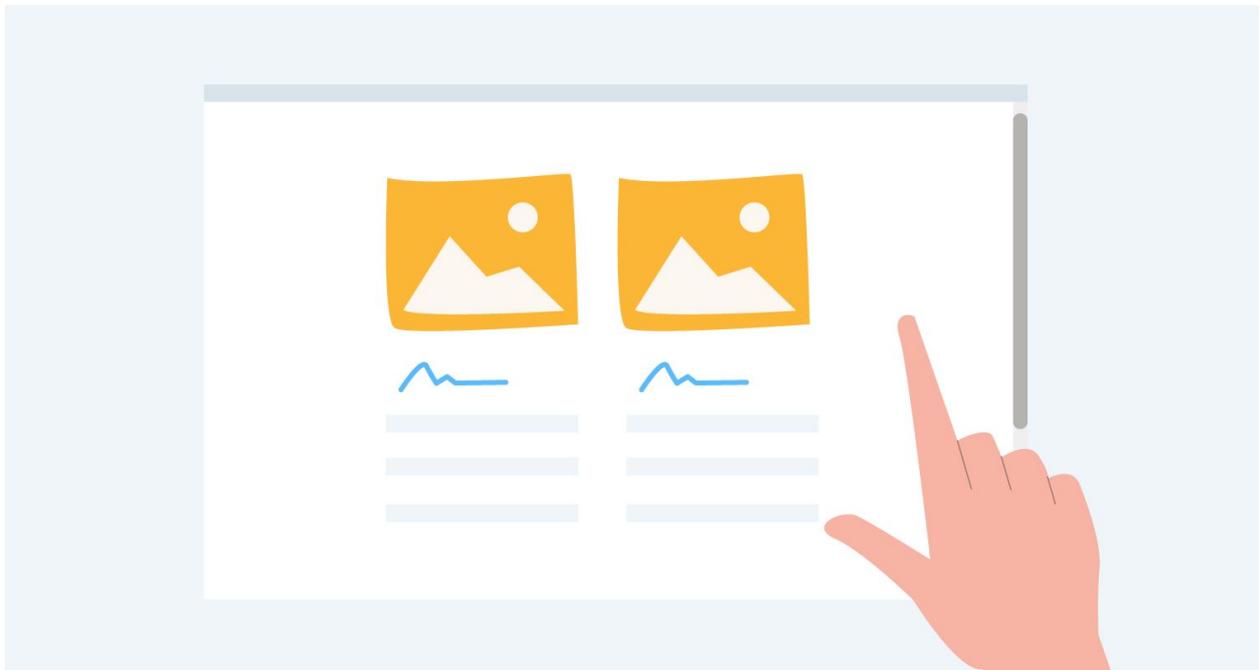
Surprising, I know. Surely our [clickbait](#)-addled minds can only handle small, manageable nuggets of information—right? Well, not according to actual user behaviour. When it comes to web pages, studies have shown that longer pages reign supreme.

Google’s Preference for Longform Content

Part of the reason behind this shocking revelation lies with Google. Google loves content—and lots of it. Internet marketing expert Neil Patel’s survey has shown that [most top-ranking pages have over 2,000 words!](#) And that’s not just some anomaly either, due to some methodological error. Blogging platform Medium similarly found that [a 7-minute](#)

[read—about 1,600 words](#)—is the optimal word length. If you want your page to rank highly in Google’s search results, then find your inner-Tolstoy and write plenty.

Longform content makes sense when you’re talking about blog posts, but what about a homepage (or landing page)? Textually-brief, visually-driven homepages are definitely the trend—and a good one too—so we don’t recommend indiscriminately dumping an essay-load of words onto your homepage. Nevertheless, the more words you have on the page, the better its chances of ranking well in search engines (we’ll explore search engine optimisation in greater detail in Stage 5).



Scrolling

Believe it or not, users are happy to scroll. Not all users are, of course, which is why your most important information should still be “above the fold” (i.e., at the top of the page before you have to scroll down). But for users looking for more detail, [“scrolling beats paging”](#). Why? According to NNG, [users became accustomed to scrolling on webpages as far back as the late 90s](#) (most pre-web applications made all the relevant bits n’ pieces visible at a single time without requiring scrolling). In other words, the habit of scrolling webpages has become so entrenched over the past two decades, it’s now pretty much an automatic reflex. Clicking to another page, on the other hand, still requires a conscious decision.

The longer the page, the more you can fit in. Duh, right? While it's always a good idea to avoid overwhelming your users with a tsunami of information, giving yourself more room makes sense. Most companies need a bit more space to share what they do and what makes them special. A longer page gives you the chance to really sell yourself. If you don't have the scroll option, it's a missed opportunity.

Long and Short: Getting the Best of Both Worlds

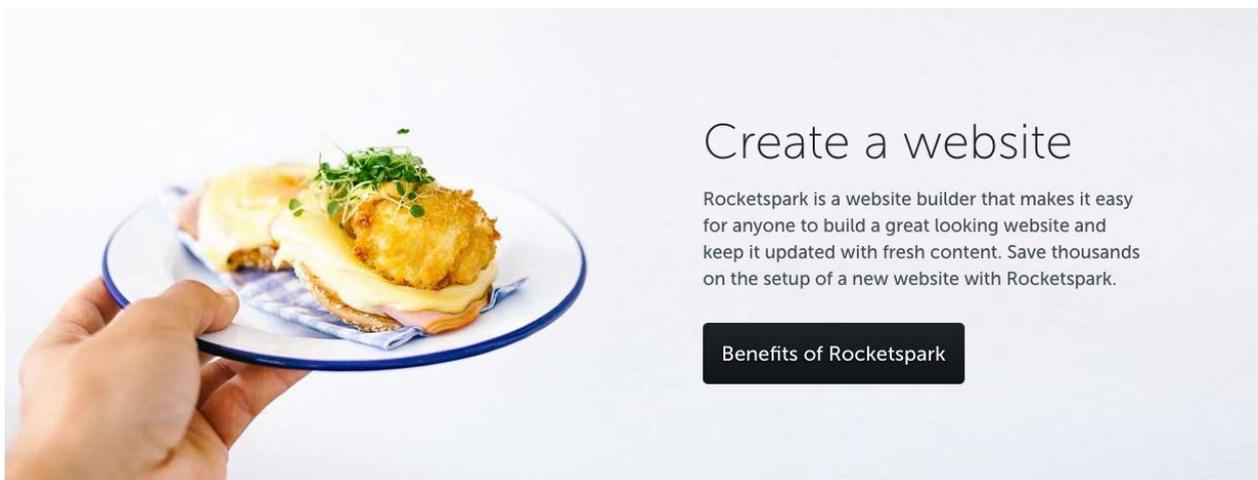
Here's the thing: you don't need to choose between having lots of content and having punchy, concise design. It's possible to design your page so that you get the best of both worlds.

How? You need to think about sections and the sequence:

Sections

Designing your page with discrete sections allows you to divvy your information up into bite-sized, easy-to-digest morsels that users can swallow in an instant. Each section should have:

1. A big clear heading
2. A small text description
3. An image*



You may also like to include a call-to-action, depending on whether or not you want your user to keep reading down the page or go elsewhere. By the way, don't be afraid of

white space—good use of white space can significantly enhance the design. [Our website builder homepage is a pretty good example of this “chunking” of information](#), if we may say so ourselves!

**Images are your ally here, even when the pictures themselves are not especially relevant, because they’re an easy way to break content up into sections.*

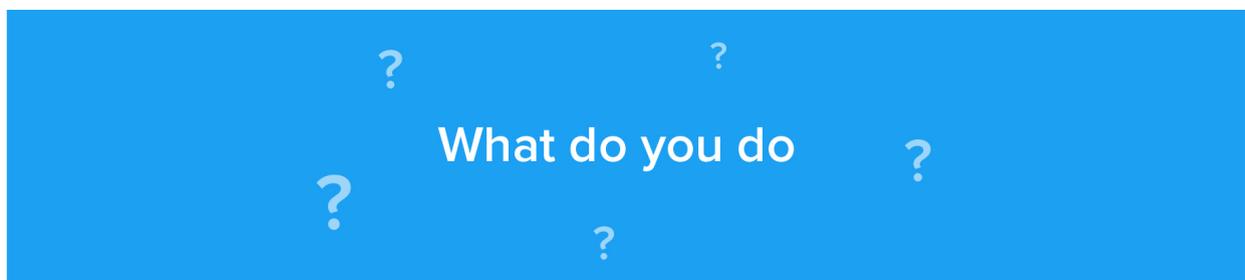
Sequence

Although most users will automatically scroll, there’s no doubt that the top of the page gets the most attention. NNG’s eye-tracking studies, which allow them to see what parts of a page users look at most and for how long, have found that users exhibit “intense viewing of the top of the page, moderate viewing of the middle, and fairly superficial viewing of the bottom”. In other words, put your primary message and a call-to-action above the fold (then secondary, then tertiary messaging). But not only that, you should think about how to design the page so that there’s a logical flow from one section to the next and something that compels them to keep reading down the page. For more information about “scroll design”, [check out NNG’s recommendations](#).

Crafting an “About Us” Page

What’s the most important page on your website, after your homepage? Often it’s your “About Us” page, the page that introduces yourself to your website visitor, tells them what you do, and builds a rapport that will hopefully turn them into a customer.

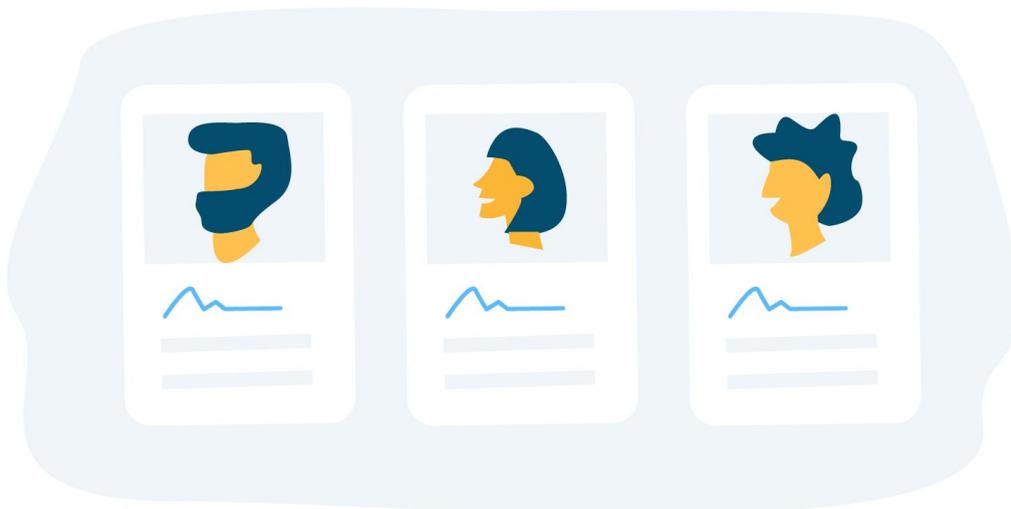
Think of your “About Us” page as speed-dating with a potential customer. They’re on the prowl for the right business and you only have a few short moments to win them over. So here are some tips for making a top-notch “About Us” page, so you can speed-date your way to more customers. Ready...Set...Go!



Goods and Services

Like it or not, one of the first questions we ask on a date is “So, what do you do?” This is just as important on an About Us page. Your page must say what you do.

This might seem like a no-brainer but it’s a surprisingly tricky thing to get right, especially if your business deals in a jargony, technical field. We looked at 10 Xero (accounting software) accounting firms in the Waikato, New Zealand, and found that 20% of the pages we assessed still left us with no idea what the business does. Chances are, if a user can’t figure out what your business does from your “About Us” page, they won’t stick around to find out.



The key thing to remember here is not just that you need to say what you do; you have to say what you do in a way that’s easy to understand. In a survey on “About Us” pages conducted by NNG, they found that the ease of finding out what a business does from their page had dropped 9% over a five-year period. Why? Because, in their words, [“marketese and blah-blah text ruled the day on many sites.”](#)

So don’t just copy-and-paste your company mission statement onto your page. That might look great to the execs but it doesn’t mean anything to the average user. Explain your core business using plain English in an engaging way.

Tone

A common approach to gaining user trust is to use formal, stiff-and-starchy corporate-speak. But not only is this writing tough to understand, it can easily backfire, making your business look aloof at best and dubious at worst. Don't scare your "date" off! Users want to know that you're a real, viable business—one they can trust. You want your business to come across as human.

You can improve the "humanness" of your page by presenting your business with a bit of creativity and pizzazz. The best "About Us" pages really show off the business's personality. Even in an industry like accounting, where conservativeness and precision are paramount, coming across as authentic and human will really help. One of the accounting firms we evaluated in our survey had a page with real "attitude," and it didn't compromise their professionalism one little bit.

Storytelling

When getting to know somebody for the first time we want to learn who they are, where they've come from, and where they're going. In other words, we want to hear their story. It's the same with business.

Stories aren't just things we read to kids to lull them to sleep at night. We don't think primarily in facts, principles or theories. We think in stories. Before sensory data gets from your outer extremities to the prefrontal cortex where it undergoes rational reflection, it has to pass through the almighty limbic system—that mass of grey matter that houses your emotions. That means we feel before we reflect. And feeling is where stories excel. So storytelling often has a more immediate and lasting effect on hearers than a litany of facts.

You might not fancy yourself as much of a storyteller, but since you're the expert in your business, you're the best person to tell the company story. Here are three tips for telling your company story:

1. Be personal. Nobody likes dealing with a cold, distant institution. It really helps to show your users that you're real, approachable people—not just another faceless corporation. So inject it with real humanness: use humour, avoid jargon, and convey your passion.
2. Structure it as a journey. Stories take us from one point in time to another; a journey—that's why fairy tales start with "Once upon a time" and end with "happily ever after". So consider giving us your company history: take us back to the beginning and explain how your business came into being.
3. Identify the central problem. "All drama is conflict," [storytelling guru Syd Field](#) once famously wrote. In other words, good stories find a problem to be solved. If things go from good to great without any conflict or hardship, then you've got a very dull story. So ask yourself: what problem does my business set out to solve? Then tell us how you did it.



Award-winning Cambridge-based Home Builders and Contractors



Images

It might seem shallow but let's just be honest: faces matter—in dating and in websites. That's why we recommend including images of you and your staff on the page.

This is about building trust. Users want to know if they can trust you to deliver. And one excellent way to build trust with potential customers is by including photos of you and your people on your page. Research shows that [pictures of people \(as opposed to things\) increases user trust](#). People, especially faces, build rapport.

This is an easy thing to neglect, especially if you're camera-shy, but omitting relevant photos can hurt the company image. Of the accounting websites we looked at, 20% had no photos at all on their page. The result? Those businesses felt like cold, distant entities. Users want to see your people (stock photos are a no-no!), so include a group photo or individual photos of your staff. This is important even if you're a sole trader because putting a face to the name really helps give you a credibility-boost, no matter what your size.

Meet the team



Grant Johnson
Founder/Marketing
[t](#) [in](#)



Jeremy Johnson
Founder/Designer
[t](#) [in](#)



Lee Reichardt
Founder/Developer
[t](#) [in](#)



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Developer
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David Micklewood
Customer Service

There are other types of trust-building photos. Pictures of your brick-and-mortar store, signwritten company vehicles, uniforms and so forth will demonstrate that you're a credible, real-world business—not just a cyber-phantom looking to scam a few bucks out of people.

A stress-free design experience with our down to earth team.

Turner Road Architecture are an honest and friendly company that takes pride in designing creative, quality buildings that meet their clients' needs and budget and reflect their individual tastes and lifestyles.

[view design process](#)



Navigation

You might have a mind-blowingly brilliant “About Us” page, but if users can’t find it then it’s not much use. That means your homepage needs to have a direct link to your “About Us” page that’s easy to spot. NNG found that there were two types of hard-to-find “About Us” pages:

1. Link buried among a bunch of advertisement-like graphics, called “[banner blindness](#).”
2. Link labelled something obscure, like “[Info Centre](#).”

It’s this latter issue—giving your page a non-standard name—that poses the biggest threat to the findability of your page. Like we said above, using clear and intuitive page labels is vital. Your best bet is to stick with “About Us”, “About [Company Name],” or just a nice, clean “About”. More creative names, like “Who Are We?” or “Meet the Team,” work fine too, but less obvious names run the risk of being overlooked.

Call-to-Action

So a user loves your “About Us” page—then what? Your page needs a call to action. Something for the user to do next. A meagre 40% of the pages we assessed included a call to action. What a wasted opportunity!

This is the perfect place to put contact details. Some websites seem intent on burying contact details in the farthest, cob-webby reaches of their site but, as NNG points out, [doing so will make your credibility drop fast](#). Users will start wondering why and what you’re trying to hide. The best speed-dates end with giving out your phone number and so do the best “About Us” pages! Don’t forget to put your company contact details there so that they can get in touch.

Another option is to have a link to your online store. By doing this, you’re making it as easy as possible for a user to convert to being a customer. If they like who you are, they can simply click the button and start buying.



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We discuss instances where including content as a downloadable file (e.g., a PDF) makes sense, and when it doesn’t.

Optimising Your Site for Mobile

While this isn't technically about how you structure your website, optimising your site for mobiles is an important topic to tackle in this section because, like structure, it has a lot to do with making your site easy to use. Mobile devices are the movers n' shakers of the internet-connected world. Every year, more people are conducting more of their web activity online. About 30% of traffic across our customer base is from mobile devices (see table below), but this percentage gets even higher for sectors where customers are likely to be on the move. As you can see, nearly half of our café clients' traffic comes from mobile devices.

Cafe	44%
Hair Salon	38%
Beauty Salon	36%
Restaurant	34%

So, as you can see, the demand is there. But why do you need a website that caters specially to mobile? There are several benefits:

Ease of Use

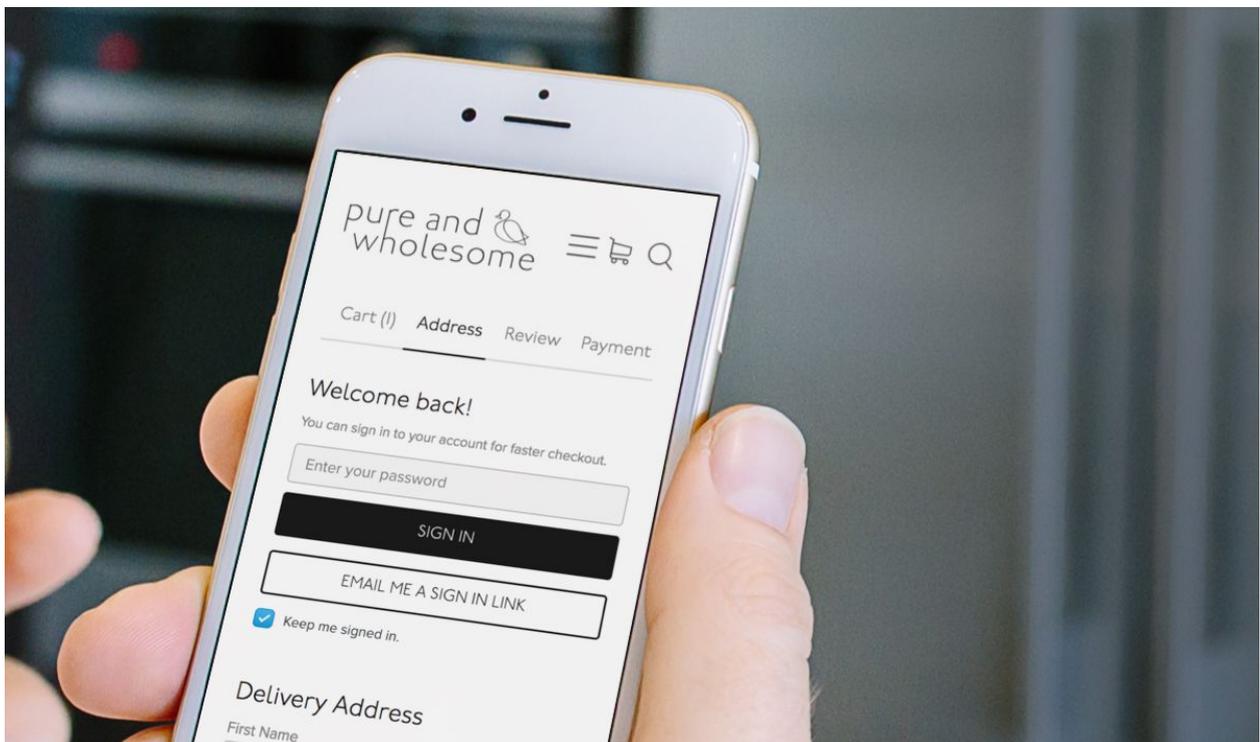
Websites are often designed to be viewed on a computer: a big screen, keyboard, and a mouse. That's perfect for desktop or laptop usage, but when accessed on a mobile those same websites can become unwieldy: text too small to read, links hard to click, and pages too hard to navigate. The result? Frustrated customers.

As far back as 2012, [Google reported that nearly half \(48%\) of users felt frustrated and annoyed by websites that don't work well on a mobile.](#) And here's where it really hurts: a whopping 79% of users say that if they don't like your mobile site, they'll look for another site instead. That means lost customers and, ultimately, lost sales. Ouch. If that was true then, it's even truer today. Expectations have grown.

Sales Impact

[That same 2012 report by Google showed 67%](#) of users say that if you have a mobile-friendly site, they're more likely to buy your product, and 74% say they're more likely to visit your website again. So having a mobile website is good for business—it's that simple.

Some website providers (e.g., us!) provide mobile-optimised websites as part of the package. That's mighty handy because it saves you having to build a second, mobile-friendly site from scratch. But even if you have to do so, it's worth it. Your business simply cannot afford to have a website that doesn't work well on mobile.



Search Rankings

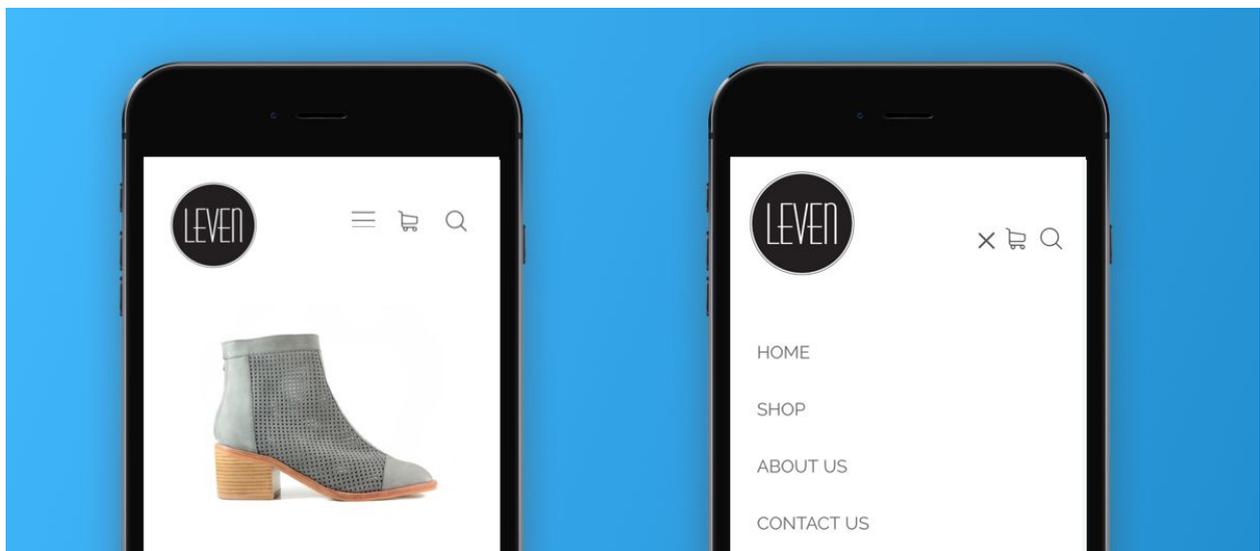
Mobile-optimised websites tend to rank higher in Google. Since April 2015 being mobile optimised is a ranking factor. That means, all else being equal, a mobile site will outrank a non-mobile site for searches made on a mobile device. With such a large and growing number of potential customers visiting your site from a mobile device this is a significant chunk of potential business you can't afford to miss out on. Plus, search engines like Google favour sites that load quickly. A site not optimised for mobile will load sluggishly and, as a result, its ranking in search results could take a hit.

How mobile-friendly is your site? [Use Google's simple tool to find out.](#)

How Mobile-Friendly Sites Work

A mobile-friendly website makes navigating on a phone a breeze. Usually mobile sites are a pared-down or streamlined version of the desktop site.

In the Rocketspark system, mobile optimisation happens automatically. Any time a user visits one of our client's website from a mobile, the site is automatically reorganised to ensure maximum usability and minimum frustration for the user. The content and appearance is consistent with the client's full website, but the content is just shuffled around into a mobile-friendly layout, which makes for hassle-free navigation. Take, for example, the website menu.



The menus on a full website are often just too fiddly for a phone, seemingly impossible to navigate successfully on a touchscreen. Using the mobile website menu, on the other hand, couldn't be any simpler: clear and accessible, like it was made for your fingertips.

As we mentioned above, a mobile-optimised site will load quickly too. That's important, since [research suggests](#) that 49% of mobile users will abandon a website if it takes more than 10 seconds to load. A good mobile site will also have a bunch of other handy features, like tap-to-call, which enables your customers to call you just by tapping your phone number. The whole experience feels natural and intuitive, making your website a joy to use even when navigating on-the-go.



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We show you how to find out how many people are visiting your site from mobile devices.

STAGE 5

Getting Found

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So you've got your (basic) website—but how will users find it? Search engines, like Google, are one of the main ways. Designing your website so that it appears near the top of the search engine's results our primary focus in this stage. Social media and email marketing are also key part of your digital marketing toolkit. Do these things well and you'll improve your chances of being found by potential customers.

Introduction to SEO

You might've heard of search engine optimisation (SEO, for short), but what is it? SEO is about getting more people to your website by being able to find you easily in search engines like Google, Yahoo or Bing. The aim of the game is to optimise your site so that it ranks well—ideally high up on page one—for relevant search results, so that ultimately people click through to your website.

SEO isn't exactly rocket science but it does require significant effort. If you want to get results, you have to be prepared to roll up your sleeves and work at it. And it doesn't happen magically overnight. Google checks a lot of stuff—over 200 factors!—to determine the ranking of your website (most of the time we'll refer just to Google, but most of what we say about Google applies to other search engines too).



The good news is that you don't necessarily have to do all of these things to rank well in Google. On the other hand, the more of them you do, the better chance you'll have of ranking well. Think of it like earning brownie points with Google so they bump you to the front of the queue. There are 200+ ways to earn brownie points—the more of them you do, the better you'll rank.

By the way, SEO is not an exact science. Google regularly updates their search algorithm (the way it determines what pages to put in the search results and their order) and how that algorithm works is the subject of much debate and speculation. Watch out for anyone promising to get you a top spot in the search results; there are very few guarantees in SEO. Fortunately, though the precise algorithm is shrouded in mystery, the formula for success has become easier over time. In the old days, there were lots of dubious tricks and tips to help your site rank well. These days, it really boils down to one thing: quality content. Simple (but hard!).

The Impact of Competition

Some businesses do a poor job of their SEO but still rank at the top of page one, while other companies might be earning more brownie points with Google and be nowhere near page one. What gives?

When the market is big, there will be a lot of businesses competing for that coveted page-one ranking. This means that a business targeting the phrase “[large town] builder” has a much tougher job than the person targeting “[small town] builder”. In other words, in order to rank well, they'll need to do more of the 200 things Google likes.

Ranking for your company name is usually quite easy and this is what people search for you've been recommended to them by name or if they're a repeat customer. Business names are often unique and so there's not a lot of competition for that search. So that's the easy bit. The bigger challenge—and bigger rewards—come with ranking well for generic keyword search terms.

Let's imagine someone who's never heard of your business and searches for, say, “bed & breakfast” or “accountant” in their area. How many other businesses do what you do in your region? Lots of competitors or only a few? How you answer those questions will dictate whether or not you call in the SEO pros. If competition is low, you could very

easily do your own SEO and see a ranking improvement. But if competition is high (and you have the marketing funds) you might consider calling in an SEO expert.

Waiting for Your Site to Appear in Google

Your new web content won't show up in Google search results right away. It first has to be discovered (or indexed) by Google, a process that can take anywhere from just a few hours to several weeks.

Adding Your Domain to Google

If you're using a newly registered domain name, be sure to add your domain name to the Google index to aid the process. Just use the handy tool found here:

www.google.com/addurl/

This will add your site for Google to index. Google provides no guarantees as to when that indexing will happen, but usually you'll notice at least the homepage is added within an hour or so. It can take days, even weeks to get your full site indexed and then much longer to improve its ranking position.



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We give you the run-down on indexing, including how long it takes and how to check if your site has been indexed.

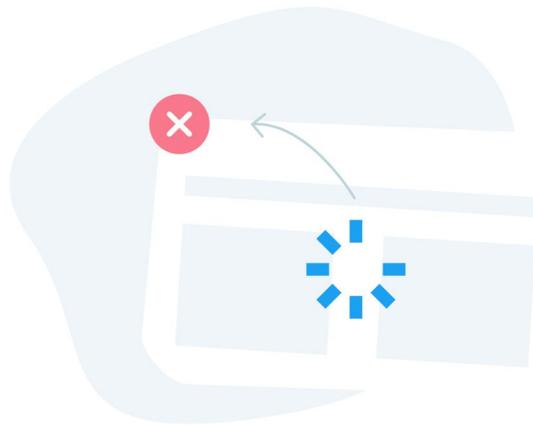
Starting With the Right Foundations

If your web platform has the right technical foundations, you've already got a big head start in the SEO front. Why? Because a lot of the initial hard work has already been done for you. It's crucial that your website has the right tools for ranking well before you start to add the fundamental SEO ingredients (great fresh content, inbound links, and title

tags). We recommend making sure your web platform has the following:

Fast Load Time

All things being equal, Google will rank a faster site ahead of a slower site. People hate waiting for pages to load, and Google knows it. That's why they tend to favour fast-loading websites in their search results. What determines load time?

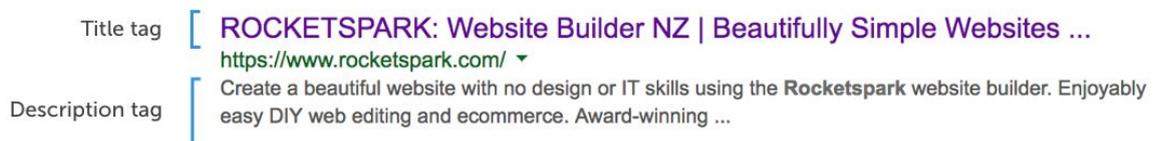


- **Hosting Location.** Generally speaking, the closer to home your hosting is, the quicker your site will load. For example, at Rocketspark, we make sure our clients' sites are hosted on a server in their home country (in the three main countries where we operate: United Kingdom, New Zealand, and Australia).
- **Quality of Software Code.** It can be a balancing act to provide sophisticated capability while maintaining fast load times, but a good website platform will refine the website code ensure the page loads quickly.
- **Image Optimisation.** If your website platform doesn't handle high-resolution images very well, that can really slow things down. Ideally, your website platform will have image optimisation. For example, at Rocketspark we've built our own [image caching engine](#). When someone visits your site, instead of showing them a gigantic 5MB-image—which is total overkill—we show them an image that has been optimised for the size displayed. If you drag-and-drop an image into a wider column we'll retrieve a larger copy from the original image on our server. It'll look just as good as the full-sized image but will load in a fraction of the time.

Canonical URL

A page can be accessed via several similar URLs (i.e., web page address). For example, both <https://www.rocketspark.com> and <https://rocketspark.com> take you to the same page. But there's a problem. Google treats these different URLs all as different pages, which can dilute your page's ranking. With a bit of web-magic—namely, using a [301 redirect](#) to point those URLs to the canonical (main) URL— with Rocketspark and other website builders the canonical URL is created automatically but it still pays to check you are set up right to ensure you are maximising your website's potential for ranking well in search engines.

Title and Description Tags



Title and description tags are important signposts for Google. It's your way of telling Google what a page is about in just a line or two. These tags also are also the snippets of text people usually see in search results before clicking on your page. We'll cover these tags in more detail later. For now, just make sure your web platform needs to enable you to enter your title tag and meta-descriptions for each page.

Tagged Headings

The headings on a website are all tagged with unseen tags which show Google what the most important headings on a page are. These headings are labelled H1, H2, H3 etc. to represent the hierarchy. These tags should automatically applied to your headings.

Mobile Optimisation

As we saw in Stage 4, being mobile optimised impact on your search rankings. If your website is not mobile optimised, you'll be missing out on potential new business.

Page Security

Keeping your stuff safe has always been hard; keeping it safe online is even harder. For that reason, Google is cracking down on unsecure websites.

 Not secure | login.example.com

 Secure | https

A recent Google Chrome release (Chrome 56) has a new feature: pages collecting either passwords or credit card details that are non-secure will be flagged with a warning in the URL bar like with a “Not secure” label (and other browsers are likely to follow suit). That warns users that, if they proceed, their important information won’t be protected, making them more vulnerable to a cyber-attack. If your page is not secure, you might scare your users away. Make sure your page shows a nice “Secure” status when loaded.

Do-It-Yourself SEO

Having the right foundations is essential, but it’s not enough. Ranking well in search engines means doing some hard yards. You’ll need to roll up those sleeves and get to work on your SEO.

Deciding on What You Want to be Found For

Understanding Customer Search Queries

SEO might seem complicated but, at the most fundamental level, it’s quite simple: the more relevant your site is to users’ search needs, the more likely you are to rank highly. So a crucial part of SEO understanding what your customers are searching for—what are the words and phrases (“keywords”) that they are likely to type into Google when searching for the product or service that you offer? Here are some steps to figure that out:

1. Think about your target audience and what keywords they will be searching for.
2. Find out what keywords are the most popular.
3. Choose the keywords that have good local search volumes and perform a search of these terms in Google to see how your competitors rank.
4. Decide on the best keywords for your site.

The aim is to to out-rank your competitors for particular popular keywords or, alternatively, focus your energies on ranking well for keywords that are under-utilised by your competitors (“long-tail SEO”). If you’re operating in a crowded marketplace, starting with a specialised focus (e.g., a specific location, a specialist part of your service) is a good idea.



How can you see what people search for? Google has a very useful tool for this. Go to Google’s Keyword tool at: <http://adwords.google.com/KeywordPlanner>

This is the tool designed for specifically for Adwords paid-advertising customers, but it’s also very useful tool for doing SEO even if you are not an Adwords customer. How does it work? Just type in some possible keywords and it’ll you how many times those words or phrases have been searched for. And the real genius of it is that it will give you the data on synonyms—other possible keywords for you to focus on—and also seasonal trends for phrases.



[GET MORE AT OUR WEBSITE](http://support.rocketspark.com)

support.rocketspark.com

We break down how to use Google’s Keyword tool to find out the most popular search terms.

Target Different Keywords on Each Page

Don't chase the same keywords on every page. Instead, optimise for a range of variations across each content page of the site. Stick to landing pages; there’s no need to waste time optimising pages that aren't natural landing pages (e.g., contact page).

If you’re operating in a very competitive sector, it might pay to focus initially on long-tail keywords. Long-tail keywords are less popular search phases (of 3+ words) that may

nevertheless still have quite a few people searching for them. There's no point going for ultra-competitive phrases right from the get-go. Wait until your site has some SEO weight behind it—which can take some time—before tackling those.



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We take a detailed look at everything you need to know about long-tail SEO.

Getting Keywords Onto the Page

Adding Title and Description Tags to Each Page

The dashboard on your website platform should allow you to enter the metadata, including title and description tags, for each page of your website:

Get Found Online / SEO

Page name: *Home*

Title tag (very important): 19 characters remaining

Homeware | Kitchen | Dining | Houseden NZ

Description tag (very important): 112 characters remaining

We stock a wide range of homeware and kitchen goods. Free shipping on orders over \$100.

Keywords (less important): 144 characters remaining

Kithcenware, decor, food, dining, homeware, gifts, linen

- Title Tag. The title tag not only appears as the heading at the top of a browser window when open on your site, it's also the heading that appears in the search

results. So it's important that the title tag will make customers want to click the link. Make sure that these tags are different on each page. It should be no longer than 65 Characters (including spaces). One handy trick: using a "pipe" character (a vertical line like this: |) is useful. You can use it to separate text without using up too much space (e.g., "Make your own website | Beautifully simple websites").

- **Description Tag.** The description tag is that snippet of text that appears under the title tag in the Google search results, giving more information about the site. They're important because, like the title tag, they're what users read to decide whether or not to click your page. Write them as normal sentences and make sure they're enticing. Avoid using the same description tag for multiple pages; the tag should be unique to that page to maximize your ranking in search engines. Including a call-to-action (e.g., a phone number) is also worth considering.

Enter Keywords

Enter up to ten keywords that best represent the content of the page. Each keyword should be separated by a comma. These keywords used to be helpful in your search rankings but these days they don't seem to have any tangible impact in search rankings. Still, we recommend you put them in for good measure. Who knows? Google's algorithm could change (as they are wont to do), suddenly making these useful again. You won't regret being thorough.

Ensuring the Page has Your Keywords

This might sound obvious, but you need to include your keywords for a webpage in the actual content of that page. At Rocketspark, occasionally we have had clients contact us confused about why their website isn't ranking well. Sometimes the answer is simply that they haven't included the phrases, even their business name, in the page's content. So make sure you include your keywords in your content. Basic, but essential.

Use your keywords throughout the content of your page. You need to make sure that the keywords you use on a page are actually relevant to the content of that page so that the search result is actually useful to the customer. Avoid [keyword stuffing](#). Google can sniff out spammy content from a mile off. Here's a great tool that lets you check the density of your keyword usage:

<http://www.internetmarketingninjas.com/seo-tools/keyword-density/index.php>.

Duplicating content can also hurt your rankings. You can check for duplicate information using this tool: www.copyscape.com

And don't copy content from other websites or you could get landed with [duplicate content penalties](#) from Google.

Aim to optimise each page for a maximum of three keywords. Focus on those keywords, instead of trying to include every word that ranked highly.

Making Headings Unique and Keyword-Rich

“Breakin’ up is hard to do,” sang 60s pop idol Neil Sedaka, but it’s vital when it comes to organising your content. And breaking up your content into small-ish chunks entails using more headings, which in turn gives you the chance to give your site an SEO boost. Putting keywords in your headings tends to help rankings more than putting them in body text (though you should do both).

Minden Heights, Luxury bed & breakfast
accommodation Te Puna, just outside of Tauranga



We recommend only having one big, H1-heading per page so that it’s crystal clear to Google what your page is about (Wondering what on earth we mean by H1-, H2- and H3-headings? Check out our [guide for using headings correctly on your website](#)). For example, let’s imagine you’re a builder with a website. Rather than a heading that says just “Services”, make your heading work harder for you by writing “Our building services in Cambridge”.

Being Consistent

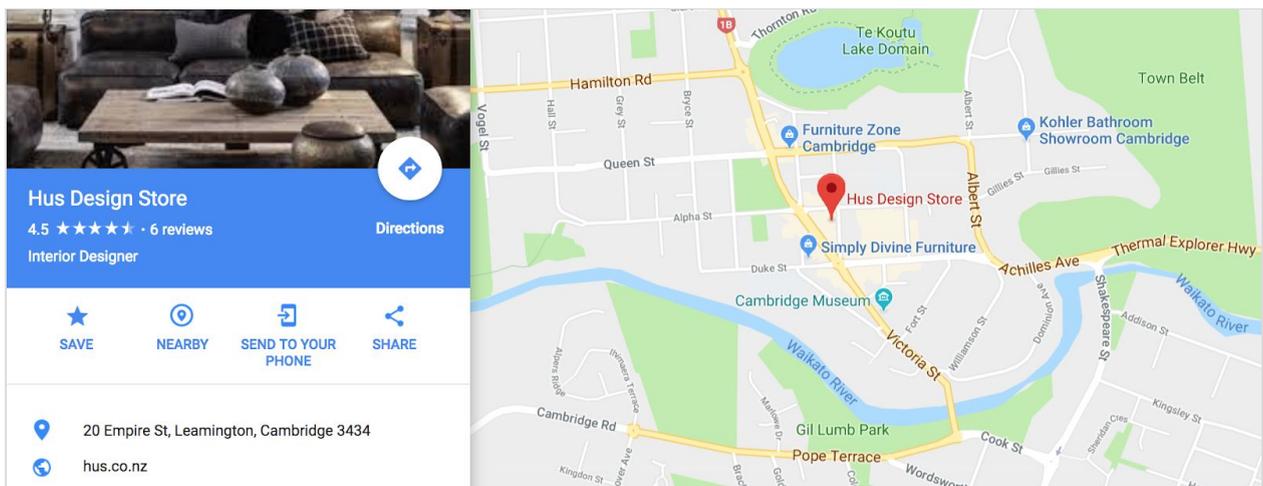
For each page you want to use the same keywords consistently in the title tag, H1-heading, body text, meta description, and the URL of the page. Consistency sends Google a clear message about what your page is about.

Adding Alt Text on images

This is text, hidden from human view, that is associated with an image, there to describe the image to Google. Many people use Google image searches to find what they are looking. Adding Alt Text tells Google what the picture is about, making it search-friendly. Google can identify images without it, but alt text is yet another of the 200 little ways you can give your website an edge in the rankings. Every little bit helps!

Setting Up “Google My Business”

Google knows where you live. And where you work. And where you eat. Basically, any time somebody searches online, Google figures out where they’re located at that moment so that it can provide local results. For example, let’s say you’re running a café. Any time somebody in your neighbourhood searches for “café” (or “coffee” or “food”) Google will show them nearby cafés, including yours—if you’re listed on Google My Business (previously known as Google places for business).



Setting up Google My Business also enables your business to be listed on Google Maps when people are searching for something via Google Maps’ search function. Learn more about the benefits of [Google My Business](#) and how to get your business set up on it.

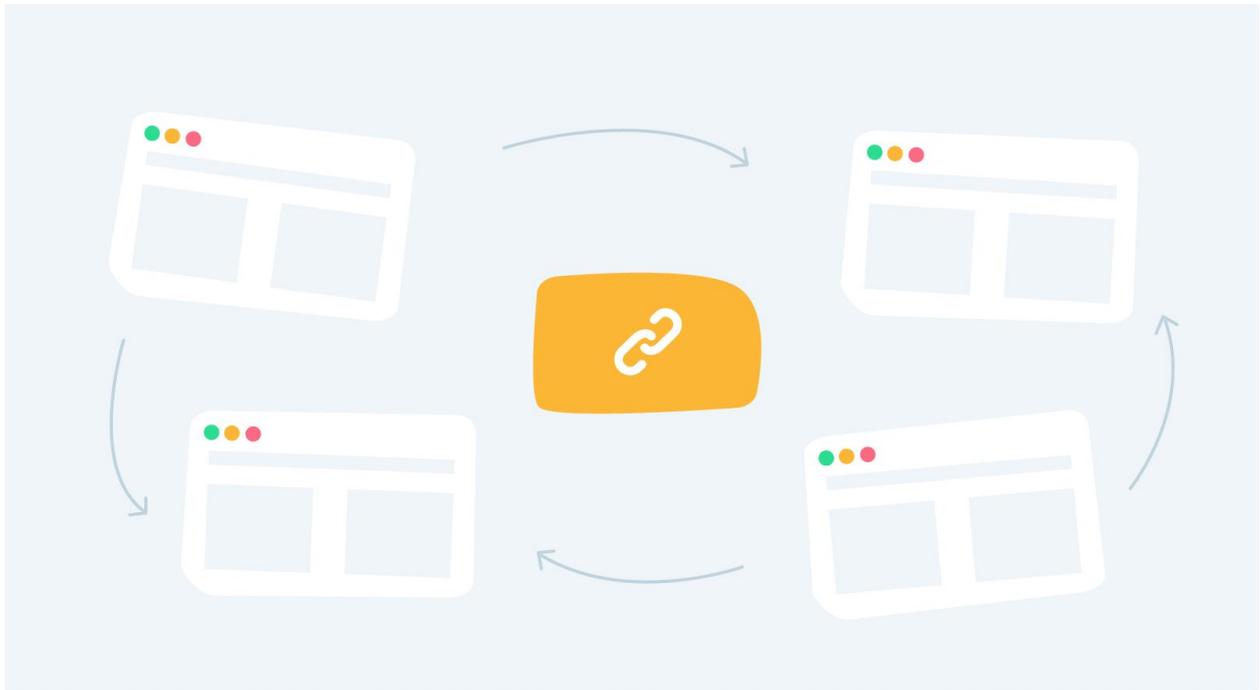
Link Building as an SEO Strategy

A fundamental SEO principle is that links boost rankings. Links are those bits of text you see everywhere on the web—usually underlined and in blue—that, if clicked, take you to another page or even website. Every time a website includes a link to your webpage,

that page should get a little jolt of ranking power. The more links you get, the more likely it is that your page will climb the search rankings.

Encouraging Links From Other Sites

Not all links are created equal. Yes, you want other websites to link to yours, but those linking sites should be logically related to your website in some way.



There are oodles of tactics for scoring links to your site. Here's just a few:

1. Asking Suppliers and Customers. Asking other businesses or clients to link to you is a simple approach but, hey, it works. Make it win-win by offering to link to them in return.
2. Participating in Industry-Relevant Online Communities. Online communities and forums related to your area of business are a great place to get links. How? Offer your expertise by answering questions and include a link back to your site for more information.
3. Sharing Content on Social Media. Share your webpages and blog posts—preferably your best stuff—on social media and encourage others to share, like, and comment on your content. [Social engagement improves rankings, albeit in a roundabout way.](#)
4. Reaching Out to Competitors' Links. Find out who is providing links to your

competitors and try to nab a link from them too. Tip: Google search: “link: www.yourcompetitorsname.com”

5. **Writing Link-Worthy Articles.** You’re an expert in your field. Why not share that knowledge around a bit? By writing articles on your site that others want to link to, you not only help potential customers, you’ll beef up your search rankings too. (Find out more in Stage 6.)
6. **Avoiding Link Farms.** Being offered hundreds or thousands of links for a small fee? Avoid these “link farms” like the plague. They won’t help your ranking and, more often than not, will actually have a negative impact. It’s cliché but oh-so-true with respect to SEO: if it seems too good to be true, it probably is.

Linking From Your Own Website

Did you know you can link to yourself? It might feel like voting for yourself as the belle/beau of the ball, but linking to other pages within your website actually helps your ranking. It’s really simple. Just insert a link from one page to another—but make sure it’s relevant. For example, if you’re running a blog, you’ll probably find that some topics you write about are similar to previous posts. Include a link in the text directing readers to your other related post for more information. Google likes links—even these internal links—and it helps your users find relevant information, staying on your site for longer.

When creating links use good anchor text i.e., the text that people click on as a link. “[Click here](#)” is common anchor text but it doesn’t do much for your ranking. You’re better off using language that is related to the page you’re linking to. [Find out more about how to create text links.](#)

Sharing Content on Social Media

The jury’s out on whether or not links on social media—like, for instance, sharing a blog post on Facebook—actually do much for your ranking. Some say it helps; some say it doesn’t. But the more you get your work out there, the more likely somebody is to link to it from their own site. A strong social media presence will improve your website traffic, which is bound to complement your SEO efforts.



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We've got a wealth of information about *link building*—that is, improving your SEO game by acquiring links.

Keeping Content Up-to-Date

Google wants to provide the best possible content to its users. For some search queries, the best content is current content. Google is good at identifying fresh content and, for some searches, will favour it in the search results.



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We explain why keeping your content up-to-date matters (hint: it's good for your customers and it's good for your SEO).

Moving to a New Website Platform

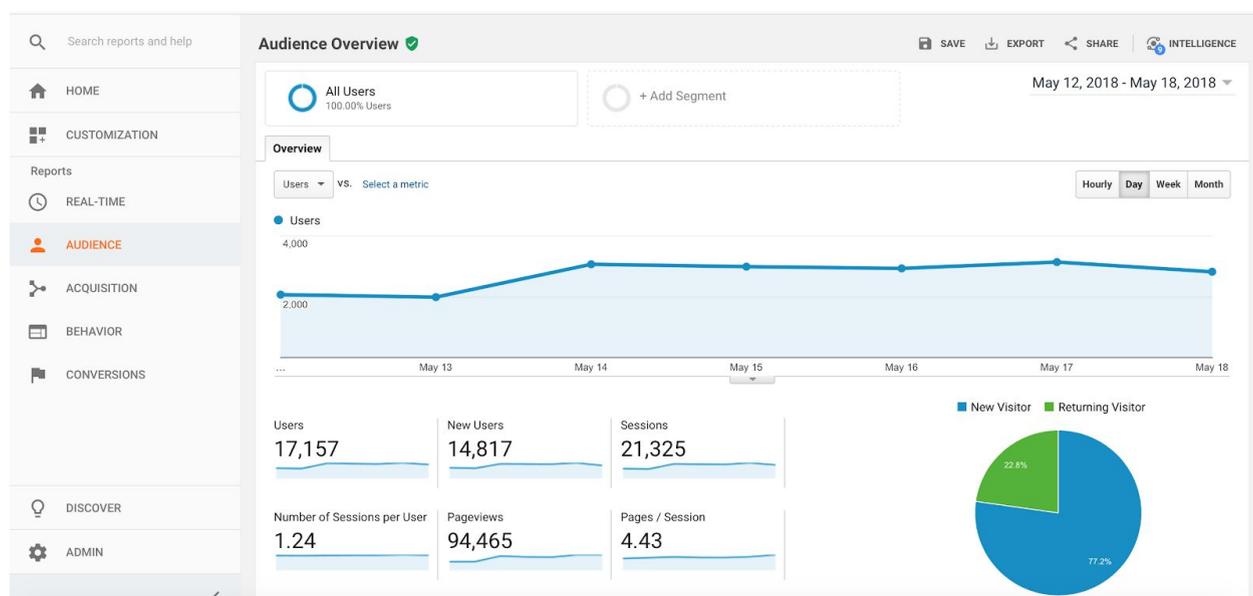
What happens if you switch to a new website platform? Because the URL structure of the new site is likely to be a little different, you face potentially losing all that ranking power you've accrued over time. Never fear! Setting up 301 redirects tells Google that the old URL has been replaced by a new one, which will help mitigate against the possibility of losing your historical search value.

Monitoring Your Progress

Search ranking matters but the most important thing is the volume of your actual web traffic. How do you know how many people are visiting your site? Google Analytics.

Google Analytics: Website Traffic Reporting

Google Analytics is the service that you use to monitor traffic to your website. Once you set-up Google Analytics you can see how many of your visitors are coming from search engines and even what keywords they used to find you. And guess what: it's free. Get set up using our [Google Analytics Guide](#).



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We explain how to conduct an SEO health check, which we recommend you do every 2–3 months.

Google Webmaster Tools

Want to take your SEO game to the next level? Google Search Console gives you access to webmaster tools that will aid you in improve the things that are already working (rather than targeting new keywords). Check out our user guide for setting up [Google Search Console](#).

Google Adwords: An SEO Shortcut

As you can see, ranking well can take a lot of work. There just aren't a lot of shortcuts in SEO. But, if you're willing to pay, there is Adwords.

What is Adwords? You've probably seen sponsored links at the top and side of the Google's search results before.

The screenshot shows a Google search for "natural cat food". The search bar is at the top with the Google logo on the left and search icons on the right. Below the search bar, there are tabs for "All", "Images", "Maps", "Videos", and "More". The search results show "About 11,700,000 results (0.66 seconds)".

Organic search results include:

- Natural Cat Food Online - 20% Off Until 25th September**
www.pureandwholesome.co.nz/cat-food
Keep Your Cat Healthy, Naturally. Range Of Food & Treats Delivered To Your Door. Brands: AATU, Barking Heads, Bionic, Furminator, Harringtons, M&C, Pooch & Mutt, Vet IQ. You've visited pureandwholesome.co.nz 4 times. Last visit: 5 days ago.
Delivery Information · Lifestyle & Accessories · Contact Us · Natural Baby Products · Our Story
- Healthy Pet Foods for your cat - Now Fresh Range**
www.healthypetfoods.co.nz/cat-food
100% natural as well as grain and gluten free. Find out more or buy online now.
Buy Online · Free Sample · Premium Pet Food · Natural · Nutritious
Types: Grain free, Nutritional, Natural
- Raw Cat Food Home Delivery - Natural, Meaty Cat Food**
www.petfoodsales.co.nz/Cat-Food
Kiwi made cat food. Since 1981. Hamilton wide delivery. Buy online now!
Kiwi made · Delivered to your door · Since 1981
Types: Beef, Chicken, Mutton, Offal, Veal, Horse, Treats, Bones
Join Our Newsletter · About Us · Get 10% Off First Order · Why A Raw Meat Diet? · Home Delivery
- Acres Complete Cat Food - 100% Natural, Premium Dry Food**
www.acrespetsproducts.com/Premium/CatFood
Complete & balanced nutrition for adult cats. Free delivery on orders over \$30.

Sponsored product listings are shown on the right under the heading "Shop for natural cat... on Google Sponsored":

- Meowing Heads Drumstix 100% ...**
\$20.80
Pure and Whole...
- Urinary S/O 1.5 kg**
\$38.99
Pet.co.nz
- PetBalance Organic Spirulina**
\$23.50
HealthPost.co.nz
- Feline Natural Freeze Dried ...**
\$35.90
Animates

These sponsored links are paid for by the advertiser through Google Adwords. It works on a cost-per-click basis (CPC). CPC means you only pay Google if and when someone actually clicks on your advertisement. You bid according to what you're prepared to pay for a word or phrase and you set a maximum monthly budget.

When someone searches for the words or phrases you've bid for, Google will automatically put your site in the search results as a sponsored link. The exact position of your ad depends on how high your bid is and Google's own quality score for your advertisement. It's a relatively hassle-free way of jumping the queue.

We at Rocketspark used Adwords when we first started out. We were entering a very competitive industry, so we knew it would take a long time to rank well for the most relevant keywords. In the meantime, Adwords ensured us a prominent presence in the search results.

But be warned: It's very easy to spend a lot of money for limited return. So it might be worth your time and money hiring an Adwords specialist. Check out the Adwords information and tutorials at: www.google.com/adwords

STAGE 6

Content Marketing

94 Maintaining a Blog

The Value of Blogging

Specific Benefits of Blogging

Writing for Humans...and Robots

Blog Writing for Humans

Blog Writing for Robots

Using content—quality content—as a marketing tool is an excellent way to go. One of the best content marketing and SEO strategies is blogging. Sites that rank well need lots of text, and blogging is an ideal way to do that. The secret is to focus on high-quality content that genuinely helps users. These days, Google can sort the good content from the bad. Pass on expert information through your site and watch it climb the rankings.

Maintaining a Blog

There are some misconceptions as to what a blog is. For some, the word “blog” conjures up thoughts of a friend's cheesy travel blog or a hodgepodge site presenting the author's political views, favourite recipes and pictures of their pet cat. These are not the blogs we are talking about. What we're talking about when we talk about blogging is this: providing top-quality content—information, advice, research—in the field your business specialises in.

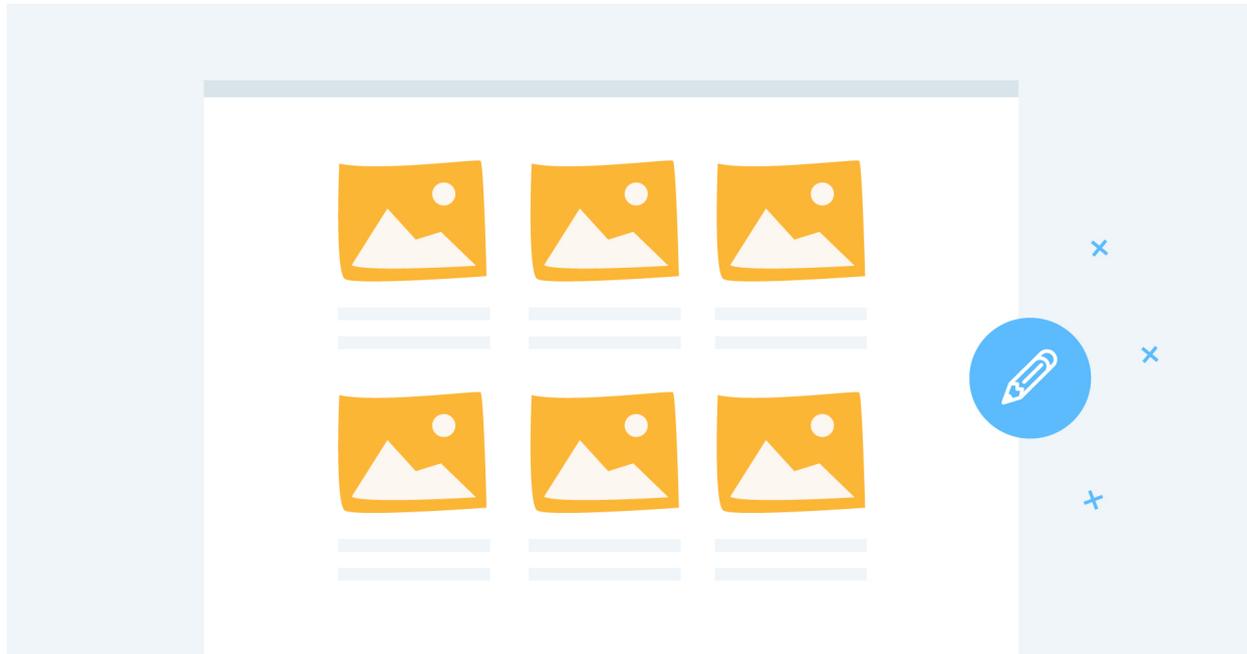
The Value of Blogging

Blogging is one of the best things you can do to climb the search engine rankings. It's a great way to share some of your expertise, which demonstrates that you do actually have the expertise to help them with what they are looking for.

It might sound like a strange strategy, but blogging works. In March 2011, Jonas Colliander and Micael Dahlen (from the Stockholm School of Economics) decided to test the effectiveness of [business blogs](#). Their method? Create a story about an organisation and then simultaneously post it on both a business blog and on an online magazine. The researchers then analysed the impact it would have on the brand attitude of the organisation, and the reader's purchase intention.

The results? The same text used on a blog, compared to an online magazine, created a 9.5% increase in purchase intentions by the reader. Similarly, a blog created an 8% increase in the brand attitude. Granted, those numbers aren't overwhelming neither are

they insignificant. Remember: it was the exact same text. It just goes to show that simply having a company blog can make a measurable difference.



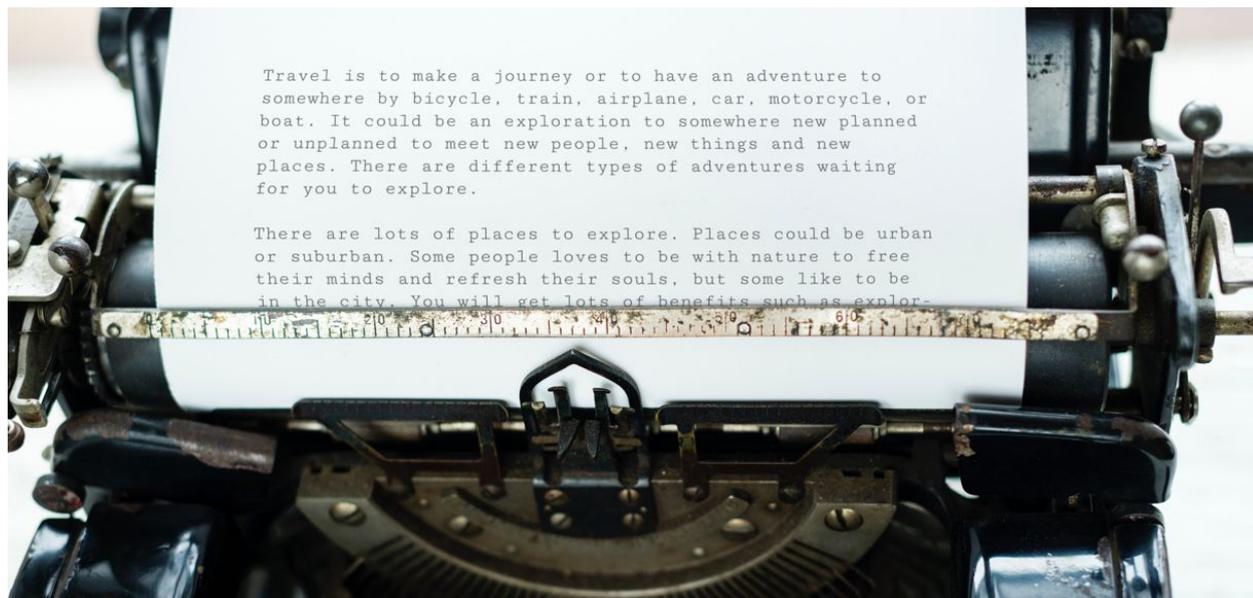
Specific Benefits of Blogging

Still not convinced? Rick Burne, marketing director for marketing software HubSpot conducted a [study of over 1,500 organisations within Hubspot](#), comparing those that had a blog with those that didn't—and got some interesting results. Companies with blogs had:

- 55% more visitors
- 97% more inbound links
- 434% more indexed pages

Those numbers tell a compelling story. Granted, the study was conducted in 2009, but there is little reason to suspect its value has fallen. Blogging remains an excellent marketing tool.

But one caveat: it has to be quality. These days, Google has very clever algorithms that can fairly accurately assess how good—or bad—content is. All things being equal, the better your content, the better your ranking. (More on this in a moment...)



Writing for Humans...and Robots

Blog writing, is unlike anything you were taught in high school English class. Sure, you were told to write for your audience. But your teacher never told you that your audience included robots. Yep, you heard me: robots.

The Robots in Your Audience

Blog writing, is unlike anything you were taught in high school English class. Sure, you were told to write for your audience. But your teacher never told you that your audience included robots. Yep, you heard me: robots.

Not the walking, talking, humanoid robots you see in the movies (sorry, but R2-D2 probably won't be reading your blog anytime soon). I'm talking about web robots—usually just called bots—and more specifically web crawlers, which are computer programs that “crawl” the internet, gathering data and creating a snapshot of the web. If your blog or website can be found in Google, that means that a web crawler has “read” it.

These web crawlers are an important “audience”; how well you write for them will contribute to how highly your blog posts rank in search engines. So if you want to bring in more visitors to your website, keep in mind this important maxim: you're writing for humans and for robots.

The Humans in Your Audience

That being said, your blog should never ever ever feel like it was written for web crawlers. It needs to read well, maintain interest and be helpful—in other words, it needs to be written for humans.

Pure and Wholesome Updates

<    >

A Wholesome Story: how Holy Tote & Paper Love Got Started
March 5th 2018
Pure and Wholesome is about the belief that if everyone only bought products that were made sustainably and by people who
[Read more](#)

Nina Ottosson Dog Puzzles and Toys with hidden treats - new in!
February 1st 2018
We've just received our first delivery of our Nina Ottosson puzzles and toys for dogs. They are world famous, created in
[Read more](#)

How To Care For Your First Kitten or Puppy
December 1st 2017
I have vivid memories as an eight year old going to chose my new kitten. Selecting her from the litter was easy as she was the most
[Read more](#)

That might sound obvious but, believe it or not, this wasn't always the case. For a few dark years, a lot of the net's content-producers paid scant regard for good writing. Why? Because they only cared about boosting Google rankings (this is essentially what all this robot business is all about). For instance, some websites overloaded their content with an unnaturally high number of keywords (a tactic called keyword stuffing), creating content that was practically unreadable for humans. That didn't care because they were only interested in writing for bots, and since web crawlers are on the hunt for keywords, they were easily duped by these kind of tactics.

Then the robots got smarter. In more recent years, Google and other search engines have been developing increasingly sophisticated software that weeds out and penalises those sorts of methods. Instead, Google is trying to encourage websites to create high quality content—write well, and you'll be rewarded in search rankings.

So, while writing for the robots is important (which requires doing keyword research to beef up your search rankings—see below), your primary focus should still be on writing interesting, insightful, compelling content for real, flesh-and-blood people.

Blog Writing for Humans

For many people, writing a blog is a daunting prospect. I mean, where do you start?? In this section, we'll explore a few fundamentals to help you get started.

Write What You Know

It's a writing cliché for good reason. Writing what you know, what you're an expert in, makes sense. [Content marketing](#) is based on the idea that you create something worthwhile for a potential customer. Your blog is a way to share a bit of your expertise for free, which shows people that: a) you actually have expertise, and b) you're a nice enough company to share it. So blog on topics that you are actually know about.

One of the great things about blogging is that you can get away with being really specific. Your topics don't have to be about the Unifying Theory of Everything. It's totally acceptable, often preferable, to write a blog post about something "small" and highly specialised if that's something your potential customers could find useful or interesting.

ROCKETSPARK Features Pricing Examples For Designers Help Log in [FREE TRIAL](#)

Rocketspark Blog

BLOG HOME Search Blog

Help, my website flunked a speed test!: What to do about page loading times...

Slow website? Learn why speed tests can be misleading and what to do about a slow-loading site.
[Read more](#)

New form builder: The tool you need to get the customer information you want

Our new form builder is live! Create forms to meet your needs and get the data you want.
[Read more](#)

Blog categories

- SEO & Reporting
- Ecommerce
- Domain Names
- Converting
- Features & News
- Social Media
- Blogging

Subscribe to be sent articles from our blog

Our own Rocketspark blog is a case and point. Previous Rocketspark blog posts include such niche hits as [“Download file’: When to avoid it and when to embrace it”](#) and [“How to best display a Google map on your website.”](#) Sure, they’re super-specialised, but they’re topics that we know are relevant to some of our customers (for the record, we’ve also tackled comprehensive, broad-appeal topics too like [“Social media for business”](#) and [“SEO Basics”](#)).

Ask yourself: What am I an expert in? What kinds of things are my clientele wanting to know about? Brainstorm a dozen potential topics and start googling them. Chances are, someone else will have blogged about it before. That’s okay! How can you make your post better than theirs? Go through this process and you’re well on your way to coming up with a few blog-able topics.

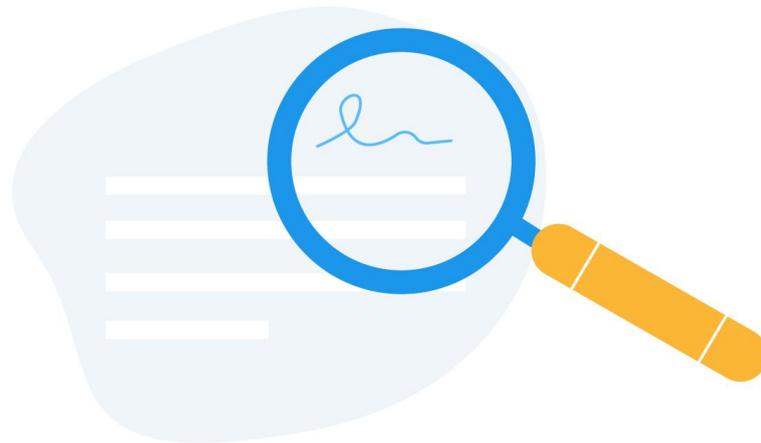
Let Content Dictate Length

In a fast-paced world of tweets, Attention Deficit Disorder and an overwhelming [1 billion websites](#), you’d assume that people want short, snappy, easy-to-digest blogs. Brace yourself for a shock...

Longer is often better. Digital marketing master Neil Patel found, counterintuitively, that most top-ten pages in search results for any given query have [at least 2,000 words](#). He also found that long posts (1,500+ words) get linked to more and garner more “likes” on social media. Similarly, blogging platform Medium engaged in some sophisticated number crunching and discovered that [the optimal length of a blog post was 7 minutes](#), which works out to [roughly 1,600 words](#). Who’d have thought it?

But short works too. Perez Hilton often writes very short blog posts—and as 7th on [Forbes’ “10 Wildly-Successful Blogs”](#), it’s obviously working for him. Okay, okay—of course the gossip-monger’s subject matter is hardly weighty ([Kim Kardashian wore the same outfit three times!](#)), but that only serves to underscore the key rule-of-thumb about blog length...

The content should dictate the length. Some topics can be done n’ dusted in just 200 words. Others need 2,000 words to do them justice. Don’t just ramble on and on for the sake of bulking out your post to some illusory magic word count. Good writing is disciplined writing. Start by writing the length you think the topic deserves, then edit it down by, say, 15%. That way you’ll have a blog post that’s the right length for the topic.



Make it Easy to Scan

Even if you decide to write a novella for your next blog post, remember: whatever the length, it needs to be formatted in a web-friendly way.

Web usability experts [NNG famously argued that internet readers don't really read, they scan](#). He made that pronouncement last century—1997, to be precise. Obviously things have a changed a fair bit since then. But readers still have a tendency to scan—in fact, NNG's more recent eye-tracking studies show that [readers' eyes tend to move in an “F” pattern](#): a couple of horizontal scans near the top of the page, and then a vertical scan down the left-side of the page.

What does that mean for blogging? Don't waste too much time in your intro. Try to jump right into the topic as quickly as possible so that readers know what it's about at a glance. The fact that readers often scan—in an “F” shape or otherwise—means that your blog should be broken up into easy-to-swallow chunks, each with a scan-friendly, information-carrying sub-heading. And paragraphs should usually be shorter than they would be in offline text.

While we're on the topic of formatting, don't forget to use images. Yes, it's extra work and, if you're buying stock images, extra expense. But it's worth it. Fact is, we humans love pictures; they pique our interest and keep us reading (or at least scanning).

Think Carefully About the Headline

Your headline might just be the most important part of your blog. It's the first part of your blog that readers will see and is the thing that will most often draw them into reading—or drive them away. [80% of people read the headline, while just 20% read the rest](#). But do it right and you'll be able to boost that number.

"A little bird tweeted me": how a website will boost your business's word-of-mouth buzz



Businesses that rely on word-of-mouth need a website to really capitalise on that positive buzz. Find out how.

[Read more](#)

Remember: you're not trying to come up with a title for the Great American Novel (The Grapes of Wrath) or the next Bond movie (You Only Live Twice). In other words, nothing vague, esoteric or cute. Your title should state exactly what the blog is about. And there's a bit of a science to doing that. Here's what makes for a strong headline:

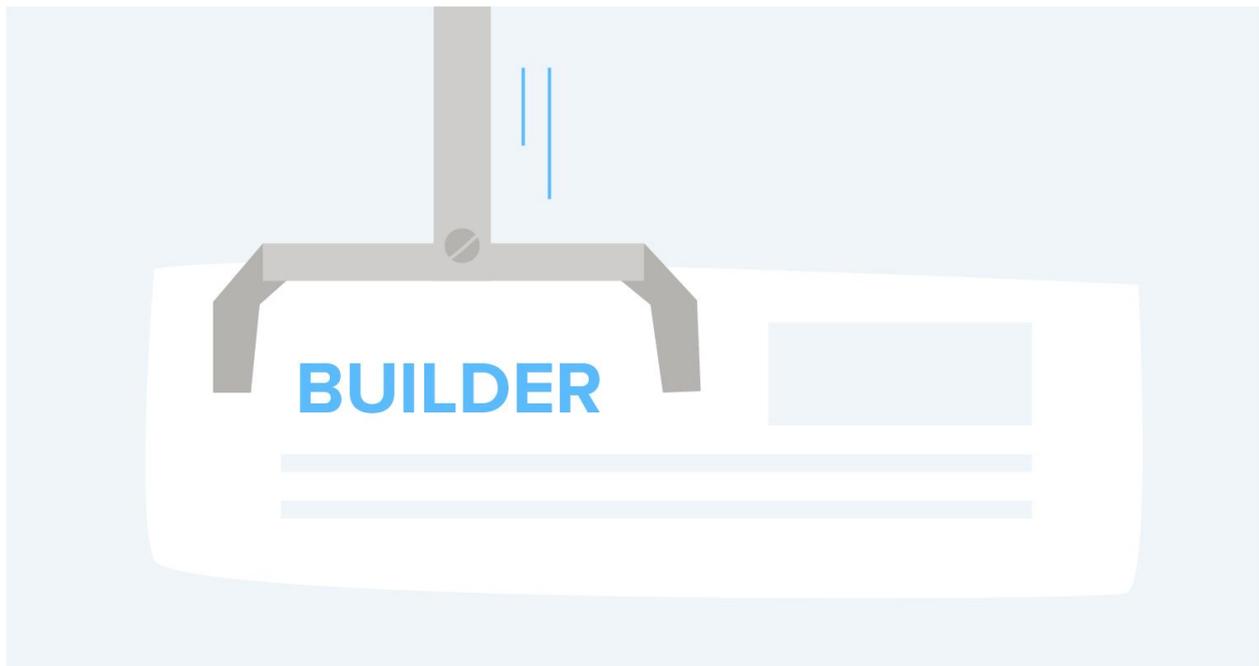
1. State exactly what the blog is about. If you try to write something flowery or poetic nobody's going to read it. It's an ugly truth for all the wordsmiths out there, we know, but that's just how it is with blogging.
2. Put keywords at the beginning of the heading. Remember the "F" pattern? It means that people spend more time looking at the left-hand side of the page, so put the words that carry the most information at the start. The colon (:) is a mighty useful piece of punctuation here because it allows you to cram the start with keywords and then write something a bit clearer afterwards (e.g., the version of this section that appeared in our online blog is titled, "Blogging for business: 8 principles for writing a blog that gets more web traffic")
3. Make it results-focused. Don't put merely "How to write a blog"—put "How to write a blog that gets more web traffic." People want to know what's in it for them.
4. Put a number in it. This is so commonplace and so particular to web writing that

it's fast becoming a [parody-worthy cliché](#). But Content Marketing Institute has found that [blog titles that have numbers in them perform 45% better than non-number titles](#). Use the numeral (“8”), not the word (“eight”).

5. Keep it short. Well, short-ish. KISSmetrics has found that the [ideal length of a headline is six words long](#). Don't worry too much about hitting that magic six-word mark; that's usually hard to do and if you have to sacrifice clarity, it's not worth it. The rule of thumb is simply this: be succinct.

Blog Writing for Robots

For some people, the idea of having to write your blog posts to “appeal” to web-crawling software will sound bizarre. Here's what it looks like...



Focus on Your Keywords

If the prospect of writing for robots still sounds weird, it's really just a fancy way of saying that you need to engage in the art (or voodoo, depending on who you ask) of search engine optimisation (SEO), which we looked at in the previous chapter.

Since search engines are the ones that use web crawlers, this is where writing for the robots comes in. Example: imagine you run a [meal kit service](#) and you decide to write a

blog post offering recipes and tips on eating gluten-free. Anytime somebody searches “how to eat gluten-free” or “gluten-free recipes”, with a bit of SEO know-how and a smidgen of luck, your blog post could appear near the top of the search results, and is therefore more likely to be clicked and read. And once someone sees how helpful your blog post is they might just decide to subscribe to your meal kit!

As we looked at in the previous stage, the most important thing in SEO is to identify your keywords. In other words, the people for whom this blog post is written—what sorts of terms and phrases are they most likely to type into Google?

Part of this is just common sense. Let’s say you own a cafe and you’re blogging about a fancy new cola you’re now stocking. Something like “soft drinks” would likely be a typical search query. But what other relevant phrases are people using? This is where Google’s nifty Keyword Planner comes in handy.

Now that you’ve identified keywords—you simply need to use those words and phrases in your blog post. Don’t go overboard with the keywords though. This is keyword stuffing, the unnatural overuse of keywords and it’ll land you a penalty from Google for trying to game the system. But so long as you avoid that dubious tactic, then you’ll be on the right track. Web crawlers operate by finding keywords. So peppering those terms throughout the post and, even better, in your headlines and sub-headings, boosts your chances of landing yourself an enviable ranking in the search results whenever those words are searched.

Finished? Once you’ve put in the hard yards writing a solid blog post, it’s time to get it out there! Social media is your ally here, which is what we’ll explore in the next stage.

STAGE 7

Promoting Your Site

105 Using Social Media to Promote Your Website

Choosing Social Media Platforms to Use

Facebook

Instagram

Twitter

And the Rest...

Getting Started

Building an Audience

Producing Content

114 Email Marketing

Reasons for Email Marketing

Ideas for Email Marketing

You don't have to sit back and wait to get found in search results. Rather than putting all your marketing eggs in the SEO basket, make sure you actively promote your site using other methods. What methods exactly? Well, these days, you can't go past social media, so mastering that ever-changing, oft-befuddling world is the main focus of this stage. Time to get your tweet on!

Using Social Media to Promote Your Website

Have you ever given a great sales pitch at a party? Gotten a new customer at a barbecue? Perhaps made a sale pool-side? You probably weren't there to sell anything—you went to socialise—but at parties people let down their guards and open up. Social media is a party that your business can't afford to miss.

Not convinced? In 2017, Social Media Examiner studied businesses using social media for at least six hours a week. Their report, as cited by Hubspot, [found that a staggering 84% saw an increase in website traffic as a result](#); 66% saw more leads in that time, and nearly half saw a reduction in marketing expenses.

Our own experience confirms the value of social media. When Rocketspark launched in 2009, we were doing everything on a shoestring. Our no-budget launch strategy was to get the word out about our launch on Facebook, a tactic that led to many of our first customers. To this day, Facebook remains a major part of our marketing strategy.

Social media has become so enmeshed in people's lives so quickly that it's radically changing how people engage with businesses. While social media is a personal communication platform, [users usually do expect some business communication](#) (as long as permission has been granted). That means you're invited to the party! And it's not fashionable to be late.



Choosing Social Media Platforms to Use

Each social media platform has its own vibe, which explains why many users actually use multiple platforms. In fact, the average number of platforms used has surged. In 2012, users averaged just over 3 social media accounts. [By 2016, the number had skyrocketed to over 8.](#) That might sound a bit daunting: Do I have to be on all those social networks?

In a word: No. You don't have to be on every platform under the sun. If you do, you'll spread yourself too thin. Just pick a manageable number and do those few well. But which ones?

Facebook

This is the one you simply must be on. Pew's most recent (US) research found that [68% of all adults and 79% of all online adults use Facebook](#). Plus, with 62% of senior citizens now on the network, it's popular among all ages. And it's not just an American thing. Facebook is the most popular social network in the [UK, New Zealand, and Australia](#), to name just a few. In fact, with 1.8 billion users globally, it's top of the heap in [119 countries \(out of 149 surveyed\)](#). It's the undisputed king of social media and has been for a long time. If you focus your marketing energies on just one social network, make it this one.

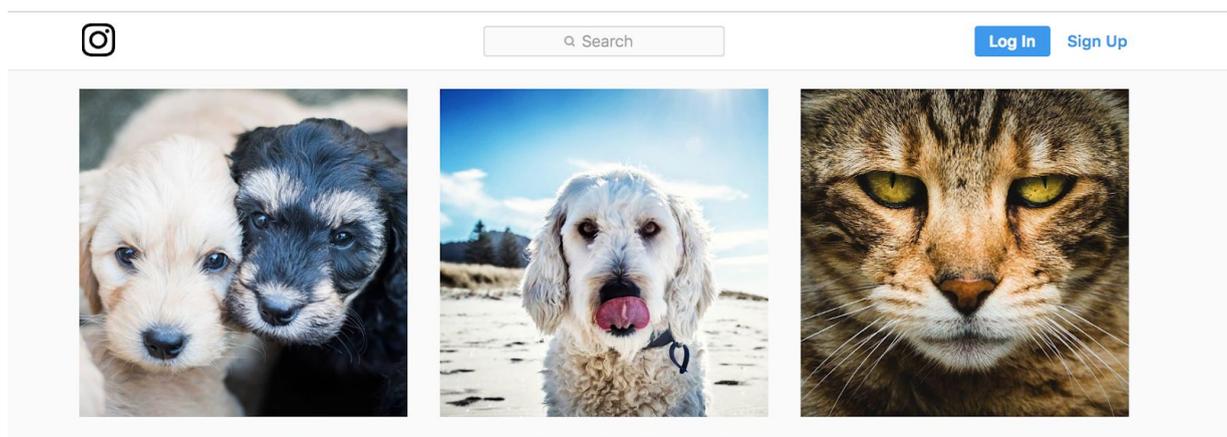
Users connect with businesses by "liking" those businesses' Facebook pages. What

makes a business “like-able”? [Digital marketing experts ExactTarget](#) (now Marketing Cloud) found that Facebook users are motivated to like a business for the following reasons: self-expression and identification with the brand, to connect with like-minded consumers, to interact with the company and learn about new products, and to keep up with latest news and promotions. Although that study was conducted in 2011, it seems reasonable to assume that those motivations have remained relatively stable.

Facebook lets you do a lot: posts, photos, videos and more. You can write lengthy posts, but just because you can doesn’t mean you should. Research shows that you get [86% more engagement with posts of 40 characters or less](#) ([other studies](#) have made similar recommendations). Facebook users won’t tolerate a barrage of marketing messages as much as Twitter users, so be careful with the frequency of your posts. How often you should post? [Just once](#)—unless you have over 10,000 followers (imagine!), in which case [SEO guru Neil Patel recommends posting twice a day](#).

Instagram

This one gets the “Most Improved Player” award. Instagram has [doubled its users in under two years, up to 700 million as of 2017](#)—with no signs of slowing. It’s the most popular platform after Facebook [in New Zealand](#) and [Australia](#) and the [third-most popular in the UK](#) (excluding the likes of YouTube and WordPress that some of these studies include). Instagram specialises in photos—*gorgeous* photos—and has some video capability. As such, it [“has become the place to share the moments we want to remember.”](#) Recently, Instagram has courted businesses by adding features that saw Forbes call it [“social media’s rising star for business”](#).



Twitter

Twitter has been a major player for a long time and, while in some markets it has been bumped from second place by the likes of Instagram, it still remains a force. Twitter made its name by limiting posts to 140 characters, making messages rapid-fire and quippy. It's remains the [second-biggest social media player in the UK](#) and [third-biggest in New Zealand](#) (again, excluding the likes of YouTube). Twitter has some significant advantages over Facebook. Twitter users have a higher tolerance of business communications than Facebook users, with a comparatively low [41% of users disengaging with businesses \(versus 55% on Facebook\)](#). This could be chalked up to the fact that tweets (i.e., Twitter posts) are quick and to-the-point. Their brevity might also make tweeting less time-consuming for you as a business. Bonus!



And the Rest...

You don't have to limit yourself to these two—there are plenty of other platforms, some of which might be ideal for your business.

Apart from being the original, LinkedIn is the most business-oriented social network. While its suit-and-tie vibe lacks the fun factor of other platforms, its [100 million-strong](#)

[userbase](#) and professional credibility make it a valuable option. It particularly enjoys a [strong niche position in the B2B \(business-to-business\) market](#).

Speaking of niches, Pinterest is one platform that certain industries can't afford to ignore. Fashion, crafts, DIY, travel, food, music—basically any industry that thrives on “Oooh, I like the look of that!”—excel here. What Pinterest lacks in reach, it makes up for in lucriveness. [69% of Pinterest users report buying or wanting to buy a product](#) through the platform, compared to just 40% of Facebook users.

Google+ has had a chequered history. It has a whopping [2.2 billion registered profiles](#) and yet just [111 million active users](#). Why the discrepancy? People have registered in order to access other Google services, but have otherwise largely ignored it. So, it's never really taken off—quite astonishing, considering how all-powerful Google is on the web. But, hey, a hundred-mill is not to be sniffed at. And get this: in the 2017 American Consumer Satisfaction Index, [Google+ topped the list](#), beating out all other social media platforms. Google+ isn't exactly a social media powerhouse but it is [popular among certain niche groups](#)—and those niche groups seem to really, really like it.

Which is an important reminder: don't underestimate the power of niche. There are some small-ish platforms that are must-haves for certain industries. So, while we recommend using Facebook as a minimum, once you venture beyond it, it pays to research what network your target demographic is using and go there.

Getting Started

Registering for most social networks is an easy process. Most are free sites, and most of the major sites have a sign-up process tailor-made for businesses, which is a great place to start. Just google “[social media name] business” and you'll find where to begin.

Be as thorough as you can in the registration process, so that you're not left with a bare-bones profile. Fill in plenty of information, include strong images, and customise logos to fit properly in the allocated spots. On Twitter, for instance, the profile picture that accompanies each tweet is tiny, so an intricate logo will probably need to be re-tooled and simplified in order to stand out at that small size. Of course, you can always go back and add more content later.

Take some time to find your bearings. Check out tutorials and start familiarising yourself with how it all works. If you've never used social media before, you'll probably feel disoriented at first. But don't worry—if more than [2.5 billion people around the world have figured out how to use social media](#), then you'll be able to figure it out too! And trust us: it won't take long. Soon you'll be tweeting, posting and pinning like a pro.

Building an Audience

There's not much use in marketing if you don't have anybody to market to. So a key component of social media marketing is gaining a following.

Each social media site has a way for users to connect with your business. Facebook has “likes,” Twitter has “followers” etc. A user can choose to like your page or follow you just by clicking a button, and any time you communicate, they'll receive that message. It's as if they've joined your conversation circle at the party. Here are a few tips for building a following:



Promote Your Social Media Presence

Social media is designed to make it easy to connect with people, and some sites even have tools to help you promote yourself. But you should also be promoting it outside of the social media realm too. Social media sites have buttons that you can incorporate into your website, blog, and email signature. Just a simple click and you've got a new follower. And don't forget offline; your social media details should be included on your business cards and print advertising.

Provide Interesting or Valuable Content

If your content is compelling you'll not only sustain the interest of your current followers, you'll hook new followers too. Sites allow users to pass on their favourite communications to others (called variously "share," "retweet," "reblog" etc.). For instance, let's say you run a café and you post a cool video of your barista doing some impressive latte art. With just a click of a button, your followers can share the video with their followers, who might just decide to follow you themselves (and maybe drop in for a cuppa).

This is where we recommend a "hub-and-hook" approach. Your hub is your blog, where you put all your stellar content. Social media then is the hook, which you use to entice people to your blog. Social media is for bite-sized content—so just put enough there to pique your followers' interest. If they want more, they'll click and visit your blog.



[GET MORE AT OUR BLOG](#)

rocketspark.com/blog

We go into greater depth about the "hub-and-hook" approach in more detail, including a client case study.

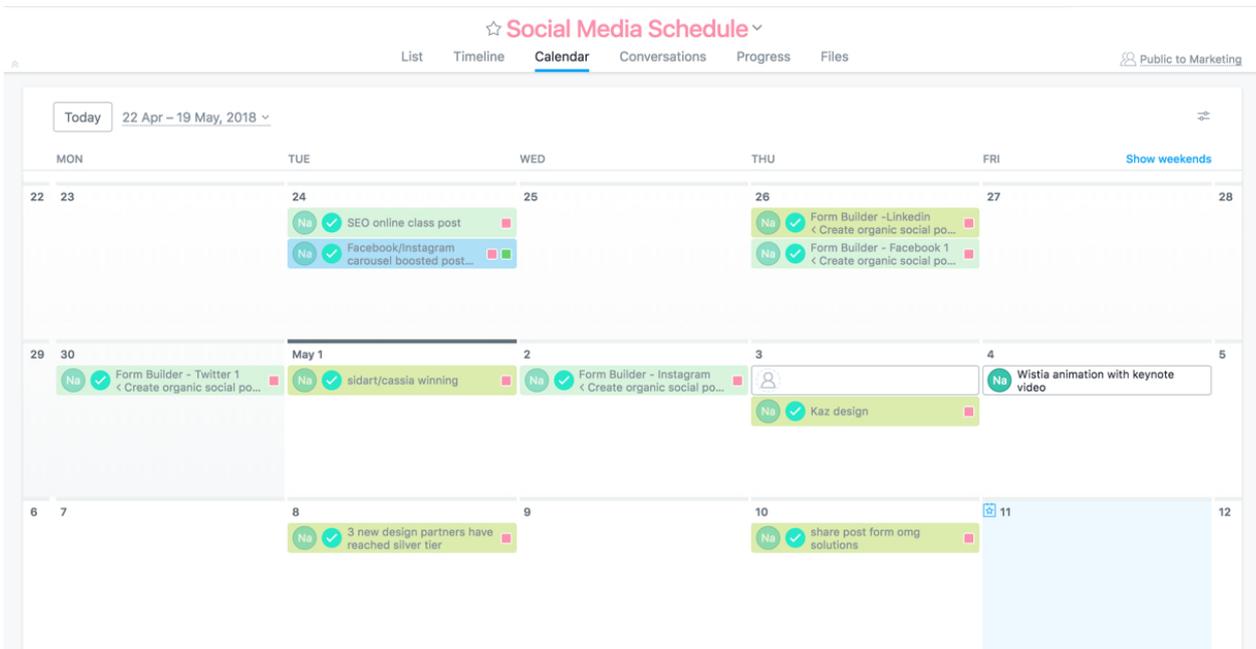
Take Time

You need to allocate a reasonable amount of time to social media. How much? That depends, but one study found that [36% of businesses using social media spend 1-5 hours/week, 26% spend 6-10 hours, leaving 48% that spend 11+ hours](#). But a little goes a long way: 65% of businesses spending less than 6 hours/week still report getting more leads through social media. However much time you allocate to your social media each week, you're in this for the long haul. Building a following doesn't happen overnight.

But with social media, it's one thing for a follower to receive your message; it's a totally different thing for them to actually see it. Content inevitably gets buried in the social media avalanche, meaning that many of your followers won't see all your posts. This is just the reality of social media, but you can maximise your chances of being seen if you post at [9am, 1pm or 3pm on Facebook](#) (discover the [optimal posting times for each major social network here](#)). Some sites let you schedule when posts go out, which is a good way to increase your exposure.

Create a Calendar

When life gets busy, it's really easy to stop posting regularly—but that'd be a mistake. The benefits will dry up almost instantly. Social media is not a marketing tool where you can just “set it and forget it”. At Rocketspark, we've learnt that the key to regularity is to set up a calendar scheduling your activity. We've found that having a plan for our social media and blog activity means that it actually gets done.



Producing Content

Communication in the social media sphere is different to traditional advertising. This isn't the place for the hard-sell; it's a place for conversation. Your content needs to be engaging, but not overbearing. Here's how:

Offer Special Deals

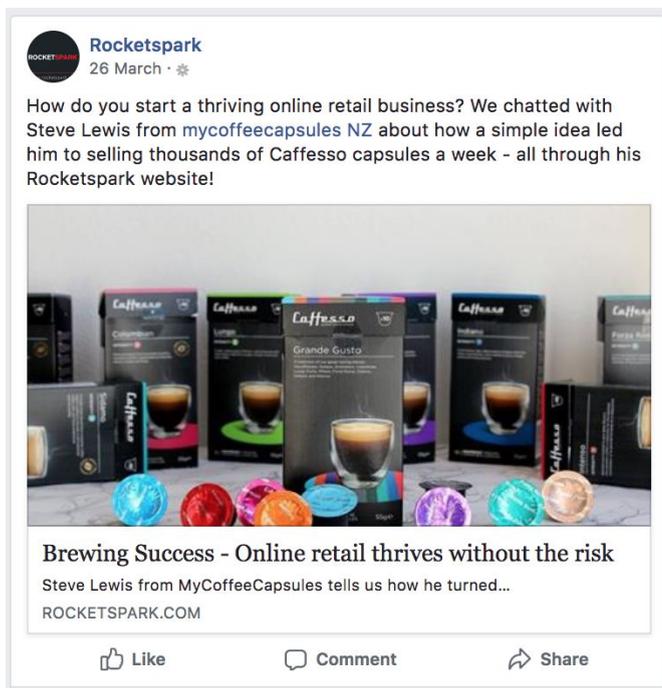
Social media is an excellent channel for extending special offers to users. One study found that [24% of Facebook users that “unliked” a business did so because they didn't offer enough deals](#). Often this takes the form of “Like' us to receive...,” which is also one way to build your following. InSites Consulting found that [61% of followers want promotions and 58% want freebies](#).

Entertain

Being bombarded with sales pitches can get old really fast. [24% of Facebook users unliked a business for being too promotional.](#) The key is to include lots of non-salesy stuff. And if there's one thing that goes down well in the social media sphere, it's entertainment. Social media thrives on fun. So get creative and let your freak flag fly. With a little luck, you might even hit upon social media gold: going viral.

Educate

It's also a great place to share ideas. As we discussed in Stage 6, sharing your expertise is a great strategy for content marketing. The same applies to social media. [17% of users unliked a business for being too chit-chatty and casual.](#) That means you need to balance the fun with the facts. Share relevant articles you've read, include links to your blog, or post some helpful tidbits directly to your social media page.



Involve Your Followers

Traditional advertising is one-way communication. Social media is different—the audience talks back. And that's a good thing, because positive engagement with your followers means a stronger relationship with your potential customers. Inviting your followers to post stories about your product or upload photos of them using it are easy ways to get them involved, but that's just scratching the surface. InSites have found that

[80% of consumers want to help businesses](#), particularly with helping improve current products and services. Take your social media strategy to the next level by harnessing the creativity of your followers.

Be Authentic

Authenticity is crucial online. It's even more crucial on social media. This is the place to show customers your human side. When an American Red Cross employee accidentally tweeted about her plans to get drunk on the their official Twitter channel, they acknowledged the faux pas by light-heartedly tweeting: “We’ve deleted the rogue tweet but rest assured the Red Cross is sober and we’ve confiscated the keys.” Best of all, [the incident led to more donations!](#) To err is human—and, on social media, being human is what counts.

Email Marketing

Reasons for Email Marketing

Social media may be all the rage these days, but email is still an important part of our online usage. In fact, the two can be mutually beneficial: the Chartered Institute of Marketing cites research that shows [“42% of social media users are checking their inboxes at least four times a day, compared to 24% of non-social media users”](#). Email marketing should still an important part of your game plan. And there are two main reasons to do email marketing: (1) to lure customers back to your site for repeat purchases, and (2) just to remind them that you exist.



Don't use your personal email account. Sending an email from dodgy_roger@gmail.com doesn't exactly convey professionalism, so make sure you're using a business-specific email account. It also pays to use proper email marketing software (e.g., Campaign Monitor, MailChimp), which makes sending to a large database of addresses easier, provides a simple way for people to unsubscribe from your list, gives you valuable information on click-through and open rates, and host of other handy features.

One way to build up your email database is by including a checkbox inviting buyers to register for email offers/updates during the purchasing process. That way, you can target your email marketing to people who are proven customers. Most email marketing systems let you create an email sign-up form that you can easily embed into your website (see the next chapter, Stage 7).

Ideas for Email Marketing

As usual, one place where people get stuck is on content. They don't know what to put in their marketing emails. Here's a few ideas:

- Promote special offers.
- Profile new products.
- Showcase feature products.
- Link to useful resources on your website e.g., a blog post, an e-book.

We've just scratched the surface of email marketing, but it could easily be an entire book on its own. So for more, go to the specialists. Campaign Monitor and MailChimp have tons of helpful information on the topic.

STAGE 8

Using Add-ons

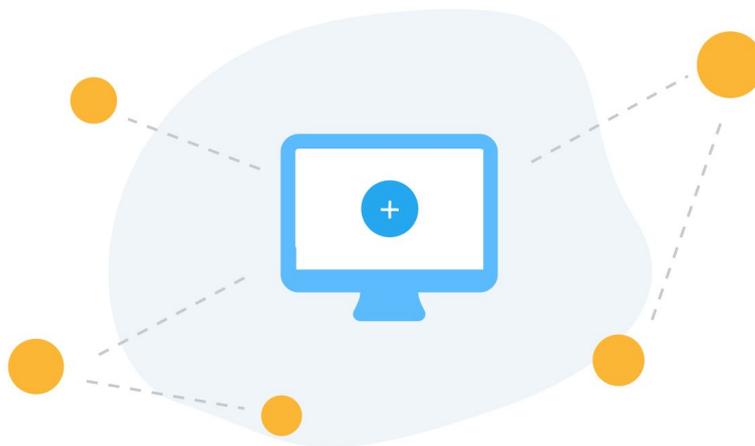
117 Exploring Add-Ons

- Accounting Software
- Point-of-Sale Software
- Online Booking Systems
- Email Marketing
- Forms
- CRM Systems
- And the Rest...

Sometimes it's better to do be really good at one thing than mediocre at lots of things. That's the philosophy behind add-ons. Your website platform should be able handle your general website needs, but if you want something specialised, you might need to use an add-on. Add-ons focus on doing a specific task—managing bookings, stock management, email campaigns—and doing it well. In this stage we look at specialist software that will serve as the ideal complement to your site.

Exploring Add-Ons

We're big fans of add-ons. And because they're so specialised, there's an add-on for everyone.



Accounting Software

As a business grows, areas of inefficiency become exaggerated. In Rocketspark's early days, we did all our accounts and reports using Excel spreadsheets. If we were starting again, we'd sign up for accounting software right from the start. A bootstrapped startup is always looking for ways to cut costs, but the time savings make accounting software well worth the money.

We use [Xero](#) for our accounting software. As a cloud-based system, accounts and reports are available online all the time from anywhere in the world. And, thanks to automated bank statement feeds, the bank reconciliation process is a piece of cake.

Some e-commerce platforms, including ours, connects your website directly with Xero so that when a sale is made on your online shop, an invoice is automatically generated in your accounting software. That means sales reports are updated in real-time, constantly providing you with a current picture of your progress for the day, month, and year, as well as what you've sold and to whom you sold it.

Point-of-Sale Software

If you're in "bricks-and-clicks" retail—that is, selling online and from a physical location—managing your sales across both arenas can be a major challenge. The challenge is amplified if you have limited stock or bespoke items where over- or double-selling could be a headache.

By connecting your online shop with your retail point-of-sale system, you can sell your products from a single stock-base and eliminate double-selling. Integrating the two systems also means that you only have to set up your products in one place and they'll automatically appear in both systems.

In our case, Rocketspark integrates with the [Vend POS system](#) seamlessly, the two-way communication between the two systems ensuring that an update in one system is automatically reflected in the other system.

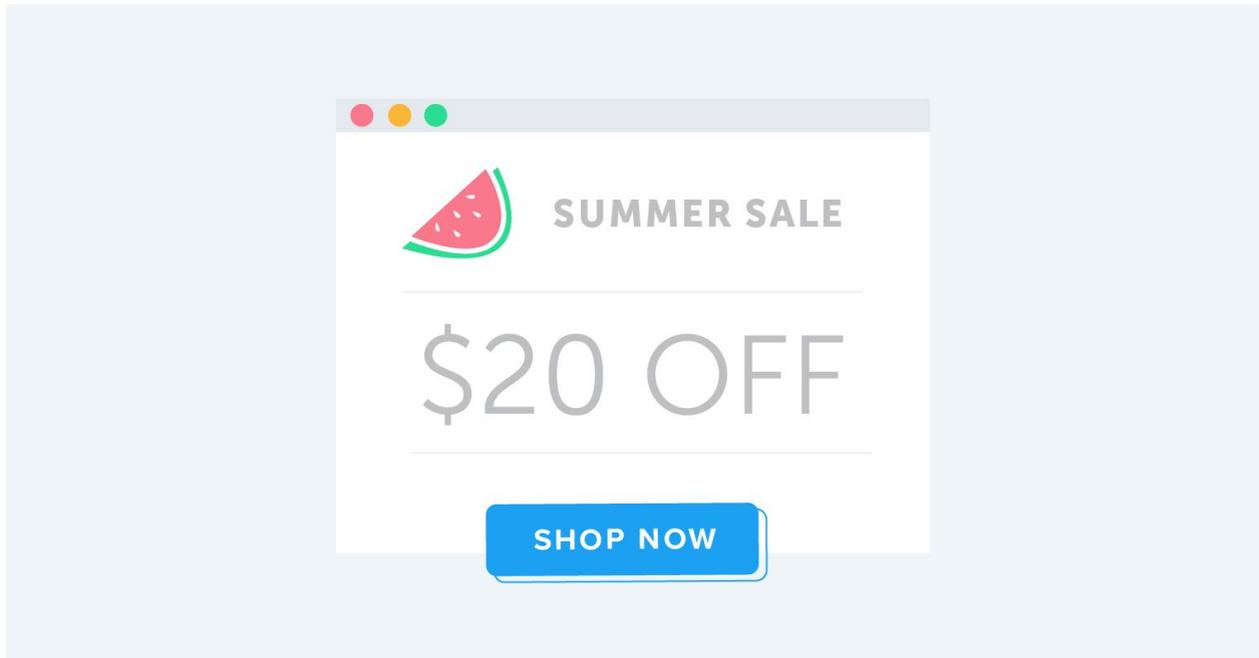
Online Booking Systems

Time is a scarce resource for a fledgling company. If you're running a service business, an online booking system will save you time taking bookings over the phone or email.

Many online booking systems provide you with a code that you can copy-and-paste into your website so that you can have your booking system seamlessly integrated with your website. There's a number of these booking systems, often specialising in specific industries. [Timely](#), for example, is geared towards businesses in the hair and beauty sector; [Checkfront](#) is designed specifically for accommodation, tours, and activities.

Email Marketing

Email marketing is a key piece of your digital marketing toolkit, so it's essential that you make signing up to your email database as easy as possible.



Most email marketing systems have a form builder that lets you create a registration form that you can embed into your website, allowing your customers and potential customers to fill out their details directly into your site. Our e-commerce platform, for example, has the ability to connect with [Campaign Monitor](#) email marketing system so that customers can opt-in at the point of purchase to receive future email updates.

Forms

A strong call-to-action is a powerful thing. For some businesses, an ideal call-to-action is an invitation to complete an online enquiry form. There are a number of good online form builders that let you to create your own contact form, and can be quite sophisticated incorporating extra features (e.g., online payment) and even dynamic forms where the questions change according to the user's earlier answers.

CRM Systems

Your list of clients and potential clients can be a powerful tool in your business. Knowing who your customers are, what they're interested in, or what they've have purchased previously gives you the chance to tailor special offers or send thank-you communications. Many CRM systems such as [SalesSeek](#) connect directly with your website.

And the Rest...

There is a huge range of add-ons out there. The challenge is selecting ones that work best for you. Plenty of add-ons let you trial the software for free, allowing you to try before you buy, while others even have a free plan for startups.



[GET MORE AT OUR WEBSITE](#)

rocketspark.com/add-ons

We've got a list of our favourite add-ons online including links to their sites.

STAGE 9

Managing the Technical Stuff

122 Domains, DNS, Nameservers, Hosting, CMS and Email Hosting

Domain Name

Website Hosting

Email Accounts

Content Management System CMS

There's just no getting away from it: there's some technical stuff to think about. But you don't have to be a certified computer geek to navigate this terrain. In this stage, we explain a few of the more technical aspects of having a website in plain English.

Domains, DNS and Nameservers, Hosting, CMS and Email Hosting

Domain Name

Put simply, a domain name is your website address. Different parts of a domain name do different things. Your domain can be set to point to your website hosting to enable people to get to your website. Your domain can also be set to point to your email hosting so that you can set up email accounts to match your domain.

If you're using an email marketing system, you'll need to follow their instructions to verify or validate your domain so that the system can send emails using your email address.



Warning: Once you've settled on a domain name, make sure you put the domain in your name so that, in the event of an ownership dispute, you can easily prove your ownership. That might sound obvious but some shady web companies register domains in their own name and then try to hold you hostage if you leave.



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We give some guidance about how to handle domain ownership disputes just in case you find yourself in that particular sticky spot.

Website Hosting

A website is stored on type of computer called a server. That's right: your website is stored on an actual computer. And like any time you buy a brand-new computer, a high-quality hosting service will help ensure you have a fast-loading website. If you use a website builder like Rocketspark, the website hosting is usually included in a monthly or annual fee.

Email Accounts

Don't underestimate the value of having a business email address. It's a must-have. Your email doesn't need to be hosted at the same place as your website hosting. Instead, you might like to use popular, quality email services like Google Apps Email Service and Office 365 from Microsoft. Your website company may also offer an email service, but it's smart to check with your provider that the email is hosted on different servers. Why? If one host fails, at least part of your business will remain in operation. Be careful of services offering huge storage space for unlimited email accounts for a small fee; typically the storage is capped across all the accounts and your website content too which can result in your inbox filling up quickly and missing valuable emails.



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[*rocketspark.com/blog*](https://rocketspark.com/blog)

We outline the lengths we go to in order to ensure our clients' data stays safe and secure.

Content Management System CMS

You can update your website without knowing highly specialised computer programming code. How? Using a content management system (CMS). A CMS is website software that lets average computer users edit and update their website.

CMS can be classed as either proprietary or open-source. The difference lies in the source code.

Proprietary CMS

When a web firm keeps its source code under wraps, then that's a proprietary CMS. It's a "fenced garden" approach which means the code can be less customisable but the provider takes care of all the techy bits for you such as backups and software updates for new features and security enhancements. Example: Rocketspark.

Open-Source CMS

To build a website requires a "source code", and an open-source CMS like WordPress freely shares its code with anyone who wants to use it. It's an "open garden" approach which can be more customisable in the hands of an expert. Example: WordPress.



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We pit the Wordpress CMS against our own CMS to see how they stack up.

It'll give you an idea of the pros and cons of proprietary and open-source systems.

STAGE 10

The Extras

126 [Questions to Ask Your Website Provider](#)

130 [Website Building Checklist](#)

131 [Glossary](#)

Phew, you're almost there! We've covered all the fundamentals of launching a website, but you may feel like you're still a beginner. Don't worry: your confidence will grow over time. In the meantime, we've included in this stage a few extras: questions to ask your website provider, a glossary of terms, and even a checklist—bits n' pieces that will come in handy.

Questions to Ask Your Website Provider

Sometimes it's hard to know what to ask your website provider. In this section, we offer a few possible questions to help you figure out if it's the right provider for you.

How many pages can I have?

It's important to know if there are any page limits on their system. If you're outsourcing the website design, it pays to check how many pages they'll create for you.

What's the design process?

If you're having the website designed for you, it's important to be clear from the outset what the design process is. It might look something like this:

1. Initial consultation (phone, Skype/Google Hangout, or personal meeting).
2. Develop design brief
3. Quotation provided for design and development
4. Deposit payment as commitment to project
5. Homepage design
6. Feedback given on design concepts (to be funnelled down to final design)
7. Progress payment
8. Development
9. Full website review

10. CMS training
11. Final payment and go live

Will I own the design and intellectual property rights of my website?

It's vitally important to determine upfront that you own the designs to your website and not the website provider. The slowest part of creating a website is gathering the content and creating the design, so you need to be confident that, if unhappy with anything, you can move elsewhere and take your design without facing any legal hurdles.

We have a “no hostages” approach at Rocketspark (and, for the websites that we custom design with bespoke templates, we even promise to provide the original photoshop files). But, unfortunately, not all website providers work this way. If there are all sorts of catches—like long-term contracts and design ownership—that's a big red flag. Proceed with caution.

Will the website be easy to view on mobile devices?

Having a mobile-friendly website is a non-negotiable in today's world, where users are just as likely to be viewing your site on a phone or tablet than on a computer. But some designers charge extra to create a mobile-optimised site, so make sure you know what this provider offers on the mobile front.

Will I have to add content to my new website before it goes live or will you do it?

Some providers will expect you to provide all the content (i.e., text); others will have copywriters who can create content themselves. Make sure you know who's taking care of what.

Which payment gateway would you recommend for my online shop?

There are a number of systems out there for taking payments, each with their pros and cons. One of the key questions to ask: Does the system have a good reputation for ease-of-use at point-of-payment? That'll have a big impact on your conversion rates.

What level of SEO work is included?

SEO is often provided as a separate service, so it's a good idea to check what SEO (if any) is included in the package. Check out what expertise they have in providing SEO services, because it's a very specialised service.

Where is the website hosted?

We've found that hosting location can have a measurable impact on your search rankings. Local hosting is best if you're operating in a single market. If you operate internationally, there are services called Content Distribution Networks that spread your website onto various servers around the world.

What backups are provided?

You've spent serious time and effort creating a great website click by click, so the last thing you want is to lose it all! That's why making sure your provider rigorously backs up your site is an absolute must. For example, at Rocketspark we do daily backups and we backup across different servers with different companies for added protection.

Will my website work well on all web browsers?

There are a lot of different web browsers out there, and they're constantly updating. If your provider isn't careful, your website might not work properly on a particular browser (or particular version). At Rocketspark, we put a lot of energy into ensuring that our websites work consistently across all of the major browsers. Be sure to ask what sort of browser checking your provider performs.

What are the ongoing costs?

Ongoing costs are something to watch out for, specifically:

- Hosting cost and any limitations on traffic or website size
- Any special licences such as booking systems or fonts
- Support and training costs
- Software updates
- System maintenance: security updates, support for new browsers, new features

How will I manage the website content after it goes live?

It's important that you have access to your website's CMS and that you can freely make updates to the website yourself. If you have to ask a web developer to update your website every time you need to change the wording or add a picture, costs will soon skyrocket.

Does your quote include training and support?

Find out what training and support is provided and whether it carries a cost. At Rocketspark, we've provide support to our customers at no extra cost, but not all providers offer free and ongoing support, so it pays to do your homework.

I recommend you ask for a demonstration of the CMS before you start your project too, so you can be confident that updating your website will be easy for you.

If I transfer my domain name to you will I still be the owner?

Beware: some (shady) web companies list themselves as the "registrant", meaning they effectively own the domain. If you decide to leave that provider, they may not let you take your domain with you. So it's crucial you make sure that you'll still be listed as the "registrant" to establish that you are the owner of the domain.

Can you provide some referees?

The proof of the pudding is in the eating. So, before you commit, ask previous clients about their experiences with the provider. Ask your provider for examples of their most recent project and a contact person you can speak to.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Checklist

- 1. Choose and register a domain
- 2. Set up your business email
- 3. Register social media accounts
- 4. Write your website content
- 5. Get photos
- 6. Design website
- 7. Review website
- 8. User testing
- 9. SEO
- 10. Social media connected to website
- 11. Go live
- 12. Write great content in your blog
- 13. Share the content on social media and by email
- 14. Repeat steps 12 and 13
- 15. Look after new customers and clients

Glossary

301 redirect

A way of directing traffic from an obsolete web address to a new one. So if you change your web address, this will ensure visitors who type in your old address will still end up at your new address. If you change your URL structure, it's a good idea to set up 301 redirects so you don't lose the search ranking value of any existing pages that are ranking well and generating new business for you. Also called a permanent redirect.

A/B testing

A clever process whereby you test two different versions of a web page at the same time. It's an excellent method for testing different ideas and learning what works best. There is a lot of A/B testing software available that will make this a cinch.

browser caching

The downloading and storing of content that your web browser performs each time you visit a webpage. Stashing away a little bit of content enables your browser to load that page faster next time you visit. So, as you can see, it's pretty handy, but it can be a hassle when developing a website, because it might not display recent updates correctly. When developing your site, you should regularly clear the browser cache.

clickbait

Content associated with a link (e.g., a hyperlink, a button) that grabs your attention, thereby enticing you to click the link.

digital marketing

Any marketing activity carried out on digital platforms like websites, social media, and email.

domain

The "name" of your website, which also doubles as your website address (e.g., rocketspark.com).

duplicate content penalties

Search engines' (e.g., Google) practice of filtering out from the search results websites or webpages that have large chunks of content identical or extremely similar to another. For this reason, copy-and-pasting the same text onto multiple pages of your site is not recommended.

favicon

The little icon associated with a website that appears as a symbol on bookmarks lists, favourites toolbars, and sometimes in the URL bar. Usually it is a modified version of the website's logo.

image caching engine

The thing that optimises large images (in terms of file size) so they can be loaded on the webpage quickly without having to first shrink those image files before uploading them.

keyword stuffing

The practice of cramming an inordinately large number of a particular word or phrase relevant to your website ("keywords") into the site's text in order to rank higher in search engine results. This dubious SEO technique used to be common before search engines began penalising it.

load time

The time that it takes for a webpage to display when being visited.

long-tail searches

Search queries (performed in search engines e.g., Google) consisting of 3+ words. Tailoring your website to attract these less popular but highly specific (and, therefore, potentially lucrative) search queries is a practice called "long-tail SEO".

opt-in

The option given to a visitor, required by law in many countries, to register for future communications from that website (as opposed to being automatically added to the website's database).

search algorithm

The sophisticated formula a search engine (e.g., Google) uses to determine the order in which search results are displayed. Load time, keywords, links, and dozens (even hundreds) of other factors are included in such algorithms.

search engine optimisation (SEO)

Optimising your site to rank highly in search engine results. This is a very involved process, requiring a lot of research. Get started by checking out Stage 5 of this guide.

secure site (SSL, HTTPS)

A website with extra security features that protect visitors' information (e.g., credit card details) from being stolen. More specifically, it has security certificates and operates as an HTTPS site (rather than the usual, less secure HTTP site), ensuring that transfer of information between a user and the website is done securely. You can spot a secure site by looking at the URL bar; if a padlock is showing and the web address start with HTTPS, you're at a secure site. (To make your website secure, ask your website developer.)

server

The place where a website is actually located ("hosted") i.e., a specialised computer that manages access to websites. You might update a website from your computer, but your website actually "lives" elsewhere—on a different computing system designed specifically for hosting.