

BUILDING YOUR ONLINE PLATFORM

WHO TO USE - WHAT TO USE - WHY TO USE IT

THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO GO ONLINE

I am going to give a brief overview of some of the best options of your business, and the various ways to go about it. Just to note I will be referring to online as a website (but this includes advanced web and mobile apps also)

For any website, there are 4 main elements to take into account:

- Building your website
- Updating Content
- General Maintenance of the Website
- Hosting

Who will build your site? e.g. Agency, Freelancer or DIY

What platform will you use? e.g. WordPress, Shopify, Wix, Magento, etc

First it is important to understand what goes into a website and how it is built.

Let's compare a Website to a House.

Your House	Your Website
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Location: It needs to have a location i.e. be located in a country, in a city, in a neighbourhood, in a street.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● This is where you host your website.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Material: You will need to build that house out of something: Bricks, Concrete, Steel, Wood etc	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● This is the platform that you choose to build your website.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Aesthetics: You will need to work on the design of your house, so that it is not an empty shell.<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Paint○ Flooring○ Furniture	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● This is the design of your website.● What the user sees when they visit your website.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Maintenance: You need to do maintenance on your house. Fixing roof leaks, electrical and plumbing issues, the basic wear and tear of your house.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● This is the maintenance that is required for your website, and this can be the site itself, or it can be the server where the site is being hosted.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Offering: You will need to offer guests something when they arrive.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● This is the content on the website. Is it fresh, is it helpful, is it enjoyable. What are you offering your visitor?

REMEMBER!

When you decide to build your website, some things you can change others you can't...

unless you want to bash it down and start over.

You don't have to build a mansion that was designed by the top architect in the world.
You build what you think you will need, and scale up as you or your users require it.

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WHO TO USE?

TYPES OF SUPPLIERS

3 WAYS TO BUILD A WEBSITE

- Using an Agency
- Using a Freelancer
- Do it yourself (DIY)

If you go with option 1 or 2 - try to look at them as your partner. They are there to help you grow your business.

They should understand:

- your brand
- your online requirements
- your long term goals, and help you achieve them.

IN GENERAL:

- Make sure you have a sit down meeting with the agency. (online or in person)
- Do not just ask them to quote you on a website.
- Be specific - you want an online shop, you want an online chat, you want these specific pages and functionality. Always try to provide references.
- This is vital, because you want them to understand what you are looking to build.
- It will avoid scope creep - which is an absolute pain for both parties, and you want to make sure it is 100% clear what you are receiving for what you are paying.

AGENCY

If they are a trustworthy agency, they should offer you a lot of guidance in terms of the various options and solutions out there that may work for you.

AGENCY PROS

- They will generally have an in house team. E.g Account Managers, Project Managers, Designers, and Web Developers, and Marketing Managers.
- This means that the team is most likely, all working together on your project, making sure all the boxes are being ticked.
- They are able to assign multiple team members to your project e.g If the designer or developer working on your project gets sick, they can assign it to another team member to carry on the work.
- They have a huge collective experience and having multiple experts looking at your project, can not be taken for granted... This is a major advantage when building out a website.
- The owner of the agency is most likely pushing his staff to take courses to increase their knowledge and skill set.
- If your agency is doing all the work - i.e. design, development, hosting, maintenance and something goes wrong everything is under one roof, so that issue will be resolved quickly.

AGENCY CONS

- The biggest con - It will always end up the most expensive route, as their overheads are much higher than a freelancer or if you are doing it yourself.

Just to note:

For web development, often agencies have a preferred platform to work with, and they may try to push you to go with a certain platform.

This is not always a bad thing, as the more experienced an agency is with a specific platform, the quicker and easier things are to build out, which may make the project cheaper in the long run...however, they should be honest enough to know if their platform of choice is not right for your project.

FREELANCER

The freelancer route - is the middle ground between Agency and DIY.

They are a one man show, who are either doing aspects of the work for you, e.g. the design and then outsourcing the development, or they are using a platform that they know very well, and will suggest that to you.

FREELANCER PROS

- They will be much cheaper than an Agency. Their overheads are low, they can work from home, they don't have office rent, or employees to worry about.
- You are engaging with one person, and often clients like to deal directly with the person who is doing their work.

FREELANCER CONS

- Their capacity is quite limited. If you require them to work on your project in the future, it may be that they are too busy to do additional work when you need it, especially if it's urgent.
- They are a one man show. If they get sick or go away, or basically don't return your calls, there is nothing you can really do. There are no offices to call or account managers to complain to.
- They are generally experts in one area. A high end website build requires User Experience Design, User Interface Design, Development, SEO. Either the freelancer will outsource some of that, or may have a very basic understanding of it.

Just to note:

You may end up using 1 freelancer for design, another for the development, and another for the marketing. Sometimes you can fall into a "Blame Game" scenario - where no one wants to take responsibility for an issue or outcome.

Do It Yourself (DIY)

If you have absolutely no budget, and you are willing to learn a new software, and are happy if things are not 100% this could be a great option.

This works for an MVP (Minimum Viable Product) i.e. to get something up that will function, and as your revenue grows, your site can evolve.

DIY PROS

- The DIY route is potentially the most cost effective route, but that also depends on how much you value your time and what your skill set is.
- If you have time to educate yourself, and upskill yourself, you will learn A TON about the online world.
- If you follow the steps and speak to relevant support - you will get something live and functioning that will do the job. It may not optimise or convert perfectly, but if for example your goal is to sell something online - you will be able to do this on your own.

DIY CONS

- If you have no experience in web design and development, depending on what you need, and what you want to create, it can become the most frustrating way to build something.
- If you come up against resistance, which you will... it can be very demotivating.
- Time vs Money... Eventually there is a crossover where you all the time you have spent does ultimately equate to money in the bank. That is a choice you have to make. It is unlikely that you will be converting as many users.

Just to note:

This is purely, in my opinion, a question of budget. If you have very little, I would suggest this route coupled with using your budget to get some guidance from an expert.

Example: The 17 year old Israeli with an online Golf Shop.

WHAT TO USE?

TYPES OF PLATFORMS

THERE ARE MANY PLATFORMS TO CHOOSE FROM

It is vital that you choose the right platform for your business so that you do not end up having to rebuild your site and waste your initial time and money.

To name a few:

- WordPress
- Shopify
- Square Space
- Magento
- Wix
- Joomla
- Weebly
- Web Flow
- Open Cart
- PrestaShop
- Craft

And the list goes on...

REMEMBER!

There is no quick fix in migrating your site to a new platform.

All these platforms have their pros and cons.
We will go through 3 of them which I have found to be the most popular.

It is vital to remember, these are just a few of the Pros and Cons.
Please further educate yourself on the Pros and Cons of each platform.

SHOPIFY
WORDPRESS
WIX

SHOPIFY

SHOPIFY IN GENERAL:

- Built for eCommerce.
- Commercial product - you pay for the service on a monthly basis.
- More for beginners - quick and easy to get something set up.

SHOPIFY PROS

- Shopify is a hosted solution (they take care of the hosting, and security, maintenance etc)
- Tons of beautiful responsive store themes to choose from (most are paid)
- Good customer support
- Great app store for extending the functionality of your website
- Easy to use
- Large community of dedicated fans

SHOPIFY CONS

- There's a fee for every transaction (over and above the payment gateway fee)
- All the apps/addons/plugins can end up costing quite a lot of money as you extend functionality.
- There are less Shopify developers compared to e.g WordPress developers.
- For custom work, developers hourly rates are generally higher.
- Generally things do take longer to build out compared to e.g. WordPress

WORDPRESS

WORDPRESS IN GENERAL:

- Open Source - it is free to use.
- Built for beginners to advanced users.
- Very scalable.

WORDPRESS PROS

- WordPress is free and gives you complete control of your website, the website files and data.
- Massive collection of plugins/addons.
- It powers 25% of the internet, it is extremely popular, and nearly everyone has an add-on for it.
- Tons of beautiful responsive store themes to choose from, which are often free.
- It is very scalable. You can move from your site being a blog based website, to an e-commerce based site very easily.

WORDPRESS CONS

- No customer support - its community based. Support will come from theme developers, or your freelancer or agency.
- Self Hosted Solution - you or a third party will be required to do the maintenance (security updates, plugin updates etc).
- You do not need to learn coding to use WordPress. However, some basic knowledge of HTML and CSS will make things a lot easier. Most beginners acquire these basic skills as they use WordPress

WIX

WIX IN GENERAL:

- Commercial product - you pay for the service.
- Built for beginners - quick and easy to get something set up.
- It's unlikely you will use Wix for very advanced web applications.

WIX PROS

- Built as a drag and drop website builder - what you see is what the end user sees. Making it very easy to work with for a beginner.
- If you are a designer, you will probably enjoy this option the most.
- Their support and Help Center is very good.
- Reasonably priced
- Very quick and easy to get a website up and running.
- Built in free stock images to use on your website.

WIX CONS

- Wix does not use responsive design - it uses absolute positioning. It may just make things a bit more complicated to get it looking perfect across as screen sizes and devices.
- Currently for e-commerce it offers less payment gateway options - which could be a vital detail if you are building an e-commerce site.
- Less available add-ons/plugins compared to Shopify or WordPress
- If you choose a template, you have to stick with it, unless you want to rework the entire website design.
- There is no option for multi-currency if you want to open an e-commerce store.

SUMMARY

What I tell our clients all the time, is that the best platform for you, is determined on what you are looking to build. e.g. If you do not want to sell online - definitely do not use Shopify

If you are going to be building this site as your main source of income, I generally suggest against the DIY route, unless you have absolutely no budget.

If you you go the DIY route, rather spend some of that budget, to consult with an expert to help guide you. It will end up saving you a lot of time and money, either by allowing you to generate more sales quicker, or by stopping you from choosing the wrong platform to build off.

**A few trade secrets (...or thoughts rather)
to help you along the way.**

- A good agency or freelancer, listens more than they talk. If they start giving you advice without asking questions or understanding your business - be weary.
- “Built With” and similar software - allow you to see what platforms and add-ons are being used on other business sites - if there is something specific you like, it’s possible they are using a specific plugin or addon that you can install yourself.
- Often clients believe that a platform dictates how their website will look. The platform is the engine of the website. The front end can look anyway you want it to.
- If you are using any Open Source Software - never ever just click on that button that says “Update Now”. It can very easily break your site, and leave you in a state of panic. If you are going to be doing all updates yourself, do it in a staging environment and check everything is working 100% - then push it from your staging environment to your live environment (generally this is a one click process).
- Do a reverse Google Image Search for Stock photos, sometimes you may be lucky and find another site offering the same image for free.

- Just because your site looks good, it does not mean that it will function well - check the loading speed of your site using Pingdom, or PageSpeed Insights . If your site loads slowly, you will lose potential users. These sites will help diagnose the problems for you.
- The most valuable currency in the world is not dollars or pounds. It is ATTENTION. Make sure you budget for solid marketing. Websites do not rely on the idea of “If you build it, they will come” Don’t build your mansion and not have anyone to visit.
- Your website is a tool to make you money - do not get too attached to it. The goal for all businesses is to generate revenue. Your site needs to help you do that.
- Your brand is so much more than your logo - Nike, Apple, Google, their logos are not mind blowing, it is their entire brand and marketing strategy that dictates what you feel when you see those logos. Make sure you focus on your brand, and not just your logo.
- Douche Tax :) It is a real thing :) - be nice to your freelancer or agency. If you are nice, they will throw things in for free. If you are not, they will up their prices purely because of the way you interact with them. Be critical and make sure you are 100% happy with their work, but don’t be a douche :)