**Know the essentials regarding website ownership and today’s DIY platforms**

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By Nora Firestone

The consumer (a.k.a. DIY) website trend has flourished since its circa-2007 initiation by those who recognized the growing desire for enterprising site owners to be less dependent on busy developers and pricy hosts and more in control of the virtual branch of their businesses. Consumer website platforms, such as Wix, Weebly, WordPress and Shopify, offer an array of professional features and support search engine optimization, or SEO, all at different package price points. Generally, they’re so evolved and efficient that even professional website designers use them. It’s easy, however, for nay-sayers to debunk the DIY option based on stories of frustration and overwhelm from those who’ve “tried” but not succeeded because they lacked knowledge or got hooked on ill-suited products.

The key to successful DIY website building is the application of the right combination of knowledge, tools/products and guidance. I call it “directed DIY.” The following points from development of my “Design, Build and Manage Your Own Website” workshop, created in early 2012 to empower people to be masters of their own domains (literally), address the basics that anyone establishing a new website, especially those exploring the DIY option, should consider:

**Domain names/registrars**

Always register your domain ([www.example.com](http://www.example.com)) in your own account. Relinquishing this control would be like establishing your bank account in your accountant’s name. Select a domain name that’s short, memorable and isn’t uncommonly prone to misspellings. Try to incorporate a keyword or more.

Compare registrars and their costs for initial registration, renewals and transfers. Know that some top-level domains cost more to register or renew than others, regardless of registrar, and some increase in price from initial registration to renewal.

In general, the .com extension is most desirable, followed, typically, by .net and .org. Anyone can use .org; it’s not reserved for nonprofits.

Compare control you’ll have over domain name system, or DNS, record management. Some registrars charge extra for more control or limit the immediacy of your access for certain tasks; others don’t. Test-run customer support, too.

**Site-building platforms**

Think independently. “Most popular” doesn’t necessarily mean “the best.” “Most popular” pertains more to the quality of a marketing campaign than to the quality of a product. Consider the following:

How user-friendly is its editing platform? Some companies offer a bigger options menu than others, but may be wrought by a steeper learning curve, creating time- and comprehension-related obstacles that can slow or derail project completion. Others offer a more intuitive, beginner-friendly menu and enable the addition of advanced features and third-party tools as you need them.

Compare features at various price tiers, especially free, and consider your current budget. Does a specific platform let you export or easily redesign your site? Does it allow access to HTML/CSS for customized upgrades? Will it place ads on your site or charge additional fees for e-commerce? Will using your own domain require a paid upgrade? Does the platform facilitate back-end SEO techniques? How compatible is it with third-party tools?

**Your responsibilities**

No matter who builds your site, you are ultimately responsible for certain elements, including, but not solely:

* Content creation/collection: This includes written copy for pages; descriptions and pricing information regarding your products and services; images and their alt text; links to videos; and more. Your written content must reflect professionalism and attention to detail. Among other things, it should contain correct use of grammar, spelling and punctuation.\* Never copy the material of someone else and use it as your own. That's not only shameful behavior, but it's also illegal.
* Keyword selection and page, site and business titles and descriptions, all to be used in various ways on- and behind-page
* Ongoing SEO, promotion and content management: This typically includes use of social media and inbound links, the addition of fresh and relevant content, and overall site and content quality, authenticity and trustworthiness.
* Maintaining payment for your various site-related services

Free and easy implementation of third-party analytics tools will let you analyze traffic and health for marketing and site improvement purposes. Fear not; I’ve yet to discover a perfectly healthy site—mine’s not perfect from day to day, nor is Google’s own, and for numerous non-tragic reasons. Overall, building and managing a basic site yourself is relatively easy and inexpensive with the step-by-step guidance of “directed DIY.” With the right combination of knowledge and products, your site will facilitate growth and change while respecting your budget.

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*Nora Firestone is a professional writer, reporter and website designer. She also develops and leads instructional workshops and presentations pertaining to writing for small business, media relations/outreach and DIY website design/building. She can be reached at 757-705-7174 or via* [*www.stepbysteppresentations.com*](http://www.stepbysteppresentations.com)