

LIKE A REBEL

The tool you need to plan a stand-out website, find a kick ass designer who understands your unique goals, and end website shame for good.



So you know you need a new website. What's next?

You research your contemporaries/competitor's websites. You dream of an online presence that really reflects what you do, what you offer, and who you are. You browse through countless websites selling premium themes. You wonder where to start. Purchase a domain name? Get hosting? Start sketching out ideas in your moleskin? Contact a web designer?

Before you start cold-calling any designer with a pretty website or get overwhelmed with a huge list of unknowns and where-to-starts, you need to get specific on what you do, who you do it for, and how you want to show up online. THEN you'll be ready to find the person who will make your website dreams come true.

HOW DO YOU ACCOMPLISH THAT?

Start with the basics. Answer the questions below and you'll be surprised with the results when you're finished.

1. WHAT DO YOU DO AND WHO DO YOU DO IT FOR?

What is it that your company does? How do you make money? What is your role in the company? Who is your target market? Think of this as an elevator pitch; how would you describe what you do to someone in an elevator. Make it short, succinct, and specific.

For example: I transform the way visionary entrepreneurs, soulful innovators and ravishing risk-takers show up online.

2. KNOW YOUR GOAL: WHY DO YOU NEED A WEBSITE?

This may seem like a funny question, but it's important to know the reason WHY (other than "You MUST have a website if you're in business. Period.") you need a website. Describe the results that you want to achieve with your website.

For example: "I need a website in order to connect and engage with my market, serve valuable content, showcase my skills, and sell my services! The goal of my website is to grow my list, blog regularly, and attract more clients"

3. WHAT IS YOUR BRAND'S POSITION IN THE MARKET?

Do you identify as a luxury brand? A premium brand? An accessible brand? Think Crocs vs. TOMS vs. Manolo Blahnik. Each sell footwear, and yet have very different values and occupy very different positions in the market.

4. WHO ARE YOUR COMPETITORS/CONTEMPORARIES?

Who are your contemporaries/competitors and how do you differential yourself from them? What are they doing with their websites that works? What doesn't work?

Important note: don't get stuck in comparison-ville or the even more dreary imposter-complex-town. Although it's a good idea to check out what others are doing in your market, don't hang out there too long. You have a unique set of skills and an offer that's like no other offer. Why? Because of the key ingredient: YOU!!

5. WHAT IS YOUR SPECIAL SOMETHING?

This point piggy-backs right off of my last important note. Some call it your USP (Unique Selling Proposition), others call it your UAP (Unique Awesomeness Proposition). Whatever you call it, it's that thing that makes you unique. It's sets you and your offerings apart from everyone else out there. What problem do you solve for your people and how do you solve it differently than other folks?

6. WHAT ARE YOUR REQUIREMENTS AND HOW DO THEY FIT IN YOUR PROFIT PLAN?

Purposefully think about the components that you will need in a website and how they fit into your overall business plan. Think back to your business goals when you make a list of your website requirements. It's important to get clear on this before you contact a web designer because this will help you narrow down who you will contact.

For example: If you are selling a product like custom monogrammed toe socks, do you need a product gallery and a shopping cart? How will an email marketing system help grow your business? Do you need testimonials? How about a blog? Is that image slider really going to connect and engage with your audience in a meaningful way?

If anything on your list of requirements for your website does not specifically enhance or work toward your business & revenue goals, remove it from your list!

7. TIME LINE

When do you need your new website to be live for folks to use it? Keep in mind that a full web design project can take around six weeks or more, depending on your needs. Most design projects will start with a discovery, move into design, then development, then testing, and finally launch!

8. WHAT IS YOUR BUDGET?

Realistically, how much money can you spend on a website? It is important to know what your budget is so that you can set your expectations appropriately. You have two choices:

Get it all done for you by a professional: A full branding, custom website design and development package from the ground up can cost you anywhere between \$2,500 – \$20,000+ depending on who you work with and what options you are looking for.

If you have a more modest budget, you can do it yourself! Domain names cost around \$12/year, hosting around \$120/year, and “Premium” WordPress themes cost an average of \$65 each. If you do decide to design your website on your own, there are many things to consider. Enlisting the help of a professional to provide support in planning can be invaluable!

9. LET’S TALK ABOUT FEELINGS.

Describe the feelings that your new website should evoke. When your ideal customer arrives on your site, how do you want them to feel?

For example: Energized, comfortable, confident, relieved, inspired, safe, understood, at peace, desire, focused, heard, driven to action, connected, amazed, joyful, liberated, anticipatory... you get the drift!

10. WHAT'S YOUR SITE'S AESTHETIC?

Let's talk look and feel – describe your website's aesthetics and desired look. Use adjectives. Go wild. Dream big. Free-write words then go back and read them. Imagine what that looks like, how it feels, cross words off that don't resonate with you. Highlight ones that do. Use crayons, pastels, highlighters, art pens, anything that feels right and inspires you!

For example: Fresh, stylish, funky, cutting edge, sexy, bold, light, earthy, minimal, subdued, honest, industrial, friendly, accessible, luxurious, close, intimate, unique, outrageous, professional, exciting, etc.

YOU'VE FINISHED THE LIST. WHAT DO YOU DO NEXT?

Congratulations! You've written your very own creative brief! Now pat yourself on the back, pour yourself a refreshing drink, and relax. You've started the first steps in getting more clear about what you need in a website, for whom, and why.

When you've had a moment to reflect on your good work, the next step is to vet a web designer. You'll be more than ready for your first meeting!

PLACES TO FIND YOUR PERFECT WEB DESIGNER

1. Reach out to your networks and ask for referrals. Referrals are awesome, because not only do you know that you LOVE the designer's work, but you can also ask your friend/college what it was like to work with the designer! Ask them:

Would you recommend your web designer?

Would you hire them again?

What are you most happy about with their work?

What did you like least and most about working with them?

2. Look at the footer of websites you love. Scroll all the way down to the bottom of your favourite website. Chances are there's a link to the designer/developer's website down there!

3. Ask for referrals on social media. This is kinda like number one, but you have to remember to also ask for sample work. So, one extra step. You may have heard of places like oDesk, 99designs, or others and I suggest you steer clear of those. I've heard a few horror stories from clients and I am a STRONG believer in referrals!!

HAVE A FEW CONVERSATIONS TO FIND YOUR PERFECT WEB DESIGNER

Now that you've got a list of crazy awesome web designers, it's time to contact them and start a conversation! Here's a list of what you should do next:

1. Start with your creative brief

Email your potential web designer and send them your creative brief. Be very clear on what you are looking for and ask them if this is something that they do. You'll be surprised, some designers don't do code and some developers don't do design whereas others will do both! You'll want to hire a web designer/developer that knows WordPress, HTML and CSS. They need to have a professional level understanding of these three topics. Also know that you get what you pay for: web designers range in price and most are booked 2-6 months in advance.

Before you start it's good to get clear on what you need and what they can deliver.

2. Ask some questions

What kind of work lights you up?

What kinds of projects or people do you NOT like working on/with? You want to make sure that your website is something that your web designer is going to be passionately stoked to work on!

Are you experienced with complete branding? If you need to be branded, it is important to make sure that the designer does this kind of work or can suggest a colleague who does.

Can you share links to three live projects that you've completed? What your role was on each project? If you've never checked out these sites before, now is a great time to do even more homework. Are the websites in the designer's portfolio still live? Is the style/vibe something you can jive with? Contact the site owners and ask them the same questions you asked your friends/network!

What is your project process? You want to make sure that they have a discovery process and consider your goals when creating the overall user experience.

What is your preferred method of communication when working on a project? This is important. If you're a Google Hangout Gal and your designer's an email-only person, it'll probably not work!

What is your availability & responsiveness like? Make sure they have at least 24 or 48 hour response time. Ask about offering to pay them a retainer to have them on such a quick schedule.

What do people most like about working with you?

3. Ask for a proposal + contract

A proposal/contract protects both you and your designer. It ensures that you are both on the same page about the project and lists what will happen if and when things change. It is an industry standard to pay at least half of the entire fee up-front. Read through the proposal and ensure that your goals are all listed. If not, ask for a revised quote. You want everything to be lined out in a clear contract that is signed before you start any work or make any payments.

The proposal and contract should include these points:

Project and website goals

Are the costs clearly described? Not just the total project cost, but also any associated costs and whose responsibility they are.

What is your payment schedule?

Have clear deliverables with deadlines been established? You want to have a clear time frame and an understanding of what will happen if those deadlines are extended.

Are revisions included in the fee? How many revisions?

Who owns the creative work? Does ownership get transferred at some point? Do you have the rights to re-use the works on other projects or websites?

Will you receive the original files (Photoshop or Illustrator)?

What happens if it's not working out and one of you wants to cancel the project midway through?

4. Sign that contract + get prepped

Congratulations! You've found your perfect web designer. Now you've got a couple more steps to complete before you start your project together.

COMPILE YOUR BRANDING MATERIALS

If you're not doing branding with your designer, be prepared to supply your them with your branding collateral (brand guidelines, logos, colours, swatches, USP, fonts, mission, illustrations, goals, etc).

Don't have branding collateral yet? Do you know your ideal client, your USP? Are you stoked with a colour palette but not sure if it aligns with your company's goals? Super in love with a font? OK – now is the time to consult with a branding specialist. [Contact me](#) for a free consultation.

COMPILE YOUR COPY

This is a super-duper important step (actually, all the previous steps are really important!!). I think that I want to emphasize this step because it is usually the most neglected step in preparing for a web design project. Writing “epic” content that connects with your future most valuable clients is a big job that takes a lot longer than most folks think!! Your copy is also very important as it literally speaks to your target market, boosts search engine optimization, and is shareable!

Consider hiring a professional copywriter or allot twice as much time as you think writing will take you! Here are some of my favourite writing resources:

Paul Jarvis: [Focus on Your Content](#)

Nicole Baute: [Nicole Baute's Copy Coaching](#)

Abby Kerr: [Voice Bureau](#)

COMPILE YOUR IMAGERY

Have professional photos taken of you and your products. iPhone photos just won't cut it, folks. Professional photography will make a huge difference in boosting your credibility and will increase your web designer's ability to create the website of your dreams!

If you want custom graphics (icons, infographics, etc) created, or are not sure if you do, bring this up with your web designer. It is something that can be included in the deliverables of your design project; make sure that you are clear about what you want so that there are no misunderstandings.

Two articles on the importance of professional photography:

Lori Highby: [Why a professional photographer is important for your online presence](#)

Selena Soo: [The most important investment for your brand](#)

START BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

(Or nurture the ones you currently have!) Being successful online has a large part to do with relationships because markets are really just conversations. So start engaging with your audience and think of ways in which you can build a trust relationship with your followers. How does your best client like to communicate with you? Do you build this relationship through a email list? Social media? Guest posting? Local organizations? Publicity? Following are some great resources on how to build online relationships:

Marie Forleo: [Five simple steps to establish credibility and build your reputation fast](#)

Tara Gentile: [Products that resonate](#)

Tara Gentile: [Look at Me vs. Look at You](#)

Brigitte Lyons: [Get more content in front of more people](#)

Follow these steps and you'll be well prepared to get the website of your dreams!

ABOUT JAMIE LEIGH

Here's the thing not everyone realizes...

A DYNAMIC WEBSITE IS BOTH A WORK OF ART AND A FEAT OF TECHNOLOGY.

Which happens to be something I totally dig.

On one hand, I'm a heart-centred creative. I've got a degree in visual anthropology and I'm fascinated by the unique ways we express ourselves and our worldviews. I believe creativity is at the core of what makes us human—and I love humans.

But on the other, I'm all tech. In a past life, I was a network administrator. Industrial-strength passwords and redundant backups give me goosebumps.

I used to think those two sides of my identity were in conflict with each other. Crazy, right? Now I know the truth: like Marty and Doc, they're way stronger together.

So I create WordPress websites that are both smart AND beautiful. Just like you.

