

# WEB STRATEGY FOR STARTUPS

## INTRODUCTION

Getting your website done doesn't have to be overwhelming. There are many services and products out there now to make it easier for you; the challenge is navigating them all and deciding what you want.

## BRAND IDENTITY

No matter which of the strategies below you decide to pursue, always start with building your brand. This means you'll need to determine your brand identity. A brand identity could consist of just a logo but it usually goes deeper into typography and colors you choose use to represent your business.

Determining a budget is key. If you don't have much of a budget, you can go to a website such as [Fiverr](#) or [Guru](#) and spend as little as \$5, or you can follow the steps outlined in the section titled "Hire a Professional" for engaging a designer.

Remember, you get what you pay for, so if you want something unique that reflects your business, you will have to spend a bit more. If you're just getting started and are fine with the potential hassle of rebranding at a later date, (which could cost you more money, then going to a freelance website could work for you.

## DO I EVEN NEED A WEBSITE WHEN THERE'S MARKETPLACES?

The first question you should ask is do you even need a website? That is entirely up to you. It is definitely possible to dip your toes into the water of your own business by strictly running your business on different selling platforms.

## ETSY

For any furniture upseller [Etsy](#) should be strongly considered as your first (and maybe only) stop. Buyers who are looking for the product you are producing have almost certainly heard of Etsy.

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## ADVANTAGES

- Buyers are already there.
- Beautiful site design that is easy to navigate and find your product.
- Requires little technical skill, turnkey option.

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## DISADVANTAGES

- Fees – listing fee, transaction fee and credit card fees can cut into your profit margin.
- Competition – You will need to aggressively work on your product listings and descriptions to make sure they are able to be found.
- Identity – it's difficult to establish your own identity on a site where so many of the shops look the same.

## EBAY

[eBay](#) isn't just for buying used merchandise, many have established businesses selling handmade items on it. Its market is not as specific as Etsy's but that also translates into a bit less direct competition while reaching people who may not be aware of Etsy.

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## ADVANTAGES

- No listing fees, listings can automatically renew (unlike Etsy).
- Auction functionality can draw attention to a piece that might otherwise be missed. You can take advantage of the reserve if you wish as well as "buy it now".
- Turnkey with some close integration with [Paypal](#) which is well established and accepted.

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## DISADVANTAGES

- 10% selling fee cuts into profit margin.
- Hard to establish a shop identity with a platform with many different shops.
- May need to build reputation as a seller before sales come.

## FACEBOOK MARKETPLACE

Facebook Marketplace is the [latest player in town](#). Facebook's answer to Craigslist (which is also a valid platform to consider with a few perils), Facebook has built Marketplace into its mobile apps which makes it very easy to generate good looking listings.

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## ADVANTAGES

- Facebook has billions of users, people are there and using it regularly every day.
- Free (as of now, Facebook has not announced any plans to charge for Marketplace).

- Can cross post to different selling groups or to your friends or your own Page and then promote the post with an ad to boost attention.

## DISADVANTAGES

- Brand new platform and has not fully matured.
- Only on mobile app right now (desktop is coming).
- Mostly caters to local search, will be difficult to obtain a nationwide audience right now.

## YOUR WEBSITE AS YOUR HUB

The key thing to keep in mind when asking yourself if you even need a website is that your website should be your hub. While you can definitely run a business off a Facebook or Etsy page it will be difficult to attract buyers from across different channels without a website.

Also, if you consider that most people still like to use search to find the products they're looking for having your product among many Etsy results or not found all on Facebook (Facebook blocks Google's crawler robots).

## KEY MOTIVATORS FOR YOUR OWN WEBSITE

- Build your own brand identity to stand out from the crowd.
- Add credence to your professionalism.
- Showcase your portfolio of past pieces and sales so browsers can see your prior work.
- Doesn't tie you to a particular platform or another that forces you to start over if you switch or add a new one – you always have your website.
- Cross post between different platforms and social media networks to get the most attention.
- Drive search engine results to show up in searches (particularly if you focus on Local SEO).

## DO-IT-YOURSELF

You're already a do-it-yourselfer so we wouldn't be at all surprised if you wanted to carry that over to doing your website. Great! You can totally do it yourself if you want to. Let's take a look at some of your best options for doing it yourself.

## FREE BLOGGING OPTIONS

Maybe you don't need a full-blown website. You can still establish an identity for yourself and your product on a free blogging platform. Some examples include:

- [Tumblr](#)
- [WordPress.com](#)
- Facebook Pages
- [Medium](#)

All of these give you a quick and easy place to post some photos, do some articles and just establish yourself as an expert in your business. This is a great baby step to take after you've already established yourself on one of the

marketplace platforms we previously covered. In fact, many of these services offer free ways to integrate with those marketplaces.

While you will be limited at how much you can customize and make your own it's at no cost and can still be the next step in establishing your own brand for your business.

## TURNKEY WEBSITES

There are a ton of players in this space and we're just going to focus on the one we recommend. Whether it's [GoDaddy](#), [Wix](#) or [Weebly](#) there are literally hundreds of options in this space. Feel free to check them out for yourself and do your own research. They generally share some common traits:

- Offer templates to build your site from so you don't have to spend time designing.
- Have a drag and drop interface so you can easily get content from your computer to the site.
- Still allows you to buy your own domain name (i.e. myfurnitureshop.com) to use with their service, you can usually keep it if you move on later.
- Have an ecommerce functionality to allow you to sell your work on the site with a minimum of hassle. These will come in varying degrees of functionality and cost.

With that out of the way, let's talk about who we think is the best (if you don't have a brick and mortar location, if you have a brick and mortar store you may want to look at [Square](#) instead).

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## SQUARESPACE

[Squarespace](#) runs its own website platform and, unlike some of its competitors, that's all it does is focus on their website service. Here are some of the reasons we think Squarespace is the best option for a turnkey do-it-yourself website.

- Easiest interface with hundreds of theme options that make it easy to still be unique.
- Fantastic customer service and help available.
- Very inexpensive, \$12/month for a website and as little as \$26/month for a full ecommerce site on their fully built platform (virtually ZERO work for you to do).
- Outstanding reputation for uptime and speed.
- Customizable – you can still hire a designer, even some who specialize in Squarespace, to dive into the code and make a site completely customized for you on Squarespace's platform.

## TURNKEY ECOMMERCE

Similar to the turnkey websites there are also turnkey ecommerce solutions. These are ecommerce platforms that are built to quickly get up and selling and have a basic website or storefront functionality built in. The advantage of these sites is they are mainly geared toward the sales process.

If you are looking to stick local then doing a turnkey website is probably a better option. If you are looking to be someone who ships anywhere and do most of your selling online then a turnkey ecommerce site might be the better solution.

## SHOPIFY

[Shopify](#) is an ecommerce platform that scales anywhere from a one-person-shop selling out of her home to a brick and mortar store with a sales floor and staff to a full-fledged medium-sized business selling online. It truly is a one stop shop for doing ecommerce.

It offers a lot of the same advantages as the marketplace platforms with a lot more customization and a full workflow from selling, to tracking your business to shipping. It's a more complete solution to the marketplaces that can be made uniquely you.

Pricing starts at \$29 a month and can go on up to \$299 a month for larger businesses with employees who need access.

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### ADVANTAGES

- Start to finish turnkey solution for doing ecommerce.
- Scales to the size of business, you can start out small and scale as your business grows.
- Offer most of the advantages of being on one of the marketplace platforms.

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### DISADVANTAGES

- Much more complex than the marketplaces, has a learning curve.
- You can customize on your own but it's not as simple as Squarespace and a bit more limited without hiring a designer or coder to build your Shopify site.
- In addition to the monthly fee you have other processing fees that can begin to add up and cut into your profit margin.

## HIRE A PROFESSIONAL

Let's face it, being a do-it-yourselfer doesn't mean you want to do it **all** yourself. Maybe you envy the person who will change the oil on his car, you just don't have the time for that. Before diving into doing a website for yourself you should ask yourself:

- What is your time worth to you?
- How much time will you spend on this versus what you would pay a professional?
- Will you get a site that looks as good as your pieces if you do it yourself?

What a professional does building a website for you is not at all unlike what you do making your pieces – it's done professionally by someone who loves doing it and has the skill to do it better, faster and likely cheaper than you could do it yourself. So while we will applaud you if you want to tackle a website yourself it's cutting into your time scouting for more pieces, delivering commissioned work or bolstering your own portfolio, it might not be the best idea.

## PICKING A DESIGNER

This process is going to be some work; we encourage you to start a checklist outlining your goals for your business.

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## BUDGET

Figure out what you can spend. Any designer that walks into a project without discussing a budget with you is not a designer you want to use. He is either over his head or looking at you like an open checkbook.

Keep in mind that web design is like anything else and follow the triangle rule of costs:

- If you want it done fast and done right, it's not going to be done cheap.
- If you want it done right and done cheap, it's not going to be done fast.
- If you want it done fast and done cheap, it's not going to be done right.

Sit down and look at your profit and loss and figure out what you can spend. Look at some of your existing spending and if it is working for you or not, you might find you can cover your costs for a custom site by cutting back in other areas.

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## EXPERIENCE

If you made a post to Facebook looking for a web designer you are almost certain to get recommendations from friends that run the gamut from their nephew who never leaves the basement to someone who fixes computers and thinks he can do a website for you. You can use this method but we don't recommend it for finding someone.

Keep in mind, the name here is web **designer**. Yes, it is technical but it also requires someone who is artistic and can show attention to detail. If you want to pay for something that's going to stand out, it's not a bad idea to look for recommendations but don't take any if you don't see their work first.

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## SEARCH THEM

While there are many disciplines in digital marketing almost all designers at least know something about search engine optimization. Search a designer out. If a designer can't be found in search what are the chances they will be able to do it for you?

There's a lot that goes into this and you have to be mindful of paid ads in search results and that showing up first doesn't make you the best but it's a place to start.

- Search for designers on Google, Bing or what have you.
- Go to their site, how does it look? If it doesn't look professional do you think what they design for you will be?
- Look for a portfolio, they should have some of their work on display for you to peruse.
- Are there testimonials? Who are some of their clients and what do they think?

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## POST AN AD

There are many platforms now that you can use to find designers where they live:

- [Indeed](#) can let you place a free ad for your job that you need to have done.
- [LinkedIn Pro Finder](#) can help you put out a call for freelancers to bid on your project and give you an easy way to evaluate them.

- Sites like [Upwork](#) or [Guru](#) can let you post for free while sites like [Dribbble](#) will charge you \$375 but show you are serious about a real designer if you have a higher budget.

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## INTERVIEW THEM

Even a remote designer should be happy to bridge the distance gap and talk to you to build some comfort with her. Make a checklist of items you want to cover. This checklist [can be small](#) or [it can be large](#). Take a look at some lists and pick the things you feel are most important to you.

Designers are different in how they work so they might not necessarily fit in the same hole for all these questions. For instance, you might have a designer that specializes in building sites on a Content Management System (i.e. WordPress or Drupal) and may have varying tools they use to build their site. Your designer might know a lot about SEO or she might know none. Your designer might do graphic design like logos and branding or he might contract that out.

The important thing is: stick to your goals you wrote out above and make sure you get those addressed. Don't expect to get it all for free. Anyone who is promising you a website for a few hundred dollars fully customized for you with original art and top three SEO results is too good to be true. Expect to pay for a good designer.

If you don't have much of a budget but still want a great design then finding someone who is a recent student (either a college, vocational or even an online school) or maybe someone who's making a career change can save you some money. You help build her portfolio and she helps you with a great site at a great price.

## A WEBSITE IS NEVER DONE

To wrap up we want to leave you with this sage advice about websites – they are never “done”. If you think it's done, you have (or will have) a bad website. Having a website is not like *Field of Dreams* where you build it and people come with their money to give you. It's work – continued work you need to decide will be done by whom, yourself or others. Money spent on the best design in the world will be wasted if the site isn't regularly updated.

Every search engine uses age of content when ranking it in search results. A website that is updated on a frequent basis will almost always rank higher than one that is not. “Business card” websites are fine if that's all you can afford for now or all you have time for. Just don't put unrealistic expectations on them, they aren't doing much for you.

As we said above, your website should be the hub of your online presence and with the right strategy it will open the doors to customers you didn't even know existed. Develop your plan and follow through to grow your business and achieve the lifestyle you are after doing what you love.

## CHECKLIST