

WHO WHAT WHY

A Quick Guide to Small Business Websites



Why your business needs a website

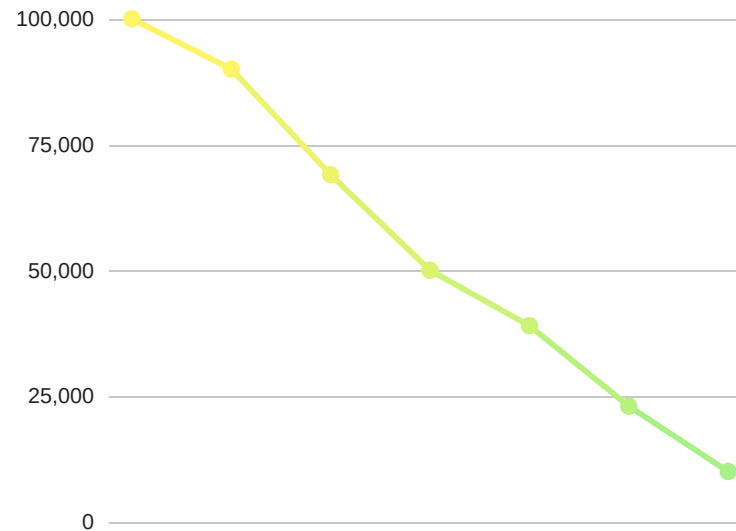


36% of consumers find new businesses through online search.

That's roughly equal to the percentage of consumers who report finding new businesses through word-of-mouth, making an online presence just as important to the average consumer as the reviews of their friends and family (1).



Keeping up with the competition



64% of consumers prefer to buy from a business with an online presence. If you don't have a website, you're almost certainly losing sales to your web savvy competitors (2).

84%

of consumers surveyed by Verisign said they considered businesses with websites, rather than just social media pages, to be more credible (2).

34%

of consumers surveyed by OwnerNation said that they were unlikely to make any purchases from a business that doesn't have a website (1).

If you think your company doesn't need a website, or if you think social media pages can serve as a replacement, think again. In today's digital world, a company website lends invaluable credibility to your business.

What your website needs



Building Your Website

Convinced your business needs a website, but feeling a little overwhelmed by the process? In this section, we'll breakdown some of the important costs and considerations to keep in mind when setting up your new site.

Websites can be broken down into two types: Static and Dynamic

Static websites contain pages that are not often (or easily) updated. Each page is built with HTML (Hyper-text markup language), uploaded to the server, and then left alone.

Dynamic websites have pages that are constantly being updated and changed. The site may run off of a database where all of the information is stored, utilizing a Content Management System (CMS).

Most dynamic websites use a Content Management System (CMS), allowing you to easily manage your own site content on a day-to-day basis without the help of the website's designer.

Popular Content Management Systems include:

- Wordpress
- Drupal
- Joomla

[Click here to learn more about CMS and Static vs. Dynamic websites on the Barred Owl Web blog.](#)

4/5

consumers use a smartphone to do their online shopping (3).

50%

of those searching for local businesses via mobile will visit the physical location within a day (4).

Today's consumers are accustomed to finding information and making purchases anywhere, anytime. To get the most out of your website, it must be mobile-friendly.

There are a few different ways to achieve a mobile-friendly website, including:

Responsive website design

With RWD, your website is designed to reformat itself for various types of screens, allowing it to display differently, and in the most easily readable manner, whether it's visited on mobile, tablet, or desktop.

Adaptive mobile site

Some website content, such as forms and certain graphics, simply won't look the same or work quite as well when resized for smaller screens. To combat this, some companies use the adaptive mobile approach.

Rather than simply taking the same content and resizing it for various screens, adaptive mobile sites are created specifically for mobile. Essentially, it's a second website created to look like your desktop site, but with mobile specifications in mind.





Web Hosting

Though it may seem like it, the internet isn't magic. It's actually comprised of a system of highly complex networks, servers, and routers.

Websites, including yours, exist on these servers. Companies such as Barred Owl Web host your website on one of these sophisticated pieces of equipment, maintaining the proper configurations and providing 24/7 monitoring to ensure your site stays online.

There are a variety of web hosting options, each with their own pros and cons. Read on for our breakdown of the various types of hosting and what they can offer your business.

Shared hosting covers the essential needs of most users. It's the perfect fit for companies with smaller websites and moderate web traffic.

Websites on a shared web hosting account “share” server resources (such as a physical server’s hard drive, memory, and processor) with other websites. Depending on how big the actual server is, there could be a dozen, or even hundreds of websites sharing the same server.

***Contact Barred Owl Web today to learn more
about our reliable, affordable shared hosting options***

Virtual Private Servers (VPS) are separate, private servers stored on the same piece of hardware. Unlike shared hosting, each server's resources are completely private.

A VPS guarantees a set amount of RAM and disk space for each customer, though they typically don't have as much RAM as dedicated, physical servers. Clients are usually given SSH (command line) access to the server. This makes it easy to update website files, make database backups, and more.

Clients can opt for managed or unmanaged VPS services. Managed services essentially mean that software & security updates to the server's operating system are taken care of by the web host. For the vast majority of users, this is the simplest and safest option.

***Contact Barred Owl Web today to learn more about our
Managed VPS services***

Cloud hosting providers maintain several physical servers. If a single server suddenly crashes, the website and/or data stored in the cloud environment continues to work.

Dedicated servers are physical servers used for a single client. When a client signs up for a dedicated server, they know exactly how much CPU processing power, RAM, hard disk space, and bandwidth they are going to get – guaranteed. There are no virtual private servers running on the dedicated server – the physical hardware is completely in the power of the single client who rents it. However, the dedicated server is only rented for a certain amount of time and is not actually owned by the client.

Colocation allows companies that own their physical hardware, to place their servers into a datacenter managed by a different company. The client in this case will rent power and space in the datacenter for the server(s), and pay for internet service provider costs. Because the server infrastructure is owned by the client, everything else is up to the client – configuring the server, installing the operating system, and making sure the website continues to be available. Note that the client can sometimes pay an additional fee to the Colocation provider for these managed services.


[Click to learn more about the different types of web hosting options](#)



Domain Names

Your domain name is your website name. For example, the domain for Barred Owl Web is barredowlweb.com.

The domain name will be an ongoing cost, but it's a valuable investment. It's one of the most important aspects of the site creation process because it defines how people access your website.



There are three important factors to keep in mind when creating your domain name:

Make it memorable

Ensure customers can return to your site quickly by selecting a domain name that they can easily remember.

Choose something that's easy to type

If your web address is something that could easily be misspelled or mistyped, your customers may get lost on the information highway.

Shorter is better

Long domain names tend to be both harder to remember and harder to type, so whenever possible, keep it short.

Domain names are an ongoing cost, but they also offer an ongoing value.

When you register a domain name, you can then begin using email addresses associated with that domain. For example, here at Barred Owl Web, we use the domain "barredowlweb.com", allowing us to use email addresses such as info@barredowlweb.com.

These types of branded email addresses lend further credibility to your small business.

Domain names are not a one time purchase. You will need to pay a fee (typically annually) for use of your domain. But don't panic! The cost is usually as little as \$10-\$30 each year.

Websites are more vulnerable to malicious attacks and hacking than you are probably aware of. And unfortunately, having a smaller business doesn't make you any less of a target. A recent survey by the National Small Business Association found that 44% of America's small businesses have fallen victim to some form of cyber attack (5).

Be sure to protect yourself and your customers with our simple tips for maintaining a truly secure website.

Securing a dynamic website

More website owners than ever before are converting their websites into the dynamic format we discussed earlier. As you may remember, these types of sites rely on a database backend and often incorporate an editor that a website owner can use to update content through the web browser.

The ability for someone to do more with less technical know-how also brings potential vulnerabilities. Because WordPress and Drupal (and other CMS's) are used by so many website owners, and because they are complex systems, it is no wonder that they are victim to a variety of bugs and security vulnerabilities. Luckily, there are some simple steps you can take to secure your site.

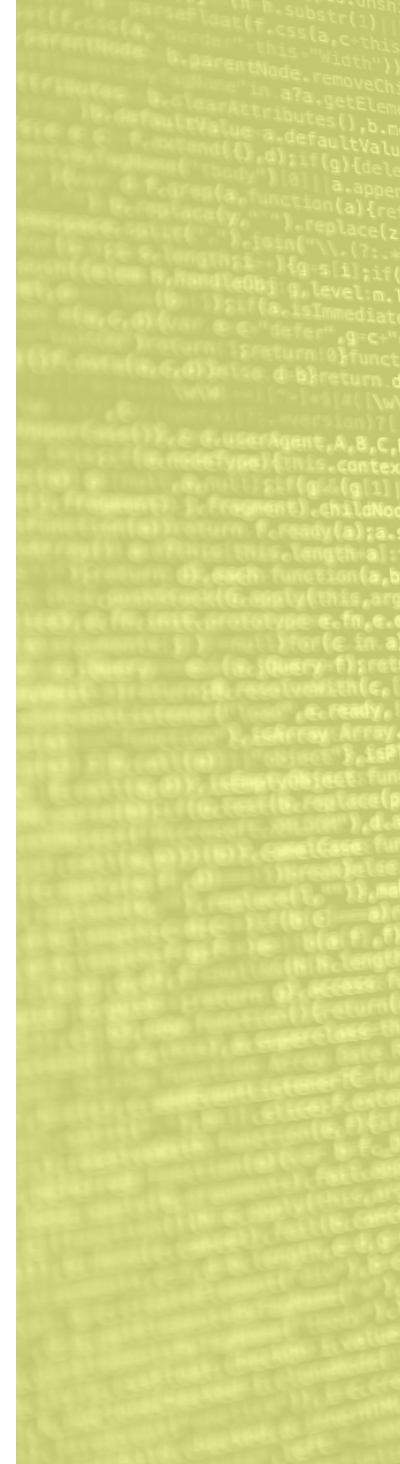
Keep your website code up-to-date

This is probably the most important step you can take to keep your website secure.

Maintainers of Content Management Systems are constantly updating and revising code, and implementing bug fixes and addressing security concerns. The vast majority of websites are hacked because their owners fail to update the CMS code when updates are made available.

This is extremely important because, not only do the various vulnerabilities exist in outdated code, but the vulnerabilities are made public, so if an attacker wanted to hack your website, they would simply have to use an exploit made publicly available.

[Click to learn how to
update your WordPress website](#)



Use HTTPS

Much of the web traffic that flows to and from a user's computer is not encrypted. A person who gains access to any part of the connection between you and a website (either legitimately or illegitimately) can very easily see the user's activity – what pages they visit, what information they submit, etc.

Think of it this way: You write a letter to your best friend and put it into the mail. If it was on a postcard that you did not put into an envelope, then any mail carrier along the way would be able to read what you wrote. However, if you put the letter into an envelope, then no one would be able to read what you wrote without tampering with the envelope.

HTTPS adds a layer of encryption to your web traffic so it is much harder for would-be attackers to “sniff” and read information you send and receive from a website, including usernames and passwords (Note that we did not use the word “impossible” here – it is still very possible, with the right tools and know-how, to break HTTPS encryption).

SSL certificates and HTTPS

“HTTPS” connections require a SSL certificate. In addition to simply keeping your site secure, having or not having SSL has two other major impacts on your business.

SSL Increases Google SEO

As early as 2014, Google stated that they would use HTTPS as a “ranking signal,” meaning that, all else equal, a website that has a SSL security certificate would rank higher in Google search results than a website without such a security certificate.

Google Marks Websites That Don't Have SSL as "Not Secure"

As of January 2017, Google's Chrome web browser will explicitly mark websites that don't have SSL security certificates as “Not Secure” for pages that accept passwords or credit card numbers, and there are future plans to mark all websites without a SSL security certificate as “Not Secure,” regardless of whether or not personal information is transferred to said website.

SSL certificates are typically purchased from your web hosting provider and range from a few dollars to over \$200 each. The typical amount of time a SSL certificate is valid for is 1 year.

**[At Barred Owl Web, all customers on
our shared web hosting platform
receive a free SSL certificate](#)**

**Who should host
your website?**



When choosing a web hosting provider, there are at least two essential questions to keep in mind:

Does the provider offer an uptime guarantee?

Do they maintain geographically redundant DNS servers?



An **uptime guarantee** is a promise that the servers will be online and available for a minimum amount of time within a given month.

For example, a 99% uptime guarantee is a promise that your website won't be down more than 1% of the time in a certain month (that percentage comes out to approximately 8 hours of downtime in a 30-day month). If a website is down for longer than that amount of time, then the guarantee essentially means the hosting provider will provide a refund or a credit in a specified amount.

Larger web hosting customers with dedicated servers may also receive a **Service Level Agreement**, a guarantee in the form of a contract between the provider and the client. While the uptime guarantee may not be enforceable in a court of law, the SLA is most certainly enforceable, assuming that there are no issues with the contract and both parties have signed the contract.

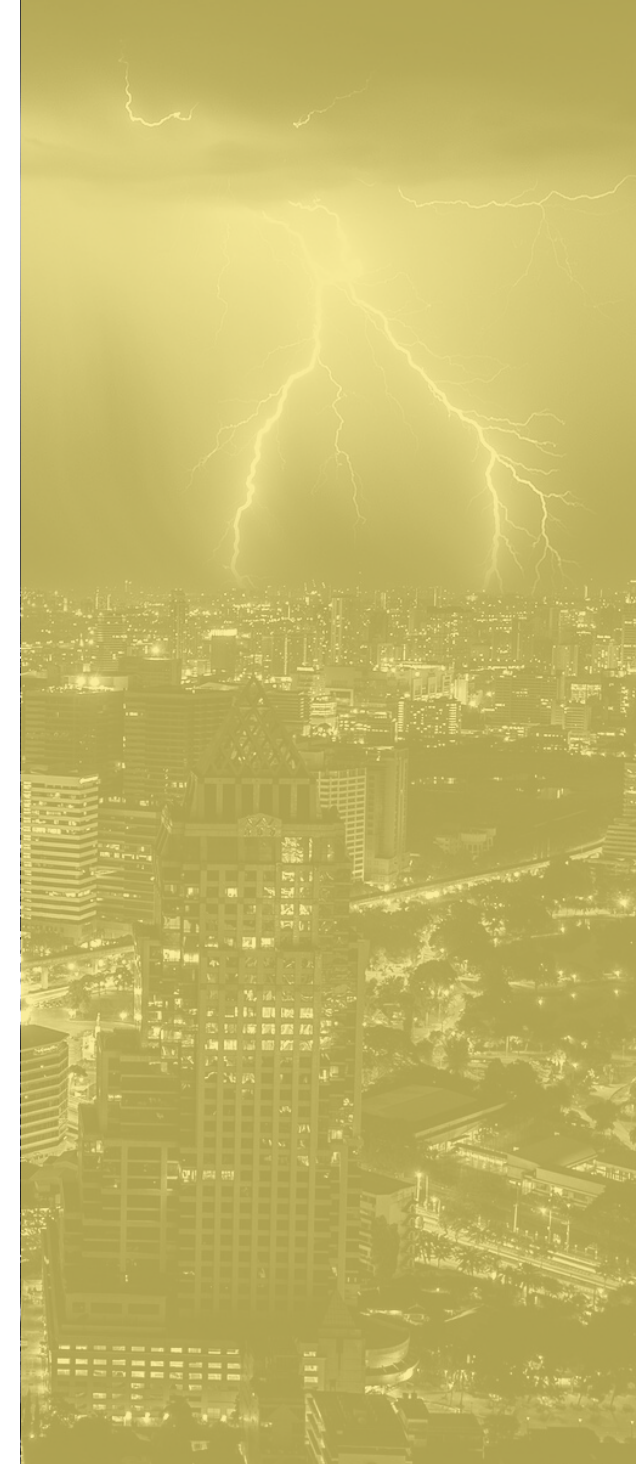
Barred Owl Web is proud to offer at least a 99% uptime guarantee for shared clients and a SLA for dedicated clients.

Due to possible power outages, natural and man-made disasters, and other scenarios that could impact an entire region, it's possible for all of the servers within a single geographical area to become unavailable.

To better ensure your site and email continues working in the event of a regional disaster, it is crucial that your web hosting provider maintains **geographically redundant DNS servers**.

Simply put, this is the practice of hosting two or more DNS servers that aren't in the same geographical region.

Barred Owl Web operates 2 DNS servers, which are located in different geographic locations.



**Contact us to get started
with your website...**



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