



10 Steps to a Crystal-Clear Website Strategy

A DIY Guide to Mapping Out Your Next Website Project



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INTRODUCTION:

HELLO!

I'm so glad you found your way to this website strategy guide. I put this together because I've realized over the years just how daunting it can be when you're starting out on a new website venture solo.

Whether you're planning on DIYing your next website or hiring a pro, having all the right pieces set up and ready to go will be a huge time saver and will make sure your project is set up for success from the very beginning. I hope this guide makes the process just a little bit easier for you!

About Shannon Blaz

Shannon Blaz is a visual designer who connects the makers and doers of the world with their audiences through beautiful, functional design. She blends her love for minimalism and her eye for typography and color, resulting in clean, purposeful web and brand design.

Shannon currently works at Blaz Design as a sole proprietor, where she spends her days collaborating with small business owners on their websites and branding. Prior to Blaz Design, Shannon has worked with several design agencies, a Fortune 500 company, and even served as the web designer for an NFL team.

In her spare time, Shannon loves to hang out with her husband and pup, and enjoys traveling, reading, spending time outdoors, and re-watching episodes of The Office.



LET'S DO THIS!

STEP ONE:

Determine your target audience

If you're anything like most small business owners in the beginning, you're probably thinking of your target audience as "anyone who wants to buy my products or services." But this isn't the best answer: if you're selling to everyone, then you're selling to no one. If you go the route of thinking the whole world is your audience, you're going to have a heck of a time resonating with anyone because your pitch isn't going to be very personal: you won't be able to address the specific pain points of your audience, you won't be able to write in a tone that makes them feel understood, and you'll likely end up lost in the sea of small business sameness.

That's why, first and foremost, you'll want to get clear on your target audience. Then, you'll be able to make the rest of the decisions throughout this series with that group in mind.

When you start to define your target audience, here are a few things to consider:

Think about your absolute ideal client. Brainstorm on this one for a bit: if you could work with anyone in the world, who, exactly, would it be? Be as specific as possible and write down **EVERYTHING** that comes to mind: age, gender, location, income, interests, personality—you name it. Here's an example:

"My ideal client is a female entrepreneur between the ages of 25–45. Her location isn't important to me because she's tech-savvy enough to be comfortable with my process of conducting meetings remotely. She's got a lot on her plate, as she wears many hats getting her business up and running, and so she needs a web designer she can 100% trust and hand over those responsibilities to. She knows what a valuable marketing tool a website can be, but she's just not quite sure how to put all the pieces together, and she wants to make sure she portrays herself in a beautiful way online."

If your business is already established, take a good look at your current customers. Take note of some of the common characteristics they share. For example, before I really started narrowing down my own target audience, I looked at my most frequent clients: female entrepreneurs, usually between the ages of 30 and 50, and usually working in the health and wellness industry in some capacity. And it just so happened those were the people I usually loved working with the most.

Look at your competition. You'll want to see who your competitors are targeting and who their current customers are—not because you want to copy them, but to see if you can find a gap in the market. Is there a segment of folks who are being missed in your industry that you might be able to reach?

Consider the pain points you're helping to solve. Put yourself in the shoes of your prospective customers: think about their specific needs that aren't currently being met that your product or service is helping to solve.

Once you have a good idea surrounding the target audience for your site, you'll be able to make the

rest of your decisions based on who you're building the site for. If you're planning on targeting women between the ages of 40 and 50, your site is going to be quite different than if you're targeting men between the ages of 20 and 30.

ACTION ITEM: BRAINSTORM YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE

First, take some notes by thinking about the points above, then fill out the Target Audience Questionnaire below.

Target Audience Questionnaire

Understanding and defining your target audience is an important step in creating your new website: this will help guide the various components of your site, including your copy and design.

Now, let's play a bit of pretend, shall we?

Think about your absolute Dream Client...

What is the age group and gender of your Dream Client?

What is the location of your Dream Client (local, regional, national, etc.)?

What is the marital or family status of your Dream Client?

What is your Dream Client's income level and education level?

What industry does your Dream Client work in?

What are some of your Dream Client's primary values?

What are some of your Dream Client's interests and/or hobbies?

What are some of your Dream Client's biggest challenges or frustrations?

STEP TWO:

Create an intuitive site map and navigation structure

Now that you've locked down your target audience, we're going to move on to building a solid foundation for your website, starting with your site map.

You might be thinking, "what in the world is a site map and why do I need one?" Well rest assured, I'm here to give you the low-down (and it's probably A LOT simpler than you're thinking)!

At its very basic level, a site map is simply a list of the pages on your website. Easy enough, right?

Whether you're planning on building your website yourself or planning to work with a developer, you'll want to have a good idea of what pages your site should include when going into your project. This will guide your site's navigation and will also help you know what content you'll need to create (more on that soon!).

When you're working with a basic, mostly informational site, sometimes it's plenty good enough to just work with a simple bulleted list of all the pages you want to include on your site. I'm not in the business of overcomplicating stuff, so if your site will need 5 pages, you don't need to go crazy with anything fancy or formal—a simple bulleted list in a Word doc will totally do.

When you start getting into more extensive content where you might, say, have parent pages each with a few submenu items, that's when having a more visual reference (like a flow chart) can be handy.

Now, you might be wondering, "how on earth do I know what pages my site needs?" Great question!

Aside from anything specific to your business that you might want to include, here are the basic pages I recommend every site should have as a starting point:

Homepage. Often, this is going to be the first thing someone to your site will see, so it's your chance to make a great first impression. You'll want your homepage to show off some of your benefits, you'll want it to help establish your credibility, and it will need to show users how they should navigate around your site.

About Page. Here's your chance to brag a little. Your about page gives you the chance to show the user who you really are, to let them know your unique mission, and to let your personality shine through.

Services or Products Page. This is where you'll give prospective customers the low-down on how you can help solve their problems.

Contact Page. The contact page is where you're going to make it easy-peasy for someone to get in touch with you. If you're putting your phone number out there, you'll want to make it readily available on this page. If you have a contact form, you're going to want to keep it simple: don't ask for more information than you really need.

Privacy Policy. This page will be required if you collect, manage, or process any sort of user data. Your privacy policy is essentially telling your users how you plan to use their information. Here's a great resource I used to create my own privacy policy: iubenda.com (note: this is an affiliate link, meaning I'll earn a small commission should you choose to make a purchase on their website).

Terms of Use. This isn't necessarily required for every site, but it can be a nice extra layer of protection for you, as the small business owner. The terms of use page sets up rules and regulations for visitors to your site, and it protects your biz by limiting the liability if a customer were to take you to court. There are lots of templates available online that can easily be customized for your business, but if you want to get super legit with it, you should always have an attorney look it over before publishing.

Once you've got your site map all figured out, you might be wondering how that translates into your site's navigation.

We've all been to that website before where it seemed impossibly difficult to find what we were looking for: there was either a massive navigation system that didn't make a whole lot of sense, or there wasn't nearly enough navigation to get us where we wanted to go. That's where creating an efficient, easy navigation system comes into play.

Here are a few tips I like to keep in mind when setting up a site's navigation.

A good navigation...

- has links to your site's most important pages from every single page.
- should be clear and easy to read, with a consistent design from page to page.
- should typically be one level for basic informational sites, and no more than two levels if your site is a little more complex.

ACTION ITEMS: PLAN YOUR SITE'S PAGES AND NAVIGATION

STEP 1: Make a list of your site's pages. If you're keeping things simple, a bulleted list will be just fine. If you're planning on having a structure that uses subpages, then take the time to create a flowchart. I like using [Lucidchart](https://lucidchart.com) (you can get a free trial), or if you don't feel like learning a new tool, PowerPoint or Keynote would work just fine.

STEP 2: Once you've drafted your site map, think about it in the context of your site's navigation. Look at it from the point of view of your prospective user: are you planning on having 15 items on your primary navigation bar (eek! that's too many), or do you have three levels of dropdown menus (maybe you can re-think the structure and simplify).

STEP THREE:

Craft an attention-grabbing headline and primary call-to-action

In step three, we're going to start thinking about some of the individual elements of your website's homepage, starting with your primary headline and call-to-action.

YOUR SITE'S MAIN HEADLINE IS TRULY ONE OF THE MOST CRITICAL ELEMENTS OF YOUR HOMEPAGE.

Have you ever been to a website and, at a glance, you're not totally sure what it's about? Maybe the site uses technical jargon you don't understand, or maybe they've decided to forgo a headline altogether and use an image rotator instead. Whatever the case may be, the lack of an attention-grabbing headline is a missed opportunity in helping to connect with and draw in your site's visitors. You won't be making this mistake on your website!

When working on your own headline, consider the following:

- **A good headline will grab your visitors' attention:** the idea here is to stop visitors in their tracks and make them take a pause before continuing to scan your site.
- **A good headline gives your visitors something to resonate with:** maybe you'll do this by calling out their biggest pain point, or maybe by offering them up a solution you know for sure they'll need.
- **A good headline gives your reader a basic understanding of what your site is all about:** because vague = bad!

After you've created the perfect headline for your site, you'll want to give your users something that they can immediately act on. Imagine that, in the examples above, there were no buttons right below the big headlines. Would the visitor easily be able to act? Would they know what they needed to do next? If they were interested enough, they'd probably figure it out...eventually. But it wouldn't be the best experience: users would need to dig around your homepage to find a button elsewhere or maybe a link in the navigation menu that instructed them how to learn more, sign up, etc.

Your goal as a website creator is to make taking action as simple as possible for your prospective customers, so you'll never want to be without a primary CTA.

A good CTA...

- **Has a clear and compelling message:** you'll want to avoid vague and generic CTAs like "Sign Up" or "Download Now." Instead, you'll want to use something more specific and compelling like "Try it Free for a Month" or "Sign Up Now and Receive Your Free Guide."
- **Creates a sense of urgency:** it's always a good idea to provide some sense of a deadline with your

CTAs, as people in general put off what doesn't seem pressing. Something as simple as “*Sign Up Now*” versus a plain “*Sign Up*” can help increase your conversions.

- **Is the companion to your primary headline:** you'll want to ensure your CTA makes sense in relation to your primary headline—if your headline is encouraging users to take advantage of a free offer, you (obviously!) wouldn't want your CTA directing users to a different web page entirely.

ACTION ITEM: BRAINSTORM YOUR HEADLINE AND CALL TO ACTION

Brainstorm some options for your headline and CTA. Don't just come up with one or two—try to create at least six—and then start to narrow them down, combine them together, and play around with wording until you're left with a few that stick out to you. Test your favorites with family, friends, and colleagues to get some feedback on what might work best.

STEP FOUR:

Learn a few, simple truths to help create killer web copy

Let's start out with a scary truth about website content, shall we?

YOUR CONTENT WILL MAKE OR BREAK YOUR WEBSITE.

But what about the fonts? The colors? The photos? Aren't *those* the most important components of a great website?

Nope.

Sadly, having a pixel-perfect design but lousy content is the recipe for a completely useless website.

It's SO important that your content draws in your prospective customers or clients. Sure, a beautiful design will catch their eye for a moment, but the content is what makes them stay, what makes them reach out, and what makes them want to work with you.

I'll start with a quick recommendation from years of working with clients and seeing them really struggle in this area: if you have a budget for your site, I'd highly encourage you to consider working with a pro copywriter when it comes to creating the core content for your site. Great content is essential to a successful site—the design, photography, color selections, etc. is all secondary.

With that being said, I totally get it if hiring a pro isn't in the cards right now. Totally fine! That's why day four of this series exists: to give you a few tried-and-true tips I've used when creating my own website content, content for client sites, and tips I've gathered from some of the content creating pros I've had the pleasure of working with.

This section is going to cover some of the truths about copywriting for your site, and some tips on how to shape your writing around these content rules of the web.

[Truth #1]: Your visitors are going to scan—not thoroughly read—your pages

Website visitors won't spend loads of time reading through dense, information-rich paragraphs on your website. No matter how beautifully crafted your content, if it looks even a little daunting to get through, your visitor is more than likely going to nope out very quickly. Most folks find themselves on your site in order to solve an immediate problem or need they have, so they're most likely searching for something specific. With that in mind, here are a few tips to make sure your content doesn't get passed by:

- **Use eye-catching headlines to break up paragraphs.** Long paragraphs will likely get overlooked

completely, and you better believe that if you don't have headings or logical separations in your content, visitors are likely going to skip pages of content entirely. To combat this, aim for an eye-catching introductory headline every two or three paragraphs. This makes it much easier for readers to scan for words or phrases that stick out to them, allowing easier access to the content they want to consume. The trick here is to make your content as easily digestible as possible.

- **Keep it short and sweet.** Don't use three paragraphs for something you can easily and clearly sum up in one.
- **Use formatting to help break things up.** Varying the structure can help make your content look a little more inviting to your readers. Whenever possible, consider using things like numbered or bulleted lists, change things up by inserting images or videos, and vary the length of your paragraphs.

[Truth #2]: Your site isn't all about you—it's about your prospective customers or clients

You'll of course want to inject some of your killer personality into your site's content, but the real point of your site isn't to go on and on about yourself. Nope. Your site is the place to address your prospective client or customer and his or her problem(s) that you're helping to solve. After you've taken an initial pass at your copy, re-read everything and pay special attention to the word "we" or "I" and your company name. Consider rephrasing some of the references to yourself, instead making the content focused on what your prospect gets by working with you.

If you're really itching to tell your prospects all about your awesomeness, that's what your about page is for. Include a bio, some info on your background, your mission—whatever you feel compelled to share.

[Truth #3]: Your readers want to know you're a human

Boring copy with no personality = big 'ole snooze fest. Copy without personality is an easy way to lose prospects quickly on your site. Your content should be inviting and conversational. I like to do a little exercise when writing where I pretend that I'm having a one-on-one conversation with someone about my business: what I would tell them (and the way I would say it), is often a good starting point for my site's content. No one wants to read copy that sounds like it's plucked straight from a college essay.

And whenever you can, tell a story with your content. Human brains love to follow a narrative and tend to pay more attention when there's a good storyline involved, so use this to your advantage. As long as the stories you're sharing are compelling and relevant, share away!

[Truth #4]: Your readers can sniff out fluffy, filler content

Have you ever been to a website, read the headline and first few lines of copy, only to wonder "WTF are these people even talking about?!" This confusion happens when, acting as your own content creator, your instinct is to stuff in all the industry buzzwords that you think your prospects want to hear. This usually backfires though: you end up creating something that your prospective customers don't understand...or really care about.

At best, this crummy copywriting tactic can make your prospects feel insecure for not understanding what the heck you're talking about. At worst, it can make them feel put off or suspicious of you.

Whatever you do, speak your prospective client's language. *"We're a digital agency that focuses on helping small businesses succeed online through beautiful design and pixel-perfect development"* sounds a heck of a lot better—and way more understandable—than *"We're a multi-disciplinary digital agency with a results-oriented approach helping our clients to craft strong visual identities through effective communication design."*

ACTION ITEMS: WORK ON YOUR WEBSITE'S CONTENT

STEP 1: Draft content for the primary pages of your site based on your site map in step 2. Or, if you're planning on hiring a copywriter, start perusing some online portfolios or reach out to your network for some recommendations.

STEP 2: Once you've put a rough draft together, spend some time editing and gathering feedback from some folks (preferably people not in your industry, and even better if they don't know you super well).

STEP FIVE:

Collect testimonials that help tell your story and sell your brand

Step five is all about how testimonials can be your BFF in hooking clients on your website, especially when you're first starting out and might not be super well known in your industry.

Visitors to your site *need* to know that they can trust you before they consider making a purchase or reaching out for more information. This is where solid client testimonials can come into play and help make a huge impact on your visitors' decision making.

Humans, in general, also really love social proof. Social proof is this fun little phenomenon where "people assume the actions of others in an attempt to reflect correct behavior in a given situation" (definition borrowed from Wikipedia).

Take for instance buying something off of Amazon. I'll personally pour through reviews before making a big purchase. Even if it's a smaller purchase, I'll still make sure a product I'm buying has at least a handful of reviews and more 5-star ratings than not. I'm seeking out social proof that the product I'm ordering isn't going to be a bust, and that it has served others well.

A lot of potential customers are going to want to do the same with you and your product or service. Assuming that you don't have a full-fledged review system on your website, testimonials from your customers are going to be the next best thing.

So, let's dive into how we put this into practice.

Once you've drafted your site's copy, take a look through it: think about where you can replace or support content with some real life testimonials. This is especially important in areas where you might make some claims about your product or service, or when you're messaging your benefits. Back it up with some testimonials!

And remember, not all testimonials are created equally. Here are a few tips to keep in mind when it comes to curating the best ones for your site.

Good testimonials...

Are from real customers. I hope this one goes without saying, but please don't go making up raving testimonials about your product or service. You're just begging to be found out, and if you do end up getting caught, think of the negative impact that might have on your biz. What if someone visits your site, references one of your testimonials, and then you're just straight up lying to their face (or over the phone or over email). Yucky feelings all around.

Offer up specifics about your product or service. The best testimonials are ones that offer up lots of juicy details, giving your readers a true sneak peek at what working with you is all about. As wonderful as “I loved working with Susan!” is for you to hear, it unfortunately tells your prospective customers nothing.

Compare that with, “Working with Susan was a dream! She started managing my social media six months ago, and in that time she grew my Facebook following by 50% and has brought in over 75 new leads from the engaging, consistent organic posts and paid ads.” Which one do you think is going to capture the attention of your prospects?

Are approved to be used on your website. I’ve certainly highlighted kind words raving about my work from client emails before—but only after asking for permission. Some folks are naturally very private and something as small as listing their first name along with glowing words they wrote about your work could be enough to make them feel uncomfortable, which you absolutely don’t want. The last thing you want is to make an enemy out of someone who was previously singing your praises. When you see words in an email you’d like to use on your site as a testimonial, just ask the person for their permission. I’m willing to guess that at least 95% of the time, the person you ask will say yes.

Help back up your claims. Whenever you’re making bold claims on your site, it’s best to back it up with a real life testimonial whenever possible. Promising to grow an Instagram following? Have a testimonial or two with clients you’ve done just that for.

ACTION ITEM: CURATE A LIST OF TESTIMONIALS FOR YOUR WEBSITE

Contact past clients or customers and request a testimonial or recommendation. If you’re just starting out and haven’t had any clients of your own yet, consider reaching out to a previous boss and asking for a recommendation that you can use on your website. Or ask a friend or co-worker to provide you with a glowing character reference.

STEP SIX:

Define your style

Step 6 is my FAVORITE in this series. Why? Because—drum roll please—today we’re going to talk design!

And don’t you go worrying if you’re not a designer, I’ve got ya covered! I’ll take you step-by-step through my process of getting your style vision together. I promise you’ll come out of this with some design direction—even if you don’t have a creative bone in your body!

When it comes to putting a vision together for the design of your site, I really want you to strive for two important things: consistency and personality. Consistency meaning that you’re really striving for uniformity between all the materials that make up your brand: logo, marketing materials, etc. If you haven’t gotten that far yet, then this exercise is all the more important! And personality meaning you’ll want your website to reflect you (or your product or service). You don’t want your website looking like it’s all stuffy and corporate if you’re really a fun, whimsical old soul.

If you’ve already been working through a branding process with a designer, then you might already have a lot of clarity in this area—you might even have a style guide that you can turn to for your website’s design direction. Instead of the exercise we’re going to go through today, you might just spend a little time searching for other website inspiration: features, functionality, etc.

Let’s dig in!

[Step 1]: Pin It. This is where you’re gonna get real friendly with my BFF, Pinterest (or if a poster board with magazine cut outs is more your style, then you do you!). Take anything that tickles your fancy and screams YOU, and pin it: you’ll want to think about colors, fonts, style of imagery, patterns, textures, etc. During the first pass on Pinterest when I’m trying to find visual inspiration, I really go hog wild—I don’t think about practicality or how something might work, I just pin, pin, pin, knowing that I can edit later.

Now, look through everything you’ve saved: what are the common themes? Common colors? Common visuals? Note any common threads between the elements.

[Step 2]: Narrow It Down. Now that you’ve gone a little crazy on Pinterest, you’ll need to reel it in and narrow down your choices. There are a few areas to focus on here (and you’ll see why in step 3): fonts, colors, visual imagery, and textures or patterns. Keep your favorites from what you’ve pinned—those things that feel most like you and that most reflect your vision for your site. Delete everything else.

[Step 3]: Find Your Fonts and Colors. Next, you’ll really want to lock down a font (or font pair) to use on your website and—lucky you—there are lots of options! If you’re DIY-ing your website, you might consider making your choice from [Google Fonts](#), as most of these are pre-uploaded with most premium templates, making them super easy to implement. Here’s a neat site that helps you pair

Google Fonts together: fontpair.co (spoiler: even as a designer, I use this site all the time!).

Once you've locked down your font(s), it's time to pick a color palette! If you've got a primary color in mind, but are a bit of a dunce when it comes to picking complimentary colors, check out [Adobe Color](https://adobe.com/color). You can start with your own base color and then generate a palette from there, or you can start by exploring some user generated palettes for inspiration.

[Step 4]: Find Your Images. While you're not necessarily searching for the photos that will be used on your actual website, this process will help guide the style of your site's imagery going forward. I LOVE [Unsplash](https://unsplash.com) for these inspiration photos as they're user-submitted and not at all hokey like a lot of standard stock photo site's images. Search this beautiful collection (or your own photos if you're so inclined!) and save a few of your favorites that you think most represents your brand and vision.

[Step 5]: Plug It In. The final part of this exercise is plugging all of your elements together to create your very own style guide! You might be thinking, "but I'm not a designer so I can't make my own style guide." That's where you're wrong! I've created two versions of a simple, single page, plug-and-play style template: one in Pages (if you're a Mac user), and the other in PowerPoint (which will work for both Mac and PCers alike).

[Download the Pages Template](#) | [Download the PowerPoint Template](#)

ACTION ITEM: CREATE YOUR STYLE GUIDE

Follow the steps above assuming you don't have a style guide to direct the design of your website. If you already have a style guide, find some website inspiration!

STEP SEVEN:

Invest in good imagery

You're doing great so far, friend (we're friends by this point, right?!), and I hope you'll stay with me just a little while longer while we dive into the topic of images.

Imagery is something that tends to have an immediate effect on your visitors. Whether that impact is good or bad will depend largely on the type and quality of the images you choose.

Authentic imagery is a biggie for the sites I'm working on. Whenever possible and as your budget allows, I highly recommend hiring a pro to take some unique photos of your product, your office, you at work, or your staff.

I've worked on quite a few projects in the past where clients have paid big bucks for a full website design and development project, who just weren't sold on needing to hire a pro for their photography. Instead, they didn't heed my warnings and slapped some cell phone quality images on their otherwise beauty of a new site. The result? A less than professional looking finished product.

My advice? I'd MUCH rather see a client with a small budget fork over their dollars for some pro photos and go the DIY route for their website to start. With so many drag and drop builders out there, it's pretty darn simple to get a nice-looking web presence up and running when you have high quality images to work with.

To help put the cost in perspective, I recently hired a local photographer to shoot some photos for my updated website. Between hiring a pro for makeup, shopping for a new outfit, and hiring a photographer for a couple of hours, I invested under \$500, total.

When thinking about the perfect imagery for your site, here are a few pointers to keep in mind.

Good website imagery...

Is relevant to your message and brand. Abstract images can be okay to use in some instances, but more often than not, you'll want to be pretty literal with your imagery, i.e. if you're offering web design services, it usually makes more sense to feature photos of your work (or maybe you at work) than it does to show off images of beautiful scenery—you want your visitors to know, at a quick glance, what your site is all about.

Is high quality. The last thing you would want is for a featured image to be blurry or pixelated—you want to keep in mind that users are visiting your site on a variety of devices and at various resolutions, so just because an image looks okay on an older, smaller monitor doesn't mean that it will look so good on a bigger retina display.

Is as authentic as possible. You know that generic “business” handshake photo, right? While it *does* convey the concept of business in a very literal sense, it can feel inauthentic and a little silly. Whenever possible and as your budget allows, I highly recommend filling your website with authentic photos: real, professional photos of your product or service and your people.

Visitors can usually see right through the generic stock photos, but I know sometimes you don’t have the bigger budget for a professional shoot. In these instances, I recommend using a user-submitted stock photo site like [Unsplash](#) or [Death to the Stock Photo](#) to find photos that have a more natural feel.

ACTION ITEM: FIGURE OUT YOUR PHOTOGRAPHY

Decide the budget you’d like to set aside for your photography. If you can’t justify forking over any money on images right now (I totally get it!), consider using a site like Unsplash for user submitted photos that look and feel a little less stock-y. If you have a small budget, see if you can find a student or someone just starting out who might be able to take some great images for you. If you’re looking to make the investment, make notes of some of your favorite photographers and get a conversation rolling to book your shoot!

STEP EIGHT:

Create a plan for keeping your new website fresh

So, what's step 8 all about? Keepin' your site fresh after you've launched that bad boy.

Because lots and lots of businesses can get a site up and running... but so few do anything to take advantage of having one after the fact. And that's a huge bummer, considering a stale site is almost as (or maybe just as) bad as no site at all.

Imagine landing on a website where news articles from three years ago are featured on the homepage: you'd probably scratch your head (but maybe not literally scratch your head, who does that?) and wonder if the company is still in business. One of the best things you can do for your website's visitors—and as a bonus, your SEO—is to be constantly evolving your website with fresh information.

In this step, we're going to talk about some ways to keep the content on your site fresh and brainstorm a plan of action for keeping it up for months and years to come.

let's look at a few, simple ways to integrate ever changing content into your website:

Post a new blog or news article monthly. Blogs are such a simple, yet super effective way to constantly keep your website's content fresh. Blogging might sound like yet another thing to add to your ever growing to-do list that you just don't have time for (I super feel ya there), but it can really be as simple as posting once a month on topics like your new service offerings, conferences you've attended, new employees you've hired, you name it! These don't have to be long research papers, simply committing to writing a quick post once a month can make a difference.

Add in new case studies or profiles as you work with new clients. Another great, relatively simple way to keep visitors coming back for more is by adding in new projects or recent case studies to your site. As a bonus, posting your projects and case studies can be a really nice thing to show off to prospective clients if they find you outside of the web: you'll be able to quickly send them a link to your work and some relevant projects.

Update your content to add in new services or revise old ones. You'll want to get into the habit of reviewing your site at least a couple of times per year (I like to review mine each quarter), making sure that all your primary content pages are up to date with accurate service information and offerings, your links are all working, your pricing is up-to-date, your FAQs are current, and things like testimonials are recent.

Update your imagery and videos. A simple way to make a nice visual upgrade to your website is by swapping out your old images with some new, fresh ones. If you're in a visual industry, it's great

to constantly be adding in new, fresh images of your latest work. If you're in a less visual industry, it doesn't hurt to simply refresh your hero image or image slider photos occasionally.

Integrate your social media. Love it or hate it, there's a solid chance you're on a social media platform or two. Another super easy way to help bring in fresh content to your site is by integrating your social media accounts through a feed on your site (there are tons of great tools and plugins available to help with this). You'll probably find that you're much more active on social platforms than you are on your website's blog or news page, so this integration can make it easy for prospective customers to see what you're up to and get a feel for your personality—with minimal additional effort on your part!

ACTION ITEM: CREATE YOUR POST-LAUNCH SITE UPDATE PLAN

Consider the ways that you'll commit to keeping your website updated after you launch. Make yourself a list, and then assign these as tasks in whatever project management or task management software you use. Don't let this one slip through the cracks! Additionally, download my [Year of WordPress Updates Checklist](#) for a year's worth of website upgrade ideas you can do any time.

STEP NINE:

Create an opt-in that serves your audience (and put it on your website!)

As we start wrapping things up, I want to talk a little bit about creating an opt-in for your website. Because, one, you'll really want to start building your email list, and—more importantly—two, you should start helping your audience in a low-pressure environment. They'll get to see what you're all about, you'll share with them some of your best knowledge, and the only cost will be their email address in exchange.

I reaaaally hesitated on adding an opt-in to my website for the LONGEST TIME. I didn't think I knew enough to share my knowledge, I didn't think I had anything important to say, and so I just decided to forgo the whole thing.

Huge mistake. My website had been up and running for over 5 years, and guess how big my email list was? That's right. A big, fat zero. Which is problematic when you want to launch a new product or drum up some business for a new service you're providing.

When I started talking to mentors and reading up on it, I discovered that—no brainer here—your email list can be one of your most powerful sales tools and valuable assets. While I'm not going to dive into the deep ins and outs today of creating the perfect opt-in freebie, suffice it to say that there are a TON of resources out there that a simple Google search will reveal to get you going in the right direction.

Today I DO want to talk about how the heck to get your freebie promoted on your site once you have it created.

Enter: the website opt-in.

Here are some of my favorite pointers for creating the perfect opt-in for your website.

Strategically place your opt-in. I always like to make sure opt-ins are in a few places (because not every person is going to land right on your homepage), including the bottom of the homepage, after every blog post, and as a popup—with settings in place so that it doesn't bombard users during every visit. If you're going to be setting up your website on WordPress, I recommend using something like [Popup Ally](#) so you have total control over when, where, and how your popup displays.

Make the offer compelling. Your offer needs to quickly captivate your site's visitors and your headline should really be the only explanation needed. At a quick glance, you want visitors to know what they're getting in exchange for their email address. How many people are going to sign up "for news and special offers?" Maybe your mom or best friend, but not too many others. However, what if you were offering something like this:

“Free Cheat Sheet: 10 ways to grow your Instagram following in just 10 days”

or

“Free Checklist: what you need to do after you hit ‘publish’ on every blog post“

In the examples above, you’re being very clear about what visitors are getting by entering their email address, and it’s a compelling offer: they feel like they’re getting some juicy insider info for free—and if you’ve created a valuable freebie—they really are!

Only ask for the information you absolutely need. Once you’ve enticed visitors with your compelling offer and headline, you’re going to have to take a moment to collect a little information. I don’t recommend collecting anything more than necessary, which is simply their email address. You can worry about gathering more information as you get to know this subscriber a little better over time. Every extra piece of information you ask for will lower conversion rates—the trick here is to keep it as easy as possible for the user to fill out your form and get that freebie.

Don’t forget a descriptive call to action. Ah, the good ‘ole “Subscribe” button. How boring! Don’t let your opt-in fall flat when it comes to the call to action. Instead, make it descriptive and exciting. What sounds better?

“Sign up now”

or

“I’m ready to grow my Instagram followers!”

Both call to actions above serve the exact same purpose, but one is clearly more exciting and enticing than the other.

ACTION ITEM: BRAINSTORM YOUR FREEBIE AND PLAN HOW YOU’LL WORK IT INTO YOUR WEBSITE THROUGH AN OPT-IN

Brainstorm a valuable freebie that you could give to your site’s visitors in exchange for their email address. The key here is to really, truly give away something of value—something that helps people. Once you’ve got that figured out and have taken the time to create it, start thinking about where you’ll place it on your site, how you’ll present your offer within the opt-in, and what info you’ll need to collect. Bonus points for selecting an email marketing provider like MailChimp or Active Campaign and getting your account set up and ready to go.

STEP TEN:

Bringing it all together

YOU'VE MADE IT and you're officially ready to rock and roll with building your new website OR revamping the heck out of your current one, RIGHT?!

If you've gone through these last nine steps, lined up all your ducks perfectly in a row, but now have no idea where the heck to go from here, I've got you covered with this last step.

We're going to talk about where to go from here: DIY or hire a little help? Freelancer or firm? WordPress or Squarespace? Etsy or Shopify?

Hiring someone versus a DIY approach

If you plain don't have the budget for a pro right now, then this is an easy answer: you're gonna want to DIY. However, if you do have a little wiggle room after sizing up your current financial situation, here are some pros of working with a pro:

- you'll have a better chance of getting a design that truly reflects your brand/style
- a good developer will understand your needs and will be able to recommend the best framework/platform for your site
- you'll get a site that is (mostly) bug-free—no weird theme issues, compatibility problems, etc.
- there's a good chance you'll save yourself a solid chunk of (precious) time
- a great designer will make sure that your site is unique and not just another cookie cutter template
- a developer can help you understand the importance of things like SEO, responsive design, SSLs, Google Analytics, and so much more

Choosing the right framework

The right website framework really boils down to what you're hoping to accomplish online (which is probably **not** the super straightforward answer you might've been hoping for). Though I'm going to do my best to give you a run-down of some of the more popular platforms I've worked with, that I recommend based on your skill level and/or needs.

Basic Site, No Website Experience: You might want to take a peek into [Squarespace](#)! It's a great platform if you're looking to get up and running quickly and if the thought of trying to wrap your brain around hosting, DNS, plugins, and all that jazz is enough to make your head spin. Squarespace can be super simple if you need it to be: just select a template; customize your fonts, colors, logo, etc.; add in your content using their (rather user friendly) visual builder; and you're ready to rock and roll!

Basic Site, Some Website Experience: I'm a HUGE fan of [WordPress](#) (it's where I do most of my work), and assuming you have a little website experience or are at least a tinkerer when it comes

to technology, the I'd send you the way of WordPress. I think one of the most powerful things about WordPress is just how extendable it is: you can have ecommerce functionality, you can create an event registration solution, events calendar, etc. I truly feel like if you can dream it, you can do it with WordPress.

Ecommerce Site, No Website Experience: If your primary focus is ecommerce, and you have little to no experience, I would probably send you straight to [Shopify](#). Shopify is in the business of helping you set up a robust online store, and it's definitely one of the better all-in-one options out there. Some of the platform's many features include product management and inventory control, hundreds of theme options to set up a site with no coding required, the ability to easily track sales and fulfill orders, and 24/7 support.

Ecommerce Site, Some Website Experience: Guess what? I'd probably still send you to [Shopify](#)! If you need a robust ecommerce solution, I'd definitely opt for Shopify over WordPress. Shopify features a decent sized app store with plenty of options for extending the platform's native functionality. If you are looking to grow or rebuild an existing ecommerce site on a powerful platform, Shopify is probably the platform for you. However, if you already have a WordPress site up and running and are just looking to add in a simple online shop, [WooCommerce](#) would probably be just the ticket!

ACTION ITEM: SIZE UP YOUR BUDGET AND PICK YOUR PLATFORM

This is it, my friend! Once you've decided if you're going to DIY or hire a pro and you've selected your platform, it's time to dive right in and get started with your website project! If you need a hand along the way, I'm here for you: send me a message at shannon@blazdesign.com and I'd be honored to help!