PRACTICAL GUIDANCE FOR INDEPENDENT BUSINESSES

Five things every small business should check before paying for a website

A few straightforward checks can save money, prevent misunderstandings and make the finished website more useful.

CONTRIBUTED BY LAPIS GLOBAL LIMITED | LIVERPOOL

When a business first discusses a website, the conversation often starts with colours, photographs and how many pages it needs. Those details matter, but they are not where I would start. Before agreeing to a quote, there are five simpler questions worth asking.

1. What should a customer be able to do?

Think about the person visiting your website, rather than the website itself. A local tradesperson may need to show recent work, explain which areas they cover and make it easy to request a quote. A cafe or shop might need opening hours, directions and a clear list of what it offers.

If someone arrives from a Google search or a social media post, can they understand your business and take the next step without hunting around? Write down the two or three actions that matter most. Use those to decide what the website needs - and what it does not.

2. What is included in the price - and what comes later?

A quoted price for a website is not always its full cost. Ask whether the price includes the domain name, hosting, mobile-friendly design, contact forms, written content, search-engine basics and a reasonable number of revisions. Also ask which parts are one-off costs and which need renewing.

For example, a cheaper build could become more expensive if every small edit is charged separately. Ask for a written scope with the price, payment stages, expected delivery date and ongoing charges. You should be able to explain the quote to someone else without guessing.

3. Who controls the domain and the finished website?

Your domain name is part of your business identity. Check that it is registered in an account you control, with clear renewal arrangements. Ask who will hold the website login details, who owns or is licensed to use the photographs and written content, and whether you can move to another provider later.

You may be perfectly happy with your developer for years. That is the ideal outcome. But if your circumstances change, you should know what can be transferred, what cannot and whether any exit or migration fees apply.

4. Has someone actually tested it on a phone?

Most business owners have seen a website that looks impressive on a large screen but is frustrating to use on a mobile. Before signing off, open the site on your own phone. Try it as a customer who knows nothing about the business.

Can you read the text? Are the telephone number and enquiry button easy to find? Does the contact form work? Are the opening hours, service areas and location correct? Ideally, ask someone unfamiliar with the design to find your contact details. Their first attempt will tell you more than another discussion about colours.

5. What happens after the website goes live?

Websites still need attention after launch. Ask who deals with updates, backups, security, technical problems and changes to opening hours or services. Is there a support period? What happens if the contact form stops working? How quickly can you expect a response, and what will it cost?

If the website collects enquiries or uses tracking tools, also clarify how customer information will be handled and what privacy or cookie arrangements may be needed. These are much easier to discuss before launch than after something goes wrong.

The question I would ask before signing

“Will this website make it easier for the right customer to understand my business and get in touch?” If the answer is not clear, review the scope before spending more on design or extra features. A useful, well-managed website will often do more for a small business than an elaborate one that leaves customers unsure what to do next.