

How to overcome 5 common barriers to building a successful business online

Based on results of May 2016 Alignable - GoDaddy U.S. Small Business Survey

By Alignable's Dan Slagen and GoDaddy's Andrea Rowland

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To better understand the challenges small business owners face with regards to doing business online, we ask them — at events worldwide, through GoDaddy’s award-winning customer care team, even at the counter of our favorite local coffeehouse when there’s nobody in line behind us. We also listen to what they say in various surveys, like the poll that inspired this white paper.

In a joint effort between GoDaddy and Alignable, we surveyed more than 100,000 small business owners to learn more about their web-based pain points. The findings highlight the unique perspective of small business when it comes to the online aspects of running their businesses.

“Enterprise businesses learned long ago that the internet was by far the most effective way to reach customers — globally or locally. With the meteoric rise of the mobile web, that lesson has only become more important.” ~ GoDaddy CEO Blake Irving

Today, only about 50 percent of small businesses make it to the five-year mark, according to the [U.S. Small Business Administration](#). We want to improve the odds by helping small businesses harness the power of the web to [easily start, confidently grow, and successfully run their own ventures](#). That starts with understanding common barriers to building a successful business online, and offering solutions to help overcome those obstacles. Here are five big roadblocks, with supporting survey data, and practical fixes.

“Only a fraction of small business owners are truly satisfied with their current website and mobile experience. The need for trusted advice and support that’s concise and actionable for business owners is surging.” ~ Alignable CEO Eric Groves

1. I don’t know how to start building a website.

Should I make my own website with a templated website builder such as Wix or [GoDaddy Website Builder](#) or a content management system like [WordPress](#)? Should I hire a professional web designer? What are [my options](#), and how much is it going to cost?

Our survey respondents are split almost 50-50 between DIY (do it yourself) and DIFM (do it for me) website building solutions. Twenty-six percent used a template-based site builder, and 23 percent turned to a CMS like WordPress to build their own websites. Fifty-one percent of small business owners chose to hire a professional web designer. Overwhelmingly, SMBs found 45 percent of these web professionals through a word-of-mouth referral.



“[Word-of-mouth] has always been the leading driver of business for small and local businesses. However, that doesn't mean you can ignore having a website and making sure it's optimized. The reason: these days, when someone wants something, remembers a place a friend recommended, the first thing they do is whip out their smartphone or get on the computer and look up the site to learn more and/or get directions. If you don't show up in search, or if you don't have a website, or the site doesn't tell people what they need to know, you lose that business.” ~ Alignable member, Janet Attard, CEO of Business Know-How



Only 9 percent of our survey respondents are completely satisfied with their website.



Why? Many small business owners don't have the time to properly maintain a website and lack the knowledge and resources to create the most optimal website for their particular business. That's why more than half of SMBs turn to professional designers to do the heavy lifting.

"If you really want to get the best out of your web designer – or any contracted professional – you need to treat that person like a business partner. A trusted, valued, critically important business partner." ~ Website designer and GoDaddy customer Lisa Stambaugh, owner of Collective Discovery

Moreover, many times, we find that small business owners have unrealistic expectations about how much traffic their website can generate without an investment of time and, in many cases, money. [Another poll](#) illustrates that 42 percent of small business owners get less than 250 monthly visitors to their website. You're not alone!

Solution

Take a strategic approach to choosing the right website designer for your business. Consider these five main factors when deciding whether or not to build your own website or to hire a professional:

1. **Cost:** It will cost in the ballpark of \$50 to \$100 per year to build your site using a templated site builder or hosted WordPress product. You're looking at an initial design fee of between \$500 and \$3,000 for a professionally designed website. GoDaddy's [Website Design Service](#) is among the most competitively priced.
2. **Customization:** Do you want a completely unique web design or need advanced features that require add-ons like databases? DIFM might be the way to go.
3. **Time:** How much time do you have to devote to building and maintaining your website? You can build an effective site using a templated site builder in less than a day and a slightly more customized WordPress site in a few days — if you're motivated. Then you'll want to commit a few hours per week to maintain and improve it. If you can't commit the time, hire a pro.
4. **Difficulty:** Templated site builders are ideal for beginners; WordPress sites are suitable for intermediate users; and more customized sites require greater skill. Be honest about your ability level when you're deciding who should build the kind of site you need.
5. **Customer service:** If you think you might need help or have questions (and if you're not a web pro, you probably will), choose a website building solution that offers quality customer service that is available 24/7.

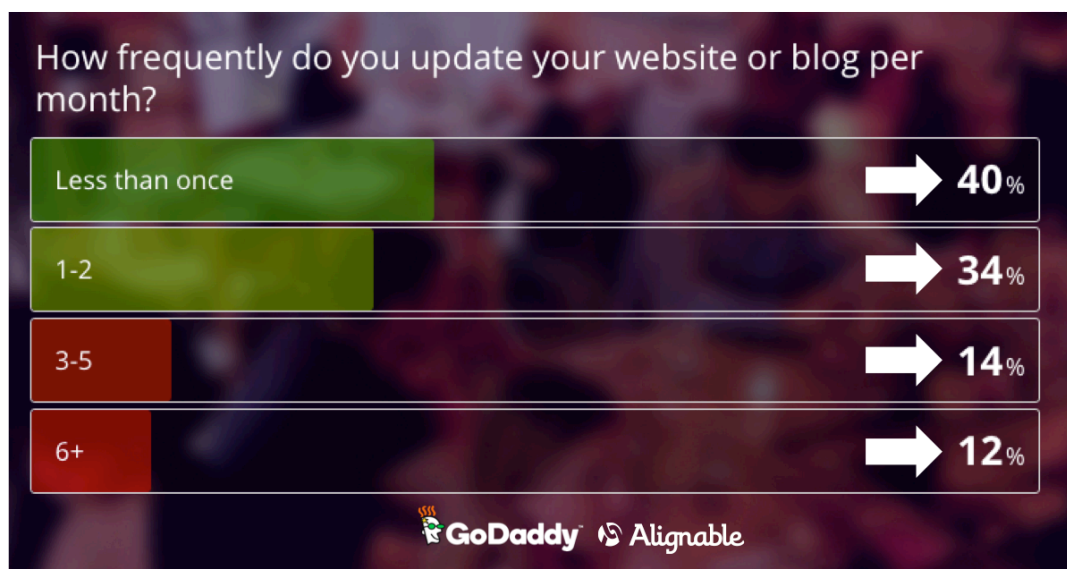
Do your homework to discover which website vendor best aligns with your business's needs (see the results of another [Alignable survey](#) which ranked GoDaddy as No. 1 for customer service and Squarespace as tops for site builder ease-of-use).

2. I'm overwhelmed by what it takes to make a website successful.

Small business owners need to keep their ear to the ground for many things when it comes to their website. Is it fast? Is it mobile-friendly? Does it have a contact form? Is the content updated frequently enough? Is it optimized for search engines? The list of must-haves and to-dos can seem overwhelming.

"A website is no longer an investment that needs to be made every 3 to 5 years. It is a marketing tool that constantly needs to be refreshed, upgraded, and renewed. Even for small businesses, if you don't have a mobile friendly website that you yourself can update, then you need to think about upgrading." ~ Alignable member Aaron Giagnocavo, project manager at CME Websites

According to our survey results, 47 percent of small business owners' biggest complaint about their website is that it doesn't show up in search engines. That's likely because the vast majority of entrepreneurs seem to take a "build it and forget it" approach to websites. Seventy-four percent of the small business owners we surveyed update the content on their website or blog two times or less per month.



Solution

Prioritize three factors that will drive more traffic to your website: search engine optimization (SEO), valuable content creation, and a design that is optimized for mobile visitors. Take the time to [understand SEO](#) then schedule about three to five hours to start optimizing your website (with an ongoing commitment to review it monthly). To start:

1. Optimize each web page with relevant keywords.
2. Add internal links.
3. Add meta tags.
4. Add/update [online business listings](#).
5. Add/update online maps.

If you can't commit to doing your own SEO, turn to a reputable provider like [GoDaddy SEO Services](#).

Providing website content that's valuable to visitors will also attract search engines. In fact, relevant content is the cornerstone of SEO strategy. Figure out what matters to your target customers and how your product or service meets their needs. Then create related, search-optimized website copy, images, video and other content. It's also important to make sure your website is [optimized for mobile users](#) — especially since Google has started ranking mobile-friendly sites higher in search results.

Take [Google's Mobile-Friendly Test](#) to see if your site makes the grade.

3. My domain name is an afterthought.

Many small businesses fail to capitalize on this fundamental element of a strong online presence. Your domain is your business's nameplate on the web, so it's important to choose a domain name that represents your business and is easy to remember. In many cases it's a good idea to register more than one domain name.

"Your domain name is the foundation of your website." ~ Sven Alwerud, CEO of Jelly Skateboards and GoDaddy customer

However, 49 percent of small business owners in our survey said they only have one domain name for their business(es), while 40 percent registered between two and five domains. Only 11 percent of survey respondents secured six or more domains for their business — demonstrating a proactive approach to promoting and protecting their brand online.



Solution

It's best to start at the start when it comes to securing the perfect domain name. Consider domain name availability when you're brainstorming names for your business. If you're already up and running, look at registering industry- and geo-specific secondary domains that you can point to your website.

Let's say you own a coffee shop in the Bronx, Jane's Cafe. You were hoping to snag [janescafe.com](#), but it was already registered to someone else. So you panicked and registered [janescafeinthebronxny.com](#). It represents what you do and where you do it, but it's long. Really long. Look at some better domain options:

[janes.coffee](#)
[janesespresso.cafe](#)
[janescoffee.house](#)
[janescoffee.menu](#)
[janescafe.online](#)
[janescafe.nyc](#)
[janescafe.review](#)

Bottom line: Don't discount your domain. It's your business address on the web. If you have any doubts, ask Jeb Bush what happens when you don't take a strategic approach to buying a domain — [jebbush.com redirected to Donald Trump's campaign website!](#)

It's easy to find the right domain at GoDaddy.

4. I haven't yet invested in business-class email.

Nearly 70 percent of all U.S. internet users prefer communications with businesses via email, according to Salesforce Marketing Cloud's ["2015 State of Marketing Report."](#)

Yet more than half of the business owners we surveyed use a free email account such as Gmail or Yahoo! for business. To many customers, that generic email address translates to "not a serious business." What's more, using generic email instead of domain-based email for business means missing a branding opportunity every time you hit send.

"Offering customers special limited-time offers via business-class email campaigns "has increased our online sales to more than double in some of our past promotions." ~ Brad Indoe, founder of Urban Raccoon Snack Bars and GoDaddy customer



Solution

Graduate from generic email to show you mean business. For less than \$5 a month you can have a [professional email address](#) that matches your business's domain name. Add an email signup form to your website and use that business-class email address to send sales-generating email campaigns to subscribers.

Get email marketing tips and tricks in the [GoDaddy Garage email archive](#) and free [Email Marketing Guide](#).

5. I don't know the best way to sell products online.

Many small business owners not only struggle with their website presence, but are unsure if and how they should start selling their products and services online. With U.S. ecommerce sales showing no signs of slowing — tallying more than \$304 billion in 2014, [according to the U.S. Department of Commerce](#) — the “if” might be the easiest problem to solve.

"The biggest challenge that I had this year was the fact that my shop just went online. It's a big change when we're trying to keep up with the inventory we're sending across the country, but it's awesome that we're reaching so many new people." - Alignable member Jaye Oman, owner of Jo Karen Lingerie

Fifty-two percent of the small business owners we surveyed do not sell their products or services on the web, seeming to prefer brick-and-mortar retail. Thirty-one percent of our survey respondents have a dedicated ecommerce site, while 15 percent sell on marketplace platforms such as Amazon and Etsy (either in addition to or in lieu of a dedicated ecommerce site).



Solution

Adopt a multi-channel ecommerce strategy. Launch your own online store for complete control of your ecommerce presence, and use marketplaces like Etsy and Amazon to sell featured products and drive traffic back to your dedicated store.

This type of website requires a few more specialized parts than a standard website, including:

1. **A shopping cart:** This tool will let you display product images and descriptions. Look for a cart option that includes important features like shipping options and inventory tracking.
2. **Payment processing:** While you can use a third-party service like PayPal to collect payments, establishing your own merchant account to accept credit card payments will give your business more credibility. Merchant accounts let you accept payments from major credit, debit and gift cards on your site — so your customers don't have to leave your online store to pay for their goods.
3. **SSL:** The first thing most savvy customers look for when they make a purchase online is an SSL (Secure Sockets Layer) certificate. **SSL certificates** are digital certificates that encrypt the information your customers send when they purchase products or complete forms on your website. Visual indicators of an SSL can include a padlock icon in the browser, `https://` before the website address, and a green address bar.

A few popular and easy-to-use ecommerce website building including **GoDaddy Online Store** (which has built-in payment processing), Shopify and BigCommerce. If you want to add ecommerce functionality to your WordPress website, try a plugin like WooCommerce.

To learn more, see "**How to start an ecommerce website to sell online.**"

About GoDaddy and Alignable



The world's largest domain name registrar, GoDaddy was born to give people an easy, affordable way to get their ideas online. Today, we have more than 14 million customers around the world, but our goal is much the same. We're here to help people easily start, confidently grow and successfully run their own ventures. Learn more at www.godaddy.com.



With over 600,000 connections and growing, [Alignable](#) is where local businesses generate trusted referrals. Active in over 8,000 communities, business owners have the opportunity to connect, message, co-promote, and generate new business through word-of-mouth marketing. Unlike traditional social networks where users connect with hundreds or thousands of people, Alignable members build a personalized core network of industry peers who align with their goals, needs and target customer base. Since trust is what drives the local business community, Alignable members also benefit from a variety of daily discussions and active Q&A forums, exclusively consisting of fellow business owners. Alignable is available on both desktop and mobile app.