Running a successful web design business

The definitive 10-step guide from GoDaddy Pro and WP Elevation

By Troy Dean, WP Elevation

GoDaddy™ Pro

Contents

The definitive guide to running a successful web design business.

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Let's get started

Why run a web design business?

There's never been a better time to build your very own business as a web professional. The internet has changed the way we communicate, socialize and do business, and if you can help clients get online through your design or development skills, you're in a great position.

So, if you want the freedom of working from home, want to travel the world and run your business from remote beaches, or even grow an agency and eventually sell it, these really are the golden days for web professionals.

After building a successful agency myself and coaching several thousand others to do the same, I'd like to give you a head start on your journey and hopefully prevent you from making the same costly mistakes I have.

One of the biggest lessons I learned is that relying on revenue from project to project makes you vulnerable, and that recurring revenue really is the holy grail of all business models.

I'll talk more about recurring revenue later on, but needless to say, the quicker you can build recurring revenue into your business, the more chance you have at success.

In this eBook, I'm going to cover a lot of material, including lead generation and winning clients, taking a brief from clients, paid discovery workshops, writing proposals, getting content from clients, avoiding scope creep and staying profitable — as well as productizing your services, selling landing pages as a service and creating recurring revenue.

I'm going to do my best to minimize the fluff, so I can give you as much actionable advice as I can. In other words, please forgive me in advance if I don't get all warm and fuzzy. Some of this material has been created in collaboration with the other coaches over at WP Elevation. So, I'd like to thank Kristina Romero, Mike Killen and Cath Hughes for their invaluable contributions and for helping me clarify my thoughts around these topics.

Before we begin, let me state from the outset that this is not an overnight process. It takes time to build a successful business, so do whatever you need to manage your own expectations. My job is to help you navigate your way down the path and keep you on track. Your job is to do the work.

This could be the most rewarding time of your life, so make a commitment to see it through to the end. Nobody remembers those who quit. Now let's dive in.

How to generate leads and win clients

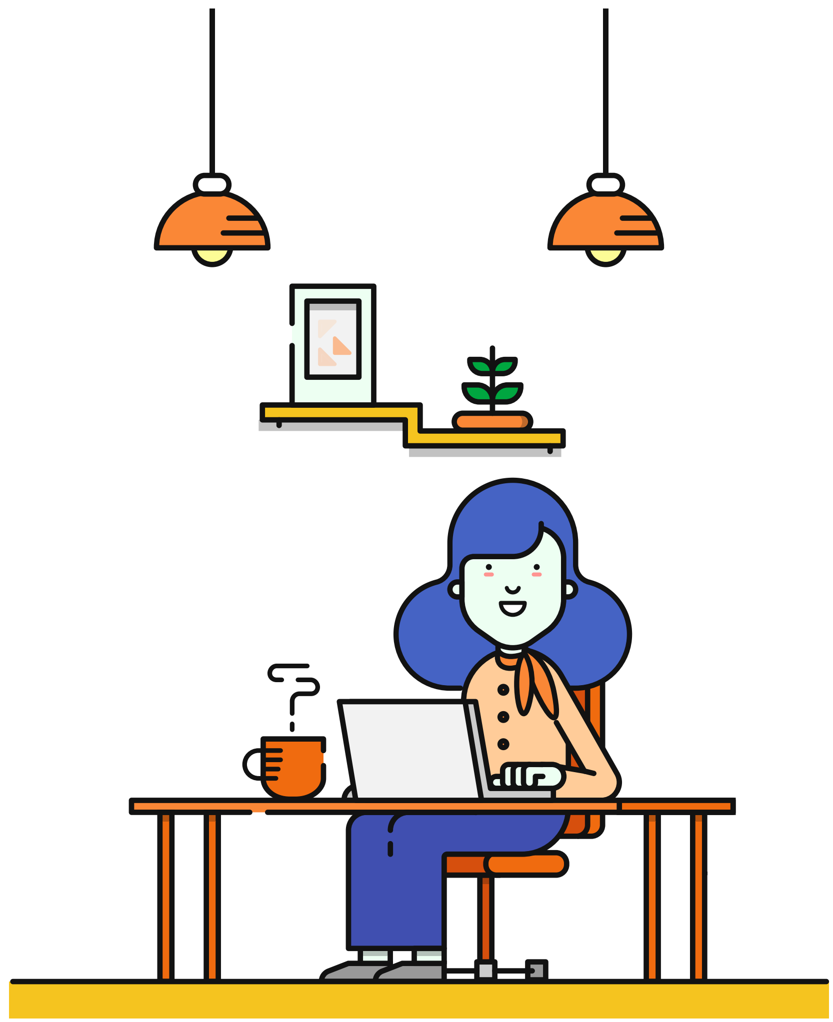
Clients aren't hiding

I've written about winning clients a lot over the years. Convincing strangers to give you money to build them a website seems like a mythical magic trick that most of us are scared of.

I once spent two whole weeks cold calling the fastest 50 growing companies in Australia and ended up with $1,700 worth of business. It was horrible, and I know I'm not a bad salesperson. Most advice around sales and lead gen involves chasing your client and interrupting them to tell them how much they need you. The most common question I receive via email is, "How do I find new clients?" as if they are hiding.

Clients are not hiding from us. They are waiting to be served. So, part of this is mindset, and part of it is tactical execution.

Put simply, the way to attract a steady flow of great clients is to make sure you are consistently doing your best work and collaborating on projects where there is a shared vision. A great way to identify your best work is finding your sweet spot.



Find your sweet spot

Divide a piece of paper into two columns, and list your skills in one column and your passions in the other. For example, SEO lives in my skills column, not my passions column. Design lives in my passions column and not my skills column. Podcasting happens to live in both columns, as does educating, presenting, making videos, designing marketing funnels and coaching. So, guess what I spend most of my time doing? Not design or SEO.

Your sweet spot is where your skills and passions overlap. These are the activities that you should spend 90 percent of your time doing. Everything else you should delegate, automate or delete.

The benefit of spending all your time doing your best work is that the quality of work tends to be higher, the outcome for your clients tends to be better, and you're happier — which is good for avoiding burnout. If you want some good bedside reading about getting into the zone of doing your best work, check out *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience by Myhaly Csikszentmihalyi.*

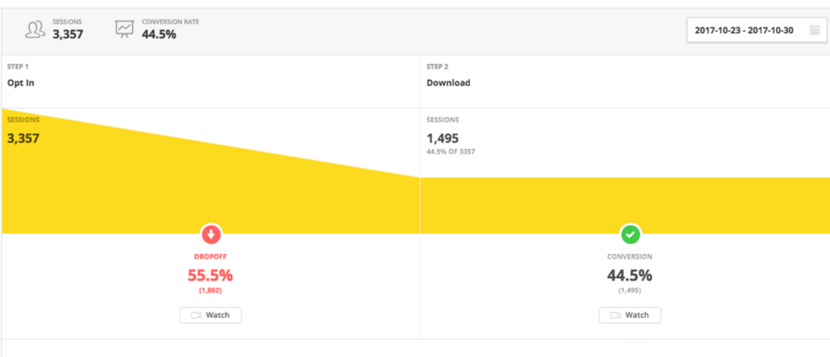
Once you've identified your sweet spot, ask yourself, "Who stands to benefit the most from working with me when I'm doing my best work?"

For me, a client who needs better search engine rankings fast is not my ideal client. A client who needs their website to win a design award is not my ideal client. A client who has an established business with an established audience and is looking to accelerate their success through digital marketing is my ideal client. This type of client allows me to do what I do best. Marketing strategy, funnels, conversion rate optimization, email marketing, etc. This is my sweet spot.

Publishing accurate content

So, I have my sweet spot—now what? It might not surprise you to learn that my advice here is going to be around publishing content on the internet and sharing that content with your ideal client. But let's get specific.

We all learn things every day by applying what we know to a project or to our business. For example, when I learned how to set up a funnel visualization using Hotjar, I first acquired the knowledge from the Hotjar blog, and then I applied the knowledge by actually doing it.



This an actual marketing funnel report from my Hotjar dashboard.

The process I went through to set up this report would be an excellent piece of content for me to publish if I wanted to attract clients who are looking to improve their marketing funnel conversions. The added benefit of publishing a piece of content like this is that I then have a document I can use to teach my teammates how to set up funnel reports. Think of it as open sourcing your internal documentation.

Now, because I have a passion for helping nonprofits, I would share this piece of content in any nonprofit marketing groups I belong to, and I could pitch this as an idea for a talk at a local Meetup for Positive Impact Changemakers. The idea is to get this content in front of as many potential ideal clients as possible with minimal keystrokes — just a few emails and a phone call or two.

Finally, make sure you have a strong call-to-action on your website where potential new clients can apply to work with you. This ensures that they are a serious contender and not a time-waster or someone just shopping for a good price.

You can see an example of this in action on my website.

Handling project briefs

Working with new prospects

So, what happens when one of your ideal clients fills in your application form and ticks all the boxes? Usually, you'd pick up the phone, agree to meet them for lunch to discuss their new project, and begin to explain to them how much you know about WordPress, plugins and theme frameworks.

If this sounds familiar, it's because this feels like the most natural thing to do. After all, this prospect potentially has money they can give you in exchange for a website. It's OK— don't beat yourself up if you've done this before. We all have, but it's time to stop.

Your job is to understand the client's needs as much as possible in order to propose a great solution for them.

Your job is also to make sure you run your business profitably, so you need to assess whether or not they have a realistic budget and time frame. There is no need to make this conversation any more awkward than it has to be. If the client has not indicated a realistic budget during the application process, then simply use this line:

"Our projects usually fall between $X,XXX and $XX,XXX. What budget do you have allocated for Phase One of your website?"

This usually gets everyone on the same page fairly quickly.

If the client indicates a budget that is not realistic for the scope of the project, then you are under no obligation to work on the project.

Determining scope

In order to set yourself up for success, you'll need to determine the scope of the project before you get started. We have a technique at WP Elevation we call "Go Wide Go Deep," which helps uncover the real motivation behind any project.

The process starts with the simple question of why. Why do they need a new website? They'll probably say something like, "We need to start making some sales online." This is a reasonable answer, and you could leave it there.

However, try digging a little deeper and ask, "Why else?" These conversations can get a little uncomfortable, which is OK. The more comfortable you can be in the uncomfortable moments, the more truth your client will reveal to you. Resist the urge to talk as much as possible, and listen instead.

When they have run out of reasons they need a new website, ask them to identify which reason is the most important.

In our example, it might be that making sales online is more profitable than making sales in their brick-and-mortar stores due to rent and wage costs involved in the physical locations. If you dig deep enough, you might just discover that this client is looking to close down their physical locations and become a 100-percent online business. This is the core motivation for the project and becomes the basis of your proposal. We'll talk more about proposals a little later.

For now, get used to the idea of asking "Why?" The more information you have, the better prepared you are — and the more your client will perceive you as a consultant who is helping them solve problems rather than a developer who is coding a website.

Want to learn more about taking a great brief from a client? Check out this post from my friend and WP Elevation coach Cath Hughes.

Sell discovery workshops

What is a discovery workshop?

Sometimes, you encounter a client who is just not ready to build a new website because they have not done the preparation or thinking required to execute a successful project. In these cases, you will do everyone a great disservice if you rush into a website project.

Content delays will mean the project becomes unprofitable and misses key deadlines, the relationship will eventually sour, and nobody wins a prize. When you find yourself in a situation where that little voice in the back of your head is telling you that this client is just not quite ready, consider pitching the idea of a [discovery workshop.]

Before you get all confused or overwhelmed by the idea of running a digital marketing strategy workshop, we promise you that this is a lot easier than it sounds. Let's get rid of the buzzwords and keep this simple.

A discovery workshop is a simple process you walk your client through so everyone is clear about the objectives of the new website project.

I believe it's the most important part of the entire process and is usually the one part that is overlooked. Why? Because it requires some deep thought by you and your client, and a lot of the time you don't know if you're doing it right. In fact, if it's not uncomfortable, you're probably not doing it right.

These sessions should feel a little awkward because there is no roadmap. We are creating something new. We're crafting a different message for our target audience. We are offering something unique and valuable that hopefully hasn't been done before. It should feel a little uncomfortable because we are navigating uncharted waters.

Why, what and who?

Feel free to use this framework to keep everyone on track during a discovery workshop. Ask your client three simple questions about the business:

1. Why do they do what they do (apart from making money, which is a given and not an acceptable answer)?

2. What is it they actually do in order to help them achieve their why?

3. Who do they do it for (i.e., who benefits from them doing their what)?

Although these three questions are quite simple, I have seen eight-hour discovery sessions fail to produce answers. Do your best to keep your client on track, and be aware that the more people there are in the room, the longer this will take. Try and restrict attendance to the business owners and key people within the organization.

Here is an example of answers to these three questions expressed as a vision or mission statement from a fictional client:

“We believe everyone has the right to a good education (why). This belief drives us to produce high-quality online courses (what) for students in remote and rural areas (who) who might not have access to larger educational institutes.”

Pretty good, huh?

SMART goals

Once you've established the why, what and who, it's time to write some SMART goals so you can measure the effectiveness of the new project. Remember, this project is designed to provide the what for the who in order to bring the why to life.

If you haven't heard of SMART goals before, SMART is an acronym that stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-Bound.

Here is an example of a very common goal that is not SMART:

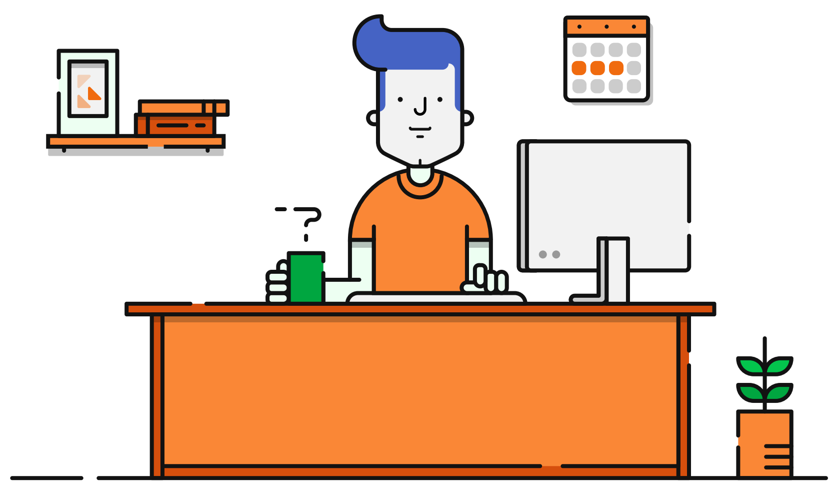
"We need more customers."

OK. How many? By when? More than last year? More than your competitor? More than you have now? Which products are they buying? The ones with the lowest profit margin or the highest?

Here is an example of the same goal, but expressed in SMART terms:

"We want 1,000 new students (specific and measurable) to sign up for our June class (achievable and relevant) by the first week of May (time-bound)."

With an effective SMART goal in place, it becomes that much easier to ensure the project can meet the client's expectations while giving you an appropriate framework for the job.



Customer experience

Now that we have the why, what and who — as well as our SMART goals — in place, it's time to turn our attention to the customer experience. And I don't mean your customer. I mean your customer's customer. In the previous example, the customer's customer would be the student that the education company is trying to get to sign up for their June class.

Years ago, I developed a very simple five-step framework that helps me think about how my customers are interacting with my brand. I still use it to this day.

The framework is:

1. Attract
2. Capture
3. Nurture
4. Convert
5. Measure

This is where the rubber really starts to hit the road in your discovery workshop, and your client will be able to see some actionable light at the end of the tunnel.

Work through the following questions with your client.

- How will they attract visitors to their website and social media channels?
- How will they capture leads from those visitors?
- How will they nurture those leads and warm them up?
- How will they convert those leads into customers?
- How will they measure the effectiveness of this strategy so they can continue to improve it over time?

I would strongly recommend you have someone taking notes while you are working through all of the above questions with your client. At the end of the discovery workshop, have these notes turned into a nicely presented PDF and present it back to the client. This becomes the deliverable and the valuable asset that the client is actually paying for. They can take this document and use it for internal discussion and to hire other third-party contractors to help them realize their vision.

Running a discovery workshop is an excellent way to position yourself as an expert, and it's a logical next step for participants to hire you to help them implement the strategy you have designed with them.

To go deeper on paid discovery workshops, check out this post from my good friend and WP Elevation coach Kristina Romero.

How to write and deliver proposals

What to include

Whether you run a discovery workshop or your client is just super prepared and answers all your questions without one, the next step is to prepare a proposal.

This is where the wheels typically start to fall off. I've been writing proposals for more than 20 years (10 of those as a web professional), and I found a great framework that seems to get good results time and time again.

Let me walk you through each section.

Snapshot

The snapshot is a brief introduction consisting of a paragraph or two that's designed to get your client to read the rest of the proposal. Make it clear that you understand what they are trying to achieve. Also make it clear that they have approached you for help.

Business needs

The next section of the proposal should outline the specific needs that the business has for this new project. Remember the SMART goals you defined earlier? This would be the ideal place to mention those goals.

Target audience needs

The third section of the proposal should outline what the target audience needs from the website. The majority of proposals I have seen make no mention of the target audience at all. By including this section, you will show your prospect that you care about their customers and users. After all, it is the customers and users that will determine the success of the website.

Solution

This is where you get to flex your creative muscle and propose a clear and obvious solution to your client's problem. The more you can communicate this in terms of benefits rather than technical features, the more chance you have of getting your proposal accepted.

Rather than mentioning "responsive jQuery lightboxes for videos and images," try saying "the target audience will be able to watch video tutorials to help them choose the right product."

Oh, and by the way, a website that works across all devices is not a benefit or feature in the year 2017. A website that doesn't work across all devices is just broken.

Timeline

Here is where you get to start setting some expectations about how long things take. I use a simple table to outline the various stages of the project and how long each stage will take.

Project	Timeline
Discovery	4 weeks
Development of a sitemap and interactive prototype so that all functionality can be tested and approved in the browser.	
Design	3 weeks
Design of website user experience and user interface to allow the target audience to easily navigate and use the website to achieve their needs.	
Development	4 weeks
Development of working website on the WordPress content management system.	
Deployment	1 week
Final testing and debugging on development server before launching.	

This shows your client that you have clear processes in place. It also adds intrigue about what it might be like to work on this project with you. I've had clients tell me they are extremely excited about seeing their interactive prototype, even though they don't know what it is.

Investment

This is my favorite section of the proposal for obvious reasons. In this section, you invite your prospect to make an investment in the business to bring this project to life. I don't call it pricing, costs, fee structure or anything other than investment. I don't break down the project investment section into line items with individual costs. I don't charge separately for project management, responsive design, CSS files or integration into WordPress. I charge a project investment based on the value I'm bringing to the table.

Frequently asked questions

Immediately after the investment section, I include an FAQ. This section is populated with the most common questions I have received from clients before they have accepted the proposal. This is also known as overcoming objections. Here is where you also get to set expectations about how long it will take to appear on page one of Google, or what happens if the client's email hosting disappears or if somebody leaves a negative comment on a Facebook post.

Next steps

The next section of your proposal should clearly outline what your prospect needs to do in order to approve the proposal. I use Bidsketch proposal software, which includes the ability for me to send my proposals electronically and have my clients click a button to approve it.

It doesn't matter what you use or how you do it—you just need to have a strong and clear call-to-action that tells your client what they need to do to accept the proposal and what's going to happen next.

Mutual agreement

The final section of your proposal is commonly called terms and conditions. I don't like this formal language, so I use "Mutual Agreement."

In the interest of complete transparency, I have adapted my friend Andy Clarke's open source contract killer. I am not a lawyer, but the best advice I got from a lawyer is that if you are earning more money than you are prepared to lose, you should have a professional look over your contracts.

This section just needs to outline what is included and what is not included in the scope of the project, as well as the obligations for each party. This is your opportunity to let your client know that if they drag their feet with getting you content, it's not your responsibility to keep the project open forever.

For a more in-depth look at creating proposals, you can check out this webinar and get my proposal template here.

How to collect content from clients

Where to start

Now that you have a signed proposal and your new client has paid their deposit, the fun begins. It's time to spin up your favorite code editor in your development environment and start weaving your magic.

The number one thing that will kill the profitability of any project is the client not delivering their content in a timely fashion. So, let's nip this in the bud right now.

I was inspired to rethink my approach back in 2007 when I read Andy Clarke's fabulous book, *Transcending CSS: The Fine Art of Web Design.* In this book, Andy talks about the concept of designing from the inside out. Essentially, this means getting all of the content from your client *before* you begin the design process.

This might seem counterintuitive to everything you've ever done, and if you're like the thousands of other WordPress consultants I've met, you probably spend a lot of time trying to shove your client's content into a theme. Please stop doing that.

I insist all content be delivered by the client before I begin any work. This is a radical shift in mindset — it changes the paradigm from the client expecting me to meet a deadline to the client being responsible for meeting a deadline.

If the client has a deadline of November 1 for their website, I will consistently remind them of the timeline we have agreed to in the proposal and highlight that they need to have all of the content to us before we begin.

Of course, some clients are just not equipped to provide content and don't have the skills to do so. In this scenario, I will charge the client extra for us to create the content for them. And don't worry if you are not an expert at creating great content for websites — you can get some help from one of the many freelance marketplaces such Speedlancer or Growth Geeks.

Tactical advice

Here are some tactical things you can do to make getting content from your client a little easier.

Invite your client into your project management software, and stop communicating via email. Create the tasks required to produce the content and assign them to your client. For what it's worth, we use Asana.

Give your client as much structure as possible so they are literally filling in the blanks. You can spin up a simple Google form like this example here. You can even program conditional logic into Google forms to ask for more content depending on the page your client is submitting content for. For example, if they are submitting content for their "Team" page, you might ask for images and a bio for each team member.

If you wanted to get really fancy, you could set up Advanced Custom Fields to manage your content within your WordPress site. Then, use an extension like Advanced Forms to have your client submit content directly onto the front end of their own website. Of course, you would want to do this in a development environment and not the production environment.

Whatever your approach, you want to make it as easy as possible for your client to give you the content in the format you need. The last thing you want to be doing is trawling through email threads trying to find an image of the CEO for the "Team" page because he just had a new headshot taken and doesn't like his old photo.

Continue to educate your client that the longer they take to give you content, the higher the chance of missing the agreed-upon deadline.

If your client disappears altogether without providing any content, let them know you will charge them a project management fee for every week that goes by without any content arriving. For a more in-depth explanation of securing clients' content, check out Cath Hughes's post.

How to avoid scope creep

Create a prototype

As I mentioned earlier, one of the quickest ways to lose any profit in a web design project is to mismanage your client expectations. When your client begins to see their website coming to life in the browser, they usually start asking questions about features and functionality that you've never talked about before.

"What happens when my members login and check their past invoices?" asks the client innocently.

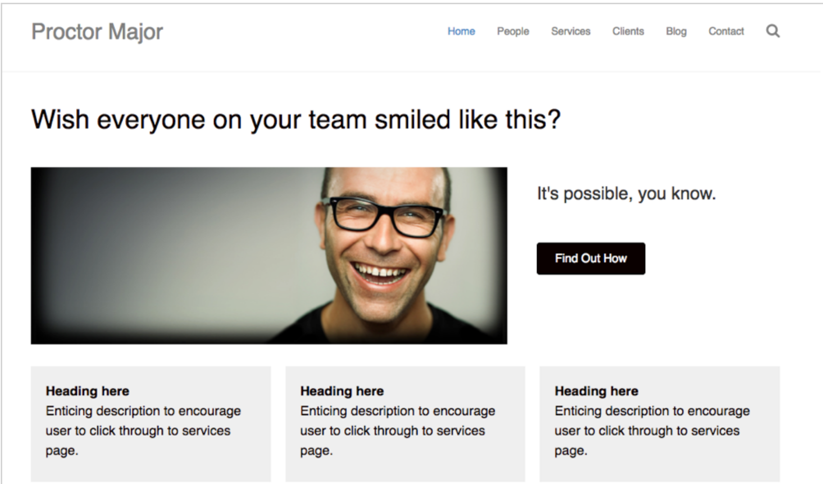
You think to yourself, "What members? What login area? What past invoices? Have I missed a series of meetings somewhere?" You break out into a cold sweat and inevitably have to have an awkward conversation about scope creep.

The best way to avoid this situation is to get your client in the browser and interacting with their website as quickly as possible regardless of how it looks.

This is where the concept of interactive prototypes comes into play. An interactive prototype is basically a black-and-white website with limited design elements that encourages your client to use their website as if they were a customer or end user.

The web is a visual medium, so it's best to have conversations and noodle out these questions in the browser rather than via email.

Here is an example of a prototype I built for an accounting website.



As you can see, I would win no design awards for this effort — and that's not the point. I'm simply trying to get my client to interact with their website in the browser so we can make decisions quicker. It's much easier to explain how a blog works with authors, categories and tags by doing it in the browser than writing it in a Word document.

There are many ways you can develop prototypes quickly using WordPress, and I won't get into a debate about which is the best workflow. For what it's worth, I use the Beaver Builder theme and page builder plugin to produce prototypes like this in about 90 minutes.

The idea is to keep it as plain as possible and get your client to sign off on functionality.

Once the client has approved the feature set, you can then send this prototype to your designers for a user interface design. If you want to take this to a whole new level, use the fantastic WordPress plugin Project Huddle and encourage your clients to notate the website in the browser.

If you would like to go deeper on avoiding scope creep, read this article by Cath Hughes.

How to launch client websites

Make sure they're ready

Let's pretend for a minute that your client has been extremely well-behaved, provided all of their content in a timely fashion and responded to your requests to approve your interactive prototype. The website has been fully designed, tested anddebugged and is now ready for launch.

Let's also pretend that this all happened within a six-week window, and so far the project is on track to be profitable. At this point, many clients can get scared of launching because they are afraid of the feedback they will receive from their customers, competitors, staff and spouses.

Your job is to make sure the website is absolutely ready to launch and give your client no excuse to hold back.

Besides the obvious content and technical check, which we'll dive into a little later, you need to prepare your client for their website launch. Here are some questions to drill through with your client to make sure they are ready to race:

- Are we satisfied that the website is going to help us achieve our SMART goals?
- Does the website clearly state what we do and who we do it for?
- Does the website contain clear calls-to-action?
- Does the client have someone ready to receive and read their Google Analytics reports?
- Does the client have a content calendar in place for the next 12 months?
- Does the client have the resources to promote their website through their social media channels?
- Does the client have someone ready to take incoming inquiries from the website forms?
- Are we using live chat, and if so, is someone ready to monitor it?
- Are we fully aware that it will take some time for our website to gain traction and start attracting visitors?
- Are we running any advertising campaigns, and if so, is our tracking code in place?
- Is our email marketing service provider in place?
- Are our email marketing automation campaigns ready to fire?
- Has the client been trained in how to use the content management system?
- Has the client subscribed to one of our care plans, and if not, who is going to support the website in the future?

These might seem like obvious questions, but more often than not, they are overlooked and can cause a strain on the relationship post launch.

The checklist

Every website is different, so every launch checklist will be slightly unique. However, there are some key areas that are common across most websites that you should be checking for obvious errors or omissions.

These areas include content, SEO and analytics, social media, HTML and CSS validation, accessibility, cross-browser and device testing, testing of all functionality and form submissions, image/JavaScript/CSS optimization, security, fonts, 301 redirects, Google Search Console verification, CDN and 404 pages at a bare minimum.

In addition, you want to make sure that your CMS and any themes and plugins are up-to-date before you launch and that you have a daily and weekly backup schedule in place.

Here is a fantastic resource to make sure you cross your t's and dot your i's before you launch a website.

Create profitable projects

Determining profit

Congratulations. At this point, you have successfully launched a website for a client. Now it's time to sit down and work out if you made any money.

Let's take a step backward for a moment. Most people calculate profit by taking the revenue from a project and subtracting the business expenses and project costs. But what would happen if you calculated the revenue you need for a project by adding your business expenses and project costs to your predetermined profit margin?

In other words, instead of calculating your profit as $10,000 minus $8,000 worth of business expenses on project costs, you determine that your business expenses and project costs will be approximately $8,000, and you add your profit margin of 30 percent to arrive at a project fee of $12,000.

The formula for calculating this is to divide your business expenses and project costs by two and then multiply that figure by three.

In our example above, $8,000 worth of business expenses and project costs divided by two equals $4,000. Multiply $4,000 by three and our project fee is $12,000. The rule of thirds suggests that 30 percent of our revenue should go toward project costs, 30 percent toward business expenses and 30 percent for profit.

This is a broad-brush, rule-of-thumb approach and does not always work out exactly; however, it does give us a great place to start. The catch here is that whatever you pay yourself needs to be factored into the business expenses. So, if you pay yourself $70,000 a year, you need to factor in $5,833 a month in business expenses for your wages. Your 30 percent profit needs to exist after you have paid yourself. Let me clarify this a little more. Let's say you pay yourself $5,833 a month, the rent on your home office works out to $1,000 a month, your electricity is $100 a month, and your software subscriptions work out to $100 a month.

That's $7,033 a month just to keep the business running before you take on a project.

Evaluating all costs

Once you agree to take a client project, you are going to incur some project costs. These might include design, plugins, software licenses, development help, copywriting, stock images, etc. Let's assume these project costs come in at around $3,000.

If the project takes four weeks and it's the only project you work on during that four-week period, your business expenses are going to be $7,033 and your project costs are $3,000. That's $10,033 before profit.

$10,033 divided by two is $5,016. Multiply that by three in your project fee needs to be $15,048 in order for you to pay yourself and make a profit.

If you're not factoring in profit to your project fees, you don't have a business — you have a job in which you are the boss.

Just a quick reminder: It's your business, and you get to decide how much you charge, not your customers. If you do good work, spend time in your sweet spot and specialize in solving a specific set of problems for a specific type of client, you can get your business to this level. It might take time, but it is possible.

For the first few years I was operating as a freelancer, I was not making any profit. I was simply paying myself an average wage. Don't set yourself up for a job. Set yourself up for success. To go deeper on this subject, read this post by my good friend and WP Elevation coach, Mike Killen.

Productize your services

The basics

Thank you for sticking with me for this long. If you were to implement everything we've spoken about in this eBook so far, you would have one of the best small businesses as a web professional in the world.

Improving your business is an ongoing process, and I believe it takes at least a couple of years to get a strong foundation in place. However, even if you were to follow all of the advice in this eBook, you are still going to face one of the biggest challenges of any service-based business — the feast and famine cycle.

I'm sure you are familiar with this already. You speak to a prospect and convince them to hire you, you get busy and do the work to fulfill your promise, and then you go looking for the next job. In the meantime you might have turned down some work or tried to put some clients on hold because you were too busy. Now that you really need to work, they are nowhere to be seen.

There is only one way to mitigate the risk of this characteristic of a service-based business. Turn your services into products and sell them online.

Let's define the difference between a service and a product. A service is something you sell once to a client. Clients are typically high-touch and high-maintenance and pay you high fees accordingly. A *product* is something you make once and sell too many customers. Customers are typically low-touch and low-maintenance and therefore pay you at a lower price point.

Examples to get you started

Let's look at some examples of a service that can be turned into a product.

Website care plans

One of the most common examples is packaging the regular tasks of maintaining a website, security scans, software updates and backups. This can easily be turned into a website care plan and sold as an off-the-shelf product.

My good friend and WP Elevation coach, Simon Kelly has a page on his website where he offers website care plans as a product for sale. He makes it clear what's included and what isn't, and he has documented his processes well enough that he can train his team members to deliver what he's promising in this product.

UI elements

If you develop apps for Android, you might be familiar with DroidUX. This is a great example of a design service being turned into a product. The team at DroidUX has worked out a way to offer their design services in a leveraged model by turning that service into a product they can sell to thousands of customers all over the world.

Online courses

Perhaps the lowest-hanging fruit in any service-based business is the capacity to turn your consulting knowledge into an online course.

My first effort in this arena was a basic SEO course I sold in 2009 called "Page 1 in 24 Hours." In this course, I taught people how to get their website onto page one of Google in 24 hours (which back then was quite easy). People who visited my website could buy this course for $200 and become my customer. A small percentage of those students would then become clients and hire me to manage their SEO at a much higher price point.

So, instead of having lots of telephone conversations with potential clients where they get to pick my brain for free, I had this conversation once in front of a camera and used it to create leveraged revenue between client projects and position myself as an authority to attract better clients.

Use your imagination to plan out which of your services you can package up into products.

If you can document the process of delivering a service to a client that gets a predictable and repeatable outcome, and you can train a team member to deliver that service, then chances are you have the makings of a product.

Pro tip: Try to resist the temptation to build a product that has not been proven as a service. You'll only set yourself up for disappointment.

Sell and deliver landing pages

I used to share an office space with an advertising agency who had very little experience selling digital services to their clients. They were a traditional print media agency and did a tiny bit of TV and radio.

I was privy to lots of conversations between them and their clients and was regularly invited into client meetings as the digital guy. During this experience, I learned how to become a valuable asset to the agency and therefore had a steady flow of work. My job was to help them sell more digital services to their clients.

They didn't care how much I knew about the technical side of things — all they cared about was how I could help them sell more digital services to their clients so their clients didn't go elsewhere.

At the time, landing pages and microsites were relatively new. I knew how to build landing pages fairly quickly using Advanced Custom Fields, but I wasn't about to mention that in a client meeting for fear of putting people to sleep.

Instead, I became a specialist at communicating the benefits of a landing page to clients:

"A landing page typically has no navigation menu and therefore no distractions for the user. A landing page has one very strong call-to-action, and having a navigation menu will distract the user from taking that action. A landing page is about one very specific thing and is somewhere we can drive paid traffic to acquire leads and customers."

No mention of Advanced Custom Fields or WordPress. It's all about the benefits, not the technical features.

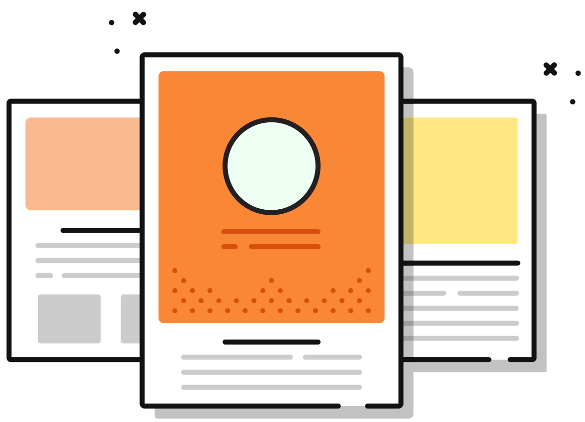
Fast forward to 2017 and building landing pages is stupidly easy and fast using something like Beaver Builder. Again, I wouldn't mention that in front of a client as it would confuse them.

However, I might present these findings to them, which show that the average conversion rate of a landing page is less than 25 percent (based on the performance of more than 74 million landing pages). I might also then highlight that landing pages I build convert at more than 45 percent (remember my Hotjar funnel graphic from earlier?).

This will help me sell more landing pages. In fact, if I really wanted to put this strategy on steroids, I would make a video showing why my landing pages convert so well and share it on my website and through my social media channels. I could drive some paid ads to that video and generate enough leads to keep me in business for the next year just selling landing pages alone.

I know I'm making this sound simple, and for me, it is. I have done the work and identified my sweet spot and who stands to benefit the most from working with me. This is second nature to me and is exactly what I should be doing in my business.

This is just one example of how specializing can keep you super focused on adding value to your clients and growing a successful business. The key is to factor your sweet spot into the equation and find a method that works for you.



Create recurring revenue

Options for revenue

Finally, I'd like to talk about one of my favorite topics of all time. Recurring revenue.

I remember the first time I sold a product online. I woke up one morning and there was a PayPal notification on my phone that someone I had never met (and to this day have still not met) put money in my bank account while I was asleep.

It changed everything for me. Up until that point, I did not believe that creating recurring revenue on the internet was actually possible and thought everyone teaching it was a charlatan. Since that day back in 2008, I have been on a mission to create as much recurring revenue in my business as possible because I truly believe it is the holy grail of all business models and the only way to secure your business financially.

Let me say right up front that I'm not talking about passive income. I am talking about recurring revenue that you receive in exchange for recurring value.

Plugins

The first product I sold was the Video User Manuals plugin, which has done very well and will celebrate its 10th birthday in 2018. This plugin adds an entire suite of video tutorials to your client's WordPress dashboard to teach them how to use WordPress so you don't have to. It also includes video tutorials on several of the popular plugins, including WooCommerce, Yoast SEO, Gravity Forms and Beaver Builder.

Each time WordPress or any of these plugins gets updated, we reshoot the videos to take into account any changes to the user interface or any new functionality. This is why our customers pay us. They pay us to keep the videos up-to-date so they don't have to field questions from their clients when things change. This is the recurring value we continue to add, and that is why they pay us recurring revenue.

Care plans and memberships

In addition to plugins, website care plans are an excellent way to build recurring revenue into your business. Or, you could look into membership websites.

Membership websites are quickly becoming popular and are a great way to build recurring revenue. In fact, a lot of our Video User Manuals customers use the videos from our plugin as the basis for their very own membership websites.

A word of warning about membership websites: If you build it, they will not come.

Make sure they come first before you build it. I wrote an extensive blog post about how we built WP Elevation based on real demand from real people that we validated first. The post includes screenshots of the original, awful sales page — warts and all.

Other considerations

Some other ideas to help you build recurring revenue include SEO plans, marketing retainers, social media management, pay-per-click management, marketing automation campaigns and email marketing services.

I'm seeing a trend in digital subscription boxes, like CrateJoy. In other words, try having your client pay you a monthly subscription, get to know their business really well, and deliver them some digital assets every month to help them in their marketing efforts. It could be a new email newsletter template, a new landing page for a campaign, some copywriting for their email marketing follow-up sequence or optimizing their one-page checkout to increase conversions.

If you know the client's business well enough, you should be equipped to make these decisions in collaboration with them. And if you know your own business well enough, you should be able to deliver these digital assets at a profit for a flat monthly fee.

I believe this type of business model is part of the future of the web professional. It's scalable, sustainable and profitable. It removes a lot of the waste from the traditional service business model, such as design revisions, project management, account management, invoicing, chasing payments, etc.

Whichever pathway you choose, I would encourage you to put some serious effort into creating some recurring revenue in your business. It adds financial security and gives you the freedom to pick and choose the projects and clients you work with.

Conclusion

Next steps

I hope you've found this eBook inspirational and motivating. It really is a fantastic time to be a web professional and to build a business to help you achieve your goals and support your lifestyle.

To learn more about running a successful business as a web professional, take a look at the free guides and training available in the GoDaddy Pro Resource Library.

To start managing all of your clients from one place, including delegated access to manage your clients' GoDaddy products, join GoDaddy Pro for free.

The end.