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Design a website in 5 simple steps

A free step by step guide from years of experience.

As a special treat, we have outlined some of the basic steps that we use to design every website we create for our clients.

All too often, people who decide to build their own website fall into the same traps:

They add everything they can think of, afraid of leaving something out, result: a cluttered mess.

They include awful photos because they can't spend the time (or the money) finding (or taking) decent photos, result: an unprofessional design.

They don't don't plan; they dive right in and start building, result: a messy website that is difficult to use.

The result of all this is lost sales. By using this guide, hopefully you won't fall into those traps. Even better, you'll call us up and ask us to design it for you!

So, let's get started ...

What you'll need to follow this guide.

Paper and pencils

Design software (Photoshop or Illustrator is expensive, try Affinity Designer instead)

A web design tool like Wordpress, Wix or Squarespace

Plenty of time!

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What's your brand proposition?

Step 1 - your brand proposition

Your visitors will bounce away quicker than you can say "*wait, there's more!*" unless you connect with them immediately. They say you have only 5 seconds to impress a new visitor. That's about right. A bit generous, even.

Look at your website homepage (if you have one, or a competitor's if not) and count to 5 as you move through the content. See how fast that time goes?

Five seconds is certainly long enough to scroll down and form an opinion as to whether or not you want to take the relationship further.

Remember, you are there to solve a problem, not to sell your services.

People need to know that they've arrived at the right place and that you have something valuable to offer and it is what they need and want. This is your big opportunity to state your case and really stand out.

Get the most out of your home page

Address the ideal client - have a bold statement that says how you solve problems.

Describe the experience from the client's point of view - explain what you do, but from the viewpoint of the client.

Make a tangible offer - explain in a nutshell how you solve their problem.

Invite the person to get in touch - add a compelling reason to contact you and make it easy to do so.

Content is King

Step 2 - craft the content

You should now have a rough idea about how you plan to present your message, whether it's a simple statement or a message that runs throughout your home page. Working out what you should include in your home page is the hardest part of the process. Here are some tips.

You are not the hero and it's not all about you.

A good home page isn't all **"me me me - sell sell sell"**. A great home page is all about the visitor, your potential client.

The client is the hero of the story and you are their trusted guide, leading them through the highlights of your offer and helping them to overcome the problems they may not even know they have.

Your goal at this stage is to get the client to like and trust you.

How do you know what your client's problems are if they probably don't?

Make 2 lists

1. Make a list of the problems and concerns that your ideal client probably has. These should form the basis of the home page.

2. Make a list of your 'must have' features but don't add them just because everyone else has. Here's a typical wish list:

Slideshows - is a slider really necessary? If you can't get your message across in one image and one statement, don't try to add them as additional slides.

Social media links and feeds - do you want to send your client off to Facebook or instagram? You haven't gained their trust yet, why send them away now?

If the feature doesn't add to your brand, leave it out.

What's your mood?

Step 3 - mood boards and styles

Now comes the fun bit, the design. But wait, don't start designing that lovely layout just yet! You need to decide on the style or the look and feel. The best way to do this is to create a mood board.

Gather all the materials and photos (even cuttings from magazines or pages from Pinterest) and decide on the overall look and feel.

Is it muted and pale or bright with primary colours? Is the text contemporary or a bit quirky? Is the tone friendly or serious? Are the photos pale and lush or dark and moody?

Try and gather design elements together that fit each other. The photos should look as if they were taken on the same day, by the same photographer.

They should all fit together as a set. Reject any that don't meet the brand and make sure that they are large enough to be reduced and cropped. You can make photos smaller, but you can't make them bigger without a loss of quality.

Images should be saved as .jpg files and graphics (icons and so on) as .png files. Photos should be 144dpi (72dpi is ok but 300dpi is just a waste and adds to the loading time of the page).

A photo is worth, well, lots really

Step 4 - images

Be ruthless when selecting photos and imagery. If it doesn't fit the brand (remember the mood board) then reject it and find another.

You'll be remembered as much by the poor photo as by the best photo so it's best to keep the quality high.

Every single word and image counts and has an important role to play in engaging your visitor. Get to the point. Less is more.

Don't be tempted to fill space. Make your home page features work harder.

Layouts and designs

Step 5 - layouts and visual plans

Now it's time to go back to basics. With paper and a pencil.

It's not pretty, but the best way to decide on the layout is to draw out what is known as a wireframe.

Define the page sections

Mark out the sections as blocks while varying the widths to make a pleasing shape. Think about the flow of the page. This is the 'customer journey' and it's important that the customer can easily find their way through the journey.

Use background images and subtle backgrounds in some of the ones to make those elements stand out.

If your home page looks too busy, you have too many fonts, colours and design features.

Pro tip: limit the choice of fonts to no more than three, using different weights to add emphasis.
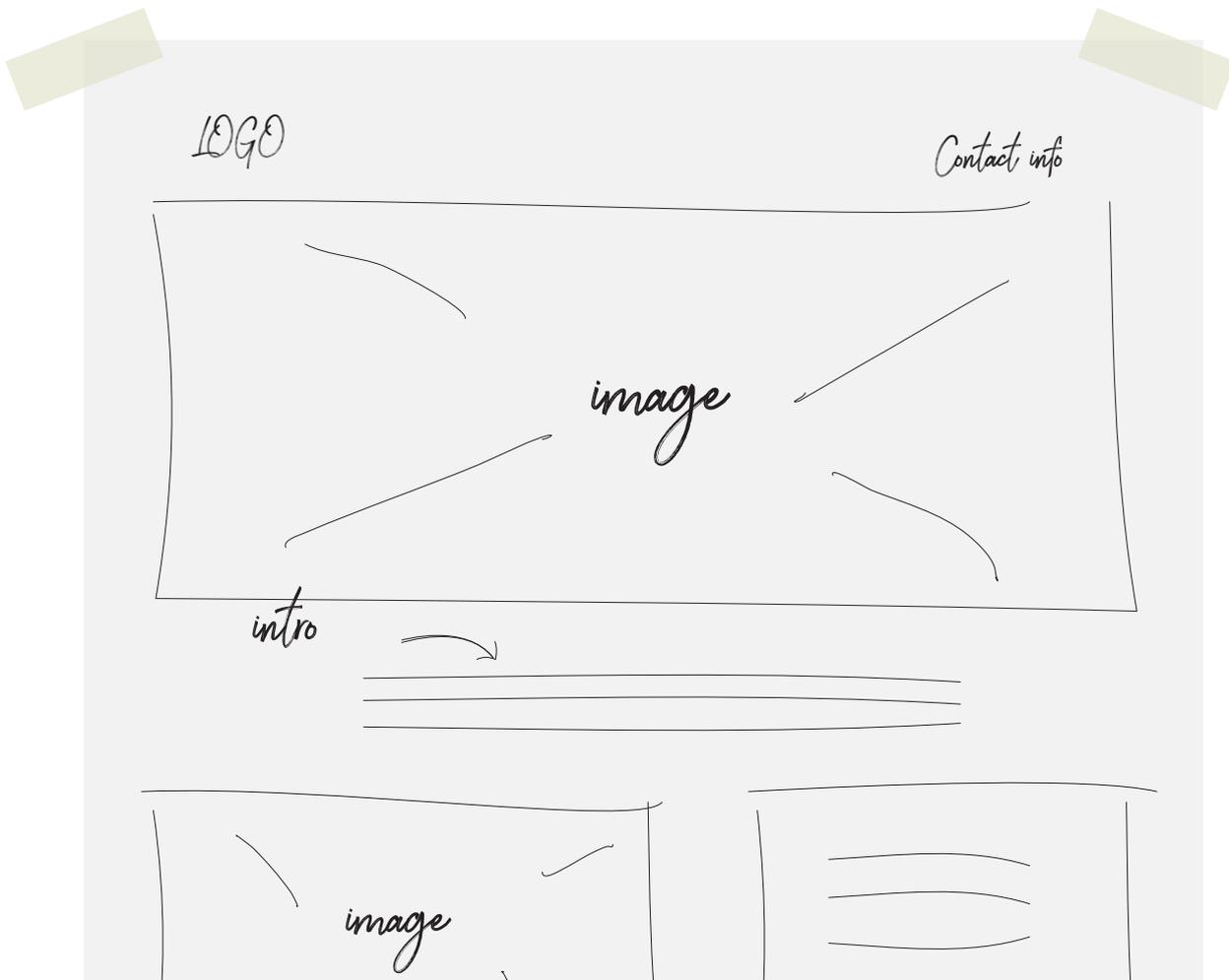
And finally ...

SEO and security

SEO

Getting your site found on Google (other search engines are available) is a whole subject in itself but try and remember these things:

Think about what your ideal client will use as a search term. This might be more than one word, such as 'wedding photographer in Devon' and then use that phrase in the appropriate page (each page should focus on one key phrase).

Use this phrase in the page name and the page title as well as the main heading on that page as well as the name of at least one photo on that page.

Security

It's a sad fact that all websites (even yours) are attacked at one time or another by people who want to cause havoc. The main way that you can prevent this is to use a suitable plugin designed to close down loopholes that may exist.

Another tip is to ensure that the software is updated regularly (this isn't the case with Square Space and Wix as they should be up to date all the time as it's a closed system).

That's all from us

That's it, hopefully a helpful guide to get you started. Some final tips:

Keep it simple and to the point
Use only the best quality photos
Think about your client (the site is for them, not for you so don't make it 'personal')
Keep your specific key phrases in mind when writing the content

Best of luck with your DIY website!

A freebie from Cube Lab at cubelab.co.uk // 01392 215400 // hello@thecubelab.co.uk