

**“I want a  
website but I  
don't know  
where to start.”**

The free and simple guide for  
people that know absolutely  
nothing about websites.



## I WANT A WEBSITE BUT I DON'T KNOW WHERE TO START

As the title suggests this guide is for people who want a website but don't know where to start. It's not in any way a guide to making your own website. It's here so you can understand what the people making your website are talking about.

We'd like to point out that this guide is gratuitously oversimplified to the extent that it might not be considered entirely 'accurate'. But that's okay, because you don't need to know all the technical details. You're not making your own website you're just being introduced to some of the basic concepts. Please don't worry about not being 'technically minded' enough for this guide. If you've understood everything so far you're going to be fine.

We hope we don't sound too patronizing, and we're sorry if we do. We're just trying to keep things really simple. To put it another way, if you want to make a cup of coffee you really don't need to know anything about the process of growing coffee beans, and you certainly don't need to understand anything about the complex chemical reactions caused by the caffeine in your blood stream. However you *do* need to understand the basic requirement of a mug and hot water. It also helps to know the difference between coffee and mud.

That was the first of many coffee analogies. If you don't know anything about websites we can help you. If you don't like coffee I'm afraid there's nothing we can do.

This guide is about helping you understand enough so you can pay someone to make you the 'right' website. This is what is at the core of this guide. Hopefully it'll give you some insight on the difference between coffee and mud. By which we mean the difference between good websites and bad websites. Obviously If you really don't know where to start, start here. Take the time to read through this guide before parting with any money. That's why this guide is free. We suggest you print it out and read it from cover to cover. It's quite short.

## **BEFORE YOU EVEN THINK ABOUT THE TECHNICAL STUFF**

If you're reading this then it's a fair bet that you want a website. Well done. You're almost certainly right!

## **WHY DO YOU NEED A WEBSITE?**

Before you go any further ask yourself the following three questions:

1. Why do I need a website?
2. What is the purpose of the website?
3. Who is it aimed at?

You should know the answers to all of these questions before you approach anybody and ask them to make you a website. If you don't know the answers it's more than likely you're not going to get the website that you want. That means wasted money, wasted time, and a lot of frustration.

The alternative is that the people who make your website ask you those same questions and you look a little bit silly when you don't seem to know the answers.

It's a good idea to write a short statement answering those three questions. The more detailed that statement is the better.

## **WHERE IS YOUR CONTENT GOING TO COME FROM?**

Once you know why you want a website you need to think about where the content is going to come from.

Who is going to provide it?

How often is it going to be updated?

Those are all questions that you should be able to answer. After all it's your website and it's your content.

This is very important. If you envision your website being updated by 20 people every week, it will have very different requirements from a website that is being updated by one person every six months. These differences are expanded on in 'content management systems' later in the guide.

It's a good idea to try and write a list of the content, or sections, that you want on your website.

## **A WEBSITE IS NOT THE SAME AS PRINTED MATERIAL**

People often consider writing for the Internet to be just like writing for print, like producing a pamphlet or a brochure.

But the Internet is not the same as a printed publication. A computer monitor is not the same as a piece of paper, and when a person is surfing the net it's not the same experience as sitting down with a book open.

One of the main differences is that people have a rather annoying tendency to scan website text rather than reading every single word.

That's the main reason that this guide is designed to be downloaded and printed out. It might be short, but it's unlikely that many people would read it properly if it was just on a website.

The message here is that whoever ends up writing the content for your website should at the very least be aware that this distinction exists.

The people making your website might have an expert that specializes in writing content for websites. They would be able to edit the text you supply and explain why they've made the changes. Alternatively there are a lot of good books on this subject, and they might suggest one to you if you want to write all of your own content.

## HOSTING,, DOMAIN NAMES AND BANDWIDTH

Okay, please don't panic. Got that? Don't panic. By all means put the kettle on and get comfortable if you want, but don't panic. Over the next three sections we're going to explain these three horribly technical terms as simply as we can.

You don't need to understand the geeky magic behind these three things, but it will really help you if you can understand why you need them and where they fit into the grand scheme of things. These technical terms are rather like the mug and hot water in the first of our coffee analogy.

Most importantly: If you want a website you're going to need to buy all three. So it's in your interest to try and understand why you need them.

### HOSTING

*"A publicly accessible place for your website to live."*

In a manner of speaking a website is just a specially formatted document. It's like any other file you might store on a computer such as a spreadsheet or a word document.

The big difference with a website is that it isn't stored on your computer. It's stored on someone else's computer. These specialized computers often sit in huge buildings full of computers and geeks. If it was stored on your computer nobody would be able to see it!

You don't need to buy a new computer. You just want to rent space on this specialized computer. This computer (through clever technical trickery or 'magic') then makes this space publicly available 24 hours a day.

This rented space is called 'hosting'. You will often hear the computer your website is stored on being called a 'server'. That's a technical term we can dismiss at this level. We're just going to continue calling it 'the computer your website is stored on', because as far as you're concerned that's just what it is.

## DOMAIN NAMES

*"An 'address' so people can find your website."*

It's no good having your website publicly accessible if no-one can find it, and that's why it needs a 'domain name'. A domain name is one of those things that begins with 'www dot'.

The 'domain name' is an address. It easily directs someone to the computer your website sits on. All they have to do is type the 'domain name' (or address) into their 'browser' (the program they use to surf the Internet), and they get taken to the right bit of the right computer with your website stored on it.

For example, 'www.fuelledoncoffee.com' is the 'domain name' that points to the computer where our website is 'hosted'. It's worth being vaguely aware that there's an awful lot of technical stuff that goes on in the background here. For example there's a list of all of these domain names stored in big directories. If you move your website 'hosting', you might need to get this big directory updated and this can take a few days to take effect.

It's important to understand that getting a 'domain name' and getting 'hosting' are not the same thing. You need them both. 'Domain names' come in lots of flavours. Some end with dot com, some end with dot co dot uk. There are about 20 other endings. Which one you get is largely a matter of personal preference, but broadly speaking it makes sense to get a domain name associated with the country you want to be associated with.

## BANDWIDTH

*"The cost of transferring large amounts of data."*

The computer that your website is stored on has an Internet connection just like any normal home computer. Except it's a really, really, really fast connection. That's because there may (hopefully) be hundreds of people looking at your website at the same time. There also might be hundreds of different websites stored on that same computer. Imagine what would happen to your home connection if you had hundreds or thousands of people using it at the same time! It would get really slow.

These super fast connections aren't cheap, and your website will normally only be entitled to use a small amount of it.

To put it very simply: if you use a lot of that super fast connection, then you are using up lots of 'bandwidth'. If you don't use much of that super fast connection then, you aren't using much 'bandwidth'. Most hosting packages come with a monthly allowance for 'bandwidth'.

If you've got ideas of your website having all sorts of fancy things like good quality videos, music, or billions of visitors then you need to be aware of the cost of transferring data, because you might have to budget in the cost for extra 'bandwidth'.

Another analogy that often helps people to understand what 'bandwidth' is involves a water pipe. You can think of the information you're providing being like water. You can only push a certain amount of water through a pipe of a given thickness. If you want to supply more water to more people you need a wider pipe. You need more pipe-'width' or more 'bandwidth'.

This is a really important concept to try and grasp. Transferring information from the computer where your website sits to other people costs money. But you should always get a certain amount of free 'bandwidth' with your 'hosting' package, and that should be enough for most normal websites.

## **WHAT ABOUT EMAIL?**

When you've got a 'domain name' and 'hosting' you'll magically have the possibility of new email addresses too. That's because the computer where your website is stored will have the clever trickery required to deal with sending and receiving email.

Any email sent to your 'domain name' will end up at that computer, just like any requests for your website end up at that computer. By following the instructions, which should be provided with your 'hosting', you'll be able to collect your email from that computer.

## DIFFERENT BROWSERS

*“Why does it matter that people use different software?”*

When you use the Internet you open a 'browser'. That might be Internet Explorer, or Firefox, or Netscape, or Opera, or any number of other programs.

Which browser people use might be a personal choice, or it might be something enforced on them by the way their computer is set up.

We mentioned earlier that a website is fundamentally just like any other file you might store on a computer like a spreadsheet or a word document.

Have you ever tried saving a document on a PC and opening it on a Mac?

Or saving something in Microsoft Word and opening it in Notepad? If you have you might know that sometimes it doesn't work very well. If you haven't, think of it as like putting unleaded fuel in a diesel car or using cold water to brew coffee.

Different software interprets different files in different ways.

The same kind of problem applies to different web browsers.

Just because something works in Internet Explorer it doesn't necessarily mean it will work in Firefox, and visa versa.

This is very annoying. But the good news is that websites *can* be made to work in basically the same way on different browsers.

But it needs to be done properly. This takes a little bit more time and effort.

When you get your website made you want to make sure that it will work in all of the major browsers. You should really ask for a list of compatible browsers from the people making your website.

At the very least that will probably scare them into doing a good job!

Otherwise you might end up with a website that looks great to you but not so great to a lot of your visitors.

That's distinctly muddy tasting coffee.

## CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

*"Putting you in control of your own website"*

A phrase that you might hear being batted around a lot is 'content management systems' or 'CMS'. A 'content management system' is essentially a piece of software that sits on the same computer as your website and allows you to make changes to the content on the website without any special software or knowledge about making websites.

If you don't have a 'content management system' you'll probably have to get the people that made your website to make any required changes.

Now if you have a small website that isn't updated very often that might actually be the economical solution. You don't always need a 'content management system'.

But if you have a website that's often updated you probably will want some sort of 'content management system'. These range from being very basic to very complex.

They might just let you edit the text on certain pages, or they might let you add your own pages.

How many features your 'content management system' needs depends entirely on how complicated the content of your website is.

## WHAT ON EARTH IS A 'BLOG'?

'Blog' is short for 'web log'. Think of it like an online diary. Geeks have kept personal web sites since the beginning of the Internet. Before we had 'content management systems' that meant you had to be able to write your own website and update the code on it every day. You had to be a *real* geek to do that!

But millions of people now keep blogs because you can update them every day with no technical knowledge. If you want a personal website chances are you'll want a 'blog'.

## USABILITY

*"Whether your website is easy to use or not"*

'Usability' is a word that some people who make websites use a lot, whilst others try to ignore it. Like 'Star Trek'.

Any coffee drinker worth their sugar knows that there are good coffee houses, and there are bad coffee houses. There are also coffee houses that you really like, and coffee houses that you really dislike. That distinction is important. They're not the same thing. Allow me to explain.

When it comes to what you like and dislike the distinction is a subjective one. Your minimalist haven is another coffee lovers under decorated nightmare. You might like the whimsical philosophies plastering the walls whilst other coffee aficionados consider them to be tacky distractions.

But that's fine. It's the reason we've got such a varied choice of coffee houses. We're all entitled to our opinion when it comes to what we like and what we don't like.

That same applies to websites. Some people like them minimalist, some like them comical, some enjoy truthful sarcasm whilst other's take theirs with a large dose of corporate cheese. There's no real science here. It depends on you and the purpose of your website.

On the other hand there's good coffee houses and there's bad coffee houses. If you get lost on your way to the toilet, it's a bad coffee house. If they repeatedly serve you the wrong coffee, it's a bad coffee house. If you have to wait ages for service for no apparent reason, it's a bad coffee house. You probably won't stay there long. You certainly won't spend much money, and you almost certainly won't go back.

The same applies for websites. If you can't find the information you're looking for, it's a bad website. If you get lost in the navigation, it's a bad website. If you wait ages for nothing to happen, it's a bad website. If the site doesn't work on the web browser you've decided to use, it's a bad website. If you leave

frustrated, as bitter as a dark roast with no intention of going back... you guessed it. It's a bad website. It's not very usable. It has 'usability' issues.

If the people making your website care about 'usability' you might find they tell you there are certain things you can't do. But they should be able to give you a good reason for everything they say. Don't be afraid to ask them to justify themselves.

## **ACCESSIBILITY**

'Accessibility' is another word that the people making your website may use a lot or may try to ignore.

It's a very complex issue and we're only grazing the surface of it. In the section on 'different browsers' we mentioned that different people use different software to surf the Internet.

Sometimes this software is designed specifically for visually impaired or physically disabled people. It might convert text to speech or Braille. They might increase the font size and change the colours. They might not be able to use a mouse.

An accessible website is one which has been written with the specific intention to ensure that they work well on these varying types of specialized software.

## **A** FINAL CHECKLIST

If you've read this guide from cover to cover, well done and thank you!

You now know where to start, and should hopefully be able to answer all of the following questions.

1. Why do you need a website?
2. What is the purpose of the website?
3. Who is it aimed towards?
4. Who is going to provide the content?
5. How often it's going to be updated?
6. Do I need a 'content management system'?
7. Do I want a personal 'blog'?
8. Does my website require a huge amount of 'bandwidth'?
9. Do I already have a 'domain name'?
10. Have I already got 'hosting'?
11. Do I understand why 'usability' may be important?
12. Do I understand why 'accessibility' may be important?