

## **Transcript: The wide world of websites**

Welcome to another episode of the Digital Master Class Series. This webinar will introduce you to the wide world of websites, and is part of Glen Eira City Council's digital enablement program. If you're watching this webinar, you may have decided that you want a website for your business or a refresh, but don't know where to start. In this webinar I will be going through the options available, given your budget and technical know-how.

On the agenda for this webinar are:

- The types and purposes of a website.
- An introduction to content management systems.
- Google sites: a no-cost option, and one that requires little tech skills.
- Software-as-a service: reasonably affordable options, which are a bit more fancy than Google Sites, that are also targeted towards the beginner.
- Open source CMS: another free option, although with more flexibility than Google Sites, it's for the more tech-savvy.
- Finally, I'll quickly go through how to brief a freelancer or agency, if you choose to have someone do it for you, and what to expect in terms of cost.

The types and purposes of websites: you have static websites, which are websites that contain fixed content that is the same for everybody. Then you have dynamic websites, where the content is different for different users, and they provide some sort of user interaction.

Some examples of types of websites:

- Information portal repository, for example a Council website.
- Online shopfront business.
- Card or portfolio (this could be your company website and personal journal, for example, a travel blog).

For a small business, a website's purpose is to turn visitors into prospects. A website is online real estate. You have space for your business on the world wide web. Think of it as an online shopfront or your virtual business card or portfolio.

The focus of this webinar is on dynamic websites, as it is most suitable for small business, given the small budget and the ability to make changes without hiring a developer. One of the most popular frameworks used to build a dynamic website is what is known as a content management system, or a CMS. A CMS helps users to create, manage, modify and build a website, without needing to code from scratch (or any code at all). The CMS handles all the basic infrastructure stuff, so that you can focus on more forward-facing parts in your website, such as content. For help with content creation, check out our other webinar: "become your own content marketing expert".

These are some of the more popular CMSs, but I will go through only a few in this webinar. The first app is Google Sites. Google Sites are free with a personal Gmail account. You can share and collaborate. If you've used any of the Google applications, such as Google Docs and Google Sheets, you'll be familiar with this particular feature. There is drag-and-drop, and you'll often see this feature on CMSs. What it allows you to do is select the element that you want. For example, a heading, an image holder or a button, and place it on the page.

You can add Google Site to your Google Drive, which is the Google document storage application. There are widgets for extra functionality. You'll see the words "widgets" used interchangeably with add-on plugins, extensions and apps. They are responsive, meaning that they are optimised for viewing on all screen sizes. For example, desktop, tablet and mobile. The elements are sized appropriately, so that you're not seeing things off screen. For the completely free version, your website will be hosted by Google, and your domain will be a Google.com domain.

If you have a Google workspace account – which used to be called G Suite, and is now a paid service – you can use Google Sites, the company Google account. This means that instead of having an @gmail.com email, you'll be logging into your @company.com account. The templates you get with Google Sites aren't fancy, but at least you'll have some sort of online presence. We cover Google My Business and Google Maps listings in our other webinar, titled: "If you're not on Google, you don't exist". Google Sites is like the next step up in making your business information public on the internet.

Software-as-a-service (SaaS): this is a single-supplier content management system with hosting and technical support, all in one. Some of the subscriptions may include commission fees for selling from online stores. For example, on Shopify. They may also come with the drag-and-drop feature. They are usually responsive and have elegant templates which have pre-made designs. The number of templates available vary, depending on the CMS. The more popular CMSs seem to have more templates, and they are either free or paid. There are widgets, apps and extensions for extra functionality. A lot of these are aimed at online stores, as they come packaged with the catalogue and shopping cart functionalities. The advantage of using these CMSs is that the software is automatically updated for you. There is very little maintenance, apart from changes to your content. Open source content management systems: these are free software, maintained by communities of developers. They have free plugin extensions and templates. You pay for the better ones, but you get free updates and support. They require no coding, to full coding knowledge and experience. Because they're maintained by communities of developers, there are often updates. With that come updates to the plugins and extensions. This means that they can be fairly high-maintenance, unlike the software-as-a-service CMSs. However, an open source CMS is more flexible than a software-as-a-service CMS, because you can build it the way you want, and customise it to fit your brand.

Now that you're informed of what's out there, it's time to create a brief. What is a brief, and why create one? In summary, the brief addresses:

- What your business is about.
- What you want your website to do (that is, its purpose).
- What you want your website to achieve.

It brings clarity around the scope, timeline, and budget. If you go to an agency and ask "I want a website, how much" they're likely to ask you to please explain. With a brief, you're in a position to do so. Be absolutely unequivocal about what you want, or what you don't want, as it is your time and money that is being spent.

What should go in a brief?

- An overview of the business and current website situation.
- Objectives of the website.
- Target audience (it's not just everyone, there is no one-size-fits-all solution that is effective).
- Problems you are facing.

- Competitor information (this will help you try and do better).
- Features and functionality.
- Revisions and design concepts.
- Timeline.
- And finally, budget.

Once you have the brief, approach two to three freelancers or agencies. Since remote working became a thing, the website market has become very competitive, which is great for those on a low budget. There are loads of platforms where you can find a freelancer or even an agency to hire, such as Upwork, Freelancer and Fiverr. Also, check out digital nomad pages on Facebook.

What everyone wants to know when undergoing a website project is: how much should they pay? Some freelancers or agencies may propose the total project cost, for example, \$5000 for an e-commerce website. Most that I have dealt with give you an hourly rate, and then estimate the project cost based on the brief. There is usually a disclaimer that, if you change the scope, the end cost will vary once you've nailed down a brief. You can agree on some terms that will go into your service agreement, and these terms may affect the cost. For example:

- The number of concepts. More concepts that need to be presented will incur further costs. Are you asking them for a low-fidelity wireframe, which could just be a hand sketch? Or a high-fidelity wireframe, which is a full-colour, interactive prototype.
- Number of revisions. The more rounds of revisions requested, the more you spend.
- Timing and urgency. Sometimes, if the website has a very tight deadline, and the freelancer or agency needs to work more hours in a shorter time period, or put in more resources to get it done quicker, the more they will charge.
- Difficulty. This refers to functionality, and if it's something that can't be resolved using a widget, app, plugin, or extension, some custom-coding may be required. In which case, it will cost you more.

Cost of websites vary greatly between freelancers and all agencies. You may have been quoted as low as \$500, but I would ask questions, keeping in mind the points I just covered. Will it be branded towards my business? Will I get a say in the design? How many revisions do I get? When can I expect it to be launched? And am I getting an online store for this price?

What if all you can afford is a cheaper website. What are the risks?

- No say in design, or fewer concepts.
- Less features (you may just get the home page, and about page, or contact page).
- Limited number or rounds of revisions. You can only make a few changes, and if you go beyond the limit, they may even charge you more.
- When you're paying less, your website may be built using a pre-made template, and you risk your website looking 'templatey'. That is, it looks like all other websites.
- You can't measure the success of the website.

However, if that is all you can afford, then that is okay, because hopefully this cheap website is not the only website you'll have. As your business grows, so will your website needs.

Once you get your website up and running, what then? Going back to what I said about websites being online real estate, if you don't publicise it, and give people a map to it, they're not going to contact you for a booking or appointment, because they don't know where you are. Or worse, they don't know that you exist.

Thank you for listening, I hope that you've enjoyed this webinar and now have a better understanding about websites.