

"TOLCHIN MINES THE SMARTEST BRAINS IN THE FIELD TO
CREATE AN ESSENTIAL BOOK FOR NOVICE INVENTORS."

—Barbara Corcoran, *SHARK TANK*

WHAT THEY NEVER TELL YOU

SECRETS of SUCCESSFUL inVENTing

FROM CONCEPT TO COMMERCE



SIXTEEN EXPERTS SPILL THE BEANS

EDITH G. TOLCHIN, EDITOR

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Why a Website?

I remember when I first used the Internet. I was managing a computer company that offered sales and service, so when it was available to the public, we were one of the first to have access to it. I was so excited I signed up for a personal account right away, ran home and had the Internet specialist set me up (it was so new, I didn't how to configure it... yet). We installed Netscape, setup the modem, heard all the beeps, whirs and chirps, and we connected! I was ready to be blown away by a world of super information! What I saw was so disappointing – a simple website that was nothing but text and very little of it at that. I thought to myself, “And I’m paying \$19.99 a month for that?” Welcome to the Internet!

Fast forward one year and my friend had created his own website. He was so excited at how easy it was. Now, being a graphic designer who majored in advertising and marketing, and minored in cartooning at the School of Art and Design, in New York City; I was looking at the website with a different perspective (layout, balance, color, etc.) and I thought to myself, “That looks cheesy! Who’d want to look at that?” You can know too much for your own good.

I was SO shortsighted; I could not see the forest from the trees! Little did I know this innovation was going to grow into an economic powerhouse that would shrink the world and connect average citizens in multiple countries to mom-and-pop operations making a family living in garages. Nor did I see online banking, education, music, movies, libraries, museums, store fronts, advertising, government administration, Dick Tracy like video smartphones, free long-distance calling, chatting, email, efax, social media and the day when NOT having a website would make one look like small potatoes in business. I was NOT seeing a lot!

Today, a website is the first thing someone looks for, no matter how they found the business or product of interest. Moreover, it has become the hub of a business’s marketing wheel, connecting all the dots in their effort to deliver their message and penetrate the market.

It’s amazing how such revolutions start with humble beginnings. So let’s take a look at how all this started, what innovations and industries it spawned, how it has leveled the playing field in media and why if you’re in business or plan to promote anything, you need a website.

A Short History on the Internet

The Internet is one of those inventions that took on a life of its own, and today, it permeates almost everything that it's hard to realize doing anything without it. Think about it! How many things does the Internet touch that we depend on? Banking, shopping, research, entertainment, business transactions, medical records, communication, defense and government administration just to name a few. If it were to disappear, it would cripple the economy, hinder national security and traumatize a generation that never knew life without it. Where would we go to "Google" it?

How it all Began

But how did it all begin? It began with someone like you, an inventor, who had a vision and the gumption to believe it could be accomplished. J.C.R. Lickliderⁱ, of MIT, in 1962 envisioned a global network of computers, all interconnected and sharing the world's data. Mind you, modems didn't exist yet and no software that could facilitate two computers speaking to each other had even been contemplated, much less developed. However, he believed! So he moved to DARPA (Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency) and started the work of developing it.

The First Computers to Connect

When you consider that in the 1960s, the vast knowledge of technology we enjoy today did not exist, it was an amazing leap forward in only three years to connect the first two computers remotely. While Licklider was at DARPA, Robert Lawrenceⁱⁱ, also a fellow MIT alum, managed to connect two computers, from Massachusetts to California, over a standard telephone line. He proved it could be done and that phone lines were inadequate (which would spawn a need for further inventions and innovations).

Since Lawrence was able to prove it could be done, just one year later, he joined Licklider at DARPA. DARPA was renamed ARPA (dropping the 'Defense' from their name) and in 1969, the very first Internet known as APRANET (for Advanced Research Projects Agency Network) was born. Coincidentally, it was in that same year we put a man on the moon—a very good year for America!

The World Wide Web (WWW)

Fast forward 20+ years and the Internet was coming together for public consumption. If you were born before 1980, then you probably remember the days of MS-DOS (Microsoft disk operating system). In those days, if you didn't know how to ask the computer for what you wanted, all you received was a message that read, "Error: Improper command improper syntax." It was the Wild West days of computers and many were trying to come up with their own solutions to this intimidating dilemma. After all, how was the average person with no computer skills, nor any desire to learn, going to be interested in a personal computer—much less surfing a would-be Internet?

Many facelifts were created, called GUIs or Graphical User Interfaces. MS Windows is a GUI operating system; where images and clickable commands took the place of having to type it all out on a black or blue screen. There was CompuServe®, Prodigy® and America Online® (AOL), to name a few. However, they were proprietary systems not universally available or compatible. This made it difficult to have a standard everyone could rally around, until one man came up with a universal solution – Tim Berners Lee.

In 1990, at the CERN Laboratories in Switzerland, the World Wide Web was createdⁱⁱⁱ. Tim Berners Lee created what would become the standard for Internet websites: HTML (Hyper Text Markup Language). By 1993, the first popular browser was Mosaic and only about 26 websites were available. By 1994, Marc Andreessen founded Netscape and the Internet was off to the races! The very first website ever was very basic (see figure 1).

World Wide Web

The WorldWideWeb (W3) is a wide-area [hypermedia](#) information retrieval initiative aiming to give universal [access](#) to a large universe of documents.

Everything there is online about W3 is linked directly or indirectly to this document, including an [executive summary](#) of the project, [Mailing lists](#) , [Policy](#) , November's [W3 news](#) , [Frequently Asked Questions](#) .

[What's out there?](#)

Pointers to the world's online [information](#), [subjects](#) , [W3 servers](#), etc.

[Help](#)

on the browser you are using

[Software Products](#)

A list of W3 project components and their current state. (e.g. [Line Mode](#) ,X11 [Viola](#) , [NeXTStep](#) , [Servers](#) , [Tools](#) , [Mail robot](#) , [Library](#))

[Technical](#)

[Details](#) of protocols, formats, program internals etc

[Bibliography](#)

Paper documentation on W3 and references.

[People](#)

A list of some people involved in the project.

[History](#)

A summary of the history of the project.

[How can I help ?](#)

If you would like to support the web..

[Getting code](#)

Getting the code by [anonymous FTP](#) , etc.

Figure 1

The focus at the time was access to information for research or news. Who knew this would explode into a global network (like Licklider envisioned) where not just information would be shared, but science fiction would become reality? Remember the Dick Tracy videophone watch? While no phone watch exists (yet... smartwatches are being developed), what's the difference between an Apple® iPhone or a Google™ Android phone with Microsoft® Skype™? You can still do what Dick Tracy did, with many more bells and whistles to boot.

Where is All This Headed?

With Pandora's e-box opened, where will it all wind up? While this will be a medium that will continue to evolve and anyone's guess could become reality, there are some trends we can look at that will give you a great idea to the enormity of it all and what it all means to you, your invention and the need to have a website. Let's look at some of these.

So What Does the Internet Hold for the Future?

From the very first rudimentary website, to today's sophisticated online communities in social networking, a revolution in communications, commerce, publishing, education, banking, employment and learning has taken place – due to the Internet and the ability to have an online storefront (a website). These changes feed multi-billion dollar economies worldwide and has truly made the world a global market place.

Let's take a look at a few of these, so you can grasp the immense opportunity a well-constructed e-presence and marketing strategy offers. Let's start with the biggest craze today, social networking and social media marketing.

Social Networking and Social Media Marketing

There used to be a time when advertising was king and advertisers controlled what the public perceived. Complement this with the traditional media (TV news, radio and newspapers) and the average person was fed only what the seller wanted them to consume.

Branding was controlled by major agencies, who were more motivated by designing campaigns and ads that won awards, regardless whether or not the ad sold products. Positioning could be manipulated, since backroom sessions would mold the message that would be delivered. Branding is how the public remembers you, positioning is how they perceive you.

For example, your logo and slogan would become your brand; so when it was seen anywhere, the first thing that would come to mind would be your company. Positioning, however, was how they perceived you. For example, Amazon is perceived as the best deal in books online, or discount books. Which is why when someone is driving down the road and thinks "book," Barnes and Noble may come to mind. However, why when they sit in front of their computer and think "book," despite that Barnes and Noble has a wonderful website, they think Amazon? Jeff Bezos, Amazon's founder and CEO, did a wonderful job of positioning.

The Paradigm has Shifted

Today, however, there no longer exists a monopoly on getting one's message out to the public and controlling how it's delivered – due to social media marketing and social networking (collectively known as "social media" even though they are two distinct mediums). There's a

power in being able to ask a question or share information with thousands to hundreds-of-thousands of people, and not have it filtered by those who would wish to conceal or control what may affect their business or brand. What you get are raw, uncensored answers based on one's own experience.

Billions of people worldwide congregate into online plazas and community centers, if you will, and converse. If they want to know about a company or product, they ask; and woe to the company who's done a poor job at taking care of the customer or of creating a quality product. On the flipside, those who care about quality and the customer's experience are rewarded handsomely. This freedom has become so popular that as of this writing, there were^{iv}:

- 1 billion Facebook users: 60% female / 40% male
- 517 million Twitter users: 60% female / 40% male
- 400 million Google+ users: 30% female / 70% male
- 175 million LinkedIn users: 55% female / 45% male

Plus, when you consider the average user in America is spending over three hours daily on social media^v and over six hours globally^{vi}, this is what I call a "captive audience."

Why People Use Social Media

There are three reasons people use social media (businesses are excluded from the following statement, because while they may have some of these reasons, they also have others that deal with commerce):

1. To be entertained
2. To be informed
3. To be helped

If you do these three things, people will flock to you. So as you package your invention and start to promote it, ask yourself, "How can I make it fun, informative and helpful?" That, my friend, is a winning formula!

Since this chapter is not on social media, there are many great books and blogs you can read and subscribe to, which will do a fantastic job of steering you in implementing a successful campaign. Some authors in particular include:

1. David Meerman Scott
2. Brain Solis
3. Chris Brogan

Remember the words of Benjamin Franklin, “*An investment in knowledge pays the best interest.*” I would invest in some good books and blogs – and you’ve already started with this one.

I will leave you with this thought: as you engage with your audience in social media, you will also be sharing your expertise through your blog articles, which will be posted in social media. This will drive traffic to your website, where they will read your blog and, if your website is designed well, look around and discover what else you have to offer. I will discuss more on this in the section, *What is a Blog*.

Mobile Surfing

Mobile surfing has taken the world by storm! Today, a smartphone or tablet replaces the computer for many people. With the ability to surf the Internet, check email, chat, do social media, take pictures, read books and even edit Microsoft Office documents on the go, many have chosen not to be encumbered by a PC.

A Brief History of the Smartphone

While the first smartphone to be created was the *IBM Simon*, by BellSouth in 1993^{vii}, the first viable phone was the Blackberry in 2002. However, it was on June 29, 2007 that the world of mobile communication would be changed forever by Apple’s iPhone.

The iPhone made it possible to have an actual PC Internet experience, complemented with a high-end camera and phone calls to boot – all in one’s pocket. People were hooked! Then the iPad followed and Internet surfing would experience a paradigm shift of its own.

What followed was a decrease in PC sales, an increase in tablet and smartphone sales, and mobile surfing overtaking traditional PC Internet surfing, according to Microsoft^{viii}. It’s reasonable to assume that the PC may be seeing its last days as the major form of ecommerce and communication – being relegated as a backup medium to the smartphone and tablet.

What does this mean to you as a businessperson and inventor, who will need to promote your product to the masses? First, since a smartphone is always in someone’s pocket or purse, versus a PC only being accessible when in front of it (and not everyone works on one daily, while almost everyone has a phone in their pocket), you will have higher success reaching people with your message. Second, you need to make sure your website is mobile ready. Since you don’t know whether your visitor will arrive via a monitor, laptop, tablet or pad, or smartphone, your website has to be able to adapt accordingly, so you don’t lose any traffic.

The Rise of eBooks

I remember when I couldn’t afford an e-reader, I would say, “I love the feel of a real book and the smell of the paper and ink. It doesn’t feel right to read on an electronic device.” While I still love a good old-fashioned book, once I got my Google Nexus 7 tablet, I was easily changed to loving eBooks.

And, what’s there not to love? You can carry a library of books in your pocket on your smartphone, or in your bag on a tablet or pad, without having to be Popeye, who became super strong after eating spinach! Plus, as I learned when my church started the Bible study on the book by Rick Warren, *What on Earth Am I Here For?* When I went to buy the book on Amazon, I could pay \$12.99 for the hardcover book, or .99¢ for the eBook. So I learned that not only do I not have to be Popeye, I don’t need to be Bill Gates to have an extensive library!

Guess what? I’m not the only person who thinks that way. As a matter of fact, so many people think that way that print book sales are down and eBook sales are up. According to Amazon, as of the writing of this chapter, Amazon experienced an increase of 70% in eBook sales for the last fiscal year, while their print sales dropped by 5%^{ix}.

What does this mean to you? After all, you're not an author... yet. One of the best ways to promote a product and brand is a book, as my friend, Marsha Friedman, would say, "It's the new business card." Imagine telling your story or sharing your expertise, completely; while building your credibility and trust factor. All that and using it as a marketing vehicle to get people to your website and invention – possibly selling your invention or attracting investors. You will learn more about this in Chapter 13, *Easy on the Pocketbook PR*.

With all the innovations and trends affected by the Internet, I mentioned the above three because they are methods, tools or strategies you can use to promote your invention and website, and drive traffic to it. And when it's all said and done, that is the goal of your marketing efforts. Why? Quite simply, your website is the hub of all your marketing efforts.

Your Website is Your Marketing Hub

While there are many new innovations and ways to reach the public (social media, Google AdWords, pay-per-click, banner advertising, direct mail, email marketing, print advertising, radio and TV commercials, etc.) everyone eventually winds up at the same location: your website. Think of it. What has become part of our vocabulary? Google it! When someone reads, sees or hears about something that grabs his or her interest, the first thing he or she will do is go look for a website to do homework. And, notice I wrote, "...to do homework" and not to buy. Why? Few people will buy on their first go around.

When was the last time you heard or saw something on TV or radio, or read about it in a newspaper article, or even found it posted in social media or a banner ad, and went straight to the website and purchased it? Maybe once or twice in your lifetime. If you're like most people, probably never. What most people will do is look at a website, and if it's done well and pulls them in, they will peruse it and glean information to see if what you have to offer is of interest. If it is, they will probably bookmark it and never return. You see, most people will forget they saw and bookmarked it, until they decide to clean up their bookmarks and find it. Then they will wonder what the bookmark was for and click on it. However, if they already purchased what you

offer elsewhere or are no longer interested, because they forgot what got them excited in the first place, they will delete it and move on. A good website will make sure that does not happen.

If your website was designed with marketing in mind, this was anticipated and you will be able to keep your website, product and message in front of your public, so when they are ready to buy, they remember who got them excited in the first place and provided all that wonderful information. You do this with a blog.

What is a Blog?

A “blog” is short for “web log.” So what is a web log? Great question! Imagine you were a journalist and your beat was the topic of your invention. You have to provide a weekly article, so you look for anything of interest that would relate to your beat. When you consider what went into creating your invention, what purpose it serves, the many facets to consider when choosing your invention, what areas in life it helps to improve, how much money it can save your customer when used properly; these are all topics for short articles you can write to share this information with your audience. That is a blog.

Now some people get intimidated when they hear the word “blog,” because they think it means creating an entire newsletter with multiple articles, ads and stuff, and they believe they don’t have the time to dedicate. In reality, all a blog has to be is one article, 350 to 750 words, written with your passion and expertise to entertain, inform and help your audience. Sounds familiar? The three reasons why people use social media. This is how you connect the dots to make sure you have an effective marketing machine that will promote and sell your invention. Plus, a blog will provide you with four huge benefits.

The Benefits of a Blog

While these four benefits are powerful, they are not the only ones you will receive; these are just the most prevalent.

1. **It shortens the sales cycle.** Since you will be sharing information on an ongoing basis through your blog, people come to learn what you do best. They will also learn the reasons your invention is a good fit for them, how they should use it for maximum benefit, what the many uses are and any other information you share. I call this “drip

marketing.” Drip marketing is about sharing information a little at a time, over time, to keep your public’s interest. In doing so, they will learn everything they need to sell themselves, so when it comes time to buy, you have little explaining or selling to do. They already know who you are, why your product is best, how to use it and that there is no one better to buy it from than you. The only thing now is the price.

2. **Earns you trust and credibility.** As mentioned above, since the customer learned who you are and what you know, the only reason they are now buying is because they trust you and believe you’re credible. After all, people buy from people they like and trust; so it’s safe to assume if they are contacting you to buy, they’ve come to like and trust you.
3. **It drives traffic to your website.** Your blog will reside on your website. I do not recommend opening blogs with third-party providers (Blogger, WordPress.com, etc.) because it will take people to some place other than your website. Plus, since the domain will belong to the respective providers, it’s not the best SEO (search engine optimization) strategy. SEO is how Google and other search engines rank you, so when people look for what you offer, you come up near the top of the search results). Now I don’t want to confuse WordPress.com the blogging website with a WordPress website; they are two different things. We will cover this later in *What Are Your Options*. When you post your blog in social media, you will post the headline, a brief description and a link back to your article on your website. Whoever wants to read it has to come to your website to do so; hence it drives the traffic.
4. **Becomes a referral tool.** Humans have what is known as the “herd mentality.” We tend to congregate with like-minded people. The same occurs online. Therefore, people reading your blog and following you know other people who would also need what you offer. When they get a question from a friend or family member regarding your expertise, what typically happens is a conversation like this. “You know, I read a blog article from (fill in your name) that I believe can help you with that question. Let me send it to you.” Since they have no choice but to read your article on your website, they have just been referred.

However, your blog is only a portion of your website. There's still the core part to be considered; where your homepage, about page, services, product and shopping cart (if applicable) reside. If this is not done well, once you've earned the visitor, they may not stick around to give you a chance to educate them on your invention. So you need to make sure you have a good website.

What Makes a Good Website?

Not all websites are equal; if they were, everyone would be successful online. It's important that you choose the right person to create it for you, or if you are creating it yourself, you think it through well and get marketing input whenever possible. You see, just like with social media, there are many people calling themselves gurus, because they know that many people know very little; hence they can sell you a service at a premium price. By the time you figure out it's not working, you will have paid a lot of money.

Website design is the same. Since a designer is not necessarily a marketing professional, he or she may design a beautiful looking website that at first glance inspires awe, but in the long run it pulls and converts no one. So let's look at some very important things you need to consider.

Good Aesthetics ("Eye Candy")

This is where designers with little to no marketing experience get you! Since he or she doesn't know what's effective and you are depending on them to show you, when they present a template with eye-popping effects and snazzy graphics, typically you love it. However, as time goes on, you realize it's not working: no one is signing up for your blog, buying your product or following you in social media.

The reason is they over did it and it distracts and eventually becomes annoying, instead of attractive. So by "eye candy," I mean it must be pleasing to look at, have only enough to make it functional and attractive, but no more than necessary. Plus, there's a difference between an image that portrays your message and one that does it with impact. Use those images only and avoid the others!

Proper Use of Space

Once you've chosen your graphics and overall look and feel, how you lay it out is crucial. You want balance and proper flow. You want to guide the reader naturally. Poor layout looks cluttered, choppy and makes one struggle to find what they're looking for. Plus, you want to make sure your homepage is used properly. The homepage is not for overloading someone with info; it's for guiding the visitor where you want him or her to go – taking them deeper into your website.

Layout also includes proper use of fonts. Avoid serifs (Times New Roman, et al.), unless there is a well-thought out purpose for them (financial or legal service, for example). You want to use 125% to 150% line height, and when it makes sense to do so, use earth tones. You see, if you make the environment soothing, people will want to read your content. However, if it's tight, black and white, and lacks good flow, it irritates the eyes and they will leave.

Quality Content

While this point should have been first, I chose to make it third because if the attractiveness and layout doesn't pull your visitor in, they won't read the content. The content is your message; it's what will persuade the reader, meet him or her where he or she is and take them where you want them to go. If the content was not written professionally, with passion and marketing insight, everything else will not matter. They will have been pulled in and then decide it's boring, tedious or overwhelming.

Remember, it's not WHAT you say, but rather HOW you say it. Moreover, saying too much is just as bad as saying too little. Whenever possible, try to hide information in plain view. How? Use tabs and dropdown boxes that people can click on if they want the information, but makes the page look like there's less to read. Everyone has two or three minutes to spare, but if it looks like it will take some time to read it all, they may choose not to or bookmark it for later and forget they did so.

A Blog

We covered the blog pretty well previously. Please refer to *What is a Blog*.

Several Conversion Forms

A conversion form is how you capture your visitor's information. Once the visitor arrives at your website/blog, you need to know who they are and be able to communicate with them in the future. If there's no conversion form so they can:

- a) Contact you and ask a question, or...
- b) Subscribe to your blog

...you will lose the opportunity to keep your company and expertise on their mind for that eventual day.

There is no way to measure what persuades a person to buy. If they need what you offer now, they'll buy now; but typically people are doing their homework. So, when it's time to buy, you need to make sure they don't forget it was you who helped them with great info. This is how you ensure future sales!

The Bribe! (A Valuable Freebie)

If your content is very good and your articles are worth reading, people will subscribe to your blog easily. However, since everyone tends to think if they wrote it, it's GREAT (like I believe this is the best chapter in the whole world), we are the worst judges of whether it pulls the reader in or not. So, you want to tip the scale in your favor.

Put together a free download or offering for the subscriber. It could be a white paper on your expertise, a training video or podcast, a software tool—whatever. Just have something that would make them think, "I want that information and all it costs me is a free subscription." You do this and your subscriptions will increase.

Social Media Functionality

Since social media is how you use your blog to drive traffic to your website, understand if someone likes what they read and wants to share it with THEIR friends on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Google+ or LinkedIn (to name a few), you need to make it as easy as possible.

So make sure you have buttons that not only allows them to follow you on your different networks, but also for them to post, tweet, like and share your content through their social media networks.

Now that you know what you are looking for and need, the question is, “Should I hire a professional or should I do it myself. While resources (time and money) will help you make that decision, there are some things to consider. Let’s look at some of those.

Things to Consider

The first thing to consider is whether to outsource to a professional. If you have the resources to do so and have no background in marketing or design, then it’s the best recommendation. When you consider there are many things to do in order to get your invention to market, the time it would take to write your content creatively, choose your platform (HTML, Joomla, WordPress, Wix, etc.), figure out the software, and find your graphics and prepare them for your site, as well as considering SEO; it could take up plenty of time that could be dedicated more efficiently and profitably in other areas.

If Choosing a Professional

If you choose to do so, there are certain things you want to ensure.

1. Do not look for a website designer on bulletin board listing services (Craig’s List, Elancer and the sort). While I applaud people who want to get into this industry by trying to promote themselves, you don’t want them learning their craft on your project. You will find inexpensive designers with limited experience in designing and especially in marketing. While designing is important, doing so with no marketing strategy and tactics to guide you is a formula for lost sales. So make sure the designer you hire is either a marketer or works with a marketing firm.
2. Ask to see a portfolio of previous projects. See what they’ve done and ask others you know and trust for their opinion on the designer’s portfolio.

3. Ask them to walk you through their strategy for your design. Based on your goals, they should be able to explain how they intend to achieve them and why the methods they use will help to accomplish them.
4. Ask for referrals.
5. Ask them what is the after-sale service you can expect. For example, once they turn over the site to you, are you on your own? Will they charge for support? How much? If free support is available, what is it and for how long? Will you need a webmaster or will you be able to manage it yourself?
6. Unless you need a highly complex site with extensive database capabilities and a back office, stay away from complex platforms like Ruby, Pearl or Joomla. You don't want to be locked into any one particular company, should you choose to move on.

While these are not exhaustive, they are a good guide to ensure you have flexibility and get a website that will perform well. After all, if it's done correctly, it will provide a return on your investment.

Doing it Yourself

Now if you want or have to do it yourself, then you want to make sure you have the best opportunity of creating a site that will work and pull. Some things you will want to do are:

- Look at other websites; not just inventor sites, but product sites. After all, your invention will be a product. Look for the very best and see what was done well, and look at some that are not so good and see what was done poorly. Learn from the good as well as the bad.
- If you have any friends who are marketers or designers, ask for their input and guidance.
- If you know anyone who has already gone through this process, ask them how they did it? What went well and what was a pitfall to avoid.
- Use a simple system. I highly recommend WordPress (not the blogging site). WordPress also offers a free standalone version of their software you can use to build a custom website on your domain. The platform is intuitive, simple and has plenty of flexibility; you will be able to create a fully functional site and not require a webmaster.

- Shop around for a good web hosting company. Google reviews and make sure you choose one that has been in business for at least 10 years. If you choose WordPress, make sure you get a Linux cPanel package, as it will make it easy for you to install WordPress and is required.

Okay, you made the choice, you have your hosting company, you've installed WordPress or other platform, and you're ready to start designing your site. You're going to need some tools. So let's look at some you can use for free.

Tools for Do-it-Yourselfers

Your website is the beginning. During the design process and after you've published it, you have to maintain it. This means weekly blogs and content needs to be written, graphics need to be added and refreshed; you need to keep it current and original, so that:

1. Repeat visitors don't get bored
2. Google and other search engines rank you well

You see, Google (the 800-pound gorilla) looks for original, new and quality content constantly. The more you refresh your site and post new articles, the more Google bots will crawl your site and update your ranking. A bot, short for robot (some call them "spiders") are what crawl the Internet to index everything they find. When they see new articles, images, comments, testimonials and refreshed content on a consistent basis, they surmise this is a good website that stays relevant and provides good information; hence if someone searches for your topic, Google will make you one of the results it displays. Consistency will be rewarded over time with you landing in the top results.

Unless you are a professional, chances are you don't have Adobe® Photoshop or Acrobat (Standard or Professional). You may or may not have MS Office. Fortunately, there are free alternatives for what you need. The only exception is royalty-free stock photography; but I have a great option there as well.

PIXLR – Image Editing

One thing you will need to do a lot of is manipulating photos. Not necessarily in a high-end professional capacity, but with simple things like resizing or adding text over it for effect. These are very simple processes. You want to make sure the resolution you use is no more than 72 dpi (dots per inch) and that you make it the actual size you need to fit the image in the spot you want it to go.

PIXLR, which looks very similar to Photoshop, and has a soothing and inviting feel, will allow you to do these things and more. As you get familiar with it, you'll find yourself getting bold and adding special effects. You can find PIXLR at <http://pixlr.com/editor/>.

123RF – Royalty-Free Stock Photography and Vector Images

Other than any pictures you may take, you will need photos for your blog and website. Here are three HUGE tips:

1. Other than professional photos you may take, limit any photos taken with your smartphone or digital camera to your gallery or "About" page. Why? We've all seen websites poorly done with impromptu photos, and it looks unprofessional and has little to no impact. You want to pull the person in with great images.
2. Do not use Google to find images to use for free. Those images belong to someone else and if you grab the wrong one, you can wind up with a lawsuit from either the photographer or distributor (iStockPhotos, 123RF, Getty Images, etc.) to the tune of being fined \$5,000 per unlicensed image used. Not worth it when you can find images for about \$1.00 or \$2.00 at most, and own a license for their use.
3. Keep photos and images in the proper aspect ratio. Avoid the temptation of skewing images out of proportion to make them fit. This looks worse than unprofessional and will hurt the image of your website. When necessary, crop the image and resize it to make it fit, maintaining the proper aspect ratio.

123RF is an online, royalty-free stock photography provider with images as low as \$1.00 and that will be mostly what you need. You will find high-impact, professional photos that will allow you to deliver your message well. You can open an account at <http://www.123rf.com>.

Google Docs or LibreOffice

If you don't have Microsoft Office or Word, then either Google Docs or LibreOffice™ are great choices. If you work on the go and don't always have access to your own computer, Google Docs is the way to go. However, if you work from the same computer mostly, then I would recommend LibreOffice. Why? LibreOffice will offer more features and you won't be dependent on Internet access, since it will be loaded on your own computer. They also offer PC, MAC and Linux based versions, so no matter what kind of computer you own, you have an option.

For Google docs, you will need to create an account. If you use Gmail or Google+, then you already have an account. Simply login with your Gmail or Google+ info and go to Google Docs.

You can find Google Docs at <https://docs.google.com/> and LibreOffice at <http://www.libreoffice.org/>.

CutePDF for Portable Document Files

Due to Adobe® Acrobat's popularity and ease of use, PDF files have become the defacto standard for sharing a document you want to protect or ensure there are no layout issues. As you develop whitepapers, reports and/or premium content to share with subscribers, you may want to do so in a PDF file. This way you can make it available for download with ease.

To do so, you will need a program to create PDF files. With CutePDF, you will be able to do so free of charge. The program becomes a printer on your PC. When you want to create a PDF, simply:

1. Open the file in its native program (Word, Publisher, LibreOffice, etc.)
2. Choose PRINT
3. Switch printer to CutePDF
4. Save it

You can get CutePDF at <http://www.cutepdf.com/products/cutepdf/writer.asp>.

Merriam-Webster Dictionary and Thesaurus, and Grammar Girl

Finally, nothing kills a job well done than typos, misspellings, redundant use of words and bad grammar. Let's face it, not everyone is a writer. That doesn't mean you're not intelligent, just that you focus on other talents more often. Writing is like a muscle, if you don't do it regularly and know the rules and best practices, you may be able to write just fine to get your point across, but it would not be publishable quality. You're in good company!

Unfortunately, people do judge you by the way you write. So, you want to make sure you have tools to help you compensate. While most good word-processing programs have built in spell checkers, they are not the most robust. It is very common for MS Word to report a misspelled word, simply because it doesn't recognize it. Moreover, if you are using technical terms related to your expertise, it may not recognize any of those. Therefore, you want to make sure you have access to a current dictionary. Also, it's easy to get stumped and use the same word too often, so a good thesaurus is a must.

Merriam-Webster is one of the best in both categories and it's free. You can access it at <http://www.merriam-webster.com/>. By the way, if you use the new Microsoft Office 2013 or 365, you can download a free Merriam-Webster plugin.

Grammar and punctuation is another consideration, separate from vocabulary and spelling. So if you're not familiar with comma rules, when to use a colon and semicolon, whether "I" or "me" is correct, and countless other rules (English is one of the hardest languages to learn for a reason), access to good grammar and punctuation resources is a must.

Grammar Girl is a pleasant, easy to use website that is free. You can look up by rule, category or ask a question. You can find Grammar Girl at <http://grammar.quickanddirtytips.com/>.

Conclusion

The Internet is here to stay! It will continue to evolve, adding more innovations and resources. Social media will grow more and more into a necessity and not an option. I believe customer service will eventually become the biggest use of social media for businesses, as good customer service is also great public relations; hence it will result in sales.

Smartphones and tablets will probably become the #1 method for commerce and computing, making access to your public much easier. After all, how many people can avoid the

jingle of their phone when they receive a message? Very few. So whether they meant to or not, when you post your blog or comment on social media, those connected to you will hear that jingle and grab the phone like a drowning man grabs a life-preserver and your message will have been delivered. However, with all these innovations, one thing won't change, and that's where the person will eventually go after receiving your message – your website.

ⁱ Howe, Walt (2012a): *A Brief History of the Internet*. <http://walthowe.com/navnet/history.html>

ⁱⁱ Howe, Walt (2012b): *A Brief History of the Internet*. <http://walthowe.com/navnet/history.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ Peters, Ian (2004): *The Internet History Project*.

<http://www.nethistory.info/History%20of%20the%20Internet/web.html>

^{iv} Media Bistro (2013): *100 Social Networking Statistics and Facts for 2012*. Infographic.

<http://www.mediabistro.com/alltwitter/files/2013/01/100-social-media-stats.png>

^v MarketingCharts (2013) *Social Networking Eats Up 3+ Hours Per Day for Average American User*.

<http://www.marketingcharts.com/wp/interactive/social-networking-eats-up-3-hours-per-day-for-the-average-american-user-26049/> Watershed Publishing.

^{vi} Media Bistro (2013): *100 Social Networking Statistics and Facts for 2012*. Infographic.

<http://www.mediabistro.com/alltwitter/files/2013/01/100-social-media-stats.png>

^{vii} TechKing (2013): *The Evolution of Smartphones* (Infographic). <http://www.bitrebels.com/technology/the-evolution-of-smartphones-infographic/>

^{viii} Microsoft (2013): *Mobile Marketing* (Infographic). http://tag.microsoft.com/libraries/old_blogs/mobile-marketing-and-advertising-landscape.sflb.ashx

^{ix} BloombergBusinessWeek (2013): *As E-Book Sales Rise, Apple iPad Bests Amazon Kindle*. Bloomberg, L.P. <http://www.businessweek.com/articles/2013-01-31/as-e-book-sales-rise-apple-ipad-bests-amazon-kindle>