



How to build a low-maintenance website for your business

A Guide for SMEs

2022 EDITION



Why invest in a website for your small business?

Even if you're not planning to sell goods and services online, it's still important – crucial, even – to have a functional, well-designed website for two main reasons:

1. Having a website makes your business infinitely more visible and searchable for potential customers.

2. A website is low-cost and effective marketing that can help you attract business, appear more reputable, and clearly showcase your products and services.

We understand. As a small business owner, you're probably pressed for time and can't devote hours upon hours designing an elaborate site. That's why the intention of this e-book is to show you the quick (and relatively painless) way to build a professional, low-maintenance website that's tailored to your business' needs.

We will take you through examples of 'basic,' 'intermediate' and 'advanced' website builds, then provide some guidance on creating a good user experience for your visitors.



But first...a few considerations for building your website

Before you dive into designing and building your website, here are a few key considerations to keep in mind.

1

Understand your needs

What size or type of business are you? Are you, for example, a hobbyist cupcake baker or independent musician? A microbusiness with a team of two staff, or a medium sized business with a team of up to 15 staff?

2

What kind of website do you want to create?

Are you looking to sell a range of products or services online through a digital storefront? Do you need to be able to process transactions? Or do you require a simpler, brochure-style site that provides a basic overview of your business and contact info?

3

What content do you have?

Good content is critical to your site's success. Carefully consider what photos and imagery you might want to use. What is your business' story? Do you have a set of key messages about your services or descriptions of products? Keep in mind that other content – like videos and customer testimonials – can add considerable depth to your website.

4

What is your budget and what can you expect to pay?

Have an ideal budget in mind before starting your website build. Remember – there are certain fixed costs, including web hosting and domain names, as well as other costs – subscription plans, templates, etc., that can vary widely. For a detailed breakdown of what you might expect to pay and how to make the most of your budget, be sure to [read our guide on website costs](#).

5

How much time are you willing to spend on your website?

Money aside, another important investment is going to be time. Ask yourself: How long can I realistically devote to building, tweaking and perfecting my website? Fortunately, many website building platforms make it easy to get a functional page online and activated within two or three hours. That said, you should always factor in ongoing maintenance, updates and edits as your site grows and evolves.

6

Are you performing the build yourself or enlisting help?

This final point dovetails with both the cost and time considerations. If you're determined to make a go of building a website on your own – great! But make sure you set a realistic timeline for yourself. If you enlist outside help from a professional web designer, ensure you are getting the best possible website within a reasonable budget.

Our in-depth [guide to getting an accurate website quote](#) can help!



Building a basic website

For some small businesses, a simple, no-frills website is all they really need. And there is nothing wrong with that! Sometimes, the most effective sites are the ones that get their message across directly.

So, what might a basic website look like? For this example, let's consider a single page site. It lays out all your business' basic information clearly and concisely.

Who would a single page website be right for?

Ideal candidates for a basic, single page site could include restaurants, hairdressers, graphic designers, consulting businesses, bookkeepers, etc.

Five of the main advantages to building a basic, single page website:

- 1. Easy upkeep and maintenance.** Not having to update multiple pages of content can be a major time-saver when you are trying to keep content current.
- 2. Straightforward, clean design.** Like we said earlier, there's beauty in simplicity. Single page sites offer you a clean, direct way to present your products or services and help avoid cluttered design.
- 3. Single page sites are a relatively low-cost way to create a web presence and advertise your products and services.** You won't need to invest major budget in professional design services or require a more advanced web building subscription.
- 4. Mobile-friendly.** Single page websites lend themselves extremely well to mobile viewing (and scrolling) – as well as shorter attention spans!
- 5. You can more effectively push your visitors to take an action.** This can include booking your service or contacting you for more details.

Two of the biggest disadvantages of single page sites to bear in mind:

- 1. Not a great platform if you have multiple pages of content to feature.** If you need to feature multiple products – or if your products and/or services require a more detailed explanation – a single page site may prove too limiting.
- 2. Relatively little or limited customisation and design options.** While it is possible to make a truly striking and attractive single page site, you are – once again – penned in by the limited web real estate.



Build your basic single page website

- ▶ Start by selecting your hosting and domain provider. A .ie domain can be purchased from one of our [.ie accredited Registrars](#).
- ▶ Next, pick your desired website build platform. [Wix](#), [Squarespace](#) and [GoDaddy Website Builder](#) are excellent single page site building tools that each have their own pros and cons.
 - **Squarespace** offers flexible, professional-looking design templates and a great blogging tool.
 - **GoDaddy Website Builder** prides itself on empowering users to get online quickly, and also includes built-in tools for marketing, promoting and monetising your website.
 - **Wix** offers pre-built templates and a user-friendly drag and drop-style editing interface that lets you add and arrange content with a few clicks.

Remember: It is always worth doing some online research on the pros and cons of different website builders to find the one that matches your needs. Many of our .ie accredited Registrars have DIY website builders to consider as well.

Best practices to keep in mind

Because there are different processes involved in using each website builder platform, we will instead provide more general guidelines on how to create an attractive, informative and professional single page site.

A good single page site has four key elements that should be included:

- ▶ Concise, compelling information about your service or business.
- ▶ Details on what your business or service offers, be it graphic design services, app design, etc.
- ▶ A clear and strong call to action. Think of what action you want your visitors to take when scrolling through your content.
- ▶ An easy way to get in touch. This can be as simple as an email form or social media handles.

Now, let's get into the actual layout and building of your single page site. Ideally, you will want to treat the site as a funnel that presents your most important information upfront and then leads to a conversion at the very end.

Start with an attention-grabbing image as the header of your site – this is often referred to as a hero image. This will be the first thing visitors see, so it should contain an image that represents your business, your business' name, a catchy tagline and a clear call-to-action. Most web builders will let you add a custom toolbar within your header that lets visitors skip to key bits of content, such as pricing, testimonials, etc.

As we get into the middle or main part of your site, you will want to include:

▶ **An About Us section**

This is your chance to tell the world about yourself and why people should avail of your services. Aim to hit the highlights of your business and keep in mind what's most compelling or interesting to your customer. An example of About Us content could be:

“At **A Taste of Rome**, we aim to bring the laid-back atmosphere and authentic flavours of Italy to Galway. Our exciting, seasonal menu was created by Giuseppe D'Angelo, a highly decorated chef with a passion for bringing you freshness and quality. We hope to see you soon for dinner. Buon appetito!”

▶ **Further details on your product or service**

Include concise, direct descriptions of your core products or services offered. Again, space is at a premium, so be sure not to dive into too much granular detail. Ideally, you want to hook your visitor enough to follow up with you in more detail.

▶ **Customer testimonials**

If you have positive, glowing reviews of your business, share them! Testimonials can add an extremely valuable layer of trustworthiness and credibility.

Finally – be sure to finish with a strong call-to-action and a way to get in touch. If your visitors have made it this far, you need to give them a place to go.

Building an intermediate website

Where the single page site prioritises economy and ease-of use, an intermediate site can be seen as a step up in terms of sophistication. Building an intermediate site typically involves multiple pages that can be easily built and customised without requiring a massive time commitment – or serious web design experience.

Who or what types of businesses would an intermediate website be right for?

Examples of businesses that would benefit from an intermediate site could include:

- ▶ A small architectural practice looking to showcase photo/video galleries of their past and current projects, offer consultations, etc.
- ▶ Gyms or personal training services that need space to showcase client testimonials and book appointments.
- ▶ Motivational speaker/life coaches offering speaking engagements and multimedia links.
- ▶ Smaller-scale or boutique digital ad agencies showcasing work and client testimonials.

Now, we will have a look at three of the most popular building platforms for intermediate sites.

Squarespace

Squarespace includes a great selection of slick, professional templates that can be easily customised to suit your needs – no web design expertise or programming required.

Wix

Like Squarespace, **Wix** features over 500 attractive, polished-looking templates that can be customised to your needs. Wix is also user-friendly and employs a drag and drop editing tool for building out your content. Or – if you fancy – you can let Wix use its Artificial Design Intelligence to design an entire website for you in minutes. Another key feature is Wix's built-in app ecosystem that can be used to add more functionality – like payment processing, Amazon store integration and more – to your site.

GoDaddy Website Builder

GoDaddy boasts an ultra-fast setup process, allowing you to get a professional-looking website up and running within an hour. However, it doesn't offer the level of template customisation that platforms like Squarespace or Wix provide. GoDaddy also boasts a fairly robust mobile app that lets you make updates and edits to your site from a phone or tablet.



Get started building your intermediate site

For the purposes of this example, we'll build our site using the Squarespace platform. Just as with the basic, single page site, you will want to get started by selecting a domain and hosting provider.

Now, Squarespace unfortunately doesn't offer the option to purchase .ie domains directly through them, so you'll have to get your .ie domain from one of our [accredited Registrars](#) and then transfer it to your Squarespace site. Here's how:

- ▶ Contact your domain provider and request the authorisation code (authcode) for your domain.
- ▶ Log in to your Squarespace account. Click on "Settings" then "Domains".
- ▶ Next, click the option "Use a Domain I Own" and type in your .ie domain name.
- ▶ Click the "Connect Domain" button.
- ▶ Authorise the domain transfer by entering your authorisation code.
- ▶ Check out and pay. Squarespace allows you to keep the time remaining on your current registration and even provides an additional year.

Start with selecting a template

Once you've successfully connected your .ie domain to your Squarespace page, it's time to begin your build by selecting a template. This can seem a bit overwhelming with the sheer number of options, but luckily, Squarespace lets you apply filters to pare down the possibilities.

You can browse either by industry – e.g., "restaurants", "photography", "musicians and bands" – or by the most popular designs. Once you arrive at a design that strikes your fancy, click the "Preview" button to get a closer look at the look and feel of your chosen template.

If everything checks out, click "Start with [chosen template]" and move along.

Remember – you can do quite a bit of customisation to your template, so don't put too much pressure on yourself to pick exactly the right one at this point.

Create a login

If you haven't already done so, create your Squarespace account with an email address, or use your Google account credentials. Squarespace gives you a 14-day free trial, so you do have a little bit of time to try things out and see if this is indeed the best building tool for you.

Give your site a name

With the template selection and sign-up sorted, it's now time to christen your site. This will be displayed along the top of your website and can be edited later.

You will then be shown a few quick tutorial slides on using Squarespace's website editing tool. Once you've clicked through the slides, you are brought to the main Squarespace menu. This is where you can edit content, add pages, view analytics, change settings and more.

Sort out your content

While it may be tempting to dive head-first into editing, you will want to take some time in advance to ensure your website's content is organised, edited and ready to be published ahead of time.

Start with all the copy for your site and paste everything into a Microsoft Word document or Google Doc for easy reference. Remember – a page riddled with typos or poorly written sentences only serve to distract potential customers from your message.

Also – take the time to ensure you have properly labelled and sized any images or other multimedia content you plan to feature on your site. Naming images tells search engines (like Google) what your content is about and can help boost your search engine rankings.

Building an intermediate website [continued]

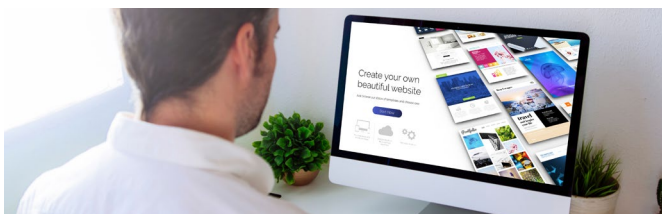
Add new pages

From your main editing menu, click “Pages” on the left-hand side of your screen. This will display all the pages currently added to your website.

Clicking the “+” symbol will show a drop-down menu that lets you add a completely blank page, as well as several other ready-made items, including blog posts, photo galleries and more. Next, choose from several possible layout options for your new page. You can also rearrange the order of your pages within the “Pages” menu by clicking and dragging.

Add as many pages as you think will be needed to house your content and tell a compelling story. Around 10 pages of quality content – including a homepage, a contact us page and product/ services pages – should be enough for most small to medium businesses.

If you ever need to delete a page, simply hover over the page in your editing menu. This will bring up a trash can icon. Click the icon, then “confirm” to permanently delete the page.



Put aside a bit of time to get creative and experiment. This is where you can make a pre-made Squarespace template feel truly unique to your business.

Add and edit content

Once you have set up your pages and layouts, it's time to finally add the content that brings your web presence to life.

- ▶ Start by selecting the page you would like to edit and then click the “Edit” button in the top left-hand corner of your screen.
- ▶ Once you're in editing mode, you will see that Squarespace divides each page up into strips or sections. You can modify any section by simply hovering over it and clicking the pen icon in the top-right hand corner.
- ▶ Adding sections is done by hovering between two sections and clicking the blueish “+” icon that appears. From here, you can drop in a wide variety of elements – from lists and testimonial quotes to photo and video galleries.
- ▶ All sections can be clicked and dragged around your page. To help with design, Squarespace provides guide boxes that show where different pieces can be moved to.
- ▶ To delete a section, hover over it and click the trash can icon.

Fine-tune your design

With the main meat and potatoes of your content in place, it's time to tweak your site's overall look and feel. Within the main editing menu, head over to “Design.” This section allows you to adjust your site's text fonts, overall colour palette and even add animations that control how your content appears.

Add social media

Connecting Facebook, Instagram or other social media accounts is straightforward. From your main editing menu, navigate over to “Settings,” then click “Social Links.” Any accounts you link will be displayed as clickable icons in your website's main header image.

Choose a subscription plan

Before your 14-day free trial ends, **make sure to pick a subscription plan** that suits your needs. For instance, the cheapest “Personal” plan is a good choice for those wanting to display portfolios or post blogs, but it can't be used to sell merchandise.

Whereas, the priciest “Advanced E-Commerce” plan provides a full suite of advanced marketing features, including analytics, email marketing integration and more.

Push your site live

While you're getting everything built, your site is private by default, which means it can't be found through a web search. To make your site publicly viewable, go to “Settings,” then click “Site Availability.” Choose “Public,” then hit “Save.”

Keep in mind, you can only make your site publicly viewable after you have selected a paid plan. If you plan to do more substantial site editing, you can go back into the “Site Availability” setting and make your site private and non-searchable.

Building an advanced e-commerce website

With the advanced level, the idea is to build a site that can offer you all the functionality of the intermediate site, but with more robust features, such as full e-commerce integration and the ability to accept and process multiple forms of payment. You may need a web developer to create an advanced e-commerce website.

Examples of businesses that would benefit from an advanced site would be:

- ▶ Small to mid-size clothing retailer showcasing multiple product lines and needing to provide payment processing and shipping options.
- ▶ A medium-sized food retailer providing grocery shipping and delivery services.
- ▶ Small to mid-size music retailer with a large, continually updating inventory of new and used vinyl LPs, CDs and concert tickets.

Here are three popular platforms for building your advanced e-commerce website:

Shopify

Features quality, easy-to-use templates. Also allows you to sell your products through multiple channels - e.g., Amazon, Pinterest. **Shopify** also works well with over 100 different payment gateways. However, once you're locked into the Shopify ecosystem, it can be difficult to move all your content to a different platform.

WooCommerce

WooCommerce is based on the WordPress platform. It can be an extremely cost-effective way of building an online store and offers nearly limitless customisation flexibility. That said, the open-source nature of WooCommerce can be daunting for first-time web builders that may be looking for a more streamlined, all-in-one solution.

Wix

Wix is another extremely popular building platform that features easy drag and drop editing tools to make building your site a straightforward affair. Wix also features a robust set of built-in apps, from email marketing programmes, to automated shipping and inventory solutions that allow you to build and customise your e-commerce store.

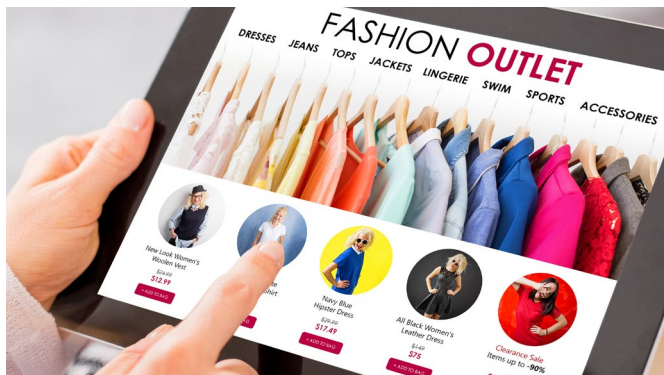
Get started with your e-commerce build

For the purposes of this e-book, we will use the Shopify platform as our example.

Start by signing up for Shopify

Head over to shopify.ie and click the green “Get Started” button. You will be prompted to add an email address, set a password and pick a name for your store. Shopify will also request a few additional details, including what you plan to sell and your (expected) revenue. This information helps Shopify tailor the overall experience to your business.

Once you’ve completed this section, a 14-day free trial begins, and you will be taken over to the main Shopify admin page.



If the selection of free themes doesn't appeal, you can also check out Shopify's wider library of paid, pre-designed themes through its “Theme Store.”

Pick a theme for your online store

From the main Shopify admin page, you can add products, customise the theme of your shop and add a custom domain that you already own.

To select a theme, click “Online Store” in the left-hand menu, then “Themes.” The default “Debut” theme is free to use and can be customised to your liking. Otherwise, you can have a look through the “Free Themes” section near the bottom of the page.

Click “Explore Free Themes” and a window will appear displaying all the available free themes. Once you’ve found one that suits your needs, click the “Add” button. Keep in mind that you can easily test and trial themes before you commit to them for the long term.

Customise your theme

With a theme in hand, you can now start to customise its look and feel. From your main admin menu, click the “Customize Theme” button. This will bring you to a new page that allows you to perform several actions, including uploading images, logos and videos, editing and adding text, tweaking your overall colour scheme and fonts, adding and repositioning various elements on your page.

Shopify uses a straightforward drag-and-drop-style editor. This means you simply select the element you wish to add, like a text box, then drag and drop into your page template.

If you need to add new sections, click the “Sections” tab followed by “Add Section,” and then pick a section category, such as a blog post, testimonial or photo/product gallery.

Add your products

Next, let's run through how to add a few products. Keep in mind that products can mean digital, physical or service items.

Click the “Add Product” button. From there, the process is straightforward. Fill in your product's name, add a short, punchy description and upload a good, clear image of the product in question.

You can even add other details, such as the product's dimensions, barcode number and more. Once everything is filled out, click the “Save Product” button.

Add your custom .ie domain

Purchase your .ie domain from one of our [accredited Registrars](#).

- ▶ Start on your Shopify admin page, click “Settings” then “Domains”.
- ▶ In the text field, enter the domain you want to connect. For example, audioobssession.ie – then click “Next”.
- ▶ After this, click “Connect Automatically”. This should trigger a pop-up that takes you to your domain provider's site. Sign into your domain provider account, click “Connect” and then “Close” to finish.
- ▶ Connecting your .ie domain can take up to 48 hours to process.

Set up payments

Once you've customised your store and added products, you will need to set up payments.

From your main admin menu, click "Settings" at the very bottom of the left-hand column and select "Payment Providers." Here, you can enable Shopify's default system, Shopify Payments, which allows you to avoid transaction fees altogether and enables you to process the most popular payment methods, including Visa, MasterCard, Apple Pay and more.

However, if you prefer to add multiple third-party payment providers, you will need to go to "Third Party Providers" and then select "Choose Third Party Provider". Pick your preferred provider from the available list – e.g. PayPal – provide your account credentials and then select "Activate".

Just remember, any transactions made via third-party payment providers incur transaction fees on every purchase, so you should check and compare various providers' fees before you select them. Offering your customers multiple ways to pay is always a good idea.

Add useful Shopify apps

One of the more impressive Shopify features is their massive App Store, which boasts around 2,500 free and paid apps that can help make the online selling process easier.

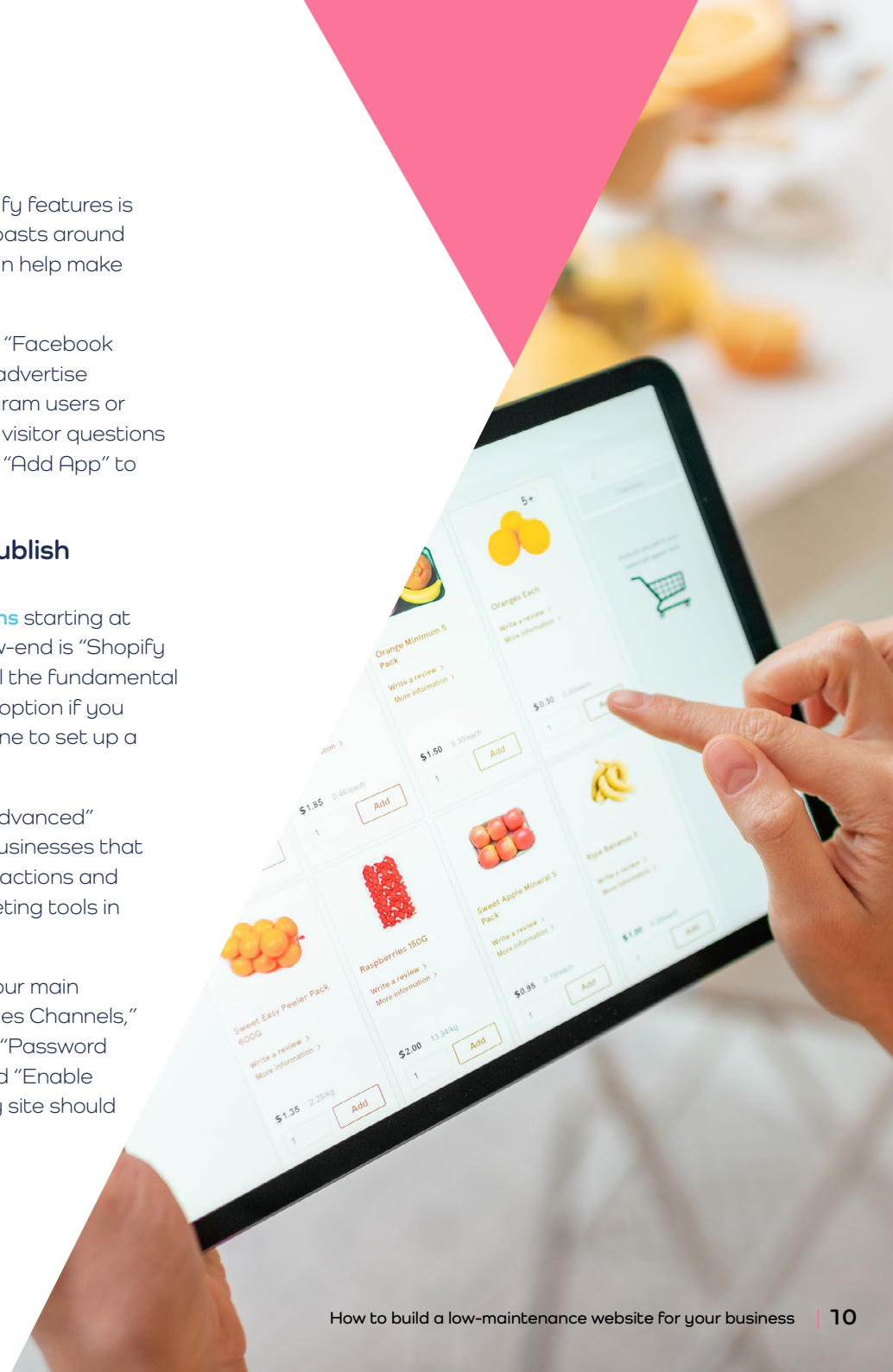
For example, you could install the "Facebook Channel" app that allows you to advertise products to Facebook and Instagram users or add a chatbot that helps answer visitor questions about your products. Simply click "Add App" to add it to your site.

Pick a monthly plan and publish your site

Shopify offers three monthly plans starting at around €27 per month. At the low-end is "Shopify Basic," which provides you with all the fundamental features you need and is a great option if you don't want to spend a small fortune to set up a professional online store.

On the high end is the "Shopify Advanced" plan which is aimed squarely at businesses that are doing higher volumes of transactions and require the most advanced marketing tools in the Shopify arsenal.

After picking a paid plan, go to your main navigation menu, then select "Sales Channels," followed by "Preferences." Under "Password Protection" untick the box marked "Enable Password" and then your Shopify site should be fully viewable for all to see.



Six tips for maximising user experience

1. Include powerful, clear calls to action

Having great content is all well and good, but what should visitors to your page do? How do you drive transactions and create excitement? Effective calls to action can sometimes be as simple and direct as “Buy Now,” “Book Today,” or “Get Started Now.”

2. Craft well-written headlines

Be direct and concise so your visitors know exactly what they're about to read and why it matters to them. If you need inspiration, there are plenty of great examples out there:

- ▶ **Dropbox Business:**
“Everything you need for work, all in one place.”
- ▶ **Ding:**
“The fastest way to send top-up worldwide.”
- ▶ **Netflix:**
“Unlimited films, TV programmes and more.”
- ▶ **Apple Music:**
“Discover new music every day.”

3. Segment key information with bullet points/icons

Break up blocks of text so that your users can get right to the information they want in a shorter amount of time. Provide short paragraphs of two to four lines, with the key words highlighted and linked to inner pages for more in-depth content.

4. Use unique imagery

Good, high-quality images can help you tell a more authentic, personal story about your business. Aim for real-life images, too, rather than stock photography. If you have the budget and the time, consider hiring a professional photographer (or even a friend that's handy with a camera) to build up your image repository.

One key thing to note is that there are plenty of dedicated resources and tutorials to help you get your website built, published and working hard for your business.

5. Ensure a consistent look and feel across all pages

As tempting as it is, don't get too wild with fonts/style/colours. Your site should look crisp, professional and consistent. Stick to standard fonts which people are familiar with and make sure there is good colour definition between the font and the web page background colour for ease of reading.

6. Take it slow and test before launch

Have friends/colleagues look over every page of your site and provide honest feedback about the design, content, etc. It can be extremely useful to gather other perspectives and address issues you might have overlooked.

For other great resources on getting your digital journey started, be sure to [explore our library of resources](#).

Unlock the power of the internet with a trusted Irish .ie online identity

It's uniquely Irish

The official Internet country code for Ireland is **.ie** and is the only online address that is Irish. A **.ie** tells the global community that you are Irish and tells the Irish community that you are local. You can even register an Irish language name if required, fadas and all.

It's more likely to be available

There is a wider choice of available **.ie** domain names compared to **.com**, as significantly more of those names are already registered.

It lets your customers find you online

.ie addresses rank higher than **.com** addresses on Irish based search engines like Google.ie. Irish consumers are more likely to click on local website addresses.

It's trusted

Every **.ie** applicant's identity is checked and validated at the point of registration. Consumers will have confidence in your business as **.ie** is a well-established and trusted domain. 77% of Irish consumers prefer a **.ie** website when buying online, instead of a **.com**.¹

It's the preferred online address for business in Ireland

91% of Irish consumers associate **.ie** websites with Irish businesses over other websites like **.com**.¹ The **.ie** domain accounts for the majority of hosted domains in Ireland.²

It protects your brand

Securing your **.ie** online address strengthens your brand and protects your online identity. All **.ie** domains are registered on a first-come, first-served basis.

¹.IE Consumer Trust 2020

².IE Domain Profile Report

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