



SPARKHES

AN INDEPENDENT BUYER'S GUIDE

The Complete Website Planning & Buying Guide

What every business owner should know before building a website or hiring a website agency.

Planning

Budgeting

Hiring

Launching

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What's Inside

This guide is organized into four parts that follow the natural order of a website project: understanding what a website can do, preparing your content, evaluating agencies, and launching with confidence. Skim it once, then return to the checklists as you go.

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01 Why Your Website Matters

For a long time, a website was treated like a digital business card — a static page with an address and a phone number. That's no longer enough. A modern website is one of the hardest-working tools available to a business: it works around the clock, generating leads, taking payments, booking appointments and answering customer questions long after your team has gone home.

A WELL-BUILT WEBSITE CAN

- ☐ Build credibility and trust
- ☐ Generate leads
- ☐ Sell products directly
- ☐ Display services clearly
- ☐ Display a product catalog
- ☐ Take bookings and appointments
- ☐ Receive quote requests
- ☐ Showcase projects and portfolios
- ☐ Answer customer questions
- ☐ Collect customer information
- ☐ Support marketing campaigns
- ☐ Automate repetitive tasks

A website that just "exists"

- Sits online with little activity
- Rarely gets updated
- Gives visitors no clear next step
- Success is measured by "having a site"

A website that grows the business

- Actively generates leads and sales
- Improves based on real data
- Gives every visitor a clear action
- Success is measured by results

02 Define the Purpose of Your Website

Before choosing colors, layouts or features, decide what you actually want your website to achieve. A website should be designed around business objectives — not just visual appearance. Tick every objective that applies to your business; you'll refer back to this list throughout the guide.

- ☐ Build credibility
- ☐ Generate leads
- ☐ Sell products
- ☐ Display products / catalog
- ☐ Receive quote requests
- ☐ Take bookings
- ☐ Showcase portfolio / projects
- ☐ Provide information
- ☐ Support customers
- ☐ Collect emails / leads
- ☐ Promote a specific service
- ☐ Automate business processes

? GOOD PRACTICE

Choose one to three primary objectives and design around those first. Trying to make a website do everything at once usually means it does nothing particularly well.

03 What Type of Website Do You Need?

Businesses should choose their website type based on their goals — not the other way around. Use this table to identify the closest match, keeping in mind that most real-world websites blend two or three of these types.

WEBSITE TYPE	BEST FOR
Business / company website	Establishing credibility and presenting core information about the business
Service-based website	Businesses that sell expertise or services rather than physical products
E-commerce website	Selling products directly online with checkout and payment
Product catalog website	Showcasing products without a full online checkout process
Portfolio website	Creative, project-based or client work that benefits from visual proof
Booking / appointment website	Businesses built around scheduled time, such as services or venues
Landing page	A single campaign, offer or product launch
Blog / content website	Building authority, audience and organic search traffic over time
Membership website	Gated content, courses or a paid community

WEBSITE TYPE	BEST FOR
Directory / marketplace	Connecting multiple buyers and sellers or listings
Web application	Interactive tools or workflows that go beyond a typical website

04 What Can a Modern Website Do For Your Business?

Modern websites go far beyond static pages. Here is what's realistically possible across six core categories — useful as a menu to pick from, not a list of requirements.

LEAD GENERATION

Turning visitors into inquiries

- Contact and quote request forms
- Consultation requests
- Newsletter signup
- WhatsApp and click-to-call buttons
- Live chat and AI chat
- Lead notifications

CATALOG

Showcasing what you offer

- Product / service catalog with categories
- Specifications, pricing, images
- Downloadable brochures
- Comparison and request-a-quote

CUSTOMER SUPPORT

Answering questions at scale

- FAQ and knowledge base
- Contact and support request forms
- Live chat and AI chatbot

SALES

Selling directly online

- Online payments and checkout
- Product and service sales
- Packages and subscriptions
- Coupons and discounts

BOOKING

Automating scheduling

- Appointment scheduling and calendar
- Availability, deposits, payments
- Automatic confirmations and reminders
- Rescheduling and cancellation

MARKETING

Fuelling growth

- Landing pages and SEO
- Blog and newsletter
- Analytics and campaign tracking
- Social media integration

05 Website Pages Checklist

Below are the most common pages a business website might include, and what each one is for. Tick only the pages that are relevant to your business — a lean, well-built site usually outperforms a bloated one.

PAGE	WHAT IT'S FOR
Home	First impression and main navigation hub
About	Builds trust by explaining who you are
Services	Overview of what you offer
Individual Service Pages	Depth and SEO value for each service
Products	Overview of what you sell
Product Detail Pages	Specifications, pricing and images for one product
Catalog	Browsable collection of products or services
Portfolio	Visual proof of past work
Projects	Detailed breakdowns of specific work
Case Studies	Results-focused proof, ideally with data
Testimonials	Social proof from real customers
Pricing	Transparent cost expectations
FAQ	Answers common questions before they're asked
Blog	Builds authority and organic search traffic
Contact	Makes it easy to reach you
Booking	Lets customers schedule directly
Privacy Policy	Legal requirement explaining data use
Terms & Conditions	Legal terms governing site or service use
Cookie Policy	Legal disclosure of tracking technology

PART 2 — PREPARE

06 Content You Need Before Building

Most website delays happen because content wasn't ready — not because of design or development. Gathering the items below before you start (or before you brief an agency) will save weeks later.

COMPANY INFORMATION

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Business name | Mission |
| ☐ Company description | ☐ Locations |
| ☐ History | ☐ Contact information |
| ☐ | ☐ Opening hours |

SERVICES

- | | |
|---|----------------------------------|
| ☐ Service names | ☐ Pricing |
| ☐ Service descriptions | ☐ Process |
| ☐ Benefits | ☐ FAQs |

PRODUCTS

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| ☐ Product names | ☐ Prices |
| ☐ Product images | ☐ Categories |
| ☐ Specifications | ☐ Variations |

TRUST CONTENT

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| ☐ Testimonials & reviews | ☐ Client logos |
| ☐ Certifications & awards | ☐ Case studies |

VISUAL CONTENT

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Logo & brand assets | Professional / product photos |
| ☐ | ☐ Project photos & videos |

07 Website Features Checklist

Use this as a working shortlist while briefing an agency or scoping a project yourself. Not every item applies to every business — the goal is to leave nothing important out.

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| ☐ Responsive design | Search | ☐ Email automation |
| ☐ Mobile optimization | ☐ Filters | ☐ Analytics |
| ☐ Contact forms | ☐ Customer accounts | ☐ Google integrations |
| ☐ Quote request forms | ☐ Blog | ☐ Social media integration |
| ☐ Booking system | ☐ Newsletter | ☐ Maps / location integration |
| ☐ Online payments | ☐ Live chat | ☐ Reviews / testimonials |
| ☐ Product catalog | ☐ AI chatbot | ☐ Downloadable documents |
| ☐ E-commerce | ☐ WhatsApp integration | ☐ Multi-language support |
| ☐ | ☐ CRM integration | |

08 Lead Generation: Turning Visitors Into Customers

A website only creates value once a visitor takes action. Understanding this simple funnel helps you design pages that actually convert, rather than just inform.



WEBSITES CAN CAPTURE LEADS THROUGH

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Contact forms | ☐ Phone calls |
| ☐ Quote forms | ☐ Live chat |
| ☐ Booking systems | ☐ AI chatbots |
| ☐ Consultation forms | ☐ Lead magnets |
| ☐ WhatsApp | ☐ Newsletter forms |

? GOOD PRACTICE

Every important page should have one clear next action — not five competing buttons. If a visitor has to think about what to do next, the page has already lost them.

09 Product Catalog vs. E-Commerce

Businesses don't always need full e-commerce. Sometimes a catalog with a quote request system converts better than a complicated checkout — especially for custom, high-value or service-adjacent products.

Catalog Website

- Displays products with categories
- Product images and specifications
- Pricing shown if desired
- Downloadable brochures
- Request-a-quote / contact sales

E-Commerce Website

- Everything a catalog offers, plus:
- Shopping cart and checkout
- Online payments, shipping, taxes
- Inventory and customer accounts
- Order management and tracking

? ASK YOUR AGENCY

"Given how my products are priced and sold, would a catalog with quote requests serve customers better than a full checkout — or vice versa?"

10 Booking & Appointment Systems

Any business that runs on scheduled time can benefit from online booking — reducing phone calls, no-shows and admin work.

Consultations

Dental

Restaurants

Hotels

Car rentals

Salons

Fitness

Contractors

Service businesses

FEATURES WORTH AUTOMATING

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| ☐ Calendar | ☐ Reminder |
| ☐ Availability | ☐ Deposit / payment |
| ☐ Booking form | ☐ Rescheduling |
| ☐ Confirmation | ☐ Cancellation |

PART 3 — EVALUATE

11 SEO: What Should Be Included?

SEO (search engine optimization) is the practice of helping your website appear in search results. It's rarely one single task — it's a combination of the items below, applied consistently over time.

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Keyword research | Internal linking |
| ☐ Page titles | ☐ Sitemap |
| ☐ Meta descriptions | ☐ Search engine indexing |
| ☐ Headings | ☐ Local SEO |
| ☐ SEO-friendly URLs | ☐ Google Business Profile |
| ☐ Image optimization | ☐ Structured data |
| ☐ | ☐ Blog / content strategy |

! RED FLAG

"SEO included" does not automatically mean your website will rank #1 on Google. Rankings depend on competition, website quality, content, authority, location, search intent and many other factors an agency cannot fully control.

12 Website Speed & Technical Quality

A slow or broken website loses visitors before they ever see your offer — and search engines factor technical quality into rankings. This checklist covers the fundamentals worth confirming.

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| ☐ Fast loading | ☐ Clean navigation | ☐ Backups |
| ☐ Mobile friendly | ☐ Working links | ☐ Security |
| ☐ Optimized images | ☐ Working forms | ☐ Error monitoring |
| ☐ Optimized videos | ☐ Browser compatibility | ☐ Basic technical SEO |
| ☐ HTTPS / SSL | ☐ Accessibility considerations | |

13 Questions to Ask a Website Agency

Bring this list to every agency conversation. A confident, experienced agency should be able to answer all of these clearly and without hesitation.

? ASK YOUR AGENCY — PRICING & SCOPE

What exactly is included in the price? How many pages are included? Is the design custom or template-based? Is mobile optimization included? Is SEO included? Is content creation included? Are professional images included? How many revisions are included?

? ASK YOUR AGENCY — OWNERSHIP & HOSTING

Who provides the hosting? Who owns the domain? Who owns the website? Who controls the hosting account? Will I receive administrator access? Can I edit the website myself?

? ASK YOUR AGENCY — AFTER LAUNCH & ONGOING

What happens after the website launches? Is maintenance included? Are there recurring fees? What happens if we stop working together? Can the website be moved to another provider? Are backups included? What security measures are included?

? ASK YOUR AGENCY — TECHNICAL & INTEGRATIONS

Is analytics installed? Is Google Search Console configured? Are integrations included? Can the website connect to my CRM? Can it integrate with WhatsApp, booking systems, email, or other tools?

14 Website Ownership & Access

Ownership and access should be clarified before signing a contract, not after. Work through this checklist with any agency you're considering.

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Domain is registered under my business/name | ☐ I control analytics |
| ☐ I have access to the domain account | ☐ I control Google services |
| ☐ I control the hosting account | ☐ I control my business email |
| ☐ I have website administrator access | ☐ I have access to website backups |
| ☐ I have CMS access | ☐ I can move the website if necessary |
| ☐ | ☐ I understand all recurring costs |

IMPORTANT

Get all of this in writing — ideally in the contract — before any payment is made. Ownership disputes are far easier to prevent than to resolve.

15 Website Cost: What Are You Paying For?

Website prices vary because the scope behind them varies. The factors below all influence cost — which is why two quotes with very different numbers can both be "fair."

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Number of pages | ☐ Automation |
| ☐ Custom design | ☐ SEO |
| ☐ Development complexity | ☐ Copywriting |
| ☐ E-commerce | ☐ Photography / video |
| ☐ Integrations | ☐ Hosting |
| ☐ Booking systems | ☐ Maintenance & support |
| ☐ | ☐ Custom functionality |

GOOD PRACTICE

Don't compare agencies based only on the final price. Compare what is included — the cheapest quote is only a bargain if it covers what you actually need.

PART 4 — LAUNCH

16 Website Quality Checklist

Before approving a website — yours or one built by an agency — work through this list on a real device, not just a preview screenshot.

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| ☐ Looks professional | ☐ Calls-to-action are clear | ☐ Links work |
| ☐ Works on mobile | ☐ Forms work | ☐ No spelling errors |
| ☐ Works on tablet | ☐ Booking works | ☐ No broken pages |
| ☐ Works on desktop | ☐ Payments work if applicable | ☐ HTTPS works |
| ☐ Navigation is easy | ☐ Images look good | ☐ Analytics is installed |
| ☐ Contact info is easy to find | ☐ Pages load quickly | ☐ SEO basics are configured |

17 Website Launch Checklist

Launch day is when small oversights become visible to real customers. These two lists cover what to confirm on each side of the switch.

Before Launch

- All pages completed
- Content proofread
- Mobile tested
- Forms tested
- Links tested
- SEO basics completed
- Analytics installed
- Domain connected
- SSL active
- Backup created
- Contact information verified

After Launch

- Submit sitemap
- Test contact forms
- Check Google indexing
- Check analytics
- Check website speed
- Test on multiple devices
- Monitor errors
- Confirm all accounts and ownership

18 Website Agency Comparison Scorecard

Score each category from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent) for every agency you're considering, then add up each column. It won't make the decision for you, but it turns a gut feeling into something you can compare objectively.

CRITERIA	AGENCY A	AGENCY B	AGENCY C
Price	___/5	___/5	___/5
Number of pages	___/5	___/5	___/5
Custom design	___/5	___/5	___/5
Mobile optimization	___/5	___/5	___/5
SEO	___/5	___/5	___/5
Content	___/5	___/5	___/5
Speed optimization	___/5	___/5	___/5
E-commerce	___/5	___/5	___/5
Booking	___/5	___/5	___/5
Integrations	___/5	___/5	___/5
Automation	___/5	___/5	___/5
Revisions	___/5	___/5	___/5
Hosting	___/5	___/5	___/5

CRITERIA	AGENCY A	AGENCY B	AGENCY C
Maintenance	___ /5	___ /5	___ /5
Support	___ /5	___ /5	___ /5
Ownership	___ /5	___ /5	___ /5
Timeline	___ /5	___ /5	___ /5
Recurring costs	___ /5	___ /5	___ /5
TOTAL	—	—	—

19 Red Flags When Hiring a Website Agency

One red flag alone doesn't necessarily mean an agency is bad — but several appearing together are worth taking seriously before you commit.

! WATCH FOR

No clear contract · Unclear pricing · Hidden recurring fees · Agency refuses to provide access · Domain controlled entirely by the agency · No explanation of ownership · Unlimited promises about Google rankings · No mobile optimization · No backup strategy · Extremely vague deliverables · No clear revision policy · No post-launch plan · Agency cannot explain what happens if the relationship ends

20 Final Website Planning Checklist

If you can tick every box below, you're ready to brief an agency — or start building — with confidence.

GOALS

☐ I know what my website needs to achieve

AUDIENCE

☐ I know who my target customer is

PAGES

☐ I know which pages I need

CONTENT

☐ I have prepared my content and assets

FEATURES

☐ I know which features I need

LEAD GENERATION

☐ I know how visitors will contact me

SEO

☐ I understand the SEO work being provided

OWNERSHIP

☐ I understand who owns the website and domain

COST

☐ I understand the total and recurring costs

LAUNCH

☐ I have a launch checklist

MAINTENANCE

☐ I know what happens after launch



A good website is more than a collection of pages.

It should help your business communicate, build trust, generate opportunities, sell, serve customers, and operate more efficiently.

Before choosing a website solution, understand your goals, identify the features you actually need, clarify ownership and costs, and make sure the final website is built around your business — not just around how it looks.

THE COMPLETE WEBSITE PLANNING & BUYING GUIDE

● COMPANY REGISTRATION

LEGAL NAME

Sparkhes Limited

COMPANY NUMBER

15383777

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Registered in England & Wales

REGISTERED OFFICE

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