

SECRETS OF A SUCCESSFUL WEBSITE



**15 WAYS TO SAVE TIME, MONEY,
FIND NEW CUSTOMERS & DEVELOP
A SUCCESSFUL MONEY MAKING SALES
MACHINE ON AUTOPILOT**

www.portsidecreativegroup.com

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Introduction

Thank you very much for requesting this free guide about the secrets to developing a successful website!

I've put this guide together because I love helping small businesses to grow and prosper. If you're not content with the present success of your business then I'd love to help you build a tremendously successful website, one that looks amazing and functions well. More importantly, I want to help you build a website that will help you sell your products, services or even just your ideas to your website visitors.

As a website developer and marketer since 1997, I've seen many websites come and go that could've been real success stories, if only they had followed even some of the advice contained in this guide.

As an extra bonus for those of you who do not yet have a website, or even if you do but you'd like help to implement some of the ideas in this guide, I've assembled a special list of 14 tips to help you choose the best web designer or web design company to work with you, and it's available for you free at the end of this guide.

Thanks again for requesting this information and please let me know if I can help you implement any of the business building ideas discussed here.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lisa P.', with a large, stylized loop at the beginning.

Lisa Parziale

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P.S. If you didn't receive this guide directly from my website, be sure to visit www.portsidecreativegroup.com where you can signup to receive my free newsletter and get regular marketing and business building tips sent to you weekly.

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Secret #1 - Define a clear purpose for your website

Building a website is a lot like building a house. It's important that you start with a well-defined plan, lay a solid foundation and then use just the right materials for the job.

In addition to deciding how your website will look and function and considering all the topics discussed in this guide, of critical importance is deciding the primary goal for your website.

Put another way, you need to decide what your "**Most Wanted Response**" (or MWR) will be.

So...just what is a "MWR" anyhow?

A **Most Wanted Response** is the primary thing that you most want your visitors to do when they come to your website.

Instead of being passive and just hoping that people will be interested in what you're offering, you need to clearly identify the one thing you most want visitors who visit your site to do. Then you need to develop your site around that purpose and lead them to take the steps necessary to accomplish your purpose.

For example, I know one company that recently decided that their MWR was to encourage people to sign up for their email newsletter. This company sells a very expensive product that often takes some time to explain the benefits of using, so they determined that the best way they could help build their business was by developing profitable long-term relationships with their customers and taking the time to properly educate them about their products benefits through an email newsletter.

Email newsletters happen to be very inexpensive to produce and it's very easy to automate the process. Creating a newsletter and focusing the purpose of this website around getting new subscribers (instead of trying to make a direct sale) has so far resulted in about thirty new subscribers a month that they now have permission to market to on a regular basis!

Other possible **Most Wanted Responses** can be as simple as:

- having someone fill out a request for more information
- asking someone to submit a request for a quotation
- offering the ability to schedule a free consultation
- providing tools or information the user will value
- for those selling products directly on the site – encouraging a visitor to click the “buy now” button and make a purchase during their visit

Whatever you decide as the MWR for your website, please don't think that your website should have one and only one purpose.

It's very likely that you'll have secondary objectives you want to accomplish, such as providing information about your products or services or asking someone to download a free trial of a software product – but you do need to clearly identify the one **PRIMARY** focus of your website and build your site around that.

Secret #2 - Choose a great name for your website

One of the most important considerations when planning your website is deciding what “domain name” you will use.

A domain name is simply the “www.companyname.com” name you type into your browser to access a website and choosing a domain name for your website is almost as important as choosing the name that you use for your business.

A great domain name is easy for your visitors to spell, easy to remember, and if at all possible...it's also great if it can tell people something about your business.

For example...if your name is "Ed" and your business is writing resumes, you might think about using the name www.edsresumes.com.

While that's not a terrible website name, it doesn't tell your website visitors much about your company, does it? Perhaps a better name would be something like www.affordableresumes.com – as it really helps tell people something about your website even before they see your home page.

If you run a retail business or one that you market extensively offline, try to keep your domain name hyphen free as it is often difficult to explain to people and may confuse some who attempt to visit your site.

For example, www.affordableresumes.com would be much better than www.affordable-resumes.com as it's difficult to explain the hyphen when telling someone about your website.

The only real exception to this rule is if you plan to rely almost entirely on online advertising or the search engines to bring you visitors. When it's just a matter of someone finding and clicking your link online and they don't have to know how it's spelled, having a longer or hyphenated name won't matter all that much.

You may also want to stay away from using numbers. If you decide to use a number or sequence of numbers, you may want to purchase the variations of the name as well. For instance, www.1fortheroad.com may be what you want, but you should also purchase www.onefortheroad.com as well. This allows someone to type it either way and find your website.

Lastly, you should consider variations that you may want to acquire should your selected domain name warrant it. Consider this example, if you purchased www.roadsandtoads.com you may consider purchasing

www.toadsandroads.com. A "redirect" can be setup to ensure the wrong ordered domain still gets the visitor to the right place. It also blocks a competitor or someone else from using a similar domain name.

Now, once you've decided on a name you'd like to use, your next step is to visit one of the many domain registrars available to register your new name. We use GoDaddy for domain registration (but not for hosting – more on that later).

Companies like www.godaddy.com, www.namecheap.com and www.hover.com are all good places where you can register a new name. On average it will cost you anywhere from \$15 - \$30 to register your name for the year, but you can also register your name for multiple years. My customers get an amazing rate (\$10 per year). I also manage/monitor the domain and will ensure it never expires unless by choice.

Once you've decided where to register your name, do a search at their website to see if your name is available, and do your best to find a ".com" name (ie. www.yourbusiness.com) over any of the alternatives like .biz, .net or .us.

The ".com" extension is the oldest and most recognized of all domain names, but if the .com that you'd like is not available, your next best option is to see if you can get the ".net" or ".co" versions instead. However, it's also good to get a country specific top-level domain such as .ca or .uk

If the name you'd like to use is already taken, most registrars will present you with other variations that you can use for your name, and you might have to try a few times to get just the name that you want. You can also reach out to me and I can help you find a good domain name.

Secret #3 - Choose a great host for your website

Choosing a good web hosting company for your website is critical to the success of your online business, as this will be the foundation for your website.

Every website needs to be stored (or hosted) on a computer that's connected to the internet in order to make your web pages available to the public. This type of computer is known as a "web server" – and the easiest way for you to get your website online is to host your website with a company that maintains many web servers in a secure facility and provides them with uninterrupted, 24/7 access to the internet.

If you're putting together a personal site about you or your favorite hobby, there are plenty of free and cheap web hosts that will do the job, and you can probably get by with hosting your website on wordpress.com or BlogSpot.

If you're running a business however, you need to be careful to choose a web hosting company that's reliable and provides you with a good range of features for a reasonable price. While most websites will do well on a "shared" hosting account where many websites are hosted on the same server, there are reasons why you may want to select a more private web server setting.

Speed, reliability and up-time are important. The web server your site sits on and the facility where that server resides can greatly impact your website performance. There are a lot of factors, but I will keep it simple. Would you want to share space with 30,000 other websites or 30 websites? Which do you think would be faster, perform better and have less issues? If you guessed the one with only 30 websites, you are correct. While having a dedicated resource is not needed for a small business, you may also

consider having your own dedicated server. While that sounds expensive, it can be surprisingly affordable.

Larger businesses will do better with a “dedicated” server that they have complete control over. Again, these can be very affordable. What determines price are the resource levels used and space needed. Selecting a good host is key and I suggest you seek professional advice. I am more than happy to give you a recommendation, feel free to contact me.

Our customers are all on private (20 websites or less per server) servers that we monitor and manage for them. On average, our customers pay around \$45 – 55 per month depending on the resources needed. We only offered “managed” hosting, which means we take care of everything.

You can find quality hosting for around \$15 to \$30 a month. Dedicated hosting typically starts around \$30 a month and goes up depending on the resources and services. This typically does not include any management of the actual website or updates. I do advise if you are hosting a WordPress website its best to get managed hosting or host with a company that can take care of all the core and plugin updates for you.

Please be wary of those web hosts that offer “free” web hosting or claim that they can host your website for only \$12 a year, a few bucks a month or some other ridiculously low figure like that.

If you’re familiar with the saying that “you get what you pay for,” nowhere is this truer than when it comes to purchasing web hosting for your website. After all, just how much service could you afford to provide to someone for only \$1 a month? It’s not much – is it?

You may also be considering the “do it yourself” hosting / website platforms like Wix or Weebly. If you have some decent skills you may have luck creating a site on one of these sites. This type of hosting may be fine for an individual or personal website, they are not the best suited for a business or professional website. Not only are they not as easy to use as they advertise,

the price can often have many hidden fees. We have had some customers tell us that their “cheap” website was costing them hundreds a month.

If you’re looking for reliable hosting for your website, don’t be afraid to shop around to find a company that can serve you the best. If you would like to secure space on our private, fully managed servers, just reach out.

Secret #4 - Provide valuable content to your visitors

Easy access to information is what drives the Internet, and it will help drive paying customers to your website if you provide them with information that helps them solve their problems and answer their questions.

Along with sales brochures and information about your products and services, be sure to include plenty of good, free content that addresses your visitors concerns and shows clearly how your product or service can solve their problems.

Free reports or whitepapers (like this one) that can be viewed either online or downloaded for later viewing are fantastic tools that can be used to build trust and credibility with your visitors and encourage them to do business with you.

If you own a computer, chances are you’ll have a word processing program installed that you can use to create your free reports, and you can either print them out to mail to prospective customers or you can convert them into Adobe PDF format like this guide. I highly recommend using Foxit Reader as a PDF Reader instead of Adobe Reader as it’s a smaller app that takes up less space on your computer’s hard drive.

If you don’t have Microsoft Word, you can use free solutions such as Open Office, FreeOffice, Libre Office or if you have a Google Account use Google Docs.

Another excellent way to provide valuable content is to write articles for publication on your website. An added benefit of writing articles for your website is that you can also distribute these articles to other websites for publication which will help get you additional free publicity as well.

You can also hire copywriters or content writers to create content for your website. Reach out to us if you need content and wish to hire it out.

One thing that I would recommend doing is coming up with 10 Frequently Asked Questions, 10 Should Ask Questions and 10 Must Ask Questions all with answers to be able to place on your website. You can then turn all of these questions into short videos and you will have thirty videos for your YouTube Channel.

Secret #5 - Update your website on a regular basis

How many times have you seen a website where they proudly proclaimed something like they were "last updated: August 4, 2015"?

I don't know about you, but I see this all the time and it drives me crazy. Now, this wouldn't be too bad if it were September of 2015, but to see that no new information has been posted on this website for almost five years now immediately reduces the interest I have in doing business with them.

Adding new content to your site on a regular basis not only shows that you care about your visitors and are eager to provide them with helpful solutions to their problems – it also provides you with more searchable content to increase your position within the search engines and it allows people searching the web find you faster.

A great way to help provide regular, fresh content for your website is through the use of a "Blog." A blog is basically an online diary or "log" that's updated frequently and easily through the use of an easy to use online interface. If you'd like to create your own Blog for your website, there are

plenty of services that make it almost “idiot proof” to create a Blog of your own.

There are all kinds of options when it comes to choosing a blogging system to use, but my absolute favorite because of its ease of use and flexibility is WordPress. With WordPress you can create a typical blog that contains short, frequent posts that are updated frequently, or a more traditional website with static web pages that stay the same over time, or a combination of the two.

WordPress can either be installed on a web hosting account of your own (many web hosts have an easy installer to setup WordPress in just a few clicks) or you can go to www.wordpress.com and signup with them to host your blog directly.

Like any piece of software though it can take some time to learn how to use the WordPress system, and it might make sense to hire someone to setup your WordPress website and show you how to use it.

Secret #6 - Use effective sales copy

While there are certainly many great looking and functioning websites out there, I don't believe the majority of them perform half as well as they could, and chances are that they lead their owners to believe that a website is not an effective way to sell their products and services.

Why do so many ineffective websites like this exist?

There are two reasons that I see.

Number one is that most businesses overlook the need for a copywriter or marketer and think all they need to put together their website is a web designer. While some web design agencies employ highly trained copywriters, most don't.

Number two is that most web designers don't have much copywriting or marketing experience, and while they can put together a nice looking and functional website, they don't know how to create a website that sells. Why would you build a website if it did not serve a purpose that results in your visitor taking some sort of action?

Which is more important to you as a business owner?

Which is more important to you, having a website that looks pretty or having one that makes you money?

While a nice-looking website certainly helps to lend credibility and a sense of professionalism to any company, isn't properly written copy that sells the benefits of your products and/or services and encourages your prospects to do business with you much more important?

Even websites that aren't commercial in nature (non-profit groups or church websites for example) must give visitors a reason to want to stay to read through their website and "buy" into the information that they're providing.

Okay—so just what does effective sales copy look like?

Effective sales copy clearly communicates the **benefits** of doing business with you and buying your products or services. Sure, it's important for people to have information about the features your products or services offer...but remember that people are buying more than just a product or service, they're buying the results of what that product or service does for them.

Effective sales copy talks more about your customers problems and how your solutions can benefit them - instead of talking only about you and your accomplishments.

Look closely when you're surfing the internet and you'll see many websites today say something like "Welcome to our website, we're a big business, we've been around for 80 years, and we do this and that" on their home page. Now let me ask you...does a statement like that make you really want to give them your business?

Sure, it tells you something about them, but if you're online looking for a solution to a problem you've got, they could sure do a lot more to get your attention.

A better opening statement would begin with a clear benefit-based headline to grab your attention and follow that up with statements that appeal to the problems you're now experiencing.

If you're in business providing marketing solutions to accountants, a statement like, "Accounting Professionals.... are you struggling to grow your business? Learn how to double your profits in 30 days or less guaranteed!" would be a much better way to start a dialog with your prospective customers.

Also, be sure to clearly communicate your USP, or Unique Selling Proposition. Your USP is what makes you stand out from the crowd...what makes you different from the business across the street that offers the same products you do. It could be a 30-day money back guarantee, or like Domino's pizza...fast, free delivery in thirty minutes or less.

You MUST make an effort to help yourself stand out from the crowd and develop a USP that gives you the edge over your competition.

Like most things in life, when it comes to writing good sales copy for your website, you really only have two choices...

Do the work yourself or hire a professional.

If you'd like to learn more about writing effective sales copy yourself, take a look at the excellent resources listed on my website at www.portsidecreativegroup.com/resources

Even if you decide not to write your own sales copy, it's important that you at least understand the basics, and these excellent guides will provide you with the information you need to make an educated decision.

If you'd prefer to work with a professional, feel free to contact me at lisa@portsidecreativegroup.com with any questions you might have. I'll do what I can to help or will gladly refer you to someone else who can.

Secret #7 – Establish trust and credibility

When someone visits your website, they are usually there looking for good information and are trying to find the solution to a problem that they have.

Since it's a proven fact that people buy from companies that they know, like and trust – you must therefore do all that you can to come across as professional, reliable and trustworthy. First impressions can often make or break a deal, so take a good hard look at what your website say about you.

Consider the following important points:

- Does your website look and feel professional, or is it cluttered with clipart and images that have nothing to do with your product or service?
- Does your website convey enough trust and credibility that encourages visitors to stick around to see what you have to say, or does it make them think twice about doing business with you?
- Does it show that you took the time to research your target market and provide them with workable solutions to their problems?

- Do you talk only about yourself (We've been in business for 100 years...we do this and we do that etc...) or do you speak directly to your visitors and tell them how they can benefit by doing business with you?
- Is it easy to find the name of a real person to email or call with questions you have?

One of the best ways I've found to boost your credibility and inspire trust with your visitors, is to make personal information about you and your business readily available on your website.

Make it easy for visitors to find your mailing address and telephone number. There are too many shady companies out there that hide behind their websites and make it extremely difficult for you to contact them if you have a problem with their product or service. Stand out from the crowd by making yourself to your visitors and they'll be more anxious to do business with you then.

Most people also enjoy reading something about the people behind the companies they choose to do business with. While I wouldn't typically include this kind of personal information on the home page of your website, it's certainly worth your time to include an "About Us" page that talks about your company history and maybe includes a few photos of yourself and your key employees as well.

Another excellent way to develop trust and credibility is through the use of testimonials from your existing clients.

When using testimonials, it is important that they be credible, and you must therefore use the full names of those providing the testimonial whenever possible. Better yet, feed testimonials in from credible websites like Google, Facebook or other websites.

To be used most effectively, don't make the mistake of only placing your testimonials on a special page on your website. Sure, you can have a

special place for them, but the best way to use testimonials is to place them near the descriptions for the products or services that they relate to.

Secret #8 - Develop a great navigation system

When developing a new website, please don't feel the need to reinvent the wheel with a radical new "groundbreaking" navigation design. Stick to what works and what people know how to use best!

For most websites this means having the website navigation links on the left-hand side or at the top of each page, and it's also a good idea to include some commonly visited links at the bottom of each page too – especially if your web pages run rather long.

Most people expect to see this kind of navigation when they visit a website, just like you expect to read this guide from top to bottom, left to right, so please don't decide to be different and put your main navigation links on the right-hand side of the page! You'll only end up confusing people in your attempt to be unique.

People also expect to see clear, descriptive page titles with easy paths that they can follow to get to the information that they're looking for.

The old rule of thumb is that your website visitors should never have to make more than three "clicks" with their mouse to get to what they want from a website. While this isn't always possible, if visitors get frustrated and feel it's taking too long to get the help and the answers they need – they'll click off your website in a second and probably won't return.

When planning the navigation for your site, consider the design of some of the oldest and best websites around.

Companies like www.amazon.com and www.dell.com have been doing this for years and they've spent millions of dollars and plenty of time researching what works and what doesn't.

Follow their lead and don't try to reinvent the wheel when it comes to good website navigation.

Secret #9 – Market your website properly

If you build it...will they come?

Many businesses make the unfortunate mistake of thinking that just because they have a website, their customers and prospective clients will seek them out to do business with them online. Then, after six months go by, they look at the poor traffic their website gets and how much their monthly hosting costs them, and they pull the plug on their site because it just wasn't "working" for them.

That really is a shame, because with a proper marketing plan their website could have been a money making investment for them instead of just a costly monthly expense.

When planning a website for your business, you really need to look at how you will market your site both online and off, and I'll give you a few ideas here to get you going in the right direction.

Offline Marketing Methods

Once you've made the commitment to invest in a website for your business, your first priority should be to have your website address printed on every business card, every brochure or marketing piece...basically every place you print your phone number you should have your website address printed on it as well.

This will help to get the word out to both new and existing customers and will encourage people to visit your site on a regular basis.

If you use voice mail or have a recorded message when people are on hold on your company phone system, you should mention your domain name there too.

Many proud website owners also go so far as to include their business name and website address on their cars and trucks, and this can often be a great traffic generator for your website.

I'd also recommend that you include your website address basically anywhere that you have your phone number printed. From your store front to your yellow pages advertising, it's important to get the word out and let people know how they can benefit from visiting your website.

Online Marketing Methods

Perhaps the greatest help to marketing your business online is to start with a website that's carefully worded to rank well with the major search engines, and especially with Google. (See Secret #10 for more information.)

Pay-per-click advertising methods like those offered by Google can also be an affordable and effective means to advertise your website. These websites allow advertisers to bid on placement within their search engines, so that when someone searches for the term "toys" for example – if you've bid a higher amount than other advertisers have – your ad will be shown first in the list. This is great because you only pay for the results you get and if someone clicks on your advertisement.

You can also promote your business online by writing articles with valuable information related to your products or services to be published on other websites. If you own a Garden Center for example, write some brief 1 or 2 page articles such as "How to grow a beautiful garden in 4 weeks or less"

and distribute these articles to related websites that may want to publish them and provide a link back to your website.

Publishing informative free articles on your website is a great way to build trust and credibility with your visitors. In addition to publishing these articles on your website, they can also be shared with other related websites to publish and this results in a true win-win situation.

The publisher of the article gets valuable free content for their website, and the writer of the article gets additional pages that link back to their website while they establish themselves as an expert in their chosen field!

This is really a true win-win situation for everyone involved!

Online forums are another excellent low-cost way to help spread the word about your website. Going back to our Garden Center example from earlier – you could find a few forums that discuss gardening issues where you can post helpful answers to questions and also make a brief mention of your website in your forum “signature.” If you’ve provided great information and people feel that you may be able to help them out, they’ll want to check out your website listed in your signature, and you’ll quickly become known as an authority on Gardening.

Marketing your website properly is something you can do yourself if you have time, or you can hire a professional to help.

If you’d like to learn more about marketing your business yourself, take a look at the many excellent resources available on my website at www.portsidecreativegroup.com/resources.

Even if you decide not to do your own marketing, it’s important that you at least understand the basics, and these excellent books will provide you with the information you need so you can hire the best professional to work with you.

If you'd prefer to work with a professional, feel free to contact me at lisa@portsidecreativegroup.com with any questions you might have. I'll do what I can to help or will gladly refer you to someone else who can.

Secret #10 - Optimize for the search engines

Most websites today could be much more profitable, if only they were optimized to attract the interest of the major search engines in order to deliver more visitors to their site. Local search is becoming a more and more popular way for consumers to locate companies to do business with and you can take advantage of this trend by designing your website with these shoppers in mind.

Like most of the secrets I've highlighted in this guide, the first step in taking corrective action is to develop a solid plan for what you want to do, and it's no different when it comes to optimizing your website for the search engines.

Your plan should start with proper keyword research to discover what words and phrases people are using to find what they want to buy.

Two of my favorite tools are <https://wordtracker.com/> and <https://neilpatel.com/ubersuggest/>.

Here you can enter key words and phrases to see how many times they were searched for online and the results you get will give you a great idea for what's hot and what's not.

Another good approach is to research potential search terms carefully to find out which ones are most popular, and then look to find those terms that have the least amount of competition out there. This means you've got less competition and it will be easier to get a higher placement within the search engines. Use these more profitable keywords throughout your

website to make it much easier for you to get noticed and increase your sales as well.

Once you've got a good list of the keywords you want to use for your website, then you can begin designing your website around them. Each page on your site should have clear and descriptive titles using your keywords. Links to pages within your site should be worded to include your chosen key words and phrases, and the copy used in the body of your web pages should be using the keywords and phrases that you've chosen to use for your site.

Search Engine Optimization agencies specialize in gaining first page positions for their clients. This makes it much harder for a business owner to do their own SEO and compete. While SEO is not rocket science, it is science and having a highly effective strategy is key. You may want to consider hiring a professional.

If you would like to gain insight into your business or market, feel free to contact me at lisa@portsidecreativegroup.com. I would be happy to offer a free market analysis for your business, no catch, no high-pressure sales.

Secret #11 –Always, always ask your visitors for their contact information!

If you own a retail business, you have the unique ability to actively welcome visitors to your store and to talk with them to identify their needs and see how you can best help them.

But what about the visitors to your website?

Isn't it a shame to have people look around your site and leave after only a few minutes without you ever having the chance to see if you can be of service to them?

The single most effective way that I've found to get to know your website visitors better, is by offering a special report, article, book or newsletter that they can download in exchange for providing you with their basic contact information.

This is the basic premise of "Permission Marketing" – where you offer someone some free, valuable information as an incentive to give you permission to contact and market to them in the future. (For more information, see Seth Godin's excellent book "Permission Marketing" about how and why this kind of marketing works. There's a link to it on my resources page on my website, or you can easily find it online or in most major bookstores.)

Offering something for free gives you the chance to get your name in front of your website visitors on a regular basis and allows you to develop lasting relationships with them.

It's a true win-win situation for you both, as you gain valuable information about your visitors...and they get the opportunity to see how you operate and if your products and services can benefit them.

This is also important because when someone visits your website they might not have a need for your products or services at that very moment, but a few months from now when they really need your help, you want them to think of you first and pick up the phone to call you!

Oh – and according to the Direct Marketing Association, email marketing is much more profitable than other marketing methods and returned as much as "\$43.62 for every dollar spent on it in 2009"!!!!

Now, before you rush off to start collecting email addresses, keep the following important points in mind!

1. **You must always ASK for permission first**, and once it's granted to you, you must respect and honor the responsibility that you've been

entrusted with. This means that you don't run off to sell your list of addresses and names if someone wants to buy them

2. If someone doesn't want to be on your mailing list, you must respect their wishes and make it easy for them to be removed from your list.
3. If you don't already have one, create a Privacy Policy that states exactly what you do with the information you collect from your visitors – and honor it! Just posting a link to a privacy policy can increase the likelihood that a prospect will sign up for your list.
4. You must be certain your email marketing efforts comply with the CAN-SPAM act or any other regional or country-specific laws. It's not difficult to do, especially if you use a reputable email service provider to handle your mailings for you, but the penalties for violating it can be steep.

There are many services and programs that make it incredibly easy to manage a permission-based email list.

[Get a free trial of the email marketing system I recommend](#) if you like to do things yourself or give me a call and I can help setup and manage your email marketing system for you.

Direct Mail can work wonders for your business too!

Depending on the business you're in a name and email address may be all you need to keep in touch with your clients and prospects on a regular basis, but I always encourage business owners to get a postal mailing address too if possible.

Now, using direct mail may not have quite the ROI that email does because it's obviously more expensive to produce and mail, but which would you rather receive from a merchant you do business with – a plain Thank You

email, or a real printed Thank You card that arrives in your mailbox and you can hold in your hands?

I'll take a printed greeting card any day, and you can bet I'll remember the company that values my business enough to send me a real Thank You card – and I'll be telling all my friends and family about the great company that cared enough to send me a proper Thank You.

What's the best way to send printed cards to your customers?

The first and most obvious way is to do it all yourself of course and buy, write, stuff and stamp your own cards – but I know that can be tiring and there are other things you'd probably rather be doing.

Another option is to have someone else take care of this for you. Maybe there's someone on your staff that has some free time to send a few prospecting or thank you cards for you, or you can outsource this to a professional Virtual Assistant or hire someone locally through a site like craigslist. You can either write a personal message to the recipient yourself and have your employees stuff, address and stamp your note for you – or do a more generic thank you card that you can sign personally or use a signature stamp on.

This frees up your time to focus on what you do best, but it can still be somewhat expensive because you have the cost of an employee plus and still need to purchase and cards and stamps which can be pricey too.

I found a great solution that lets me create a greeting card for any occasion on their website, click a button and then print the card in photo quality full color using even my own signature if I want. They then stuff and address the envelope, place a first-class stamp on it and drop it in the mail – all for about a dollar a card!

Try it out for yourself at www.greatcustomcards.com and send two free greeting cards on me! This one thing could dramatically increase your

business and sending cards and gifts to friends and family too is great for your personal relationships.

Because so many companies are terrible when it comes to thanking their customers for their business – be sure to thank your customers properly and they'll be more likely to remember you and give you their business again in the future.

Secret #12 - Make it easy for people to contact you.

Nothing is more frustrating to me than when I find the website of a company I'd like do business with, but I can't find an easy way to ask a simple question about their products or services.

If I have questions I'll usually look for a "FAQ" (Frequently Asked Questions) page first, but if one can't be found or it doesn't answer my question, I'd like an easy way to be able to contact someone there and ask them a simple question.

You should make it really easy for people to contact you if they have questions before or after the sale. Be sure your contact information is easily accessible from anywhere in the website, and a phone number (800 numbers work best) and address at the bottom of every web page can work wonders too.

If your business is run from a home office it might be tempting to set up a P.O. Box to act as your mailing address, but I'd advise against it.

Using a "real" street mailing address helps your business to appear more professional and instills confidence in those considering doing business with you, for the simple reason that you wouldn't expect a fly-by-night business to have their address posted for all the world to see, would you?

The best websites out there also actively solicit feedback from their visitors because they know that when they get the chance to answer those questions, they then have the chance to prove themselves and win their visitors business!

Secret #13 - Provide the ability to search your website

How many times have you visited a website where no matter how hard you look, you can't find what you're looking for? What do you do next?

Chances are that you leave the website in frustration and then go on to the next one on your list, swearing to never return to that website again!

Don't let this happen when people visit your website.

People get frustrated easily when they can't find what they're looking for, and they're just a click away from leaving and never coming back again. Make it easy for them to find what they want by providing the option to search your entire site.

When a search feature is not warranted, ensure you have excellent navigation on your website.

Secret #14 - Use fast loading web pages

While fast internet access is becoming more popular and available everyday, there are still many internet users who are using slower speeds, and it's important that you design your website with them in mind.

When designing your website, it's very important to design your pages to load as quickly as possible. If your website takes more than about three or four seconds to load, you will usually lose the interest of many people who

simply won't want to wait for your page to be displayed – and then with a click of their mouse...they'll be gone for good and they won't be coming back.

Website loading speed is also important because Google recently started judging websites by how fast they load, so a slower website may not place as high in Google's search results as one that loads faster.

Use highly optimized images that download as quickly as possible. This is particularly important to consider on your home page, where visitors will usually only wait a very short time before clicking away to another site.

I highly recommend that you check out CloudFlare to not only speed up your site but also protect it. It will cost you nothing as they have a free service and you'll sleep better at night knowing your site is fast and secure (I know I do) Check out their website at www.cloudflare.com or if you need any help reach out to me at lisa@portsidecreativegroup.com

Secret #15 – Optimize your website for mobile visitors

As a business owner today, you know it's important to have a website, but are you losing business because you ignore the visitors to your website who arrive via their mobile phones? How much is one new customer worth to you and can you afford to lose them to your competitor because they couldn't access your website on their mobile device?

Everyone has a mobile phone plus other portable devices. Is your website optimized for all of them? It should be. Knowing your demographic is important. I have seen in some verticals, mobile phone traffic accounted for 90% of all traffic to a website. Imagine if that site was not optimized for a mobile device.

Yet today, so many website are still tough if not impossible to navigate on a mobile phone, and even on tablets, some sites are hard to read and navigate. Users will give up and leave to find a website that's easier to read on their device.

One of the best tips when designing for smaller devices; you don't need to reproduce everything that may be on your regular website on your mobile site, but the most important information like the products and services you sell, your phone number and address (with a map) and a "contact us" form should suffice for most local businesses.

Once you've got a plan in place and know just what information you want to include on your mobile website, talk to your website designer and ask them about how to best assemble a mobile version of your website so that desktop and mobile browsers can easily view it. They can show you how to display a mobile version of your website to mobile visitors, or if that's not possible depending on your current web design, they can help you create a special mobile only version that will be displayed to visitors using their mobile phones.

However, I highly recommend that you do not use a separate domain for your mobile device but if you do then you set up proper canonical urls telling search engines that the pages are related. If this sounds like Chinese don't worry about it, simply send me an email at lisa@portsidecreativegroup.com and I'll help you out.

Special Bonus Report

Selecting a great web designer.

14 Tips to help you make the right decision!

Choosing a web designer to work with is not unlike choosing any other business you plan to give your hard-earned money to.

Whether it's an accountant or a contractor, it's important to know that you're working with someone reliable and trustworthy, and you need to know that they can handle the job you're looking to have done.

I've done my best here to identify all the major considerations when choosing a designer to design your website, but if you have questions or if I can help you out in any way, please don't hesitate to send me an email at lisa@portsidecreativegroup.com and I'll do my best to help.

Yes, we create websites! I would love to work with you. However, I also realize that an educated consumer makes the best customer.

Before beginning your quest for a web designer, its important to have a good idea of just what you want to accomplish with your website and how you plan to accomplish it. Refer to [Secret#1](#) in this guide and define a clear purpose for your website so you can clearly communicate this with your website designer.

A good designer will certainly help you expand on your ideas and give you advice that will guide you in the right direction, but knowing in advance what you'd like your website to do will allow you to compare designers quickly and fairly, and will help you to get an accurate quotation for your project.

Okay – if you're ready to go, lets get started!

Tip #1. Decide who you want to work with.

When selecting someone to develop your website, you'll most likely encounter three kinds of businesses.

- 1) Large companies with employed designers on staff (like ours).
- 2) Companies that contract out much of their work to third party developers – often overseas.

3) Independent designers who do almost all work themselves.

While all three kinds of companies are unique and can create a solid website, I recommend finding a company that has staff specifically trained to do tasks, along with a great project manager. However, finding a larger company with an owner that is directly involved in each project has the most benefits.

I feel that owner operated companies often provide better service and value because they have a more personal interest in the success of the business, and they know exactly what's required to keep their clients happy.

A company that outsources all of the work is in my opinion, the worst choice. Imagine the time and communication delays that must happen in this scenario.

Finally, independent designers can be a great resource. This usually refers to a single person who may design sites full time. However, in my experience, I have heard from countless clients that independent designers usually work a day job. This can result in a long process, delays and lack of communication.

Tip #2. Ask if they have any marketing or copy writing experience?

Many web designers can design a fabulous looking website that functions well technically – but the real test is if the website can accomplish it's intended purpose...usually to sell a product directly or generate sales leads for a product or service.

If you're not using the services of a copywriter to write the copy for your website, be sure you choose a designer who understands at least the basics of writing and using effective sales copy, so they can create a website that will turn out to be a profitable investment for you.

Your website should be an investment that makes you money each month, NOT an expense that costs you money each month!

Tip #3. Ask to see their portfolio.

Look at examples of other web sites they've done. Do you like the way they look? Are they easy to navigate and does the web site do what it says it will do?

Tip #4. Ask about their work experience

What kind of work experience do they have? Do they have a specialty or focus on doing websites for a certain industry? Have they been in business for a while or are they new to web design?

A great way to research a company you want to do business with and get a rough idea of how long they've been online, is to do a search for them at the "Wayback Machine" at <http://www.archive.org>

This website archives websites going back many years and can often give you a great idea how long a company has had their website, and it can even show how that website looked in the past. Even ours did not always look as good as it does today!

Tip #5. Ask about their technical expertise

This relates to such things as search engine optimization, load time, usability, browser compatibility, mobile responsiveness, retargeting pixels, payment gateways, special functionality like forms or calendars, scheduling or chat features, etc.

In their discussions with you have they addressed each of these important considerations...or did they only talk about the look of the web site? Looks are definitely important, but not at the expense of the form, function and sales message an excellent website should convey.

Tip #6. Look for testimonials

Does your prospective designer have testimonials from their clients available? Are they a 5-star business on Google?

Do they give you the impression that they are easy to work with and will do what they say they are going to do?

Tip #7. Will they guarantee their work?

Does the web developer offer a guarantee for their work?

If your designer doesn't offer a 100% guarantee on their work, in writing, I'd recommend that you keep looking. This not only includes you being satisfied with your delivery but also the functionality. If working with an individual, will they be around if something happens in 6 months?

I would ensure you have a written agreement that clearly outlines what you will be receiving, the costs AND the timeline to complete the work. An agreement protects you as much as the developer.

Tip #8. Consider price carefully

As you're evaluating website designers, keep in mind that there is often a great difference between the **price** and the **cost** of almost everything that you buy.

Price is a one-time thing, and it's what you pay upfront for a product or service.

Cost however, is what you will pay over the long term, and you must consider both when choosing a website designer.

If the designer provides good value however and can build you a website that will make you more money than you've invested in the site, that's much more important to consider than just the price of the project alone.

You are much better off spending \$5000 on a website that will make you \$50,000 during the course of the year, then to only spend \$1000 on a website that won't make you a thing.

Tip #9. Identify their main point of difference.

What good reasons does your designer have for why you should use them over someone else? What do they have to offer you that other companies don't? For instance, my company carries a \$1 million-dollar errors and omission insurance policy. Why? To protect our customers. That differentiates us quite a bit, as most individuals do not see the value in paying for such insurance.

In a world where most companies offer good products and service, you'll often have to look harder to find an exceptional company to work with, but don't you want the very best for your business?

Tip #10. Choose a designer that's easy to work with

First impressions count when you're considering working with any business, but especially when hiring a web designer or web design team.

If your designer or project manager is impossible to get hold of, never returns your calls or emails, or doesn't like any of your ideas, then he or she may not be the best person to work with.

Have they made themselves available to you to answer all your questions?

During your initial discussions with a web designer, **did they attempt to identify your needs...**or do they simply insist on selling you a pre-packaged solution, even though it might not be the best solution for you?

Choose a developer or team to work with that listens and is interested in helping you achieve your goals, but at the same time, be willing to listen to them and take the advice that they have to offer you.

Tip #11. Can the designer or team talk with you in plain English?

Proper communication with your website developer or development team is critically important and you need to fully understand what they are telling you, but many designers or project managers can talk “over your head” using technical jargon that sounds impressive, but does nothing but confuse you.

Like most industries there are many terms and acronyms in the web design field (CGI, PHP, ASP etc...) and your developer or team should be able to discuss what they can do for you in plain English. While “tech talk” is sometimes needed, a good developer or team will help you easily understand whatever they are trying to convey.

Tip #12. Ask if there are any hidden costs involved.

Will the web designer or company charge you every time you need to make a minor change to the web site?

Is your domain name or website hosting included or will you need to provide for that yourself?

Contracts your designer asks you to sign should be written in plain English and easy for you to understand, so that you know you're getting exactly what you're paying for.

Tips #13. Are they personable and do you get along with them?

I think most of us can intuitively feel if a person is genuinely good and trustworthy. You'll be spending a great deal of time working with your website designer or design team, so it's important that you find people that you enjoy working with. If you just don't like them for one reason or another, then that's usually a good enough reason not to choose them.

Tip #14. Consider where they are located

While there are a couple of advantages to working with a designer or team located physically close to your offices, the widespread use of the internet and email today make it as easy to work with someone across the country as it is to work with someone across town.

My advice to you is to choose the web designer or company that best meets your needs, regardless of whether they work across town or across the country.

Now having said that however, I do think it is important to work with someone that lives at least within your own country.

Here are two good reasons why:

1) While there are many good design companies located overseas where they can often work at greatly discounted prices, without proper knowledge of the language and customs in your country, working with them may prove to be much more of a challenge than you really want to deal with and it may end up costing you more in the long run.

2) When working with a company outside of your own country, there may be little or no recourse if they take your hard-earned money to develop a website, and then does not complete the project as promised.

If you decide to work with someone outside of your country, be sure to do your research and carefully evaluate them and get as many personal references as you can about them and their work.

A website should be a smart, profitable investment for you and a great tool to grow your business - if it's designed properly!

I've done my best here to identify all the major considerations to help you choose the best developer or website design company for your site and I sincerely hope that this helps you out.

If you have any questions about anything in this guide, or if you'd like to discuss development of your website with me directly, please email me at lisa@portsidecreativegroup.com or call me at (469) 545-0042 and I'll be happy to see how I can help you.