

STARTING A BUSINESS

CHECKLIST FOR LAYING A
FOUNDATION FOR ORGANIC
ONLINE VISIBILITY



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INTRODUCTION

This book was created to *help small businesses* build a strong foundation for organic online visibility. Following the checklist in this book (printable checklist found on *page 19*) will set your business up for success.

This book was created as a group effort by the SEO specialists at CourseVector. CourseVector is a Harrisburg, Pennsylvania-based, family & veteran owned web agency providing clients with web design, web development, digital marketing, web hosting, software development, & more.

So *lace up, and get ready* for the journey ahead as we lead you down the path to online visibility and business growth.






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DETERMINE A BUSINESS NAME

Choosing the name of a business is important for many reasons, including the visibility of that business online. Select a ***name that represents*** the products and/or services your business offers.

For example, if you are a pressure washing business, a name like “*Charlie Cleans*” may not be the wisest choice. Instead choose a name like “*Charlie Cleans Pressure Washing*”.

PURCHASE A DOMAIN NAME

Once you determine your business name, **do not** make the name public until after you secure your domain name. Purchase a domain name that closely reflects your business and is easy for someone to remember/type in. There are many different domain extensions; “.com”, “.org”, “.net”, “.me”, etc. It is highly recommended to **use a “.com” domain** name.

When purchasing a domain name you will come across many “addons” such as “*privacy protection*”, “*matching domain names*”, etc. These are typically **not needed**. At this point your focus is to **secure** the domain name for your business.

HELPFUL LINKS

<https://www.godaddy.com/>
<https://www.domain.com/>
<https://coursevector.com/hosting/>

LOGO DESIGN AND BRANDING

The old saying of “*a picture is worth a thousand words*” rings true for logos and branding. A logo can say **a lot** about your company. Same as with choosing a business name, you want to ensure that any imagery in your logo **represents** your business. The colors and fonts that you use in your logo design are also

important. Choose a font that is easily readable on a business card. Make sure the font is available for commercial use (Google Fonts is a great place to start). Choose a color palette (2-5 colors) that represents your business. Using a **color psychology chart** can help in your decision.

HELPFUL LINKS

<https://fonts.google.com/>

<https://netcolors.info/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Color_psychology/

SET UP EMAIL WITH YOUR DOMAIN

Your company will ***immediately*** look more professional when you have an email address that ends in your company's domain name. "*bsmith@billsingroundpools.com*" looks far more professional (and credible) than "*billspools@yahoo.com*". Plus, an email address that includes your domain name makes it very easy for a customer to find you online via the domain name in your email address.

There are many different email options out there (G Suite, Microsoft 365, etc). However, email is usually ***included in a hosting plan*** (which is needed for your website). If you plan on having a website, you may also want to explore where you will be hosting your website first (*see page 14*).



HELPFUL LINKS

<https://coursevector.com/hosting/>

<https://gsuite.google.com/>

<https://www.microsoft.com/microsoft-365/>

SET UP SOCIAL MEDIA PROFILES

During this step you should setup Social Media accounts across **all** of the major social media websites. Attempt to have the same naming convention across all of your profiles. For example, your Twitter handle and Instagram handle should be the same.



When setting these profiles up make sure to fill in **every detail available** to optimize your listing to its fullest. The more information you provide, the more credible your business appears to potential customers.

Even if you only post to 1 or 2 social media channels on a regular basis, setting up any applicable social media accounts ahead of time reserves your handle and affords you the ability to scale when ready.

HELPFUL LINKS

<https://www.facebook.com/>

<https://twitter.com/>

<https://www.youtube.com/>

<https://www.instagram.com/>

<https://www.pinterest.com/>

<https://www.linkedin.com/>

GOOGLE MY BUSINESS LISTING

A Google My Business (GMB) listing is one of the most **important** things to have as a local business. This allows your business to be found on Google Maps and **significantly** helps increase visibility in Google's standard search results.

HELPFUL LINKS

<https://www.google.com/business/>

Before setting up a GMB listing, make sure that there is not already a listing for your business. A quick Google search will give you the answer. If your business already exists hit the "*Claim this Business*" link. If it does not exist, set one up. Claiming or setting up a business from scratch may require verification through a postcard in the mail.

Once verified, you will have access to your listing. Fill in **every detail** you possibly can, add pictures & videos, add the services you offer, etc. The more you can fill in, the better.

BUILDING A WEBSITE

The first step in building a site is choosing the platform. You need to consider the following when determining what platform you wish to use: scalability & growth, cost, support, features, customizations, etc. Do your research! A platform might seem like a perfect fit however, there may be limitations resulting in ***poor search engine rankings***.

WordPress (WP) is a great platform on which to start a website for any new business (WP powers ***over 30% of the web***). WP is easy to learn, can be customized to fit any need, is scalable, and performs great for SEO.

If you are not technically savvy, find a professional to develop the site for you. You will typically see better results with a ***professionally built website*** than one that you DIY. If you wish to DIY, a happy medium would be to find a developer to build the first few pages of your site and show you how to add/edit the content. Then you can finish up the site yourself.



HELPFUL LINKS

<https://wordpress.org/>

<https://coursevector.com/web-design/>

CHOOSING A HOSTING PLAN

There are numerous hosting companies out there. Shop around to find the hosting company that best fits your needs. Keep in mind the following features when finding a hosting company to work with.

Reliability

Ask to see reports of reliability. A good web host will boast a 99.99% uptime minimum (this equates to a maximum of 8 hrs and 45 mins of downtime a year).

Support

What type of support is offered? Phone, chat, email, emergency? Is the support team located in your country? These are all questions to consider.

Email

Is email included? Does it cost extra? Is it limited in storage and/or accounts?

HELPFUL LINKS

<https://coursevector.com/hosting/>

Shared Server

Being a new or small business you most likely will choose a shared hosting plan. What this means is that your website will be placed on a server with other websites. Ask how many websites your hosting company puts on a single server (the lower the better). Most new or small businesses will be fine choosing a shared hosting plan.

Resources

Know your resources (storage, bandwidth, etc). Be aware of “unlimited” plans. These may sound great on paper, but **read the fine print!** Typically an unlimited plan will start to throttle your website once it hits a certain amount of resources used. This will severely slow your website down. Slower websites may result in unfavorable user experiences and ranking penalties.

SSL

An SSL is **highly recommended** for any website. Be aware of the costs. SSLs can be obtained for free so your hosting company should not charge for the certificate. The only cost that should come from an SSL is the initial implementation on your site as there are certain changes to be made to make your site SSL compliant.

SET UP ANALYTICS

Now that you have your site up and running you may want to know how many and what type of people are ***visiting your site***. Set up analytics even if you do not plan to monitor traffic right away. The historical data will be very helpful should you choose to work with a company for SEO or digital marketing in the future. The data will assist you to evaluate the effectiveness of their marketing campaigns.

There are many different types of analytics tracking out there, but the industry standard is ***Google Analytics***. It's free and relatively simple to configure for your website.

HELPFUL LINKS

<https://marketingplatform.google.com/about/analytics/>





SET UP GOOGLE SEARCH CONSOLE

Over 90% of all searches across the web take place in Google. With this staggering amount of the market share it's pivotal to "*play by their rules*" to be seen in their search results. Connecting Google Search Console with your website allows you to see how Google views your website. It also alerts you of any issues their crawlers find with your site. Fixing the issues in your GSC will make Google "*happy*" and will help ***increase your rankings***.

HELPFUL LINKS

<https://search.google.com/search-console/about/>

DIRECTORY LISTINGS

Find out what directory services **best apply** to your business and get your business listed on these directories. For example, if your business is a Pizza Shop, you will want to have your business listed on Yelp, Trip Advisor, etc.

When determining what directory sites on which to list your business, keep in mind your customer and the directories **they may use** to find your business. It may even be beneficial to ask family or friends “What service would you use to find a pizza shop?”.

STEP 9 - Directory Listings

Be wary of signing up for paid directory listings. **Pay close attention** to the costs associated as they can quickly snowball if not monitored closely. Some paid directory services may also redirect leads from your site to your competition if you do not pay their fees.

HELPFUL LINKS

The below list is just scratching the surface of some of the more popular directory listing services.

<https://www.yelp.com/>
<https://www.tripadvisor.com/>
<https://www.yellowpages.com/>
<https://www.bingplaces.com/>
<https://smallbusiness.yahoo.com/local/>
<http://business.foursquare.com/>
<https://www.chamberofcommerce.com/>
<https://www.veteranownedbusiness.com/>

OPTIMIZE YOUR WEBSITE (ON PAGE SEO)

Now that you have everything in place the last step is to ***optimize your website***. This includes, but is not limited to, optimizing content for keywords, robots.txt file, creating an xml sitemap, implementing caching, implementing a CDN, monitoring and correcting 404 errors, conversion rate tracking, blogging, disavowing toxic backlinks, off-page seo, installing and configuring AMP, speed optimizations, image optimizations, and more!

When you start to optimize your site you may want to track your keyword rankings and analytics. Each site is different and requires different optimization techniques. Tracking rankings will assist in ***providing feedback*** for what optimization techniques work best for your site.

This step ***never ends***. As your business/customers evolve, so should the content on your site.



HELPFUL LINKS

<https://coursevector.com/seo/>

OFF PAGE SEO

Off-page SEO is ***just as important*** as on-page SEO. Off-page SEO includes your efforts in posting to social media, backlink building, review management, building connections/networking, etc.

Social media is one of the easiest ways to build your off-page SEO. Research and determine what social media platform your customers use most and post ***quality, engaging content*** regularly. When posting, keep in mind “*quality over quantity*”.

Review management is another important aspect. How you respond to your reviews across your business listings is important. Take accountability for the ***good and the bad***. Offer to make it right publicly for bad reviews.

Remember your website is ***one of over a billion websites*** on the web. You need to make the effort to connect and drive attention to your site. Commenting on public forums, networking with social media influencer's, guest blogging, etc are all ways to help bring attention to your business and drive traffic to your site.

This step ***never ends***. As your business/customers evolve, so should the off-page SEO strategies.

ONLINE VISIBILITY CHECKLIST

10 STEPS FOR SUCCESS

- ☐ 1. Determine Business Name
- ☐ 2. Purchase a Domain Name
- ☐ 3. Logo Design & Branding (Fonts & Color Palette)
- ☐ 4. Email Setup
- ☐ 5. Social Media Profiles Created
- ☐ 6. Google My Business Listing Claimed
- ☐ 7. Website Built & Hosting Plan Decided On
- ☐ 8. Analytics & Google Search Console Connected to Site
- ☐ 9. Directory Listings Added
- ☐ 10. Optimize Website Content & Off-Page SEO Strategy Planned

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For more information on web design, web hosting, search engine optimization, digital marketing, and how to improve your business' overall online visibility, or for a free SEO Analysis visit CourseVector.

[***https://coursevector.com***](https://coursevector.com)

"This book was a simple read that got my business off and running. Fantastic resource that allowed me to quickly understand how to start getting my small business online!"

T. Karanas

<https://athomesoccerskills.com>

"Super quick and easy read. It was packed full of information."

T. Harris

<https://www.dirtymurf.com/>

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<https://coursevector.com>