

— A PRACTICAL GUIDE

# *The 5 questions every small business should ask before hiring a web designer.*

A short, honest checklist to help you avoid the most common, and most expensive, mistakes when getting a website built.

## Why most small businesses overpay for the wrong website.

Most small business owners get a website built once every five to ten years. That's not enough to develop a feel for what's reasonable, what's a fair price, or what a good supplier looks like.

The result is that decisions tend to get made on price alone, or on the recommendation of a single person, and you don't find out what you've actually bought until twelve months in. By then, the small problems have compounded, you're paying for hosting you don't understand, you can't update your own content, the designer has gone quiet, and your site is six months out of date.

For context, here's where the UK small business website market actually sits:

**32%**

Of UK businesses have no website at all, rising to 35% of sole traders.

*UK Business Data Survey, 2024<sup>1</sup>*

**£1.5k–4k**

Typical price range for a brochure-style small business website built by a UK professional.

*UK web design industry data, 2024–25<sup>2</sup>*

**53%**

Of mobile visitors abandon a page that takes longer than three seconds to load.

*Google research<sup>3</sup>*

This guide isn't a sales pitch. It's five questions you can ask any web designer, including us, before you sign anything. Ask all five. The honest answers will tell you everything you need to know.

- **Question 1.** Who actually owns the website when it's finished?
- **Question 2.** What's included in the price, and, more importantly, what isn't?
- **Question 3.** What happens when something breaks?
- **Question 4.** Can I update the content myself without paying for every change?
- **Question 5.** How long will it actually take?

*"A cheap website that takes nine months to launch isn't a cheap website."*

# 1 OWNERSHIP

## "Who actually *owns* the website when it's finished?"

### WHY THIS MATTERS

*If the designer owns the code, the domain, or the hosting account, you're not buying a website, you're renting one. The day you want to leave, you find out you can't take anything with you.*

There are three things a website actually consists of: the **domain** (the address), the **hosting** (where the files live), and the **code/content** (the site itself). All three need to be registered in your name, on your accounts, paid for by you directly, not through a designer's reseller account.

A reputable designer will set everything up under your name from day one. A less reputable one will register things in their own name "for convenience" and then quietly use that as leverage when you eventually want to make a change.

#### ● Good answers to listen for

- "You'll own the domain, we'll help you register it under your own account."
- "The hosting is in your name. You can move it at any time."
- "You'll get a copy of the code. It's yours."

#### ● Warning signs

- × "We'll handle all of that for you, don't worry about it."
- × "It's all on our platform, you can't take it elsewhere."
- × Vague or evasive answers about domain registration.

# 2

## SCOPE & PRICE

### "What's included in the price, and what isn't?"

#### WHY THIS MATTERS

*Most website disputes aren't about quality. They're about scope. The quote covered "a website" but didn't say how many pages, or whether photos were included, or what counts as a revision. Get the details in writing before you sign.*

Ask for a written breakdown that covers, at minimum: how many pages, how many design revisions, whether copy is written by you or by them, whether photography is included or you'll need to source it, what happens if you want to add a feature mid-build, and whether the first year of hosting is included.

For context, the typical UK price range for a brochure-style small business website built by a professional sits between £1,500 and £4,000.<sup>2</sup> Ongoing costs depend on what's included: hosting alone typically runs £100–£300 per year, while a full monthly retainer covering content updates, fixes, and support usually sits at £50–£200 per month.<sup>2</sup> A price dramatically below that range either skips significant work or relies on off-the-shelf templates with very little customisation.

Then ask one more question: "If I asked you for one extra page after launch, what would that cost?" The answer tells you how the designer thinks about post-launch work, which is most of the relationship.

#### ● Good answers to listen for

- A line-by-line breakdown of what the fixed price covers.
- A clear day rate or page rate for additional work.
- Honesty about what isn't included (e.g. photography, copywriting, SEO).

#### ● Warning signs

- × A single round number with no breakdown.
- × "We'll work it out as we go."
- × Vague phrases like "everything you need" with no definition of "everything".

# 3

## SUPPORT

### "What happens when something *breaks*?"

#### WHY THIS MATTERS

*Websites break. A plugin goes out of date, a form stops sending emails, an image disappears, the contact page redirects to nowhere. The question isn't whether it happens, it's what happens next, and who pays for it.*

You want clarity on three things: the response time (how quickly does the designer reply when something goes wrong?), what's covered for free versus chargeable (is a broken contact form a maintenance issue or a billable fix?), and what backup plans exist (if the site goes down on a Saturday, what's the process?).

The honest answer for most small businesses is that some kind of monthly maintenance arrangement is a good idea. It's not a big number, typically £30–£80 a month, and it covers the small stuff. The alternative is paying ad-hoc rates for every small fix, which often works out more expensive in the long run.

#### ● Good answers to listen for

- "Email response within one working day. Critical issues sooner."
- "Small bug fixes and content tweaks are included in the monthly plan."
- "We back up the site weekly so we can always roll back if needed."

#### ● Warning signs

- × "We charge by the hour" with no quoted rate.
- × No maintenance option offered at all.
- × "We'll get to it when we can."

# 4 CONTROL

## *"Can I update content myself without paying for every change?"*

### WHY THIS MATTERS

*If you can't change a phone number, swap an opening time, or update a service description without involving the designer, you'll either stop updating the site or rack up a monthly bill for small changes. Either is bad.*

You don't need full design control. Most small businesses don't want to fiddle with layouts. What you need is the ability to change **content**, text, images, opening hours, prices, blog posts, team members, without help.

This means asking what platform the site is built on, whether it has a content editor you can use, and whether you'll get training to use it. A 30-minute walkthrough at handover is usually enough. Beware of bespoke systems that only the designer knows how to update, those create lock-in by design.

#### ● Good answers to listen for

- "We'll build it so you can update text and images yourself."
- "You'll get a walkthrough at handover. Most people pick it up in half an hour."
- "For bigger changes, new pages, new layouts, we're a quick email away."

#### ● Warning signs

- × "Just send me the changes and I'll do them."
- × A bespoke custom-build system with no documentation.
- × No training or handover plan mentioned.

# 5

## TIMELINE

### "How long will it *actually* take?"

#### WHY THIS MATTERS

*Websites overrun. A "six week project" routinely takes four months. Most of the slippage isn't the designer's fault, it's content that wasn't ready, feedback that took weeks to come back, photography that never got booked. But you need a realistic timeline and a clear schedule, so you can plan around it.*

A good designer will give you a schedule with three things in it: when you'll see the first design, when you'll see a working draft, and when it goes live. They'll also tell you what they need from you, and by when, for each milestone to land on time.

If you don't get a schedule, or you get a vague "should be done in a few months", that's a signal that the designer hasn't really thought about how the project runs, and the timeline will slip.

#### ● Good answers to listen for

- A written schedule with named milestones and dates.
- Clear "we need this from you, by this date" for each milestone.
- An honest acknowledgement that timelines depend on your responsiveness too.

#### ● Warning signs

- × "It'll be done when it's done."
- × An unrealistically short timeline (under 2 weeks for anything bespoke).
- × No mention of what they need from you to hit dates.

— IF YOU WANT TO TALK

# *If you're hiring us, here's what you'd actually get.*

If you've read this far, you'll know what to ask any designer you speak to. For full transparency, here's how we answer the same five questions ourselves.

## *Delegait Sites, the same questions, our answers*

**Ownership:** Domain, hosting, and code are all in your name from day one.

**Scope:** Fixed-price projects from £1,500, with a written breakdown.

**Support:** Optional monthly maintenance for small fixes. Reply within one working day.

**Control:** You can update content yourself. Training included at handover.

**Timeline:** Typical project runs 4–6 weeks with a written schedule.

Based in Crewe, Cheshire. Owner-run. Bespoke websites for small businesses, trades, and professional services, built from scratch, not from templates, and priced for independent businesses rather than corporates.

If those answers sound like what you've been looking for, we'd be glad to have a conversation. If they don't, this guide is still yours to keep, and the questions above will serve you well with whoever you end up working with.

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## *Where the numbers come from.*

Every statistic in this guide is referenced below. The questions and warning signs are drawn from our own experience working with small businesses, not from research, they're presented as practical advice rather than data.

### **1 UK Business Data Survey 2024. UK Government**

Department for Science, Innovation and Technology national survey of UK businesses. Found that 32% of businesses have no website at all, rising to 35% of sole traders and 26% of micro firms.

[gov.uk/government/statistics/uk-business-data-survey-2024](https://gov.uk/government/statistics/uk-business-data-survey-2024)

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### **2 UK web design industry pricing, aggregated 2024–25**

Price ranges aggregated from multiple UK web design industry sources (GoDaddy UK, Shopify UK, and independent UK design studios). For a brochure-style small business site, the typical professional range is £1,500–£4,000. Hosting only typically £100–£300/year; full maintenance retainer typically £50–£200/month.

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### **3 Google research, mobile page speed and abandonment**

Google's analysis of mobile page load times found that as load time goes from 1 to 3 seconds, the probability of a mobile user bouncing increases by 32%, and at 5 seconds it reaches 90%. Widely summarised as: 53% of mobile visitors leave a page that takes longer than 3 seconds to load.

[business.google.com / think with Google, mobile page speed benchmarks](https://business.google.com/think-with-google/mobile-page-speed-benchmarks)

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## **What we didn't claim**

Where the guide gives advice on what to ask and what to listen for, those are our own opinions formed from working with small businesses. They're not research findings, they're judgement calls, and we've tried to be honest about which is which.

If anything in this document conflicts with your own experience, your experience is the more reliable guide. Trust your gut.