

WEB DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT

The Small Business Website Playbook

Seven pages, a handful of decisions, and the difference between a site that looks fine and one that earns its keep.

FREE GUIDE · 18 PAGES · INSTANT DOWNLOAD

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WEB DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT

Your website is quietly costing you customers.

- ✖ Visitors land on your homepage and leave within seconds — before they understand what you actually do.
- ✖ Your site looks fine on desktop but breaks, crowds, or hides the important stuff on a phone.
- ✖ There's no pricing signal anywhere, so price-sensitive visitors assume the worst and never reach out.
- ✖ You know it needs work, but you don't know which fix actually moves the needle.

50msTO FORM A LASTING FIRST
IMPRESSION OF YOUR SITE**~60%**OF SMALL BUSINESS TRAFFIC IS
NOW MOBILE**93%**OF BUYERS SAY VISUALS DRIVE
THEIR DECISION

WHAT'S INSIDE

Seven practical chapters. No fluff.

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01 The 5-Second Test Most Homepages Fail

What actually happens in the moment before someone decides to stay or leave.

Give a stranger five seconds on your homepage, then ask them what your business does, who it's for, and what to do next. If they can't answer all three, your homepage isn't doing its job — no matter how nice it looks.

This is the 5-second test, and most small business sites fail it for the same reason: they're written from the inside out. The header talks about the company's history or mission before it says what the business actually sells. The hero image is a stock photo of a handshake instead of the product or the person. The navigation has eight items, none of which is the one thing a first-time visitor actually needs.

Visitors don't read a homepage top to bottom like a brochure. They scan. Their eyes hit the headline, the first line under it, and whatever's visually loudest — usually a button. In that scan, they're answering one question: is this for me? If the answer isn't obvious immediately, most people don't stick around to find out.

The fix isn't a redesign. It's usually a rewrite of the first 100 words on the page, plus a photo that shows the real thing instead of implying it. Say what you do, who it's for, and give them one clear next step — before you say anything else.

Try this today

Open your homepage on your phone, cover the logo, and read only the headline and subheadline out loud. If a stranger couldn't guess your industry from those two lines alone, that's the first thing to fix — before anything else on this list.

02 The Seven Pages Every Small Site Needs

Most small business sites are missing at least one — usually without realizing it.

A small business website doesn't need to be big. It needs to be complete. Here are the seven pages that consistently show up on sites that actually convert visitors into inquiries, and the one job each page has to do.

Home — states what you do, who it's for, and where to go next, all above the fold. About — builds trust by showing the people and story behind the business, not a corporate mission statement. Services or Products — answers “what exactly do I get” in plain language, ideally broken into clear packages or categories. Pricing (or at least pricing signals) — even a starting-at range keeps unqualified leads from wasting your time and qualified ones from bouncing in confusion.

Work or Gallery — proof, in the form of real photos, past projects, or case studies. Testimonials or Reviews — proof from someone else's mouth, which carries more weight than anything you say about yourself. Contact — a fast, low-friction way to reach you, with the form itself asking for the minimum information needed to start a conversation.

Missing one of these isn't fatal on its own, but each gap adds friction. A visitor who can't find pricing has to ask, or leave. A visitor who can't find proof has to trust you blind, or leave. Small gaps compound into a site that technically exists but doesn't actually sell.

03 Writing a Hero That Earns the Scroll

The anatomy of the one section almost every visitor actually reads.

The hero is the top section of your homepage — headline, subheadline, image, and a button, all visible without scrolling. It's the highest-traffic real estate on your entire site, because it's the one section every single visitor sees. Everything below it is optional. The hero isn't.

A hero that earns the scroll has three parts working together. The headline states the outcome you deliver, not your job title — “Custom cakes for weddings that don't taste like weddings” beats “Welcome to Riverside Bakery.” The subheadline adds the specific detail that headline had to leave out — who you serve, where, or how you're different. The call-to-action button names the actual next step in the visitor's language: “See Pricing,” “Book a Free Consult,” “View Our Work” — never a bare “Submit” or “Learn More.”

The image matters as much as the words. A real photo of your product, your space, or your team outperforms a polished stock photo almost every time, because visitors can tell the difference — even subconsciously. Stock photography reads as “generic business”; real photography reads as “real business.” That single swap is one of the highest-leverage changes you can make to a homepage that isn't converting.

Quick swap

If your current headline describes your company (“Welcome to...”), rewrite it to describe the outcome your customer gets instead. Outcomes convert; company names don't.

04 Calls-to-Action People Actually Click

Small wording and placement changes that measurably change behavior.

A call-to-action is any button or link asking a visitor to do something — call, book, buy, sign up. Most small business sites have one CTA style repeated everywhere: a small gray “Submit” button at the very bottom of a long contact form. That’s the least effective possible version.

Effective CTAs share three traits. They’re specific — “Book a Free Consultation” tells a visitor exactly what happens next; “Learn More” tells them nothing. They’re visible — high contrast against the background, sized like something meant to be clicked, not a same-color-as-everything-else text link. And they’re repeated — a visitor who’s ready to act after reading three sections shouldn’t have to scroll back to the top of the page to find the button again.

The single highest-impact change for most small sites is adding a second, obvious CTA partway down every important page — not just at the very top and very bottom. People convert when they’re convinced, and they get convinced somewhere in the middle of the page, not just at the start.

Words that outperform “Submit”

“Get My Free Quote,” “Book a Consultation,” “See Pricing,” “Start My Order,” “Call Us Now.” Each one names the actual next step in the visitor’s own words — that’s the whole formula.

05 Mobile-First, Not Mobile-Also

Designing for the device most of your customers are actually using.

Most small business websites were designed on a laptop, previewed on a laptop, and approved on a laptop — then quietly broken for the roughly six in ten visitors who show up on a phone. Text that looked fine at desktop width crowds into a tiny column. Buttons sized for a mouse become nearly impossible to tap accurately. Multi-column layouts stack into a scroll that feels endless.

“Mobile-friendly” and “mobile-first” aren’t the same standard. Mobile-friendly means the site technically works on a phone — it doesn’t break. Mobile-first means the phone experience was the primary design target, and the desktop version is the expanded version of that, not the other way around. The difference shows up in things like tap target size (buttons should be comfortably thumb-sized, not squeezed together), line length (shorter lines are easier to read on a narrow screen), and load order (the most important content should appear first, not after several large images finish loading).

The fastest way to audit your own site: open it on your phone, on your actual mobile data connection — not wifi — and try to complete the one action you most want a visitor to take. Book something. Fill out the contact form. Find your price range. If it’s annoying for you, on a site you already understand, it’s worse for a first-time visitor who doesn’t.

30-second phone check

Can you read every headline without zooming? Can you tap every button with a thumb, first try? Does the contact form fit on screen without horizontal scrolling? Three “yes” answers is the bar.

06 Speed, SEO & the Basics That Rank

The unglamorous technical work behind pages that load fast and get found.

Speed and SEO don't make a website look better, but they decide whether anyone sees it at all. A beautiful site that takes six seconds to load, or that Google can't understand, loses to a plainer site that does both of those things right.

On speed: the most common culprit is oversized images — a photo straight off a phone or camera can be five to ten times larger than it needs to be for web use. Compressing images before upload is the single highest-return, lowest-effort fix most small sites can make. After that, it's worth checking whether your hosting is fast enough for the traffic you get, and whether the site is loading unnecessary scripts and plugins you're not actually using.

On SEO, the basics that actually move the needle for a small local business are unglamorous but effective: a unique page title and meta description on every page, a Google Business Profile that's claimed and kept current, your business name/address/phone listed consistently everywhere online, and a site structure Google can actually crawl — clear navigation, working internal links, no orphaned pages. None of this requires a marketing agency to start. It requires about an afternoon and a checklist.

Free speed check

Run your homepage URL through Google's PageSpeed Insights (free) and note the mobile score. Anything under 50 usually traces back to unoptimized images — the cheapest fix on this entire list.

07 Your Pre-Launch Checklist

The last pass before a new or redesigned site goes live.

Before a site goes live — or before you call an existing site “done” — run it through this checklist. Most launch-day problems are small and preventable, but they’re the kind of small that makes a business look unfinished to a first-time visitor.

- ☐ Every page has a clear headline that states what it’s about within the first line.
- ☐ Contact information (phone, email, or form) is reachable in two clicks or fewer from any page.
- ☐ Every button and link actually goes where it says it will — test each one.
- ☐ The site loads in under three seconds on a standard mobile connection.
- ☐ Every page looks correct and is fully usable on a phone, not just a desktop.
- ☐ Spelling, grammar, and business details (hours, address, phone) are accurate and current.
- ☐ There’s at least one clear call-to-action visible without scrolling on every key page.
- ☐ Real photos are used wherever possible instead of generic stock imagery.
- ☐ Page titles and meta descriptions are filled in, not left as placeholder text.
- ☐ The site has been tested in more than one browser and on both iOS and Android.

WHEN YOU'RE READY FOR THE REAL THING

We design and build the whole thing for you.

Read the playbook, then hand it off. We turn these decisions into a custom site built on your brand — designed to convert and easy for you to run.

- ✓ Custom design on your brand
- ✓ Copy that sells, not just describes
- ✓ Mobile-first build & on-page SEO
- ✓ Analytics, forms & launch support

Starter Site

5 pages · mobile-ready · contact form

\$2,500

Growth Site

8 pages · SEO setup · blog

\$4,500

Monthly Care Plan

updates · backups · security

\$150/mo

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hello@joskieproductions.com · joskieproductions.com · Portland, OR & remote nationwide