

Small Business Website Launch Guide

Platform, hosting, security and email decisions, plus the
pre-launch checklist that keeps a launch from becoming a support ticket

A free guide from Delray Digital Solutions

About this guide

Launching a small-business website involves more than publishing pages. This guide walks through the decisions and checks that keep a launch from turning into a support ticket: choosing a platform and host, locking down security and backups, getting business email right, and running a pre-launch and launch-day checklist.

What's inside

#	Section	What you'll do
1	Choose your platform	Match the site type to the right builder or CMS
2	Choose your hosting	Pick a host tier and understand what you are paying for
3	Domain, DNS and email	Point the domain correctly and set up professional email
4	Security and backups	SSL, updates, access control and a tested restore
5	Pre-launch checklist	Twenty checks before the site goes public
6	Launch day and the first 30 days	Go live cleanly and confirm everything is measured
7	Handoff: what you should receive	The logins, documents and access every owner should hold

Please note: Platform interfaces, plans and prices change frequently; verify current details with the provider.

1. Choose your platform

The right platform depends on what the site must do in the next two to three years, not what is easiest this week.

#	If your site needs to...	A good fit is usually...
1	Present services, capture leads, publish articles	WordPress (self-hosted) for flexibility and ownership
2	Sell a small catalogue of physical products	Shopify, or WordPress + WooCommerce
3	Be a simple brochure with little future change	A hosted builder (Squarespace, Wix) with a custom domain
4	Take bookings or memberships	WordPress with a booking/membership plugin, or a hosted tool embedded in the site
5	Integrate with existing business systems	WordPress or a headless setup; confirm integrations before committing

Questions to answer before you decide

- Who will update the site after launch, and how comfortable are they with the tools?
- Do you need to own and export your content and data at any time?
- What must the site integrate with (CRM, email tool, payments, scheduling)?
- What is the realistic monthly budget for hosting, plugins and maintenance?

2. Choose your hosting

#	Hosting tier	Typical fit and trade-offs
1	Shared hosting	Lowest cost; fine for low-traffic brochure sites. Performance depends on neighbours.
2	Managed WordPress hosting	Updates, caching, backups and security handled for you. Best value for most small businesses.
3	VPS / cloud server	More control and capacity; requires someone to manage the server.
4	Hosted platform (Shopify, Squarespace)	Hosting is included; you trade flexibility for simplicity.

What to check on any hosting plan

- Daily automated backups with one-click restore, kept for at least 14 days
- Free SSL certificate with automatic renewal
- Server location near your customers, or a CDN included
- PHP/database versions kept current; staging environment available
- Support hours and channels, and the realistic response time
- Renewal price, not just the introductory price

Tip: Pay for the host in your own name and with your own card. Never let a freelancer or agency own your hosting account.

3. Domain, DNS and email

Domain

- Register the domain in a business-owned registrar account with two-factor authentication turned on.
- Turn on auto-renew and keep the payment card current; note the renewal date in your calendar.
- Enable registrar lock and WHOIS privacy where available.

DNS records you will typically need

#	Record	Purpose
1	A / AAAA (or CNAME for www)	Points the domain to the web host
2	MX	Routes email to your email provider (Google Workspace, Microsoft 365)
3	SPF (TXT)	Lists servers allowed to send email for your domain
4	DKIM (TXT/CNAME)	Cryptographically signs outgoing email
5	DMARC (TXT)	Tells receivers what to do with mail that fails SPF/DKIM
6	Verification TXT records	Search Console, Google Business Profile, email tools

Business email

Use a professional mailbox on your own domain (name@yourbusiness.com) from Google Workspace or Microsoft 365 rather than a free address. Set up SPF, DKIM and DMARC before launch so that contact-form notifications and quotes are not sent to spam.

Tip: Lower the DNS TTL to 300 seconds a day before launch so that changes propagate quickly, then raise it again afterwards.

4. Security and backups

#	Control	What good looks like
1	SSL / HTTPS	Whole site on https with automatic redirect; no mixed-content warnings
2	Admin access	Unique admin usernames, strong passwords, two-factor authentication, no shared logins
3	Updates	Core, theme and plugins updated at least monthly; unused plugins and themes removed
4	Backups	Automatic daily backups stored off-server; a restore has actually been tested
5	Login protection	Rate limiting or a firewall on the login page; default admin URL changed where practical
6	Forms	Spam protection on every form; submissions also stored in the site, not only emailed
7	Least privilege	Contributors get editor or author roles, not administrator

Backup and restore test

- Confirm where the backups live and who can access them.
- Restore the most recent backup to a staging site and confirm pages, forms and images work.
- Write down the restore steps; the test is only useful if someone else can repeat it.

5. Pre-launch checklist

Work through every item on the live domain (or staging with the final content) before making the site public.

#	Check	Done
1	Every page has a unique title tag and meta description	
2	One H1 per page; headings follow a logical order	
3	All images compressed, with alt text; no images over 300 KB	
4	Phone number and email are clickable on mobile	
5	Contact form submits, sends a notification and shows a thank-you message	
6	Form notifications arrive in the inbox (not spam) - SPF/DKIM verified	
7	404 page exists and links back to key pages	
8	No placeholder text, stock captions or 'lorem ipsum' anywhere	
9	Privacy policy, terms and cookie notice published as required	
10	Favicon, social-share image and site name set	
11	Site tested on a phone, a tablet and two desktop browsers	
12	Mobile page-speed score checked; largest issues fixed	
13	Old URLs (if redesign) mapped to new URLs with 301 redirects	
14	Analytics installed and receiving data; key events defined	
15	Search Console verified; sitemap submitted	
16	'Discourage search engines' setting turned OFF; robots.txt allows crawling	
17	Google Business Profile links to the correct URL	
18	SSL active and https redirect working on all URL variants (www / non-www)	
19	Backups running on the live site; restore tested	
20	Admin accounts reviewed; agency/freelancer access documented	

6. Launch day and the first 30 days

Launch day

- Point DNS during a quiet period; confirm the site loads on https from a phone on mobile data.
- Submit a test contact-form entry and a test purchase or booking if applicable.
- Check that redirects from any old URLs work and that no page returns a 404 in Search Console.
- Update the website link on Google Business Profile, social profiles, email signatures and directories.

Week one

- Watch analytics daily for traffic and form submissions; confirm key events are firing.
- Review Search Console coverage and fix any crawl errors.
- Ask three customers to visit the site on their phones and tell you anything confusing.

By day 30

- Run the pre-launch checklist again as a post-launch audit.
- Confirm backups have run every day and that updates were applied.
- Decide who owns ongoing maintenance and how often content will be updated.

7. Handoff: what you should receive

Whether the site was built in-house or by a partner, the business owner should hold the following before considering the project finished.

#	Item	Why it matters
1	Registrar login (domain) in the business's name	Losing the domain means losing the brand online
2	Hosting account login and billing ownership	You can move or restore the site without a third party
3	Website administrator login (not a shared one)	Full control of content, users and plugins
4	Email admin access (Workspace / 365)	Add and remove staff mailboxes yourself
5	Analytics and Search Console ownership	Your data stays with you if you change vendors
6	List of plugins, licences and renewal dates	Avoid surprise expiries and broken features
7	Backup location and restore instructions	Recover quickly from mistakes or attacks
8	Style guide: colours, fonts, logo files	Consistent updates by anyone
9	How-to notes for common edits	Update hours, prices and pages without a developer

Want the launch handled for you?

Delray Digital Solutions' Website Launch Package covers domain, hosting, platform, security and email setup, the full pre-launch checklist and a complete handoff packet. Details at delraydigitalsolutions.com/website-launch-package/ or email hello@delraydigitalsolutions.com.