LEARNING MADE EASY

Building DIY Websites

for dummies®

A Wiley Brand

Build your own website using any platform

Follow proven processes to build a site that sells

Apply pro designer tricks to attract search engines

Jennifer DeRosa

Small business web strategy expert

Building DIY Websites

by Jennifer DeRosa

for dummies®
A Wiley Brand

Building DIY Websites For Dummies®

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Introduction

Welcome to *Building DIY Websites For Dummies*, a book that focuses on building your own website from start to finish. It includes many secrets and best practices that web developers know and implement when building any quality website.

Throughout this book, I walk you through the steps of building a website in a way that streamlines the process and gives you the best result.

About This Book

Building a quality website is not about learning how to use software. Anyone can learn to use software. Building a quality website is not about choosing a theme and uploading text and images. Anyone can take or find photos and write some text.

Building a quality website is about getting people to a thank you page, getting a phone call, an email, or a walk-in because they found your amazing website online, and they think you can solve their problem and want to engage with you. Building a quality website is also about building a website that search engines understand and want to match with Internet searchers when the search intent matches the offer of a website.

There is a lot that goes into building a website. This book teaches you how to think about your new marketing tool and take the most effective building steps in the best order possible. You discover how you can supercharge the tools and the platforms available today to build a website for your endeavor using sound best practices.

This book does not explain how to use software; anyone can learn to use software. Each web building platform also has support and documentation to help you.

This book teaches you all of the other "stuff" that web developers know about building great websites. It teaches you concepts that permanently empower you. You learn about tasks that you need to perform and learn *why* you are performing them. These concepts will make your digital marketing efforts better.

This book covers the thought process that goes into each step of building a website with the end in mind: more customers/visitors. Whether you end up building the site yourself or handing over the assets to a professional web developer, the skills you learn in this book will help you create websites that work!

Conventions Used in This Book

I've established the following conventions to make it easier for you to navigate this book:

- New terms are in *italics,* and I define them for you.
- Website URLs are shown in this special font: `https://wpengine.com/`.
- **Bold** text highlights key words in bulleted lists and action parts in numbered lists.

Foolish Assumptions

In writing this book, I've made some assumptions about you:

- You want to enhance your organization's online presence.
- You want to build a website that attracts visitors and converts leads.
- You are not technical or might be semi-technical, but need guidance about how websites function.
- You like being empowered.

I've used these assumptions to help explain how to build a tool that will work for you by preselling your products or services. My philosophy is that anyone can learn to use website-building tools to get their message out and resonate with visitors This book empowers you with the knowledge to help you market your business overall, not just teach you to click here or there.

How This Book Is Organized

This book begins by helping you get set up. It then moves into thinking about the end users of your website: visitors and search engines. After you are in the right mindset, you will be well prepared (and hopefully excited) to get your content ready and display it with amazing results.

To make the content more accessible, I divided it into six parts:

- Part 1, "Getting Started with DIY Websites," includes lots of ideas about getting your domain name and web building space set up. One of the most frequent questions I see online and hear from soon-to-be DIY website builders is "Which platform is the best?" This part will help you determine the answer to that question.
- Part 2, "Creating a Site That People Will Visit," will get you in the correct mindset to create a site that attracts and converts leads. When you understand *why* you should perform particular tasks in particular ways, the task changes from a box you need to check off to a marketing strategy. Thinking this way will empower you and excite you to create something that will bring real results.
- Part 3, "Architecting Plans for Your Website," teaches you how to organize your content, what to include on your pages, why certain content will help you more effectively, and how to prepare these assets for the best result. You learn many of the professional tips and tricks that that "regular" people do not know. These concepts are not that difficult to understand, and I give you all of this info at once in an organized fashion.
- Part 4, "Designing and Laying Out Your Website," is the part that most of us think is where we should start when building a website. Once you have everything organized and prepared, it is so much easier to design and lay out your website, which is why this information appears in Part 4. This section is where the rubber meets the road. If you take the time to prepare your content and work through the other parts of the book that come before this, you will be in a much better mindset to lay out and design an attractive website.
- Part 5, "Going Live and Measuring Results," covers all things SEO (search engine optimization), including optimizing your pages for web search, measuring your results (visits, click-throughs, forms, and so on) using Google Analytics and other tools, and securing your website from fraud, malware, and hackers.
- Part 6, "The Part of Tens," includes the "cliff notes" to building websites. If you want to read this section first, go ahead, as it might help you think about the big picture.

Icons Used in This Book

In the margins of almost every page of this book, you find icons, which are there to alert you to different types of information. Here's what they mean:

This icon saves you time and energy by explaining you a helpful method or technique for doing something.

This icon points out important information you need to know as you develop your website.

This icon points out potential problems and pitfalls to avoid, as well as positive solutions.

Feel free to skip over (and come back to) the technical information marked by this icon. However, knowledge is power, so it's wise to read them too.

This icon points out sage advice I provide from my years of experience in web design. I have made some mistakes along the way, and I provide advice so you don't have to make those same mistakes!

This icon indicates the presence of concrete examples that illustrate the topic being discussed. I give you examples of situations that have happened to me over the years.

Beyond the Book

In addition to the book content, you can find valuable free material online. We provide you with a Cheat Sheet that serves as a quick checklist, including the basic supplies you need to draw, where to find inspiration, how to identify common drawing styles, and more. Check out this book's online Cheat Sheet by searching `www.dummies.com` for **Building DIY Websites for Dummies Cheat Sheet.**

To download the Buyer Persona Template, which you learn about in Chapter 3, go to `www.dummies.com/go/buildingdiywebsitesfd`.

Where to Go from Here

You don't have to go through this book in sequence, but I suggest that you do to have the best result. It is tempting to just "get some tasks done," which may be steps that come naturally later in the process. If you don't do the steps in order, and build a sitemap first, you could very well end frustrated, with a process that takes much longer. As Benjamin Franklin said, "if you fail to plan, you plan to fail."

However, there are some sections that you can skip:

- If you have a domain name, you can skip the section on registering a domain name in Chapter 2.
- This goes also for a platform. If you have a website up and running and you will be using the same platform to build this new site, you do not need to read the section on choosing a platform in Chapter 2.

The information in this book is the fastest route to the best website for growing your business or endeavor. A route to more sales, faster traction, better user experiences, and trouble-free website functionality.

The practices you learn in this book also translate to social media marketing, email marketing, and more. This book teaches you how to build an online presence. It's more than about websites; it's about your reputation online. *It's about that first impression — that long-lasting relationship!*

So, are you ready to get started? I'm excited for you! If you read this book and build something great, I would love for you to email me with what you built.

1 Getting Started with DIY Websites

IN THIS PART . . .

Learning the basics about creating your website from the ground up

Registering your domain registrar and setting up your business email

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Setting up your site for success
- Considering the best platform for your needs
- Designing a look and feel that works
- Getting and analyzing website results

Chapter 1

From Groundbreaking to Grand Opening: Constructing Your Website Step by Step

You've embarked on an incredible journey with a remarkable goal: to build an website for your business or endeavor that attracts visitors and converts leads.

You may have tried to build a website in the past, but were left feeling frustrated, angry, or even worse, you lost time and money. Well, that is all over now. I am here to walk with you through every step of the process.

I've been working with people just like you for several decades and I know what questions you have. I know where you can get stuck. I know where a non-technical person needs some help. Most importantly, I know that you want to get the job done and don't want to repeat the process later! This chapter helps you set the stage for building an excellent website and outlines the sequence of steps you'll follow to build an effective, compelling, and modern site that best represents your organization online.

Setting Up Your Site for Success: Foundation, Messaging, and Search Engines

Many DIY website builders worry about choosing a platform and a theme. I see it all over the Internet: "What platform should I choose?" "Which platform is the best?" "How do I choose a theme?" These are all good questions, but in the grand scheme of things, as far as your website success is concerned, the platform you use doesn't matter that much.

If you had Picasso's paintbrush, paints, and canvases, would you be able to create a masterpiece? If you had a contractor's hammers, saws, and heavy equipment, would you be able to build a house? If you had a scalpel, anesthesia, and some cotton balls, would you be able to perform surgery?

Most likely the answer to all three is a resounding no. Having the tools doesn't mean you know how to effectively use them. The same is true when building websites. Having a web host provider, easy-to-use software, and a couple of plugins doesn't mean you can build a website that will bring in thousands of click-throughs and hundreds of orders. It's more than the tools. Building a successful website includes:

- Using the right messaging.
- Organizing your website so that visitors can find things with the least amount of clicks possible.
- Understanding what search engines are looking for.
- Creating content that is easy to understand and digest.
- Laying out your content in interesting and unique ways so that visitors understand your message.
- Building trust so that visitors feel comfortable handing over their email addresses or their money or their time.

REMEMBER

Having the tools is a means to an end. The tools can't teach you the skills; they just provide a way to use skills you already have. This book will teach you the skills.

Picking a platform

Remember that, although the platform you choose is important, equally or *more* important is the messaging, as well as how you provide information to search

engines. You should indeed choose a platform that you can use easily. However, be sure to also consider your messaging and content, how search engines work, and how to lay out your content. This is what I teach you in this book.

Having said that, you may still want some advice about which platform to pick, so consider the pros and cons of the following platforms before you decide on one:

- **Wix:** Wix is known for its drag-and-drop interface, making it super easy to design your website without any technical skills. If you are a beginner, this may be a good option for you. Wix offers a wide range of templates and customization options, and it comes with hosting, templates, and design tools all in one place. In addition, Wix frequently updates its platform with new features and designs. Its ease of use comes at the cost of less control over more technical aspects of your website. That means you can run into a wall when you want to do more with your website. Also, it can get expensive. While it starts off affordable, costs can add up with additional features and apps. Like any other closed platform, if you decide to move your site from Wix, you most likely will need to rebuild your website from scratch.
- **Shopify:** Shopify is ideal if you are setting up an online store, as it provides powerful tools specifically for e-commerce. Shopify also offers robust security features and reliability for handling transactions, which is important, and its platform integrates with many third-party apps and services. But there are some considerations: Shopify can be expensive, especially with transaction fees and add-ons, and it is not the best choice if your primary focus is blogging.
- **Squarespace:** Squarespace is known for stylish and professional templates that are great for portfolios and visual presentations. Like Wix, Squarespace includes hosting, templates, and e-commerce capabilities and is user-friendly with a drag-and-drop interface. Squarespace does not have as many third-party integrations as other platforms and customization is somewhat limited compared to platforms like WordPress. While it supports e-commerce, it's not as powerful as Shopify for online stores.
- **WordPress:** WordPress is a popular software for building websites. It come in two flavors — `WordPress.org`, which you download and install on your own hosting platform, and `WordPress.com`, which is a platform you log in to, much like the others. WordPress is the choice for many who are semi-technical or need to create a custom website, as it is highly customizable. WordPress offers extensive customization options with themes and plugins, and there is a huge global community offering support, plugins, and themes. WordPress is great for all types of websites, from blogs to e-commerce sites, and you have full control over your website and its data. While this all sounds great, for novices, WordPress has a learning curve. It can be overwhelming for beginners due to its complexity. WordPress also requires regular updates and maintenance, especially for security. You are the manager of the software, not the platform, like in the other options presented here. For example, you need to arrange your own hosting, which can be a technical challenge for non-technical users.

There are many others out there — this is just a small sample. Chapter 2 goes into more detail about choosing the best platform based on your needs and goals.

Building the foundation

Setting up the mechanics of your website involves registering your domain name, choosing a *platform* (a place to host your website), a basic understanding of how nameservers work, setting up your email, and making sure you have a few other items in place.

TIP

The good thing is that if you have already checked some of these boxes, you can skip some of the sections in this book. For example, you may have already registered a domain name. In that case, you don't need to read the section on choosing a domain name in Chapter 2. If you are starting a new business and you have not registered a domain name, then read that section. The same goes for the platform, hosting, and email sections.

Understanding your potential customers

Once you get set up with the mechanics, start thinking about connecting with your audience. Your website needs to do a lot of preselling on its own. Ask yourself, "... can my website presell my products or services?"

AUTHOR SAYS

Building a successful website starts with understanding your customer. Understanding your customers' pain points and how to offer the solution to their problems is very important. When you understand your customers, you empathize with their wants and needs. *Your website should reflect your understanding of your customers and show that you have the solution to their problems.*

You want to show visitors that you understand them right away, by placing a very strong message on the homepage that talks directly to their heart. Throughout your website, you want to place content that addresses the problems that the visitor is having right now.

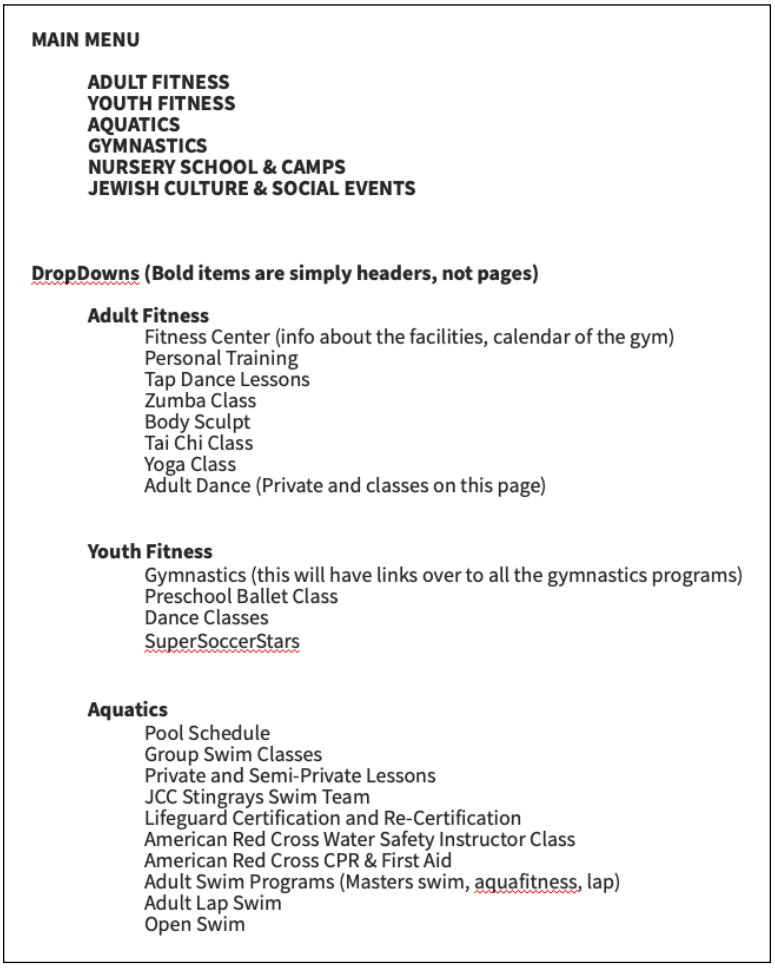
You might have heard that one way to create good messaging on your website is to show transformation. How will your potential customer's life be transformed after engaging with you? Chapter 3 walks you through some exercises that help you create a website that will resonate with your potential customers.

Understanding your customer helps you with other efforts as well, such as social media marketing, social media advertising, email marketing, print advertising, and more.

A Place for Everything and Everything in Its Place

This is one of my favorite sayings. When it comes to websites, this principle rings true! An organized site allows visitors to easily find whatever they need, and a *sitemap* is the tool for organizing a website.

A *sitemap* is kind of like an outline you might create for a paper you're writing. The outline ensures that the paper covers all the important points and that there is a hierarchy to the important items. Figure 1-1 shows an example sitemap that I worked on with a health club client.



MAIN MENU

ADULT FITNESS
YOUTH FITNESS
AQUATICS
GYMNASTICS
NURSERY SCHOOL & CAMPS
JEWISH CULTURE & SOCIAL EVENTS

DropDowns (Bold items are simply headers, not pages)

Adult Fitness
- Fitness Center (info about the facilities, calendar of the gym)
- Personal Training
- Tap Dance Lessons
- Zumba Class
- Body Sculpt
- Tai Chi Class
- Yoga Class
- Adult Dance (Private and classes on this page)

Youth Fitness
- Gymnastics (this will have links over to all the gymnastics programs)
- Preschool Ballet Class
- Dance Classes
- SuperSoccerStars

Aquatics
- Pool Schedule
- Group Swim Classes
- Private and Semi-Private Lessons
- JCC Stingrays Swim Team
- Lifeguard Certification and Re-Certification
- American Red Cross Water Safety Instructor Class
- American Red Cross CPR & First Aid
- Adult Swim Programs (Masters swim, aquafitness, lap)
- Adult Lap Swim
- Open Swim

FIGURE 1-1: An example sitemap built for a health club.

For your website, you need to create an outline that includes two things:

- The *functionality* that you want the website to have, such as a shopping cart, forms to gather leads and for people to reach out to you, a calendar system to show your events, galleries of photos, databases for displaying content, or videos.
- The *information* that you want to provide, such as services you offer, product categories you offer, content that shows your credibility and authority such as degrees, licenses, or photos, and ways to reach out to you.

When considering functionality, your website can also work for you in other ways. Some examples:

- You might have some forms that clients need to fill out before they come into your office. If you move those forms online, you can decrease the amount of time that patients or customers have to spend in your office.
- You might have some videos that potential customers can watch prior to coming in to your place of business. You can place those videos on your website. Then you don't have to spend your time repeatedly explaining the basics.

You can move many administrative and repetitive tasks to your website as well. A sitemap helps you think about these issues.

When it comes to thinking about the information you want to provide, building a sitemap also gets you thinking about how can you best use your website as a tool for your business. Think about what information would be most relevant to a potential lead that would turn them into a customer. To do this, you probably want to use your website as a pre-sales tool. This means that your website should provide great information to those looking for it, and also do some of the initial screening that your salespeople would normally do when meeting with a customer. Not all customers are good for our businesses. If you can use your website to weed out the customers you don't want before they come in contact with you, that will save you time and energy. You can do this by adding specific fields to your forms, by showing photographs of the level of service you provide, and by being clear about the services you provide.

If you've already built a website or you've just started, you understand when I say that building a website can be a lot of work — there are a lot of tasks that you need to perform and a bunch of content you need to create, not to mention design!