
chapter 1: **the perfect small business website**

This book's introduction featured small business owners, Krista and Jim, a couple who owns a local fitness center. They really want a website that will help their business grow. A great place to begin the process is to visualize what a perfect website would look like. Not just in appearance, but in its ability to attract, persuade, and connect with potential customers. Let's look at Jim and Krista's perfect small business website in action (while you're reading this, imagine a similar scenario playing out for your website as well).

Imagine a potential customer for Jim and Krista's gym; we'll call him Alex. Alex has just moved into the neighborhood and wants to join a new gym. He asks his coworkers for suggestions and hears about a couple of options he thinks might work for him. On the way home from work one day, he drives by two of his choices, looks them over from the outside, and heads home. That evening he goes online and Googles "gym Teays Valley" and "fitness center Teays Valley." There on the first page of Google is one of the gyms he drove by earlier. He clicks the link for Teays Valley Fitness Center in the Google search results and goes to the gym's home page. He isn't wowed by flashy animations, but then again, he doesn't want to be. Alex wants information.

Visualize what a perfect website would look like. Not just in appearance, but in its ability to attract, persuade, and connect with potential customers.

After scanning the home page, he clicks a Play button on a video and views a professional-looking two-minute video tour of the facility. After watching, he clicks the Group Fitness link to find out if they have a spin class. Then

he clicks a Photos link to make sure the gym looks like a place he'd be comfortable working out and making new friends. Then he clicks the Personal Training link to see what they offer when it comes to 1:1 training.

Before Alex moves on, he clicks a link that says, Fitness Tips. The link sends him to the site's blog page, where every couple of weeks the owners enter a fitness/health tip they think their members and potential members will find helpful. The blog also has the occasional post about what is happening at the gym, from a new monthly group fitness schedule to a post about the new selection of energy drinks the gym now carries. There is a simple form on the page with a field for an email address. Above it read, "Get our free weekly email with fitness tips and member updates. You can unsubscribe anytime." Alex thinks this sounds helpful and types in his email address and clicks Send. He is then taken to a page that says, "Thank you for visiting Teays Valley Fitness online. We hope you'll come visit us soon. Be sure when you come in to ask about our free 14-day, no-obligation membership."

A few minutes later, he automatically receives an email from the gym reinforcing the same message from the thank you page, along with the gym's contact information, a brief introduction from the owners, and a Google map link with directions to the gym. The email also has a link to the gym's Facebook page. Although Alex noticed the Facebook icon on the site, he hadn't clicked it there. But for some reason he decides to click it now. After all, Alex is on Facebook, and by connecting with the gym's Facebook fan page, he could learn a bit more about the gym and see if he knew any of the other folks that are part of the gym's Facebook community.

The email Alex received is called an *autoresponder*. It is sent automatically to new subscribers who become part of an email list (more coming about this in the email marketing section).

Later, Alex gets tied up on a new work project and doesn't think much about gyms until a couple weeks later when he receives a second email from Teays Valley Fitness with their most recent fitness tip. At the bottom of that email is again the gym's contact information and a reminder about the free 14-day offer. That evening Alex stops by the gym. He takes a tour and becomes a member.

In its simplest form, that is how a small business website should work. The essential marketing elements were there. It had the right information that allowed the site to appear in Google when Alex did his search; it looked professional; it incorporated email marketing, a blog, and social media; and it contained just the right amount of information that helped Alex make a buying decision. That's the perfect small business website.

Let's take just a little deeper step into what made their website so effective.

1. The website appeared in the search engines (Google, Yahoo!, Bing, etc.). Seventy-eight percent of consumers now go search for information online prior to making a purchase. It's a necessity to appear when consumers are searching for your type of business.
2. The website looked professional. Just as you wouldn't want a cheap-looking business card, brochure, or advertisement, you don't want an unprofessional website. More people will

visit your website than will ever walk into your business. Make a good impression.

3. The site had easy navigation. In our example, Alex didn't have to search deep inside the site to find what he wanted. It was all there in front of him. When it comes to your website, keeping things simple is crucial.
4. The site had easy-to-read content. Everything about the web copy was inviting and easy to understand.
5. The site had a blog (this is where Alex found the fitness tips). Now, don't get freaked out when I say *blog*. If you have any preconceived notions of what a blog is, let them go. A blog for a small business is simply an area where you can provide company news and tips about your industry. We'll discuss a few huge benefits of having a blog later.
6. The site took advantage of YouTube by having a video tour of their facility right on the home page.
7. The gym's Facebook page and the invitations on the site and in their emails gave Alex the opportunity to become part of the gym's social media community.
8. Finally, the site took advantage of the opportunity to stay in touch with Alex via email.

As we move forward, we'll get into all the elements that will help you have the perfect website. And these pieces of the puzzle will help you no matter how you plan on getting your website online: doing it yourself, hiring a freelancer, or working with a web development firm. No matter which route you decide to choose, it's important that you know what should be part of your online presence.

Knowing the essential elements of a small business website is now more important than ever, yet it's still probably the least understood of all small business marketing strategies. In addition, understanding the key elements of your website will prevent you from being ripped off or having an online presence that is only partially effective. We'll help you understand it all. You, too, deserve the perfect small business website.

chapter 2: **ready. set. go.**

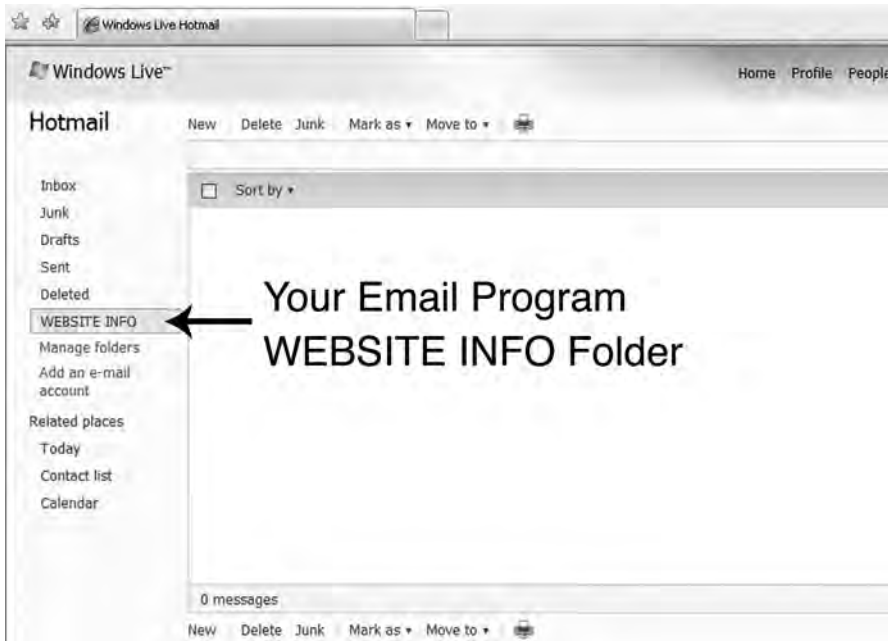
LET'S GET ORGANIZED

The biggest thing you can do for yourself now and in the future in regard to organization is to create three folders.

1. Create a folder within your Documents folder on your computer called, WEBSITE INFO (or whatever name you choose). Throughout the process, you'll be creating, collecting, and adding information and files. You want to make sure they're all stored (and can be easily backed up) in one location. Also, within this folder, create a text or Word document (this will be your first document in your new folder). We'll be utilizing this new Word/text document as we move forward to add the usernames and passwords you'll inevitably be creating through the process.



2. Create a folder (or a new Label if you use Gmail) in your email program called, WEBSITE INFO (or whatever name you choose). As we work through the process, you will receive emails regarding your new website. Save these emails in your new WEBSITE INFO email folder. This way, all information regarding your new website will always be found in one place in your email program.



3. Get a small notebook, keep it near your computer, and dedicate it solely to information regarding your website. Use this for your notes, ideas, and thoughts about your new website. Use the inside cover or first page of this notebook to write down usernames and passwords as we move through the process. Now you'll have this information here, as well as in your WEBSITE INFO folder on your computer.

Don't skip this step of the process. In fact, stop reading here and go do it now. Without these simple, but super-important organizational tools, you'll end up making things much harder for yourself as we move forward.

If you already have a website or have been working toward your website, take the information you have now and incorporate it into these new folders we've created.

Password Tip: So that you can stay consistent with your usernames and passwords, use a combination of lower and uppercase, as well as adding numbers and characters. This is good for security purposes, but it will also help you not run into having to use different usernames for different services/sites because yours is already taken. Plan out a 6 to 8 character username and password. For instance: Username: gmuRRay31 and password: piTTsburgh!31.

BACK IT UP

When it comes to backing up your computer, I hope you can scare yourself silly thinking of all you would lose if all your information was suddenly...gone. And not just your business info, but all your personal folders, files, and photos as well. So let's create a simple backup game plan that will provide peace of mind.

You're going to want two backups. One locally and one online. If you don't have both, you're not truly backed up.

Get in the habit of saving everything you do—whether it’s this project or your kid’s photos—inside folders on your computer’s Documents/My Documents folder.

Your Local Backup

Go to any electronics store and buy a USB backup storage drive. (Get at least a 250 GB model.) Then, every week, copy your entire Documents/My Document folder onto your new backup storage drive. (Use the standard “drag and drop” method to copy the files.) Every week you can replace what was there from the previous week. You can keep this connected to your computer, put it in a drawer, or hide it in a safe. But make sure you’re backing up every week.



Your Online Backup

For around \$50 a year, you can sign up for an amazing service at <http://www.carbonite.com>. Once you’ve downloaded their software, you can have your Documents/My Documents folder backed up automatically to an online *cloud*. And because the software is always

running in the background, your latest files/folders will always be backing up automatically. Carbonite is real peace of mind for backing up. You have the security that if there is ever a fire, robbery, or natural disaster that hits your home or office, you'll always have the ability to recover your files and folders online. (You can thank me for this later.)



I realize this isn't an exciting part of the process. But we just have too much business and personal stuff on our computers these days to lose. **I can promise that eventually something bad will happen and you'll lose what's on your computer.** Backing up locally and online will save you from a lot of heartache and headaches in the future.

YOUR WEB HOST

Your *web host* is also sometimes referred to as your *server*. It's the place where your web pages and files are located (i.e., *hosted*). It took me a while to get my head around web hosting, so let me give you an analogy.

Think about your office telephone service. If you have voicemail (rather than a physical answering machine), your custom message (“Hi, this is Gregg. I’m not able to take your call right now...”) is usually hosted with your phone company. If you called my voicemail, you would hear my message, but there’s not an actual answering machine at my office. It’s sitting somewhere on a computer at the phone company. Your website works much the same way. A third-party company hosts the information that you create for your website and makes it available for anyone else around the world to find, visit, and browse.

There are hundreds of web hosting providers out there. Many people use GoDaddy because that’s where many domain names are purchased. But I find their constant up-selling annoying and their



navigation/usability very confusing. I highly recommend another large and reliable company, <http://www.BlueHost.com>, because it's inexpensive (less than \$70 a year), it's as user-friendly as anything out there, and it's been the most reliable for me. Most importantly, they have excellent 24/7 phone support.

Every website needs a web host or server. Unless you have super-privacy reasons or heavy-duty software that runs off your website, you don't need your own *dedicated server* (which can be expensive and a big headache). Hopefully you'll be fine, like I am with my 50+ websites, to use a *shared-hosting provider* like BlueHost.

Before you move forward and sign up for your BlueHost account, let's go over domain names. We'll be incorporating your domain name into your new BlueHost account at the time you sign up.

YOUR DOMAIN NAME

Since this is the first section we discuss signing up for something, I want you to keep in mind your organization. Make sure to keep all relevant website addresses, usernames, and passwords in each of your organization folders.

The obvious reason you need a domain name is so you can have a professional website address. But the other big reason is because you need a professional business email address. Using a Gmail, Hotmail, or Yahoo email address is fine for personal use. But you need a professional email address for business. Since we're going to be doing a lot of emailing through this process, let's get your domain name and hosting account set up, so we can get your new email address as well.

Don't Have a Domain Name?

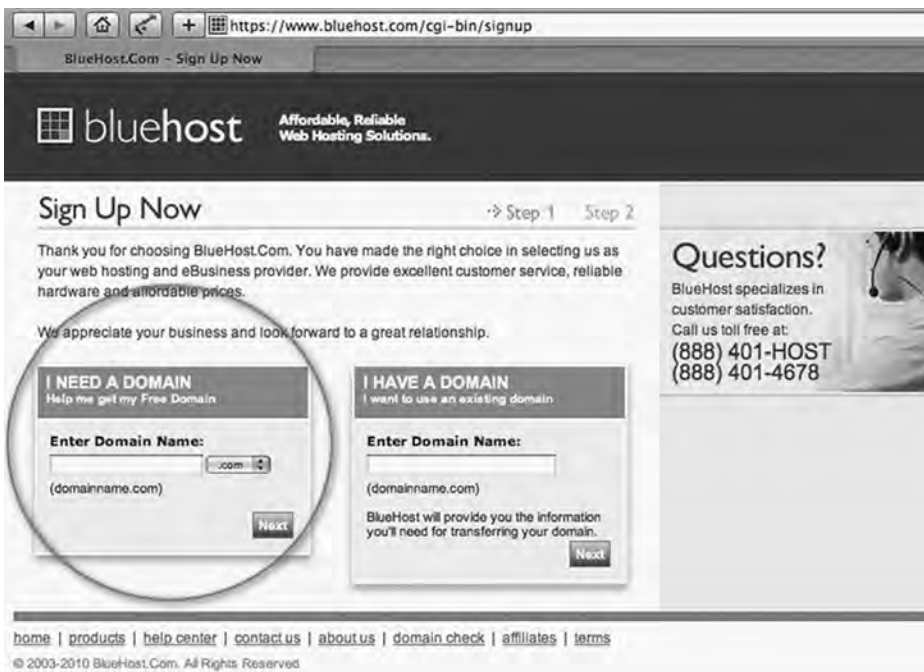
Domain names have become as scarce as beachfront real estate. No, they're not expensive, but it is getting more difficult to find a good one for your business.

Before we touch on how to register your domain name, let's look at some tips to follow about choosing the right one for your business.

- The best scenario is to get the domain name that matches your business name. Hopefully, it's available. If it isn't, consider some subtle variation.
 - For instance, if your business name is Jake's Bookstore and `jakesbookstore.com` is not available, consider incorporating your local town/city/region into the name. For instance, you might try `jakesbookstorepa.com` if you're located in Pennsylvania.
- Don't make your domain name too long. If your company name is *Benson, Jacobs, and Duffield Law Offices* or *Wooldridge and Sons Heating and Cooling*, you may be tempted to create one long domain name. I would try to stay under 20-characters for your domain name if possible. 15 or less is even better. For these two examples, you may want to try something like `bjdlaw.com` or `wooldridgeandsons.com`. Taking long business names to shorter (or available) domain names can take some thinking, so be sure to jot down plenty of ideas to choose from.
- You may be tempted to use `.biz`, `.net`, `.info`, etc., domain name extensions. I don't recommend it. People are just too used to using the `.com` domain name. The only exceptions are if you qualify for an `.edu` or `.org` domain name. The only other exception

would be if you're a B2B (business-to-business) company. If so, you can consider using a .biz domain name. However, just realize that many people will still make the mistake and enter the .com extension by habit.

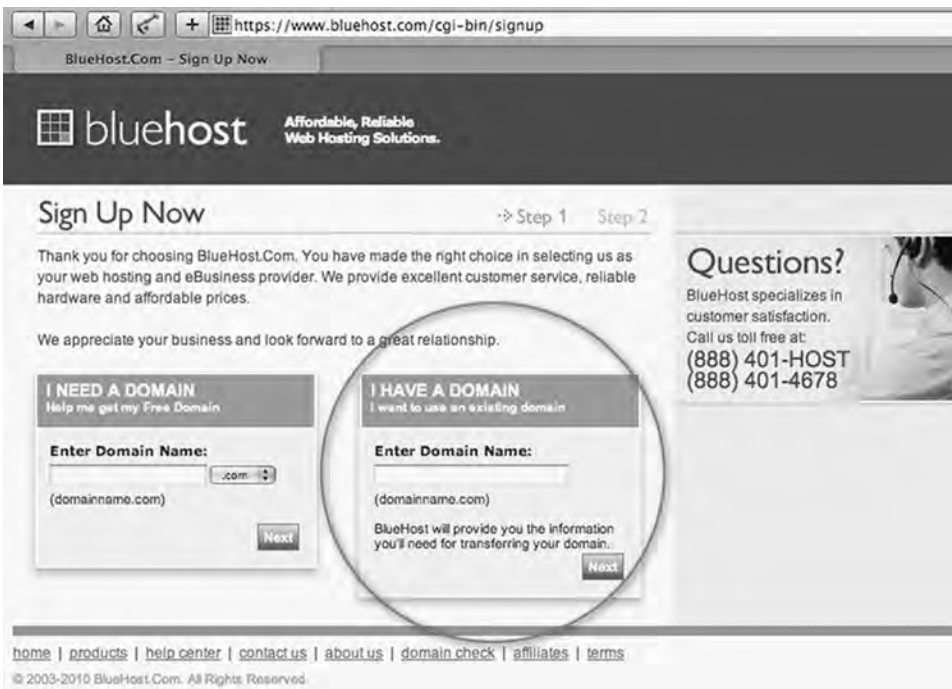
If you want to find out what domain names are available, you can always go to GoDaddy.com and take a look. But don't buy your domain name at GoDaddy. We're going to buy your domain name from BlueHost.com, the same place where we will host your web-site. Once you've found the domain name you're going to use, go to BlueHost.com and click the *Sign Up Now* button. Enter your domain name into the *I Need a Domain Name* field and go through the sign up process. When you're finished you'll have both your domain name and web hosting all ready to go.



Have a Domain Name, No Website, and No (@yourdomain name) Business Email Address?

Many small business owners have previously purchased a domain name, but have not done anything with it. If this is you, I want you to transfer that domain name to <http://www.bluehost.com>. More on how that's done in a moment. I want your domain name at BlueHost because we want the simplicity of having all your web stuff in one place if at all possible.

You can always keep your domain name at the place you registered it (such as GoDaddy) and still use BlueHost as your web host (by adding new DNS records—sounds harder than it is). But I think it's easier to have everything in one place.



NOTES

To Transfer Your Domain Name to BlueHost.com, do the following:

1. Go to BlueHost.com to sign up for an account.
2. Click the Sign Up Now button and enter your current domain name in the I Have a Domain Name box.

Now your domain name should be in the process of being transferred to BlueHost.

If you need help, BlueHost's 24/7 phone support can walk you through the process of transferring your domain name. It should be a pretty simple process.

Have a Domain Name, No Website, but Use a (@yourdomain name) Business Email Address?

First, congratulations. Under this scenario, even though you don't have a website, you're still using a professional business email address that uses your domain name. (I see this sometimes.) *If this is you, don't do anything yet with transferring your domain name to BlueHost.* That's because it will mess up your email.

If you're fine with how you get your email now and your domain name is registered with someone other than BlueHost, keep things as they are. Set up a hosting account with BlueHost and just use DNS settings to point your domain name from where it is now to BlueHost.

Please contact BlueHost, tell them your situation and have them walk you through the DNS forwarding process. If you find this is over your head (it's not as hard as it sounds), wait until you read the "Finding Help" section so we can get someone to help you. The bottom line: Make sure you explain to BlueHost that you want them

to host your website, but you don't want to mess up your email account with your current provider.

Have a Domain Name and a Current Website as well?

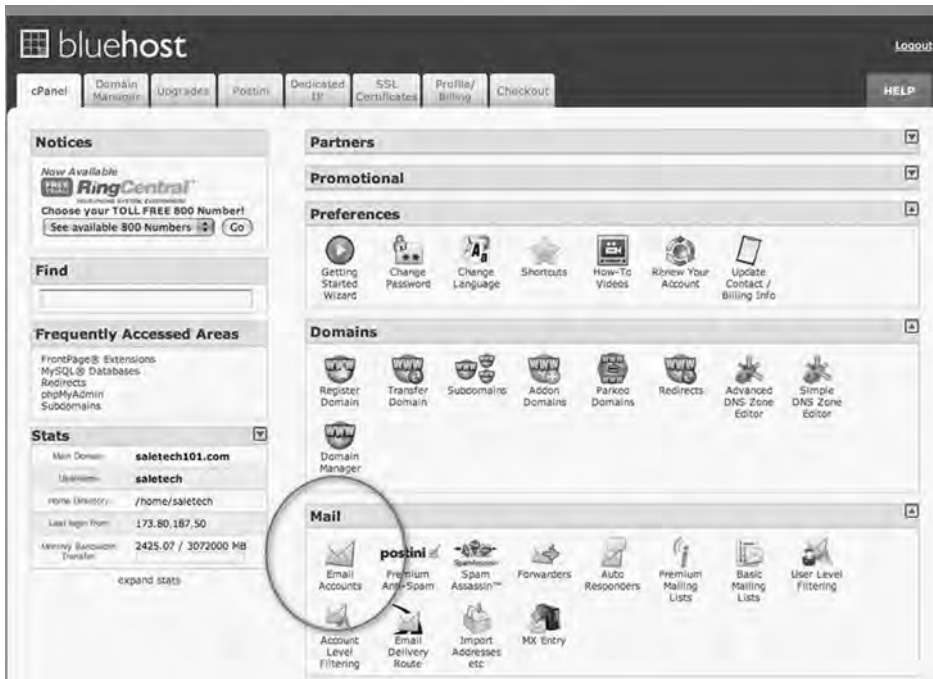
If this is you, and you're perfectly fine with your web hosting provider, you can move on. However, if you're not happy with your current situation and you want to move to the convenience of BlueHost, then call the folks at BlueHost and let them know you already have a website (and email if you have it) hosted elsewhere and you want to bring everything to BlueHost. They'll walk you through the process. If you find this is over your head, wait until you read the "Finding Help" section so we can get someone to help you out. The bottom line is that **we don't want to do anything that's going to create any considerable downtime or screw-ups with your current website or email.**

YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS

If you already have a professional (@yourdomainname) email address or if you've gone through the process of setting up a new web host account with BlueHost, it's time to talk about your email address and accessing your email.

First, if you did not have an email address and your new BlueHost account is set up, go get yourself a new business email address.

Once you're logged in, go to the control panel and click the Email icon in the middle of the page. From here, it's super easy to create an email address for yourself. If you have any problem, contact BlueHost and they'll help you.



Now Comes the Big Question: How Do You Want to Get Your Business Email?

There are a lot of variations of how this could happen. The only thing I don't recommend is getting it directly through what's called WebMail. This is where you log in to BlueHost (or any web host) and get your email directly from their server. The two big reasons are because there aren't enough options and incoming SPAM is often a problem.

Many small business owners are used to using a desktop email program such as Outlook. If you fall into this category and like it, stay with it. You can contact BlueHost and get the POP settings you need to receive your new business email through your current

desktop program. You can also use the same POP settings to get your new business email onto your iPhone, Blackberry, or mobile phone.

Many other small business people don't use a desktop email program, but get their email through an online provider like Gmail, Yahoo!, Hotmail, or their current ISP (*Internet service provider*, such as Verizon or Comcast). If this is you, the simplest thing to do right now is to click the Email Forwarder icon in your BlueHost control panel and have your business email forwarded to your current personal/nonprofessional email address.

- The good news is that you can now give out your new business email address and always receive email that people send you because it will be forwarded to your personal email account (@gmail, @yahoo, etc.).
- The bad news is that the emails you send people or emails you reply to will still show as coming from your personal email address (@gmail, @yahoo, etc.).

Recommended

If you want the professional look of your email being sent from your business email address, consider what I use: Google Apps, which includes an email application. More to come on Google Apps.