

Why Free Websites are Expensive

and the best website option
for your small business.



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CONTENTS

How can a free or cheap website be expensive? 1

Is it really free?

Bait and Switch

What's in the actual Agreement?

Three important things that they like to limit

What they are counting on

Is there a good option?

Static HTML, Joomla, Drupal or WordPress

What is WordPress?

Isn't WordPress a blog?

Can I convert my current website to WordPress?

Can any website host do a WordPress site?

Is WordPress all I need?

WordPress: Operating System

Theme: The Visual Look

Plugins: Features & Function

What else do I need?

Where can I find that?

How can a free or cheap website be expensive?

It's so enticing to sign up for a free website. It all looks so easy. The ad says there's lots of templates to choose from and anyone can do it.

Is it really free?

Think about it. They have to be making money somehow. At least make sure you go in with "eyes wide open" so that if you decide to accept the offer, it is because it is something that works for you.

For some free and low cost sites, it's all about you spreading the word... that means your site will have your domain name, but their branding will be ON YOUR WEBSITE. Are you okay with that?

Bait-and-Switch

What happens to a LOT of people... you sign up for the "free" website. While it is relatively easy, it does take time and energy to get the entire thing set up. So, after you've gotten that initial stage done, you find out that if you want Search Engine Optimization (SEO) capability, there will be a \$5.95+ monthly fee. After some brief research, you discover you REALLY must have SEO capability. So much for free.

What's in the actual Agreement?

Let's use a very popular cheap website as an example. When you set up your site, you must click the box that says you accept their Services Agreement.



Website Builder by [web.com](http://www.web.com)

Their offer is \$1.95 a month, with a FREE domain name. But guess what is in their Services Agreement. .

*Website Builder, 1 Month \$1.95 Promo This promotion provides Customer with a discounted rate of \$1.95 per month for the first (1) billing cycle of the related Services. After the first (1) billing cycle, Customer's recurring fee will automatically change to then current rate. The current rate for the Services is **\$22.95 per billing cycle (every four weeks)**; subject to change at the sole discretion of Web.com. Customer may cancel prior to the end of the promotional period or at any time thereafter by contacting Web.com at 800-932-4678. The Services are to be further governed by the terms and conditions found at <http://www.web.com/legal/serviceagreement.aspx>.*

The rate goes from \$1.95 a month to \$22.95 a month!!!

Let's look at what it says about the free domain name.

The "Free Domain Name" Domain Included promotional offer is valid for a one (1) single 1-year domain name registration. This offer is valid for initial (new) purchase only and only on domains to be registered with a Web.com registrar, and is only valid for domain names with the .com, .net, .org, .biz, or .info extensions. After the applicable one (1) year promotional period, then-current renewal rates shall apply. For reference, the current renewal price for a one (1) year .com domain name registration is \$37.00, subject to change at the sole discretion of web.com.

The rate goes from free to \$37.00 a year. (There are tons of places you can register a domain for \$9 - \$12 a year.)

Three important things that they like to limit.

Pages - Bandwidth - Storage

So, once you get all cozy with your new free site, you want to add another page and find out that you can't... unless you upgrade. Strike one. Then, you get some traffic or do some uploads of photos and find out that you have reached your bandwidth (bandwidth is kind of like minutes on your cell phone) allowance and can't do any additional activity on the site... unless you upgrade. Strike two. You finally did get some photos added and some other .pdf files and you reach your storage limit and can't add anything else to the site... unless you upgrade. Strike three!!

Still need to talk about why this free website is costing you money?

What they are counting on

They bank on the fact that it will be easier for you to pay money for what you've already done. Their entire business model is based on that assumption. And it works because most business people get so darn frustrated it ends up being the path of least resistance.

No support for you. Since technical support has to be done by a human being, whether it's chat, email or telephone. That can get expensive, especially when most support calls can take 30 minutes to an hour. So, how much support do you think is going to be given to a free website builder? They are counting on you giving up after you've been on hold for an hour or paying \$29.95 for a support call.

At this point, you might decide that you want to just take what you've done and go to another website host. Guess what, if you want to cancel, you can, but you walk out the door with NOTHING. Everything you have created is G-O-N-E.

They are counting on you biting the bullet and staying put. You pay for upgrades, you pay for support calls, you pay for extra pages, you pay for additional bandwidth, you pay for expanded storage. See the trend here? YOU PAY.

SIDENOTE: A big caution is to make sure you are getting something that you know you can have another web designer work with... make sure you read the section on themes and plugins. You don't want to be held hostage by a web designer who has "custom coded" a site that no one else can easily take over for you.

Is there a better option?

Yes. But before you learn who should help you with your website, let's review exactly what type of website makes the most sense.

Static HTML, Joomla, Drupal or WordPress?

You can do your own research into each one of these. Static HTML is still around, and some people like it. You'll hear people talk about Dreamweaver, Quanta Plus, Microsoft Visual Web Developer and more. Some are even open source, but have a difficult learning curve and the demand to know so many other facets of web development like Ruby on Rails and other coding languages.

Websites are also being created based on a Content Management System (CMS), which is a computer application that allows publishing, editing and modifying content, organizing, deleting as well as maintenance from a central interface. Joomla and Drupal are CMS's with a following, but are definitely not enjoying the success of WordPress. The popularity of WordPress has prompted an explosion of the development of themes and plugins for WordPress... which will in turn continue to expand its popularity.

What is WordPress?

WordPress originated in 2003 with a single bit of code to enhance the typography of everyday writing and with fewer users than you can count on your fingers and toes. Since then it has grown to be the largest self-hosted blogging tool in the world, used on millions of sites and seen by tens of millions of people every day.



WordPress is an Open Source project, which means there are hundreds of people all over the world working on it.

(More than most commercial platforms.) All of the code and online documentation was created by and for the community. It also means you are free to use it for anything from your cat's home page to a Fortune

500 web site without paying anyone a license fee and a number of other important freedoms.

WORDPRESS

The WordPress Website must be hosted by an Internet Provider, but the beauty of having a WordPress Website is if you have issues with a host, you can MOVE your website.

Isn't WordPress a blog?

WordPress did start as a blogging system, but has evolved to be used as a full content management systems (CMS) and so much more through the thousands of plugins and widgets and themes. A website powered by WordPress is limited only by your imagination... okay, that's not entirely true. Creating a WordPress website does take imagination, but it also takes work. There is a need to monitor the site, install updates and stay current with the endless changes taking place on the internet.

As a small business owner, the blogging aspect of a WordPress website offers you the ability to add current information to your website that not only creates a connection for you to current and prospective customers, but gives you the online opportunity to establish yourself as an expert in your field.

Can I convert my current website to WordPress?

Technically, no. It will require a WordPress installation. The good news is if you have a current website with content, it is a much easier process to create that WordPress website for you.

Do all Website Hosts support WordPress?

No. We will be able to tell you whether a Website Host is compatible for WordPress.

Is WordPress all I need?

Three things are needed in order to have a website with a professional look and user-friendly operation.

- WordPress Operating System
- Theme
- Plugins

You know when you have a customer who just wants to have a better understanding of the problem they are having with their air conditioner, their refrigerator, their car? We know you might have some of the same issues in knowing "what's under the hood" with your website. We not only appreciate that attitude, we support it! Our goal is to provide you with the level of service and support that helps your business thrive.

If you don't want to know anything, that's fine, too. But, most people who don't want to know wouldn't have taken the time to download this information! Let us give you some of the basics.

Let us give you some of the basics. Let's pretend your website is a car.

1. WordPress: Operating System = The Car's Engine

The “engine” is the WordPress operating system that allows your website to go down the road.

One reason this is a very good analogy... are there Fords and Lamborghinis on this information highway? Yes!! Is WordPress the Lamborghini? No! But WordPress is a reliable, functional and adaptable engine. There are over 74.6 million websites powered by WordPress.



If you use a WordPress site, you are in good company. The New York Times, CNN, Mashable and eBay all run their blog sites on WordPress, the most popular CMS (Content Management Systems) in the world.

Fact: 22% of new U.S. domains run on WordPress.

2. Theme: The visual look = The Car's Make & Model



The “body” is the WordPress theme that gives your website its specific look and color.

Shopping for a theme is also fraught with peril. It is like ordering that new car from a picture and when it arrives you say, “Is that the car I ordered?”

We recommend a WordPress theme being used by lots of people. This insures it works well. If you pick a theme that is not being actively supported for updates, you will end up with what we call a broken theme. It literally just

stops working. Themes must be updated when there are either changes with WordPress operating system or with browsers.

The great thing about these WordPress Themes is that just about any Web Designer can step in and help you with that website. In fact, some people slowly become comfortable enough to maintain their own websites!

As we mentioned before, beware of someone who offers to “custom-code” a website for you. If they literally build a site from the ground up, you are now being held hostage by the custom developer for any updates and changes.

3. **Plugins: Features & Function = Car Options & Accessories**



“Plugins” are what add Features & Function to your website. Very much like adding a GPS Navigation, bluetooth, or a rear-view backup camera.

The nice thing is that it allows you to add as much (or as little) as you want.

Some plugins are considered “must have’s”. Especially ones that provide Search Engine Optimization or perhaps Google Analytics.

Caution is to be used on using free plugins. Yes, there are thousands of free plugins out there, but sometimes those free plugins aren’t supported by the developer, which means when the WordPress basic system gets updated,

that plugin may/may not work anymore.

WordPress + Theme + Plugins = GREAT website

What else do I need?

A web designer who knows business and knows how to listen.

Call Kathy and Karen to get more information on what your next step is to expand your online presence.

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Your success is our business.

Our Portfolio:



FriendsofChildrenofBrevard.org



NewDayNewLeaf.org



pronica.org



sovereign-homes.com