How's BUSINESS

The How's Business guide to
Creating a Website

What's How's Business?

Hello. First of all, we'd like to say a big thank you for downloading our guide.

We're How's Business, the growth hub for York, North Yorkshire and East Riding. We're one of 39 growth hubs set up by the Department for Business Environment and Industrial Strategy.

Our role is to make it easy for business owners like you to find the support you need. This could be to locate funding, help with marketing, or advice on how to expand your set-up. In this eBook, we're going to take you through some of the things you need to consider when creating and running a website for your business.

As our patch is quite rural, travel times can really cut into your day. So, we try to focus on what's available locally. Our website plays a vital role in offering advice from anywhere with an internet connection.

We hope you find our guide really useful.

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Introduction

Creating a website is a great way to increase the amount of customers making use of your business and to spread the word about what you do. But, it can be quite tricky to create a site that people find really easy to use and has all the "functionality" it needs to. This eBook will help you break down the technical jargon of web development and give you some tips for things to look out for when you're creating a business website.

Contents

Disclaimer: This eBook has been designed as a guide for creating your business website. Get in touch with an expert if you have any further questions.

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Chapter 1: What options are available to you when creating a business website?

Anne Taylor
See Green

Whether you're just starting out, or looking to grow your business, there's so much to consider – finance, premises, equipment, staff - the list goes on. It's easy for the promotion of your business to slip down the to-do list.

But how you market yourself is a reflection of your business and who you are, and online consumers make decisions in the blink of an eye, or click of a mouse.

Customers are savvier than ever, and even if you're not selling online, you will be judged by your online presence. That doesn't mean that you have to have every social media account going, or develop an eCommerce store when you sell cupcakes at local markets. But it does mean that you need to carefully consider the whole range of tools at your disposal for promoting your business to the people you ultimately want to buy your product or use your service.

The first thought for most businesses is to create a website. But where do you start?

There are so many options, from your friend's son who is studying web design at school and can build something for you at weekends, to template sites you can put together yourself – and of course, you can get the professionals in to help too.

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Budget is often a factor when deciding how to get your business online, and there are a range of free or low cost tools such as WordPress or Moonfruit which can get you online relatively quickly.

You need to consider what your website will look like, how many pages your site needs, what functionality it will have, what the domain name will be, where you will host it, whether you need to be able to update the site yourself, and if so, how IT literate you are – and how much time you have.

The old adage 'you get what you pay for' is generally true. If a site is free or very cheap, it's likely that its design will be the same as hundreds, if not thousands, of others, and not bespoke to your business. It might also be lacking in functionality, accessibility and usability.

But these low cost options can be beneficial in getting your brand out there, making yourself known, and as long as it's done as professionally as possible, it will help you to achieve your aims.

If you are going it alone, make sure you don't add stretched photos, lots of pages that say 'coming soon' or make all of your text yellow and in Comic Sans font, because it's unlikely to be reflecting the professional you.

If budget allows, it's certainly worth getting the pros in to help, and don't forget, if a well-made website gets you more customers, it will soon pay for itself.

Dedicated web companies can help you to develop your website, from considering the design and layout, to how a user will travel through your site, ultimately ending at the call to action you want – whether it's picking up the phone to call you, seeing your opening hours and paying a visit or making a purchase directly online.

They will also help with the more technical aspects of functionality, where you may not have the skills required to do it yourself, or simply don't have the time or inclination.

Ultimately, it's important to do what works for you and your business. Using the right tools and getting the best advice will help you make the best decisions to succeed online.

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Chapter 2: Questions to ask a web designer

Rob Kendal
Created Red Media

Developing a website is a vital piece of your overall marketing puzzle and one that might be best left in the hands of a capable web professional, be it an experienced freelance designer, or a digital agency, depending on your needs.

However, when it comes to having a website designed and developed, the internet is a vast place full of all sorts of firms of all shapes and sizes offering to make you a website for anything from a couple of hundred pounds to a few hundred thousand!

So, how can you be sure that you will get the best website for your budget and ultimately, that the company you choose to deliver your website will create something that inspires trust in your customers?

Here are our top ten questions to ask a web designer

1. What is included in the cost of my website?

Websites are difficult things to price without first having a discussion about what it is that you want it to do, how it should look, and what features you'd like to see included. However, once a project quote is produced, you should be able to see an itemised list of deliverables, which should also give you an opportunity to negotiate

the price by removing some items if they aren't needed at this stage.
A good quote should include everything - even if it is an optional extra - but be sure to ask about things that aren't included. For example, some firms offer hosting or maintenance that isn't included in the initial price.

2. Do you have any experience with other clients in a similar business field to me?

If the firm has experience with another business in the same field as yours this can be a good thing. It's likely they will have an understanding of your business' goals, challenges, needs and target market. Even if they created a website for your direct competitors, this shouldn't be an issue, but it will depend on what sort of relationship the developers have with them.

If, for example, they provide on-going search engine optimisation (SEO) services to help your competition rank higher on search engines, then this will be detrimental to your marketing efforts and result in a conflict of interests. Check out our chapter on SEO to find out more about this.

3. How will I be able to measure the success of my website?

A good website should have a point, a goal, some action that it drives your customers toward performing. If it's an online shop this would be purchasing products; for a brochure-style site this might be to have your customers contact you for a quote or to engage your services. Being able to measure how your site is performing is vital, allowing you to tweak things that aren't working and promote things that are.

Most designers will include some sort of analytics software in the website development that allows you to monitor how many visitors your website is experiencing and what they are doing on your site. Check out our Google Analytics chapter to find out more about monitoring performance.

4. What do I need to supply to you to get started?

The first point of call for any reputable company should be to arrange a meeting to discuss your requirements in detail to be able to provide you with an accurate proposal, or project quote. Alternatively, some companies will provide you with an extensive questionnaire, or scoping document, that helps them to understand more about you, your company and its needs, and gets you thinking about things that, up until now, you might not have.

5. What happens after my website is launched?

Once a website is launched, that is really the start of the journey. What happens next is what matters. It's important to have confidence in your design firm that they will support you and your website going forward, especially in its infancy.

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This might include any support and training, content editing services, or simply answering any questions you may have.

6. Who owns the site design when it's done?

Essentially you should always own the intellectual property rights to your site and content. Depending on the firm you use, and the agreements they have, it could be that they own the copyright to the original artwork, or at least retain some free usage rights to be able to showcase your designs in their portfolio or other marketing activities.

However, if there are any proprietary software systems involved (like content management systems, analytical apps, etc.) then you won't have access to, nor own, the code or design involved with these.

7. Can I add to the site in the future?

Any website that is produced for you should be scalable. There are many reasons why you might want to add to your website later down the line, but the important thing to be concerned with here is 'can my website be added to in the future?', 'will it be able to grow with me and my business?'.

Your website should be flexible enough to accommodate steady growth or support new features and content.

8. Will I get original designs from scratch or do you use pre-made templates?

Pre-made templates have their uses and can be a good way to keep costs to a minimum. However, what you save in monetary terms, you may sacrifice in brand identity. Surely, you'd want your business' website to accurately reflect the uniqueness of your company, or the services you're trying to provide? Well the only way to truly do this is by having a custom design created for you.

9. Who will I deal with at the various stages of my project?

This might depend on the size of the company you end up working with and their processes, but it is hugely useful to be able to speak with your designer or developer directly at some stage to discuss any concerns you have or changes you'd like, as the job is likely to get done much faster than, say, working through a project manager.

Either way, you should be sure that there is a reliable point of contact at the other end of the line who can help you out.

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10. Who produces the content for my website?

The short answer is 'you do', after all it's your website! However, there are a lot of people who aren't confident when it comes to putting their company's products and services into words, or at least choosing the best words to make everything shine. This is especially true when talking about a website's imagery - most people don't have access to a library of images and might need some help finding some for their website.

Ask your design firm if they can help you with the copy (text) and images for your site. They should have contacts in the copywriting field who will be able to put some pizzazz into your words. They should also be able to source some great images to bring the site to life. It is likely that these services will cost extra though, so make sure you know the costs upfront. See our tips for writing exciting copy in chapter 6.

One more thing

You might notice that the list of questions doesn't include one about seeing examples of previous work. Ideally, you should be able to see a good range of existing work for a prospective design firm before you initiate contact with them. It might help to contact the owners of those sites to see what they think about their website and how happy they were with the process and the service they received.

Chapter 3: Tips for a good website

There's no easy answer to what makes a great business website. But, there are lots of things that all work together to build a great site that your customers find easy to use.

Here are our tips for a good website design.

The three click rule

If your customers can't find what they're looking for on your website in three clicks or less you'll lose their attention. People don't want to have to spend ages clicking through pages and pages of information and adverts before they reach the information that brought them to your site in the first place.

Make sure your website is clear of clutter and that the most popular products or services you offer are the first thing your customers see when they visit your site.

Be mobile friendly

You're never far from your mobile phone and neither are your customers. One of the most important things you need to consider when you're looking at how to create a good website is to make sure it's mobile friendly. On the smaller screen of a mobile phone can your text be read? Do your images load properly?

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Mobile phones load more slowly than traditional web pages, so it's important that the most useful information is visible as soon as the page loads. It's also a good idea to limit the amount of text that customers have to input on your mobile site – have drop down options or checkboxes instead to make it easier for customers to search without having to type things out. Anything you can do to save your users time is a bonus.

Need for speed

How many times have you been frustrated with your computer for not loading a site quickly enough? We all do it, and if your business website is slow to load then you'll lose out on customers.

Grab attention

When someone comes onto your website, you have two seconds to impress them or grab their attention so they don't hit the back button and "bounce" (leave your site). You'll need to think about what imagery and colours you want for your site, and how they will contribute to the overall building of your brand.

Have the right content

Having the right content on your website is key. Having too much text on a page can ruin your website design and put people off. Nobody wants to read through a massive chunk of text when they're looking to buy a present or book an experience.

The text – or "copy" – on your website is there for a reason, and that's to sell the benefits of your product or service. You'll also need to let potential customers know who you are and what your business does, but get creative! Big, blocky paragraphs on the page are not interesting and people will leave your site.

Heading, subheadings, short paragraphs, lists, bullet points, infographics, pictures etc. all help to create exciting content for your website and hold people's attention.

Copy is so important, we've got a whole chapter devoted to it – check it out.

You might also want to have a read through the article written by How's Business adviser Mike Phillipson about writing great content.

Have a clear focus

You'll likely be investing a lot of money into your website and are hoping to get a lot more out of it. Making sure you have a clear focus for each page can help your customers move their way through your website and encourage them to buy.

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Having lots of pages with no clear goal will just make your website feel cluttered. While the experts all say having lots of pages is better for your SEO (head down to chapter 4 to find out more about this), having pages just for the sake of it will confuse customers and make it difficult for them to find what they need.

Encourage your customers to do something

Having a clear "call to action" on your website can help you make sure your customers do more than just look at your website. Getting them to the page is great, but not if they don't use your business.

So, ask yourself, what do you actually want your customers to do when they're on your site? For example, do you want them to buy something, sign up to a newsletter, or get in touch with you?

Every page on your website should have a strong call to action – a next step that your customers can take to keep them interacting with your business.

Google My Business

Google My Business is a really useful tool that you can use to get your business noticed by the Google search engine (check out the chapter on SEO) and build up trust with your customers. They're able to upload their thoughts and post reviews of your business and lots of positive recommendations from your customers is likely to encourage more to come your way.

Check out this great guide from Simply Business to help you get your Google My Business account up and running.

Chapter 4: Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) and key words

When you're building your business website, you need to know at least a little bit about Search Engine Optimisation – more commonly known as SEO. Having great SEO for your website pages and blog posts can significantly increase the business you get coming through from the internet.

What actually is SEO?

When you search for something in Google or any of the other search engines, you are taken to a list of different websites that you can then have a browse through. The better your SEO ranking is, the higher on the page your website link will be. If you can get your website to be on the first page of a search, you're much more likely to get visitors to your site than if you were ranking on the bottom of page three. How many times have you hit that "page two" button on Google? Hardly ever, right? In the website world, it's all about being the top listing on page one.

Google and other search engines monitor every page on the internet and build an idea of the usefulness of your website to decide where you should "rank" in a search. The easier you make it for the search engine "crawlers" to read and understand your site, the higher you'll be listed. Think of it as lots of little workers moving from page to page of the internet with a big checklist of things to look out for.

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On page SEO

There are two types of SEO that you can focus on to help break it down into manageable pieces – on page SEO and off page SEO. On page SEO looks at how you tailor your content to please search engine readers through "key words".

Key words are great. They can let you know exactly what your customers are searching for and the specific words that they're using in their searches. This means you can really tailor your content to what they're looking for and make sure your tone matches theirs. You can produce content that you know they're going to like based on their searches.

To be able to search for your key words, you need to have a Google AdWords account. AdWords is an extremely useful tool that's worth exploring more in your own time, but here we're going to focus on their keyword planner tool.

Finding keywords to include in your content does take a little time, but it's time well spent as it increases your rankings and gets you more customers. When looking for key words to use in your content using the AdWords tool, look out for:

- **The average monthly searches** – this shows you approximately how many people are searching for the specific key word. The higher the number, the higher your chances are of being found in a search.
- **The competition** – in business, you always need to know who you're competing against, and it's no difference in key word searches. Look for search terms with low or no competition to give yourself an edge.
- **The bid** – this tells you the amount other businesses are spending in their Google AdWords marketing campaigns to rank for a certain term. Popular searches will have higher spends attached to them, so you'll probably want to look to use key words that have no suggested bids as you start out.

How to use your keywords in your content

Now you know what your keywords are, you'll need to know how to get them into your content. Using them too often in your blog can actually harm your SEO. Google and other search engines will see it as spam and lower your rankings as a result. Your key words shouldn't be more than 2% of the overall content.
To successfully use keywords you should:

- **Put them in the title** – tell Google, and your readers, what the content is focused on.
- **Use them in your headers** – headers are great for telling search engines which are the important pieces of information, and there are different types of header to let Google know what to privilege. A H1 header is your biggest one and goes at the top of your content. H2 headers are slightly less important, but still should have your key words in them. H3 and H4 etc. are headings further down the piece – still important, but are extra bits of information that users might not necessarily read on their first sitting.

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- **Use them in the text** – make sure you use your key words in the first sentence after a header. Using your keywords in the first sentence or paragraph after a new header shows search engines that you're talking about the topic you've promised to.
- **Use them in the "meta data" and page titles** – to help make it really clear for search engines what you're writing about, include it in what's called your meta data. Sounds fancy, but all it means is the little bit of text that appears under your title on the search engine listing. And your page title is exactly what it says on the tin, it's the bit of information that sits at the top of a tab when someone has the page open.

Images

Every marketer knows that using images in your content makes them much more user friendly and encourages people to keep reading so it's very important that you include pictures in your content. But, search engines cannot "read" pictures and if they're not properly optimised, they will lower your rankings.

Optimising an image is easy. You simply have to include what's called an "alt tag" with your picture which tells search engines what your image shows and how it's relevant to your post.

Off page SEO

Off page SEO is all about making it easier for search engines to know that other people find your content really useful so they'll increase your rankings. There are lots of ways that can contribute to increasing your off site SEO:
- **Link building** – if you can get other sites to link through to your website, search engines will increase your rankings. The more influential the site the bigger impact it will have on your SEO. Think about trade unions and chambers of commerce; you could get your website listed on to help with this. For example, if you're a tourism business, join Welcome to Yorkshire and benefit from their link recommendation.
- **Social media** – the more people that share your content, the better for your business in terms of SEO and social media is the best way to get people to share your posts. Make sure you're actively using different social media accounts to connect with your customers.
- **Get people to share your content** – if you mention other businesses in your content, see if they'll share it on their social media sites.
- **E-Marketing** – if you send out a newsletter to your customers, make sure it's got lots of links back to your website to encourage people to visit.

Chapter 5: Top tips for SEO

Each SEO expert you talk to will have their own idea about what the most important element is. There's no easy fix for improving your SEO and it takes time to build up trust with search engines, so don't be put off if you don't see results straight away. We've pulled together our top tips of things you might want to look at for increasing your SEO.

Regularly update

SEO is a continuous process. There's no end point when you'll get to tick "SEO website" off your to-do list. If a website isn't updated, the search engines lower it in the rankings thinking that it's no longer in use. Make sure you regularly add content and refresh your site with content that your customers want to show the search engines that your site is worthy of a high ranking.

Be specific

The more focused you are with your content, the better. If you have lots of tailored content for a specific market with a specific purpose, search engines will be able to identify you and raise your rankings more easily. Sites that cover broad topics in lots of different areas struggle with their SEO. If you can join what's known as a "topical community" your SEO will soar. It shows Google and other search engines that you have specific expertise in an area and that other, similar sites agree with your content.

Use keywords

Head back up to chapter 4 for a refresh on keywords. Making sure you use the terms that your customers are actually using not only lets you know that your content will be well received and worth the time, it's also vital to increase your SEO ranking. Make sure you use your keyword in your page title, headers and body text.

Submit a sitemap

There are so many sites on the internet that it boggles the mind to think about them. So, imagine the task facing search engine crawlers – having to regularly go through every single site to decide where it should rank. Submitting a sitemap makes it easier for these crawlers to categorise your site. Your sitemap sets out the organisation of your website, how the pages link together and can explain your image or video content. It can help you get recognised by crawlers much faster when you first launch your website too.

Set up Google My Business

Google My Business is built and used by Google so it gets special attention from Google's crawlers and it's completely free to use. You need to input some data about your business (location, contact details, opening hours, and sector – those kinds of things) and encourage your customers to leave reviews on it. The more useful people are finding your site the higher you'll rank and who better to tell Google than the people it's listing things for?

Get links to your site from other pages

Having other search engine friendly sites listing your business website on their sites creates "back links" which is great for your SEO. It shows them that sites they already know recommend you to other people. It's also really useful to have links to your site in lots of places as it increases the chances of someone finding your business online.

Some good places to start are with trade organisations to link through to you. If you're a member of an organisation, they'll most likely have a list of all their members on their site, so make sure you're listed and grab yourself an easy back link.

Register on quality directories

Things like Yell and Better Business Bureau are all well known by search engines and provide easy links back to your websites. Online directories also allow customers to give their feedback and prove your usefulness to search engines.

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Link to your own site

Search engines give higher rankings to the pages that people spend longer times on. If a customer is on your website and is reading a blog post they're clearly interested in your business. Hold on to that interest and have links to other parts of your site within the first article to encourage them to visit other parts of your website and increase your SEO.

Images

Search engines can't read pictures, so they don't know if they're helpful to the people that use your site. Make sure you include alt text with the image so that crawlers know exactly why that image is there and how it's relevant to the rest of the content. You can also help the crawlers by saving the image file as "sensitive skin care body lotion" rather than "40235.jpg" when you upload it to the site.

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Chapter 6: Copy writing and blogging

The words you use on your website and in any communication with your customers is incredibly important to your business success. The word "blogging" can often put people off by calling to mind a teenager locked in their bedroom posting pictures of their dinner or chatting about their lives. But in the business world, having a regularly updated blog with content your customers love is a must.

Why is great content so important?

Forget the image of the teenager! Blogging is actually a great way for you to engage with your customers and increase the amount of new and exciting pages on your website that search engines love.

Having great content on your website can:
- **Help you engage with your customers** – if someone finds your website, they need to know what you do and how it can make their lives better, hopefully making them a loyal customer.
- **Improve your search engine rankings** – using the right key words in your content can boost your rankings. Head back up to the chapter on SEO if you need a refresh on key word optimisation.
- **Increase visitor numbers** – increasing your rankings will naturally increase the number of people coming through to your website. From there, your website can encourage them to buy.

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- **Build trust and reputation for your business** – informative, well written content increases trust and confidence in your business. How many times have you left a website because the text is full of errors? Badly put together copy signals a spammy website and potential cyber threats. If you want to keep yourself safe from cyber threats, you can [check out our cyber security tips here](#).

So, what makes a great piece of website content?

Every business is different, and will have its own style, customer base and topics of interest. But there are a few things that all great copy has in common:

- **It's aimed at your customers** – there's no point writing something that your customers aren't interested in because they won't read it. Make sure that you tailor your copy to what people are searching – thanks Google AdWords!
- **It's easy to read** – if it's not easy to read people won't read it. The internet is full of much more exciting things than a long, jargon heavy article on a business website. If you write something that's clear and targeted at your customer's interests, you're on to a winner.
- **It's unique** – Google knows if you've taken content that wasn't yours and will punish your plagiarism by dropping your rankings.
- **It's full of benefits** – you're a business and your aim is to sell and your customers know it. So sell the benefits of what you do by letting them know how your product or service will make their lives better. Focus less on what you do and how you do it, customers don't care, but they are interested in what it means for them, so tell them.
- **It's focused** – the best pages are the ones that have a clear message and goal. They're also the best ones for increasing your rankings on search engines as the more specific you are, the better.
- **It has the most useful information at the top** – people don't read a webpage from start to finish, they jump around and scan for the information they want. Don't make them have to scroll for the most useful details, put it front and centre so it can grab their attention and keep them on your page.

You can read more about [writing exciting copy for websites and social media here](#).

Calling in the experts

You might not have enough spare time to devote to writing exciting and tailored content for your website or blog. Luckily, there are people that you can hire to do it for you. Calling in the experts to do the jobs you can't is always a good idea if you've got the budget for it.

Employing a professional copy writer for your business can help you get the best, optimised, content for your site if you haven't got the time to spend on it yourself. Take your time when choosing who you want to hire and make sure they understand your business, brand, personality and key messages. Look at lots of their other work to get a sense of their writing style and to see if they'll be a good fit for your business.

Chapter 7: Google Analytics

You've spent lots of time, effort and money on your website, making sure it looks and works great and has perfectly optimised content for your customers. Now, you need to see some results and know that your site is performing well and adding lots of value to your business. That's where Google Analytics comes in.

Google Analytics can help you monitor every aspect of your website so you can see what's working really well and which areas need a little tweaking to get them up to scratch. And to sweeten the deal, it's free to use.

Using Google Analytics can show you exactly what people are doing when they come on to your website. You can find out:

What pages customers visited

Knowing where people are going on your site shows you what your most popular content is. Using this information you can create similar content to boost your ratings and focus your marketing on your most popular content, product or service.

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How long they stayed on your site

Knowing how long people are staying on your site shows you how useful they find it. If they "bounce" (immediately click off your site), you know you need to spend some time on your pages to grab attention. If they're staying a while, you know they're engaging with the content on your site.

How people move through your site

You can map how people are moving through your website and see how engaged they are with your content. If people are spending a while on lots of different pages, you know they're thinking about your content. If they're leaving after one page, you can make some changes to keep people longer on your site.

In-depth details about your users

You can find out things like your website users age, gender, location etc. which you can then use to inform your marketing.

What devices your customers are using

If lots of your customers are viewing your site on their mobiles, you need to make sure it's optimised for mobile. The same goes for if they're using a tablet or desktop computer. Make sure your website looks great and loads perfectly on the devices your customers are using.

Where your users are coming from

Analytics lets you know how people are coming on to your site, whether that's "organically" thanks to your SEO, from social media, links on other sites etc. You can then use that information to see where you should spend your marketing budget.

Which key words are working for you

You'll be able to see what your customers are typing into search engines in order to find your page, showing you which keywords are performing well and where you need to alter your approach.

About your bounce rates

A bounce rate tells you how many people immediately click off your site after landing on it. Search engines prefer websites with lower bounce rates because it signals that users find your content useful.

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How you've changed over time

Analytics lets you see how your website has performed from the time you opened your account to the present. You can see which months you did really well and which were less popular, which you can then use to inform your future content and marketing.

Support for using Google Analytics

If you need any help with getting yourself set up with analytics, or want some guidance for using the tools, they have great guides that you can access to walk you through the process.

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Next steps

This guide has hopfully given you an idea about what things you need to consider when you're creating your business website. If you need a little more support though, there are lots of places you can go to get extra information.

The National Business Support Helpline

If you need some advice for your business, give the folk at the National Business Support Helpline a ring. Their advice is free, and the number is **0300 456 3565**

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At How's Business, we pride ourselves on making it easy for you to find support. So, make sure you check out our other articles, eBooks and events to get answers to your questions. If you still need a face-to-face chat, why not get in touch with one of the How's Business advisors?

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