SAILING DIRECTIONS FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

Building your own website

Everything a small business needs to know, from your web address to your first online booking. In plain English, and free to keep.

BEFORE YOU START
What it's for, your web address and how to build it

WHILE YOU BUILD
Pages, words, photos, phones and speed

AFTER IT'S LIVE
Google, bookings, the legal bits and keeping it safe

AT THE BACK
A go-live checklist you can tick off

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BEFORE WE START

Hi, I'm Rob. This guide is yours to keep.

You've decided to build your own website. Good. Plenty of small businesses do it well, and you know your customers better than any web designer does.

I build websites, tills and software for small businesses in Lincolnshire. I'm a big believer in local businesses helping each other out, so this is everything I'd tell a friend who was doing it themselves. There's no catch and nothing to sign up to. There's one page about me at the very end, and you can skip it.

Most of it comes from looking at hundreds of local business websites and finding the same few problems again and again: menus nobody can read on a phone, booking buttons that hand a cut of every sale to someone else, and sites that still say 2021. They're all easy to avoid if you know about them before you start.

THE ONE TEST I USE FOR EVERYTHING

Could someone who hates computers use it? If a customer can find your opening hours and ring you within ten seconds on their phone, with no instructions, you're most of the way there.

How to use it: read sections 1 to 3 before you spend any money. Sections 4 to 9 are for while you're building, and section 10 is the legal bit, which is dull but needed. The checklist at the back is for the day before you go live.

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01 START WITH WHAT IT'S FOR

Nobody visits a small business website for fun

They've searched for something like "chippy Skegness" or "plumber near me", usually on a phone and often in a hurry. Your website's job is to turn that search into a call, a booking or a visit.



FIG. 1 — WHAT A WEBSITE IS FOR

Almost everyone arriving on your site wants the answer to one of four questions. Put all four on the first screen of your home page, before anyone has to scroll, and you're ahead of most local websites.

01
What you do
In one plain sentence, not a slogan.

02
Where you are
Your town in the first line, and a map link.

03
When you're open
Today's hours, kept up to date.

04
How to reach you
A number you can tap, or a Book button.

Pick one main job

Decide the one thing you most want a visitor to do: ring you, book, order or come in. Make that the biggest, clearest button on every page. Everything else comes second.

Write down what customers ask

For a week, jot down every question people ask on the phone or at the counter. Do you do gluten-free? Is there parking? Do you cover Louth? Are dogs allowed? Those answers are your website, and each one you answer there is a phone call you don't have to take while you're busy.

Be honest about the time

Building it is the quick part. Most of the time goes on words, photos and prices. As a rough guide, a simple site on a website builder takes a weekend or two. One with bookings or an online shop takes a few weeks of evenings. Gather your words and photos first and everything goes faster.

DO YOU NEED A WEBSITE YET?

If you're just starting out, a complete Google Business Profile (page 11) does a lot of the work for free. A website earns its keep when you want people to book or buy directly, when you want to look established, or when you're tired of Facebook deciding who sees your posts. It's the one place online that you control.

02 YOUR WEB ADDRESS AND EMAIL

Keep your web address in your own name

Your web address (the "domain", like `thecrabpot.co.uk`) is the one thing you should never let someone else own. A website can be rebuilt. A lost address takes your Google ranking, your printed menus and often your email with it.

Choosing one

- **.co.uk** tells people you're a UK business, and customers here trust it. **.com** is fine too, and **.uk** is a shorter version of .co.uk.
- Make it easy to say over the phone. Avoid hyphens, numbers and spellings people will get wrong.
- If your name's taken, add your town: `crabpotskegness.co.uk` works well and helps with local searches.

Registering it

- Register it yourself, in your own name or your company's, with an email address you'll always have. Not a relative's, an employee's or your web designer's.
- **Turn on auto-renew** and keep the card on the account up to date. Turn on two-step login too.
- Check the **renewal** price, not just the first-year offer. Some registrars charge £1 or even 1p for the first year, then £12 to £28 a year from then on. Around £10 to £15 a year is a fair renewal price for a .co.uk.
- Write down where it's registered and keep the login somewhere safe. A surprising number of owners don't know.

ROCKS AHEAD

I've seen a holiday park whose old web address now shows a "buy this domain" page, while tourist websites still send visitors there. And a family attraction whose old address now shows their name mixed in with spam. Both started with a renewal nobody noticed.

An email address that matches

An address like `hello@thecrabpot.co.uk` looks more established than a Gmail or Hotmail one, and it stays yours if you change provider. Google Workspace costs £5.90 per person a month on a yearly plan, plus VAT, and Microsoft 365 Business Basic costs about the same. Zoho Mail has a free plan for up to five people, though it only works in Zoho's own app and website.

If your website sends you enquiries by email, make sure they arrive. Send yourself a test the day you go live, and check your spam folder. Your email provider's setup guide will walk you through the three settings (called SPF, DKIM and DMARC) that stop your emails landing in other people's junk folders.

03 CHOOSING HOW TO BUILD IT

For most people, a website builder is the way to go

There are three ways to get a website. If you're doing it yourself, a website builder is the one I'd point most people to.

ROUTE 1 · MOST PEOPLE

A website builder

Wix, Squarespace, Shopify and others. You pay monthly, they host it and keep it secure, and you drag and drop. The catch is the monthly fee, for as long as you have the site.

ROUTE 2 · FOR TINKERERS

WordPress

Free software that runs about four in ten websites. It's powerful, but you're responsible for updates and security, and out-of-date WordPress sites are a favourite target for hackers.

ROUTE 3 · HAND IT OVER

A web designer

Someone builds it for you. It costs more up front and less of your time. Whoever you pick, make sure the site and the web address are in your name.

The main website builders

BUILDER	GOOD FOR	FROM, A MONTH	WATCH FOR
Squarespace	Good-looking sites with little effort. Every plan can sell.	£12 Basic £17 Core	Basic adds 2% to every sale; Core doesn't.
Wix	The most freedom over layout, with bookings and a shop built in.	About £9 Light About £16 Core	Light can't take payments. The free web address is for year one only.
Shopify	Selling lots of products, with stock and delivery.	£19 Basic	An extra 2% on sales if you don't use Shopify's own card payments.
Square Online	Cafés, takeaways and shops already using a Square till.	Free £20 Plus	The free plan can't use your own web address and shows Square's branding.
WordPress.com	Sites with lots of articles, that might grow into full WordPress.	About $4 Personal	Priced in dollars. Cheaper plans take a cut of payments.

Paid yearly, checked October 2026. Paying monthly costs more, VAT may be added, and offers come and go, so check before you sign up.

MY HONEST PICKS

- **Most businesses:** Squarespace Core or Wix Core. Both take payments without the builder taking an extra cut.
- **Already on a Square till:** Square Online. Start free, and move to Plus when you want your own web address.
- **Selling lots of products:** Shopify.
- **B&Bs and holiday lets:** any of them, plus a free booking tool such as Freetobook (page 13).

03 CHOOSING HOW TO BUILD IT, CONTINUED

What it will really cost

The advertised monthly price is never the whole story. Here's what a small business website typically costs to run for a year, done yourself.

WHAT	TYPICAL COST	NOTES
Web address	£10 to £15 a year	For a .co.uk, after any first-year offer
Website builder	£110 to £230 a year	About £9 to £19 a month, paid yearly
Business email	£0 to £71 a year, per person	From Zoho's free plan to Google Workspace
Booking or ordering tool	£0 to £350 a year	Several good tools are free to start (page 13)
Card payments	1.4–2.1% + 20–25p	Per card payment, if you sell or take deposits
ICO fee	£0 or £52 a year	If you need it (page 14), or £47 by direct debit
Your time	20 to 60 hours	To build it, then about an hour a month to keep it current

THE SHORT VERSION

A simple site with your own .co.uk address and a matching email address typically costs **about £120 to £300 a year**, plus card fees on anything you sell. Most of the real cost is your time.

Before you pay for anything, check

- [ ] **The price after the first year.** Introductory discounts often double at renewal.
- [ ] **Fees on sales.** Some plans take a cut of every order or booking on top of the card fees.
- [ ] **Your web address.** Can you connect one you already own, and take it with you if you leave?
- [ ] **Leaving.** Can you export your words, photos and customer list? Moving builders usually means rebuilding.
- [ ] **Add-ons.** Are bookings, a shop and forms included, or paid extras?

ROCKS AHEAD: RENTED WEBSITES

Some directory and advertising firms "include" a website in a monthly package. Ask who owns it: when you stop paying, the site, and sometimes the web address, can go with it.

USING AI TO BUILD IT

Most builders can now write you a whole site in minutes. Treat it as a first draft: put it in your own words, check every fact, and never publish reviews you didn't get.

Where to spend, and where to save

Worth paying for

- Your web address, in your name
- A booking or ordering tool, if you take bookings
- An afternoon getting good photos

Usually not worth it

- Premium templates you'll change anyway
- "SEO packages" from cold calls and emails
- Apps and plugins you don't strictly need

04 PLANNING YOUR PAGES

Plan it on paper first. Five pages is plenty.

Most small businesses need five pages or fewer. One good page beats five thin ones, and a single-page site is fine if you don't have much to say.



FIG. 2 — A TYPICAL SMALL BUSINESS WEBSITE

What your type of business needs

BUSINESS	MUST HAVE	WORTH ADDING
Café, restaurant or takeaway	Menu as text with prices, opening hours, allergen information, phone number, map	Table booking, online ordering for collection, photos of real dishes
B&B, hotel or holiday let	Each room with photos and prices, availability and booking, location and parking, cancellation policy	Breakfast menu, things to do nearby, accessibility details
Trades	What you do, the areas you cover, photos of real jobs, reviews, a quote form	Registrations (Gas Safe, NICEIC and so on), "from" prices, questions people ask
Studio, classes or salon	Timetable, prices, how to book, who teaches or works there	Online booking, what to bring, a gallery, beginners' information
Shop	What you sell, opening hours, where you are	Click and collect, an online shop, gift vouchers

The bottom of every page

The footer is where people look when they're in a hurry. Put your business name, address, phone number, email, opening hours, links to your social pages, and the legal bits (your privacy notice and, for a limited company, your company details) at the bottom of every page.

A QUICK WAY TO PLAN

Take a sheet of paper for each page. Write its one job at the top ("help people choose a room"), then the questions it answers, then the button at the bottom. If a page has no job, you don't need it.

05 WORDS THAT WORK

Say what you do and where, in the first line

Write like you'd talk to a customer at the counter. Short sentences, everyday words, and your town's name early on. Specifics sell better than adjectives.

BEFORE

~~Welcome to our website! We are passionate about delivering quality and excellent customer service.~~

AFTER

Fresh fish and chips on Skegness seafront since 1985. Open every day, 11:30 till 9.

Menus and price lists as text, not PDFs or photos

This is the most common problem I find on local websites, by a distance. A menu that's a PDF or a photo has to be pinched and zoomed on a phone, can't be read by Google (so nobody finds your dishes when they search), can't be read aloud for people with sight loss, and is a faff to update. Type it in as normal text instead.

Show your prices

Someone comparing two B&Bs at ten at night will book the one that shows a price. If your prices vary, use "from £65 a night" or give a few examples. "Call for prices" sends a lot of people elsewhere.

Give every page a proper title

Each page has a hidden title that shows on the browser tab and as the blue link in Google. Many builders set it to "Home" and leave it there. Change it to say what and where, such as **"The Crab Pot · Fish and chips in Skegness"**. Look for "SEO settings" or "page settings" in your builder.

Keep it current

Little things make a business look closed or forgotten. Every few months, look for:

- [ ] Dates from years ago, such as "prices for 2021"
- [ ] Covid notices and old opening arrangements
- [ ] "New website coming soon"
- [ ] An old year in the footer copyright line
- [ ] Events that have already happened
- [ ] Menus, prices and staff that have changed
- [ ] Links that go nowhere or back to the home page
- [ ] A fax number, unless you still use one

06 PHOTOS

Real photos, taken in daylight, made small

Your photos do more selling than your words. Real photos of your place, your food, your work and your people beat stock photos every time, and a recent phone is all you need.

Taking them

- ~ Shoot in daylight, lights on, lens wiped.
- ~ Turn the phone sideways for wide header photos.
- ~ Tidy up first: bins, boxes, cables and clutter.
- ~ People doing things beat empty rooms (ask first).
- ~ Take lots, then pick the best ten.
- ~ For food, shoot by a window, from slightly above.

Making them small

Phone photos are huge, often several megabytes each, and big photos are the main reason small business websites are slow. Before uploading, resize each one to about 2,000 pixels wide and compress it, aiming for under 300 KB. `squoosh.app` and `tinypng.com` do it for free.

```
before   IMG_4032.jpg            6.8 MB   4032 x 3024
after    haddock-and-chips.jpg   240 KB   2000 x 1500
```

FIG. 3 — THE SAME PHOTO. IT LOOKS THE SAME ON SCREEN AT A 28TH OF THE SIZE.

Describing them

Every photo has a space for "alt text": a short description read aloud to people using screen readers, which Google reads too. Write what's in it, such as "haddock and chips with mushy peas", not "IMG_4032". Give the file a sensible name before uploading as well.

ROCKS AHEAD: OTHER PEOPLE'S PHOTOS

Don't use photos you've found on Google Images or another business's website. Photo agencies use software to find their pictures on small business sites and send bills that can run to hundreds of pounds. Use your own, or free libraries such as `unsplash.com` and `pexels.com`, and check the licence.

Your logo

Ask whoever made your logo for an SVG file, or failing that a large PNG with a transparent background. A blurry logo is the first thing people notice.

07 PHONES, SPEED AND EVERYONE

Check it on your phone, outside, on 4G

Most of your visitors will be on a phone, so that's what to design for and test on. Not on the Wi-Fi in your office. Walk outside, switch the Wi-Fi off and try it on mobile data, like your customers will.

The two-minute phone test

- [ ] Tap your phone number. Does it start a call?
- [ ] Tap your address. Does it open a map?
- [ ] Can you read the menu or prices without zooming?
- [ ] Can you zoom in if you want to? Some sites block it.
- [ ] Are the buttons big enough for a thumb?
- [ ] Does a pop-up cover the page before you can read it?
- [ ] Does the page load in a few seconds on 4G?
- [ ] Can you book or order without turning the phone sideways?

Speed

Put your address into Google's free `pagespeed.web.dev` and look at the mobile score. The usual fixes are the same everywhere: smaller photos, no videos that play by themselves, no sliding banners, and fewer add-ons such as chat bubbles and pop-ups.

Make it work for everyone

About a quarter of people in the UK have a disability, and many more have tired eyes, shaky hands or a cracked screen. A website that works for them works better for everybody. It's the law too: under the Equality Act 2010, businesses mustn't put disabled customers at a disadvantage, and that covers websites.

- ~ Dark text on a light background, with strong contrast. No pale grey on white.
- ~ Real text, never words baked into a picture.
- ~ Headings in order, so the page has a clear outline.
- ~ Links that say where they go: "See our menu", not "click here".
- ~ Alt text on every photo that matters.
- ~ Labels on every form box, not just faint hint text inside it.
- ~ Don't rely on colour alone, such as "items in red are sold out".
- ~ Captions on videos.

For a free check, put your address into `wave.webaim.org`. It marks problems directly on your page.

TRY IT WITH YOUR EYES CLOSED

Turn on your phone's screen reader (VoiceOver on an iPhone, TalkBack on Android), shut your eyes and try to find your phone number. It takes five minutes, and you'll never look at a website the same way again.

08 GETTING FOUND ON GOOGLE

Getting found is mostly two things, and the first one is free

For a local business, getting found comes down to a complete Google Business Profile and a website that says clearly what you do and where you are. There's no secret beyond that.

01 Your Google Business Profile

It's your listing on Google Maps and the box that appears on the right when someone searches your name. It's free, at `business.google.com`. Google will ask you to prove you run the business, usually with a short video of your premises, a phone call or text, or a postcard with a code. Don't change your name, address or category while it's being checked.

- Fill in everything: categories, opening hours (including bank holidays), phone, website, services or menu, and attributes like wheelchair access or dog-friendly.
- Add real photos, and new ones every so often.
- Do the same on **Apple Business** (for Apple Maps on iPhones) and **Bing Places**. Both are free, and Bing's can copy your Google listing across.

02 Your website

- Page titles that say what and where (page 8), and your town in the text.
- A page for each main thing you do, such as boilers, bathrooms and repairs.
- Your name, address and phone number written the same way everywhere.

03 Reviews

Ask every happy customer, on the day if you can. Your Business Profile gives you a short review link to put on a card, a receipt or a follow-up email. Reply to every review, good or bad, politely. Never write, buy or swap fake reviews, or hide genuine bad ones. It's been illegal since April 2025.

ROCKS AHEAD: HIDDEN FROM GOOGLE

Most builders have a setting that hides your site from search engines while you're building it, and it's easy to forget to switch off. I've found local shops that were invisible on Google because of one forgotten tick box. Add your site to the free `Google Search Console` and check its "Pages" report says your pages are indexed.

BE WARY OF

Anyone who promises "page one of Google" or the top spot, because nobody can promise that. Cold calls selling SEO or "Google listing" services are best ignored: Google never charges to set up or verify your profile. And give a brand-new site a few weeks to show up.

09 BOOKINGS, ORDERS AND PAYMENTS

Let people book with you directly, and keep the commission

Booking and delivery platforms are good at finding you new customers. They're expensive at handling the customers who've already found you. Lots of people look you up by name before they book, so give them a way to book with you there and then.

A B&B ROOM

£90 a night, 15% commission

£13.50 to the platform every night it's booked that way. Over 100 nights a season, that's **£1,350**, before extras like Booking.com's Genius programme.

A TAKEAWAY ORDER

£25 order, 30% commission

£7.50 to the app, plus VAT on the commission, when they deliver. Apps typically take around 14% if you deliver yourself, and still add VAT.

Typical rates, which vary by platform and contract. Check your own agreement.



FIG. 4 — WHY A BOOK BUTTON ON YOUR OWN SITE PAYS FOR ITSELF

Keep the platforms, but make direct easy

There's no need to leave the platforms; they bring new customers. Just make your own site the easiest place to book, and give people a reason to, such as free parking or a late checkout. Check your platform contract before offering a lower price direct.

Taking payments

Card payment services such as Stripe, Square, SumUp and PayPal charge a small percentage of each payment, typically around 1.5% to 3% depending on the card, with no monthly fee for the basic service. Taking a deposit cuts no-shows. Whatever you decide, show your cancellation policy clearly before people pay.

FOOD BUSINESSES: ALLERGENS

If you take orders online or by phone, allergen information has to be available before the order is placed (on your website, or by phone) and again when the food is delivered or collected. The Food Standards Agency's guidance is at `food.gov.uk`.

09 BOOKINGS, ORDERS AND PAYMENTS, CONTINUED

Adding a Book button to your site

You don't need to build a booking system yourself. Plenty of good tools do the hard part and plug into whichever website builder you choose, and several are free to start.

TOOL	GOOD FOR	FROM	NOTES
Freetobook	B&Bs and holiday lets	Free	No commission. Card payments £139 a year; linking to Booking.com and Airbnb from £9 a month
Square Appointments	Salons, studios, appointments	Free, one location	Plus is £29 a month. Online card payments 1.4% + 25p
Bookwhen	Classes and courses	Free, up to 50 bookings a month	Paid plans above that. Card fees through Stripe or PayPal
Fresha	Salons and tattoo studios	£14.95 a month plus VAT	No fee on clients who book through your own website
Square Online	Takeaway and click and collect	Free	Card payments 1.4% + 25p for UK cards
ResDiary, OpenTable	Restaurant tables	Ask for a UK quote	Monthly fee, and OpenTable can also charge per diner

Prices checked October 2026.

How to add one

01 Sign up and add your rooms, classes, services or menu, with prices and the times you're available.

02 Set your rules: how far ahead people can book, whether you take a deposit, and your cancellation policy.

03 Copy the booking link the tool gives you into a "Book now" button on every page. Every builder has a button for this, or an "embed" block if the tool gives you a piece of code instead.

04 Make a test booking yourself, on your phone, and check the confirmation emails arrive at both ends.

05 Put the same link on your Google Business Profile and your social pages, so people can book from wherever they find you.

10 THE LEGAL BITS

The legal bits, in plain English

None of this is difficult, but it's easy to skip. This is a summary to point you in the right direction, not legal advice. The links go to the official guidance.

01 A privacy notice

If your website collects any personal information at all (a contact form, bookings, a mailing list, even visitor statistics), you need a privacy notice. It's a page saying what you collect and why, who you share it with, how long you keep it, and how people can ask to see or delete it. Link to it from your footer. Since June 2026 you also need to give people a way to complain to you about how you've used their information, so include an email address for that. The ICO's guide for small businesses, at `ico.org.uk`, walks you through the rest.

02 The ICO data protection fee

Most businesses that keep customers' details on a computer or phone have to pay the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) a yearly fee. For a business with up to 10 staff or a turnover up to £632,000, it's **£52 a year, or £47 by direct debit**. You're exempt if you only use personal information for your staff, your accounts and marketing your own business, but using CCTV to prevent crime means you have to pay, which catches a lot of cafés, shops and takeaways. The ICO's quick self-assessment at `ico.org.uk` tells you for sure.

03 Cookies

The rules relaxed in February 2026. You no longer need people's consent for cookies that only count visitors to help you improve the site (analytics), or that remember their settings, as long as you explain them and give people a simple way to opt out. Cookies the site can't work without, such as a shopping basket, never needed consent.

You still need a proper banner, where saying no is as easy as saying yes, if your site uses advertising or tracking cookies, such as Facebook or Google ads pixels, or analytics where the provider uses the data for its own purposes. Builders often switch these on for you, so check your settings, and the ICO's guidance if you use Google Analytics. Fines for getting it wrong went up sharply at the same time.

04 Your business details

Every business website has to show your business name, a real postal address, an email address, and your VAT number if you're registered. Prices must say whether they include VAT and delivery.

If you're a **limited company**, also show your full registered name (with "Ltd"), company number, registered office address and where you're registered, such as "Registered in England and Wales". The footer is the usual place for all of it.

10 THE LEGAL BITS, CONTINUED

05 Selling online

If you sell online, you must tell people before they buy who you are and how to contact you, what they're getting, the total price including VAT and delivery, when it'll arrive, and their right to cancel, then confirm it all by email. For most goods bought online, customers can cancel within 14 days of receiving them, without giving a reason.

There are sensible exceptions, including food that goes off, items made to order or personalised, and services booked for a particular date, such as a room, a table or a class. For those, set your own cancellation policy and show it clearly before people pay.

06 Prices and reviews

Since April 2025, the price you advertise has to include any fees people can't avoid, such as a compulsory booking fee or cleaning charge. Optional extras can still be added at the checkout. Fake reviews are banned outright: you can't write them, buy them, swap them with another business or hide genuine bad ones. The Competition and Markets Authority can now fine businesses directly for breaking consumer law.

07 Marketing emails

Only send marketing emails to people who've said yes to them, or to existing customers who bought something similar from you and were given a simple way to opt out when they did. Every email needs an unsubscribe link that works. An unticked box on your booking or contact form ("Send me the occasional offer") is the easy way to ask.

08 Accessibility

Under the Equality Act 2010, businesses mustn't put disabled customers at a disadvantage, and that includes your website. Following the international accessibility guidelines (WCAG 2.2) is the accepted way to get it right, and page 10 covers the basics.

09 Copyright

Only use photos, words, music and fonts you have the right to use. That includes the music on your videos, and text copied from another business's website.

WHERE TO READ MORE

- Privacy notices, the ICO fee and cookies: `ico.org.uk`
- Company details on your website: `gov.uk/running-a-limited-company`
- Selling online: `gov.uk/online-and-distance-selling-for-businesses`
- Prices and reviews: `the CMA's guidance on gov.uk`

11 KEEPING IT SAFE AND UP TO DATE

Know who holds the keys

Most website disasters I see aren't hacks. They're a login nobody can find, an account in the name of someone who's left, or a renewal that went to an old email address. Fill this in and keep it somewhere safe.

ACCOUNT	WHO IT'S WITH	LOGIN EMAIL	RENEWS ON
Web address (domain)			
Website builder or hosting			
Business email			
Google Business Profile			
Google Search Console			
Bookings or payments			
Social media pages			

Keep the passwords in a password manager (Apple Passwords and Google Password Manager are built into most phones, and Bitwarden is free) and turn on two-step login everywhere. Make sure the owner of every account is you or your business, and that at least one other person you trust could get in if you were ill.

A 15-minute check, once a month

- [ ] Send yourself a message through your own contact form, and check it arrives
- [ ] Make a test booking or order, then cancel it
- [ ] Click through every page on your phone
- [ ] Check hours, prices and menus, on the site and on Google
- [ ] Reply to any new reviews

Once a year

- [ ] Check the renewal dates and the card on each account
- [ ] Update the copyright year, prices and photos
- [ ] Remove anyone who no longer needs access
- [ ] Read every page once, start to finish, as a customer would

IF YOU CHOSE WORDPRESS

Update WordPress, your theme and your plugins every week or two, delete plugins you don't use, and make sure your host keeps daily backups you can restore yourself. Out-of-date WordPress is the most common way small business sites get hacked.

12 THE GO-LIVE CHECKLIST

The day before you go live

Print this page, or tick it off on screen. If every box is ticked, your website is ahead of most out there. Well done.

The basics

- [ ] The web address is in my name, with auto-renew on
- [ ] Two-step login is on for every account
- [ ] What we do, where, hours and phone are on the first screen
- [ ] One main button (call, book or order) on every page
- [ ] Every page has a proper title, not "Home"

Words and photos

- [ ] Menus and price lists are text, not PDFs or photos
- [ ] Prices or "from" prices are shown
- [ ] No old dates, Covid notices or "coming soon"
- [ ] Photos are my own, resized and under 300 KB
- [ ] Every photo that matters has alt text

On a phone

- [ ] The phone number starts a call when tapped
- [ ] The address opens a map
- [ ] It loads in a few seconds on 4G
- [ ] No pop-up covers the page

Google

- [ ] The "hide from search engines" setting is off
- [ ] The site is added to Google Search Console
- [ ] Google Business Profile is complete and verified
- [ ] Apple Business and Bing Places are set up
- [ ] Name, address and phone are the same everywhere

The legal bits

- [ ] A privacy notice is linked in the footer
- [ ] I've checked whether I need to pay the ICO fee
- [ ] Cookies are handled properly (page 14)
- [ ] Name, address, email and any company or VAT numbers are shown
- [ ] Terms, delivery and returns are clear, if we sell online

Working properly

- [ ] A test enquiry arrived, and not in spam
- [ ] A test booking or order went through
- [ ] Every link works, with nothing leading nowhere
- [ ] Someone who's never seen it found our hours in ten seconds

Your first month

WEEK 1

Tell your regulars

Put the address on your receipts, menus, van, email signature and social pages. Your existing customers are your first visitors.

WEEK 2

Ask for reviews

Ask five happy customers for a Google review, with the short link from your Business Profile. Reply to each one.

WEEK 4

Check in with Google

Look at Search Console: are your pages indexed, and what are people searching to find you? Use their words on your site.

IF YOU GET STUCK

Write to me. A quick question is free, and you don't need to be hiring me.

If something in here doesn't make sense, or your builder's doing something odd, send me an email. It's just me here, so the reply comes from me. I'd rather your website worked than not.

robert@tideswell.dev tideswell.dev

And if you ever decide you'd rather hand it over, that's what I do, by hand, here in Lincolnshire. The web address and hosting are in your name, so the website's yours to keep whatever happens.

WEBSITES

Web design

Built for phones first, set up for Google, and easy to update yourself. Online shops and bookings too.

TILLS

EPOS and tills

A till that handles your stock, use-by dates, rota and cash-up as well. No monthly fee.

SOFTWARE

Custom software

Swap the spreadsheets and paper forms for one system the whole team can use.

Good luck with it. I hope it brings you plenty of calls, bookings and new faces through the door.

Feel free to pass this guide on to anyone it might help. Edition 1, October 2026. Prices and rules were checked in October 2026, but they change, so double-check before you buy anything. This guide is general information, not legal or financial advice.

Tideswell has no tide. It's a village in the Peak District, nowhere near the sea, and the name means *Tidi's well*. There is a well, as far as anyone knows.

Robert
Tideswell

FL(2) 5S

