How to plan a website

Here is a summary of the main points from the "How to Plan a New Website" course delivered by Evan Mangan for Local Enterprise Office Kerry, along with a list of action points for participants.

Summary of Main Points

The course provided a comprehensive guide on planning a new website, focusing on foundational elements, digital marketing integration, and practical strategies for success. It was structured to cover both the technical nuts and bolts of getting a website live and the strategic marketing aspects required to make it effective.

1. Foundational Website Components To have a website, you need three key things:

- **Domain Name:** This is your website address (e.g., yourbusiness.ie). It's recommended to choose a domain name that matches your business name. The choice between .ie and .com depends on your target audience; .ie is better for targeting customers in Ireland, while .com is a top-level domain suitable for a global audience. A crucial piece of advice is to **buy your own domain name** to maintain control and to always **select the 'auto-renew' option** to prevent losing it.
- **Hosting:** This is the server space where your website files are stored, making them accessible on the internet. Shared hosting is a cost-effective option for small businesses, typically costing around €50 per year. It is highly recommended that you **purchase and control your own hosting** rather than letting a web designer manage it, as this gives you control if you ever need to switch designers.
- **Website:** The course outlined different types of websites, including brochure/information sites and e-commerce sites for selling products or taking bookings online.

2. Options for Getting a Website There are two main routes to getting a website:

- **Hiring a Local Web Designer:** This option can be expensive but provides professional expertise. When choosing a designer, it's vital to seek recommendations focusing on customer service, check if they rank well in Google for "web design Kerry" (indicating

SEO knowledge), and review their portfolio. You should also specify that you want a **WordPress website** due to its ease of use and adaptability through plugins.

- **Building Your Own Website:** For those with smaller budgets, platforms like Wix, Weebly, Squarespace, and Shopify offer user-friendly templates to create a professional-looking website without needing technical skills. Shopify is specifically recommended for e-commerce stores. This route is low-cost (around €250-€360 per year), includes hosting, and gives you complete control.

3. Planning Your Website for Digital Marketing Success A successful website needs to achieve two main goals: **appear high in Google search results** and **convert visitors into enquiries or sales**.

- **Search Engine Optimisation (SEO):** To rank well in Google, your website must be seen as **relevant** and **trustworthy** (having a high "domain authority").
  - **Relevance:** You must create a dedicated page for each specific topic, service, or product you want to be found for. For each page, the main search term should be included in the meta title, headline, body text, and image alt tags.
  - **Domain Authority:** This is Google's measure of trust, influenced by the number and quality of other websites linking to yours (backlinks).
- **Engaging and Converting Visitors:** With average conversion rates being low (2-3%), you need to employ specific tactics.
  - **To Engage Visitors:** Your pages must load quickly, have compelling headlines, feature easily scannable text, and establish credibility through media mentions ("as featured on"), metrics (e.g., "20,000 customers served"), and videos.
  - **To Convert Visitors:** Use time-limited offers, create a sense of scarcity, and prominently display genuine customer testimonials to encourage action.

4. Using Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Your Planning AI tools like ChatGPT and Google Gemini can be invaluable for planning your website. They can help you:

- Identify the key search terms your potential customers are using.
- Determine the pages you need on your website for SEO purposes.
- Write compelling headlines and scannable body text for your pages.
- Brainstorm ideas for lead magnets, offers, marketing content, and backlink strategies.

Here are the main ways you can use AI when planning your website, as explained by Evan

1. Identifying Key Search Terms and Website Pages

One of the most critical steps in website planning is figuring out what pages your site needs to be found on Google. AI can help you identify what your potential customers are searching for, which in turn dictates the pages you need to create.

- **Discover what customers are searching for:** You can ask an AI tool like ChatGPT to act as a Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) expert and list the top search terms people use for your type of business in your location. For example, a dental practice could discover that people search not only for "dentist Killarney" but also for specific services like "teeth whitening," "emergency dentist," or "child-friendly dentist".
- **Determine the necessary website pages:** Based on those search terms, you can then ask the AI to recommend a full list of pages your website should have. This ensures you plan for a dedicated page for each key service or topic you want to rank for in search results, a crucial element for effective SEO.

2. Crafting Compelling and SEO-Friendly Content

Once you know which pages you need, AI can assist in writing the content for them. This helps ensure your pages are not only optimised for search engines but also engaging for visitors.

- **Write effective headlines:** You can ask AI to act as a web copywriter and generate several headline options for a specific page. For instance, you could ask for headlines for a "child-friendly dentist" page that incorporates the main things parents look for in that service. This helps create headlines that both resonate with visitors and include important keywords for SEO.
- **Create scannable body text:** People tend to scan web pages rather than read every word. You can instruct the AI to write easily scannable body text that is broken down into clear sections with subheadings. This makes the information easy to digest for visitors, increasing their engagement.

3. Developing Marketing and Engagement Strategies

AI can function as an expert consultant, helping you brainstorm ideas for various marketing strategies that you should incorporate into your website plan.

- **Brainstorm lead magnets:** To capture visitor email addresses, you can offer something of value, known as a "lead magnet". AI can brainstorm ideas for lead magnets suitable for your business, such as discount codes, style guides, or quizzes.
- **Generate ideas for video content:** Including videos on your website can significantly increase visitor engagement. You can ask AI to act as a video marketing expert and

suggest ideas for videos relevant to a specific page or service. It can even provide a step-by-step guide on how to create the video content.

- **Formulate a backlink strategy:** To improve your site's "domain authority" and rank higher in Google, you need other websites to link to you (backlinks). AI can act as an SEO expert and brainstorm a list of ideas for generating backlinks, such as collaborating with local attractions or tourism bodies. It can even provide detailed, step-by-step instructions and email templates for outreach.

4. Creating a Website Brief for a Designer

If you plan to hire a web designer, you need to provide them with a detailed brief or a request for a quote. Having a clear plan of the pages you need, based on your AI-assisted research, allows you to get comparable quotes from different designers. AI can help you outline exactly what you need in your new website, from the number of pages to specific content requirements.

To get the best results from AI tools like ChatGPT or Gemini, it's recommended you provide context about your business, ask the AI to "act like an expert" in a specific field (e.g., SEO, copywriting), and use prompts like "teach me" or "brainstorm" to get detailed, creative, and instructional answers.

Action Point List for Participants

Here is a checklist of actions to take after the course to effectively plan and launch your new website.

- **Action 1: Secure Your Domain and Hosting.**
    - Choose a domain name that reflects your business name.
    - Purchase the domain name yourself from a provider like Black Knight.
    - **Crucially, enable the 'auto-renew' feature** for your domain to avoid losing it.
    - Purchase your own hosting package and ensure 'auto-renew' is also enabled.
- **Action 2: Decide on Your Website Build Option.**
    - If hiring a web designer, get recommendations, check their SEO performance, and ask for quotes that specifically include SEO work. Specify you want a WordPress site.
    - If building your own, explore Wix, Squarespace, or Shopify and experiment with their free templates to see which platform suits you best.
- **Action 3: Use AI to Plan Your Website Structure and Content.**
    - Use ChatGPT or Gemini to brainstorm the top search terms your customers use.
    - Based on these search terms, list all the individual pages your website will need to be found in Google.
    - Use AI to help write SEO-friendly and engaging headlines and body text for each key page.
- **Action 4: Plan for Visitor Engagement and Conversion.**

- o Plan to include a video on key pages to increase engagement.
- o Identify metrics or PR coverage you can display to build credibility.
- o Brainstorm ideas for time-limited offers or ways to introduce scarcity to drive sales.
- o Collect customer testimonials and plan to display them using a tool like Trustindex.io.
- **Action 5: Set Up Foundational Marketing Tools.**
  - o Ensure **Google Analytics** (or your platform's built-in analytics) is set up to track website traffic and user behaviour.
  - o Install the **Meta Pixel** on your site so you have the option to run remarketing ads to recent visitors on Facebook and Instagram in the future.
  - o Plan how you will capture email addresses, for instance, by offering a discount or a valuable guide (a "lead magnet"). Sign up for an email marketing tool like MailerLite.

Please note: This guide was created with the help of one of our AI colleagues ☺