



Local Enterprise Office Kerry

How to plan a website

Course Summary

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Prepared by The Marketing Crowd *with the help of one of our AI colleagues* 😊

Course Overview

This session covered what you need to know when planning a new website for your business. It was split into two main parts: the nuts and bolts (domain names, hosting, types of websites, and how to go about getting one built) and then the marketing side (how to plan your site so it gets found in Google, supports your social media, and converts visitors into enquiries and sales).

A poll at the start showed that 38% of participants already had a website, while 63% did not but were planning to get one.

Part 1: The Nuts and Bolts

Domain Names

Your domain name is the web address people type in to get to your site. To buy one, Evan recommended Black Knight (blackknight.com) as the main domain provider. The reasons: they are Irish, they are competitive on price, and they answer the phone quickly (typically within about 20 seconds), which matters when technical issues come up. Other providers include Register365 and GoDaddy.

To search for a domain, go to Black Knight and type in your desired name (just the name, not the .ie or .com). It will show you what is available. A .ie domain costs around €30 plus VAT per year, and a .com around €20 plus VAT per year, after the introductory first-year offer.

Pitfalls to avoid when choosing a domain:

You do not need a domain name that matches a search term. There was a time when having a keyword-rich domain (like "atticinsulationkerry.ie") helped with Google rankings, but that no longer works. Instead, get a domain as close to your business name as possible. Avoid anything too long (four words or more) and avoid hyphens, as they look like you settled for a second choice.

Auto-renew is essential. When you buy a domain, tick the auto-renew box. If you miss a renewal, your website disappears from the internet and the domain enters a 60-day "washing period" where nobody can buy it. After that, domain resellers can snap it up and try to sell it back to you at a huge markup. Evan shared an example of someone who lost a domain after 10 years and was offered it back for €1,000.

You never truly own a domain. You are leasing it, and it must be renewed (annually or for longer periods, up to 10 years).

.ie vs .com: which to choose?

Google assigns every website to a country. If your domain is a .ie, you are automatically assigned to Ireland. If it is a .com, Google looks at where your hosting is located. A .com

hosted by Black Knight in Ireland will be assigned to Ireland; a .com hosted by GoDaddy in America will be assigned to America.

Why this matters: when someone in Ireland searches, Google elevates Irish-assigned websites and pushes down international ones, and vice versa. So if your customers are mainly in Ireland, a .ie is ideal. If you are selling internationally, a .com is better, but make sure it is hosted in Ireland if that is also a target market.

Google recently retired country-specific versions of its search engine (google.ie, [google.co.uk](https://www.google.co.uk), etc.) and now uses [google.com](https://www.google.com) for everyone. However, it still personalises results based on the user's location (determined by their internet connection).

Evan recommended buying both the .ie and the .com if you can, primarily to prevent another business from taking the other version of your name. Evan shared that he bought themarketingcrowd.ie, .com, .net, .info, and even [.co.uk](https://co.uk) for this reason. It costs money each year, but it protects your brand. If you can only pick one, choose based on where your customers are.

Hosting

To have a website live on the internet, you need three things: a domain name, a website, and a server (hosting). A server is an expensive piece of hardware. Large companies like Bank of Ireland might have their own, but small businesses use shared hosting, where a company like Black Knight splits a server into around 200 sections and rents you one.

When buying hosting on Black Knight, there are typically three tiers (they call them Mega, Giga, and Terra). For most businesses starting out, the smallest plan is plenty. Budget around €50 to €60 per year plus VAT. If your traffic grows and you need more capacity, they will notify you and you can upgrade with a click.

Own your hosting. If you go with a web designer, they may offer to host your site and might charge €150 to €200 per year for it. There is nothing wrong with this, but Evan strongly recommended buying your own domain and your own hosting, then giving the web designer login access to put your site on it. The reason: if you ever fall out with your web designer, or if they become unresponsive, pass away, or relocate, you retain full control. You can simply change the password and bring in someone else. If your website is sitting on a web designer's hosting, no other designer can access it and you could lose control entirely.

Buying hosting requires no technical knowledge. It is like buying something on any website. You get a username and password, which you can then share with a technically minded person.

Types of Websites

At a high level, there are two main types:

Brochure (information) websites have pages like Home, About, Services, and Contact Us. There is no e-commerce. Think of a typical accountancy firm's website. If you go to a web designer for a brochure website, expect to pay around €1,000 plus VAT for a five-page site.

E-commerce websites allow you to take payments online. This is a broad category. It includes full online shops (like a ladies' boutique with hundreds of products, add-to-basket functionality, stock management, VAT handling, and delivery pricing). For a full e-commerce site from a web designer, expect €3,000 to €6,000 plus VAT.

But e-commerce also covers simpler payment scenarios: a yoga instructor selling class bookings, a guest house taking room reservations, or a hair salon accepting appointments. For these, you would search Google for a booking engine specific to your industry (e.g., "booking engine for yoga classes"). These specialised tools can cost as little as €200 per year because they are sold to thousands of businesses globally.

Website Platforms

The software that underpins a website is its platform (like an operating system for a phone). The main ones you will hear about are WordPress, Joomla, Magenta, Wix, Weebly, Squarespace, and Shopify.

WordPress is by far the most popular, powering around 40% of pages on the internet. It is popular because it is easy for non-technical owners to update, and because there are over a million plugins available. Plugins let you add functionality without programming knowledge: a Google Analytics plugin, a Meta Pixel plugin, an e-commerce plugin, a booking plugin, and so on. WordPress sites are flexible and future-proof.

If you go the web designer route, Evan recommended specifying that you want a WordPress website. About 80 to 90% of web designers in Ireland can work with WordPress, so if you ever need to switch designers, it will be straightforward. If your site is built on a less common platform, fewer designers will be willing or able to take it on.

Two Main Ways to Get a Website

Option 1: A local web designer. Think of web designers on a spectrum. At one end are those who design everything from scratch, take time to understand your business, know how Google works, and employ all the right marketing tactics. They are the most expensive and usually have waiting lists. At the other end are "Ryanair-style" designers who will give you a five-page site for €900 in a week, but it may not have everything you need and might never rank in Google.

To find a good web designer: first, post on your social media asking for recommendations from people who had excellent customer service. Second, search Google for "web design [your county]." Evan's logic: if a web designer cannot get themselves found on page one for their main search term, do they really understand SEO? He would look up to halfway down page two for newer designers who have not yet built up Google trust. Cross-reference

recommendations with Google rankings, check portfolios, and then send a written quote request (not a phone call) to six or seven designers, specifying exactly what you want. This way you can compare apples with apples.

Important: web designers typically ask for 50% upfront and 50% on completion. Before paying the final 50%, check your page speed using GTmetrix. If pages are loading slowly, ask them to fix it before you sign off.

Option 2: Self-build platforms (Wix, Weebly, Squarespace, Shopify). These platforms provide templates you can customise yourself. No technical skills are needed. You choose a template by industry, click edit, and replace the placeholder text and images with your own. Cost is typically €20 to €25 per month for Wix, Weebly, or Squarespace (roughly €240 to €320 per year). Shopify, which specialises in e-commerce, costs around €30 per month.

On Wix, you can browse nearly a thousand templates by category (restaurant, florist, DJ, novelist, etc.) and edit them for free before committing. When you go live and start paying, you can connect your own domain name. Evan strongly advised not buying your domain through Wix, as extracting it later can be very difficult. Buy the domain separately (e.g., from Black Knight) and connect it.

Shopify is the best option for e-commerce self-builds. Their templates are beautiful, their back-end payment processing is strong, and they include tactics that increase sales (like "people who viewed this also bought" suggestions).

When to choose each option: If budget is tight or you are unsure whether your business will work, self-build is lower risk. Evan shared the example of a Kerry boutique owner who was getting nationwide interest on social media but did not want to spend €3,000 to €6,000 on a website without knowing if online sales would work. Shopify at €30 per month let her test the concept with minimal investment. If it worked, she could always invest in a custom-designed site later.

If you have specific requirements that templates cannot accommodate, or you want everything tailored, WordPress with a web designer is the way to go.

Part 2: The Marketing Side

Your Website is the Centre of Your Digital Marketing

Visualise your website at the centre, with all other platforms (Google, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, email) feeding traffic into it. Your website is your sales environment. You control it, and on it you explain features and benefits, show videos, display testimonials, and include calls to action prompting the next step (buy now, request a quote, get in touch).

Google vs Social Media: Understanding the Difference

Google is the most important platform because the people searching have both need and intent. Someone searching "dog groomer Killarney" has decided they need a dog groomer

and is actively looking for one. When they land on your website from Google, you have a much better chance of converting them.

Social media is different. Your post or reel about dog grooming appears in someone's feed while they were watching a cat video. They were not thinking about grooming. Your content might pique their curiosity enough to click through, but because they did not start with the intent, you convert them at a much lower rate. Evan cited that Google traffic converts three to four times better than social media traffic.

All platforms serve the purpose of getting in front of relevant people and driving them back to your website. That is why having a website is so important.

The Marketing Funnel

Once you drive traffic to your site, there are two further stages: engaging visitors (getting them to browse around) and converting them (turning them into enquiries or sales). Many people only think about the "top of the funnel" (getting discovered and driving traffic) but forget that once people land, there is a whole other marketing challenge.

Conversion Rate Reality Check

For every 100 people who land on a website, a typical 4-star hotel converts about 2%. For products like handbags or shoes, it is 1 to 3%. One participant on a previous course was disappointed with a 3% conversion rate, but that is actually very good. Evan has seen boutiques at 0.5% (needing 200 visitors per sale) and one business at 0.1% (needing 1,000 visitors per sale).

Online conversion is lower than in-store because online shoppers can instantly compare you to competitors. Google data shows that 60 to 70% of website traffic comes from search, and when people search, they typically look at three to four results. So the majority of visitors have come from another site and will likely go on to another. You are always being compared.

Another key stat: typically 80% of people who land on a website are at the research stage, not ready to buy or enquire. They clicked out of curiosity. So your website needs to work harder than a physical shop.

Using ChatGPT to Help Plan Your Website

Evan introduced a simple framework for getting useful answers from ChatGPT (or Gemini):

1. **Give context** about your business (what you do, where you are, your situation)
2. **Ask it to act like an expert** in the relevant area
3. **Be clear about what you want**

Without this structure, you get generic, middle-of-the-road answers. Evan demonstrated the difference by asking "What is a mass spectrometer?" three ways: a standard ask (accessible but generic), "explain it as though I'm a 5-year-old" (simplified with a LEGO analogy), and

"explain it as though you're an expert in physics" (detailed, with mathematical formulas). For business questions, you want expert-level answers, so always include the "act like an expert" instruction.

A poll showed 36% of participants used ChatGPT a lot, 57% used it a little, and one person did not use it at all. For those new to it, you can sign up for free at chatgpt.com.

Practical demonstration: planning website pages. Evan prompted ChatGPT with: "I have a dental practice in Tralee, County Kerry, and we don't have a website. Act like a website marketing expert and tell me the pages you think I should have." ChatGPT recommended a homepage, About Us page, Meet the Dentist page, and individual treatment pages (general dentistry, cosmetic, teeth straightening, etc.), with priorities. Evan then followed up: "That looks great. Could you write a quote request email specifying exactly what I want?" ChatGPT drafted a professional email listing all the proposed pages, ready to send to web designers for comparable quotes.

The key point: you are the boss. If ChatGPT suggests a page for a service you do not offer, just remove it. If it gets geography wrong, correct it. Use its suggestions as a starting point, then tailor.

Google Business Profiles

A Google Business Profile is completely separate from your website. When someone does a local search (e.g., "solicitors Kerry"), Google shows a map with three Google Business Profiles at the top, and then 10 organic web page results below. A business can appear in both.

A poll showed only 20% of participants had a Google Business Profile, 73% did not, and two did not know.

To create one, go to google.com/business, sign in with a Gmail account, and click "Add Business." Then follow the step-by-step prompts (about five or six pages). It is 100% free. To check if you already have a profile, type your business name in the search field. If it appears, you have one.

Evan noted that a dedicated SEO course covers Google Business Profiles in much more depth.

SEO: How Google Decides What Goes on Page 1

Evan gave a helicopter view of SEO, acknowledging that his full SEO course takes three hours and this section would only be about 20 minutes.

How Google Search works: When you search, there are sponsored results (ads) at the top, paid for by businesses. Below are 10 organic (free) results. Page two has another 10, page three another 10, and so on. Google tells us that 70% of searchers do not go beyond page one, and 95% do not go beyond page three. If your page is on page four or five, you might as well be on page 100.

The Google Spider: Google sends a bot (called the Spider) to every website roughly once a week. Its job is to catalogue around 200 things on each page, then send that data back to Google HQ. When someone searches, Google's algorithm processes all that data, applies weights to the 200 factors, and ranks pages accordingly.

The three big things Google cares about:

1. Relevance: Google wants the most relevant web pages (not websites, not businesses, but individual pages) for any given search. This is the single most important concept for planning a website.

2. Trust (Domain Authority): Google has a trust score for every website, called Domain Authority, on a scale of 0 to 100. No one reaches 100. Sites like Google, Facebook, and NASA are around 95 to 100. RTE.ie is about 90, Fáilte Ireland around 85, Brown Thomas 52, the LEO website 50. Well-known hotels sit around 30 to 35. For a small business, reaching 20 is very good; most sit between 5 and 15. A brand-new site starts at zero.

You can check Domain Authority using Neil Patel's free backlinks tool. Search Google for "Neil Patel backlinks," click the first result, and paste in a web address. You get three free checks per day (requires a free account).

3. Page Speed: Google wants pages that load quickly, ideally within 1.2 seconds. Use the free tool [GTmetrix.com](https://gtmetrix.com) to check. Create a free account so you can change the server location (test from London rather than America for more relevant results). The key metric is LCP (Largest Contentful Paint). Two seconds is fine. Three to four seconds needs work. Five to six seconds is terrible. Check multiple pages across your site, not just the homepage.

Building Domain Authority Through Backlinks

Domain authority grows through backlinks, which are simply other websites linking to yours. Google treats each backlink as a vote of confidence. The quality of the linking site matters enormously. One backlink from Fáilte Ireland (Domain Authority 85) could be worth 30 backlinks from small B&B websites with Domain Authority of 1 or 2.

Evan illustrated this with the example of a new tourist attraction in Killarney. Initially, the Spider finds no backlinks, so Google holds off on trust. Over time, articles in the Killarney Advertiser and the Kerryman link to the site. Then the LEO website links. Then Fáilte Ireland adds a link on their Kerry tourism page. Each time, Google's algorithm notes that trusted sites are vouching for this business and increases its trust accordingly.

How to get backlinks: Evan demonstrated asking ChatGPT: "I have a restaurant in Killarney. Act like an SEO expert and teach me how to get backlinks." ChatGPT suggested tourism websites, hotels (who get asked "where should we eat?" every day), tour operators, wedding venues, local attractions, food bloggers, and local newspapers. It even provided email templates and suggested creating mutual partnerships (e.g., offering jaunting car customers a complimentary item in exchange for a link on their site, while you add their attraction to a "Local Attractions" section on your site).

Understanding what you are up against: Before investing effort, check the Domain Authority of the sites currently on page one for your target search terms. If they range from 5 to 25, and your DA is 8 or 9, you are in the game. If your DA is 1, you need to build more backlinks first.

The Crucial Lesson: One Page Per Topic

This was the most important concept of the session for website planning.

Google does not rank websites or businesses. It ranks individual web pages. When someone searches "dog-friendly hotel Killarney," Google does not show the hotel's homepage. It shows a specific page that is entirely about being dog-friendly, where the meta title says "Dog-Friendly Hotel Killarney," the headline says "Dog-Friendly," the body text covers dog-friendly policies, and the URL contains "dog-friendly."

Evan demonstrated this with his own site. Searching "digital marketing trainer" brought up an inside page about Evan as a digital marketing trainer (not the homepage). Searching "video marketing training course" brought up a different inside page entirely about that topic. Searching "AI digital marketing trainer" brought up yet another page, one Evan had created about a year ago when he noticed his site was not ranking for that term.

The takeaway: inside pages do battle for you in search results. Do you want 5 pages doing battle, or 20?

The beautician example: Evan described a common mistake. A beautician has a five-page site (Home, About, Services, Testimonials, Contact). On the single services page, there is one paragraph about waxing, one about tanning, one about eyebrows, and one about something else. When someone searches "tanning salon Killarney," Google will not surface that hodgepodge page. The salon should have a separate page for tanning, a separate page for waxing, a separate page for eyebrows, each with its own meta title, headline, body text, and URL focused on that one topic.

The gifts.ie example: Evan showed how gifts.ie ranks number one for "gifts for godson" because they have a dedicated page just about gifts for godsons. They also have separate pages for gifts for boyfriend, brother, dad, granddad, and every other recipient. Each page has a focused meta title, headline, and content.

Using ChatGPT to find your search terms: Evan demonstrated: "I have a dental practice in Killarney. Act like an SEO expert and tell me the 30 most common search terms people would use that my business would want to be found for." ChatGPT produced a list including teeth whitening, veneers, composite bonding, root canal, tooth extraction, crowns, and more. You then decide which ones are relevant to your business. Each one you want to be found for needs its own dedicated page.

Evan also recommended doing searches for your industry in larger cities (Dublin, London) because the sites ranking on page one in those markets probably understand SEO well and can give you page structure ideas you might not have thought of.

Personalized Search and Incognito Browsing

Be careful checking your own Google rankings. Google personalises results based on your browsing history, so sites you visit frequently get artificially pushed up in your results. To see where you actually rank, use an incognito browser window. In Chrome: click the three dots in the top right corner, select "New incognito window," then do your search. This strips out all browsing history and cookies, giving you an unbiased view.

How Social Media and Website Pages Work Together

Having a page for every topic you want to be found for is not just an SEO strategy. It also helps your social media marketing.

If you are sending out a post about how dog-friendly your hotel is, you should link to the page specifically about being dog-friendly, not to the homepage. People clicking through from social media have very short attention spans. They were just looking at something else, your post piqued their curiosity, and if they tap through and the headline matches what they expected, they might stay. If the headline is generic and they cannot immediately see what they clicked for, they are gone.

So one page per topic serves both Google and social media.

Engaging and Converting Visitors

The final section covered practical tactics for turning website traffic into enquiries and sales.

The leaky bucket analogy: Many websites are like leaky buckets. You push traffic in from Google and social media, but people land and leave (bounce). Before ramping up your marketing, plug the holes first.

Engagement vs bounce rate: For every 100 visitors, if only 20% browse around (engage) and 80% leave after one quick look (bounce), you have a small pool of potential customers. If 75% engage, you have a much bigger pool. The goal is to maximise engagement.

Engagement tactics:

Do not frustrate visitors before they arrive. A Meta (Facebook) study of a million link clicks found that if a page takes more than 4 seconds to load, 40% of people leave without waiting. Two seconds is fine; four seconds or more is costing you visitors.

Every page needs a headline that resonates. People look at the headline first. If it does not immediately tell them they are in the right place, they leave. To write a resonant headline, ask ChatGPT: "I have a business that sells [your product/service]. Act like a marketing expert and tell me the top 3 things people look for in this product." For washable dog sofas, the answer was: easy to clean, comfort and support, and durability. Then follow up: "Act like a web copywriter and write a headline for the web page, incorporating those three things." ChatGPT produced options like "Washable Dog Sofas Built for Comfort, Made to Last."

You can then ask ChatGPT to draft the body text for the page, incorporating those three priorities. Always rewrite in your own words and check for factual accuracy.

Establish credibility and trust quickly. Include any media coverage (an "As Featured On" banner with media logos, like Killarney Glamping does). Use stats to convey experience (e.g., "25 years of combined industry experience" or "20,000 companies trained"). Ask ChatGPT to interview you about your business so it can suggest credibility-building ideas for your site.

Use image links and text links to get people browsing. Once someone starts clicking around your site, they tend to keep going, which increases your chance of converting them.

Conversion tactics:

Offers. If visitors are comparing you to two or three competitors, a compelling offer can be the deciding factor. Ask ChatGPT whether offers are suitable for your type of business and what kinds would work. Run many short offers (three days, not a month). A month-long offer lets people think "I'll come back later," and they never do. A deadline of "tomorrow evening at 7 o'clock" focuses the mind.

Scarcity. Phrases like "only 4 places left" or "only 1 left at this price" drive action. This is why [Booking.com](https://www.booking.com) tells you "3 other people are looking at this room." If you can introduce genuine scarcity (e.g., a bonus item with the first 10 orders), it works.

Testimonials. Essential for reassuring people they are making the right decision. Have a dedicated testimonials page on your site. Pull in reviews from your Google Business Profile, [Booking.com](https://www.booking.com), TripAdvisor, or wherever your customers leave feedback. Once you have testimonials, display them throughout your site, not just on one page.

Recap

The nuts-and-bolts foundation: buy your own domain name (never let anyone else buy it for you), get your own hosting, understand the difference between brochure and e-commerce sites, and decide whether to use a web designer or a self-build platform.

The marketing planning: every page on your site should target one specific topic you want to be found for in Google. Use ChatGPT to generate a list of search terms, then create a dedicated page for each relevant one. This approach also makes your social media more effective, because you can link each post to a page that directly matches the topic. Plug the holes in your leaky bucket with engagement and conversion tactics before ramping up traffic.

This was created with the help of one of our AI colleagues 😊