

HOW TO CHOOSE A WEBSITE BUILDER

How Do You Choose Between Weebly, WordPress, Wix, Squarespace or Shopify?



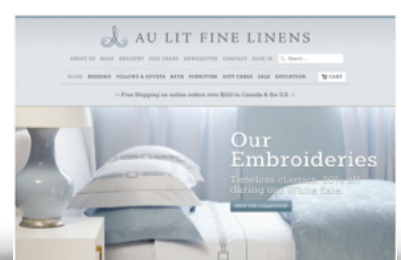
Weebly: robust drag and drop builder; allows embed for more functionality.



Wordpress: nearly unlimited features and functionality, yet more complex to use. Great for professional bloggers.



Squarespace: beautiful templates; a bit more of a learning curve than Weebly. Has speciality features.



Shopify: great choice for ecommerce.

We get that question all the time

Choosing a builder tool or platform depends on your business model, the features and functionality you desire, and the overall appearance you want.

It's not an easy choice and there's no perfect solution. The answers to these questions will help you understand the tradeoffs between purpose, functionality, design and ease of use. If you need help, we offer white boarding sessions to help clients make these types of decisions.

1. What type of website suits my business?

Your first decision is whether or not you need an online store. If not, the functionality and ease of use of tools like Weebly, Wix or Squarespace may fit the bill. All have good looking, mobile

responsive templates (critical for Google and good for customers).

Weebly and Wix are created by dragging and dropping content. Squarespace is a little more complex, but has better designed templates. Even if someone sets the site up for you, you should be able to take over most of the modifications and maintenance yourself.

Brochureware

Brochureware sites are the most basic type of website; they're like printed brochures, but in website form — very simple, not much special functionality, except for maybe a contact form. That doesn't mean you couldn't add functionality to any of these tools (see embeds and plugins below).

Weebly is ideal for brochureware websites. They offer about 30 mobile responsive themes that are highly customizable. We often set our clients up on that platform, then pass it on to them for



content and maintenance, just helping them with some customization or more challenging bits.

Ecommerce Sites

Ecommerce sites are designed for selling physical or digital goods. They have catalogs, shopping carts, check out and credit authorization built in.

We wouldn't recommend Weebly or Squarespace for ecommerce. They don't have other critical features that come with a more sophisticated ecommerce platform like Shopify.

Shopify is designed from the ground up for ecommerce, with a full range of features like inventory management, merchandising and sales promotions.

If you need something simple to plug into an existing site and want to sell digital or physical goods, Gumroad is an inexpensive option, and it comes with marketing tools.

If you're hooked on Wordpress, you can use the WooCommerce plugin.

Blogging Sites

If blogging is central to your business model, go for Wordpress. Although it's not as easy to use as the others we've mentioned, it's worth the learning curve, especially if you want to publish a sophisticated, feature-rich blog or magazine. Be careful though. We've noticed that Wordpress sites are getting hacked — you'll need to set up security at both the host and the site itself, with a plugin like Wordfence. And you'll need to monitor it carefully, which may mean more maintenance than you're willing to do.

Going beyond Wordpress could require something like Joomla or Drupal — not appropriate for most small businesses, unless there's a need for database functionality.

2. What special features and functionality will I need?

Start with a wishlist of what you want your website to do, planning a couple of years out (by that time your business will have changed and so will the tools). If you're not sure where to begin, try visiting competitors' sites for inspiration. You can use builtwith.com to see what platform each site uses. We also work with clients to figure this out through facilitated whiteboarding sessions.

Once you've created your list, look for the tool that's the best match, feature for feature. There probably won't be one that gets it 100%.

Add Functionality with Embeds or Plugins

Most platforms allow you to add embeds or plugins when a certain functionality isn't readily available on the platform. They're also known as plugins on Wordpress. For example, a common addition is to embed widgets from services like MailChimp for collecting email addresses.

No matter what you choose, you'll probably need to evolve, even overhaul, your website at some point — by that time your business will have changed and so will the tools.

3. How critical is design?

As they say, form follows function. After that, it's about finding the template that's the best fit for your brand. If that's all you need, Weebly will satisfy. You can custom visualize your brand with logo, fonts, colors and more.

For graphic or interior designers, artists or ad agencies, for example, where design is central to what you offer, you'll want to highlight this capability. In that case, Squarespace has its own set of beautifully designed templates.

With Wordpress, you can access hundreds if not thousands of gorgeous templates available for purchase.

There are also third party templates available for Weebly and Shopify, which you can purchase separately. Just make sure they're fully vetted to work properly on the platform.

Choosing a template is a job unto itself. Be sure to check out our handout about how to choose a template.

4. How much customization?

All of these builders allow you to add a logo, choose a design template, add content, and change font styles and colors of selected components. If you want to do more than that, you'll need to get into the CSS. All but Wix offers this option.

5. How do you want to display your information?

Websites can display your content in any number of ways, from slideshow headers to one page scrolling and more. Each website builder tool has an array of templates, each with their own display options. If you're looking for something specific, be sure to check the builder's templates and feature list.

6. How much time am I willing to devote to learning the platform?

The simpler builders with drag and drop functionality, like Weebly and Wix, may not have as many features as Wordpress, but they're the easiest, least expensive option I've found with the most functionality.

When all is said and done, you need to find a platform and template that works for you, your business and your website visitor. If you don't know how to edit HTML or don't understand what CSS is, and you don't want the expense of hiring someone to do it for you every time you

need to make a change, go for Weebly. Squarespace is a little more challenging, but if you like their designs, it could be worth the effort. Wordpress is even more complicated, but the tradeoff is that you'll get a great platform for publishing.

No matter where you've registered your domain (GoDaddy or otherwise), you can point it to your site, whatever builder tool you choose.

Try Them Out

Once you've gone through this list, your next step is to check out the ones you like. Do a feature list comparison, check out their templates and then sign up for free trials.

And check out their customer support; some offer just email, others give you a phone number. And some don't really have any. That's a sure way to figure out which one will work for you.

A Final Note: Specialty Builders

Other types of builders are specialized for photographers, education, restaurants, graphic designers, and more. If you can think it up, there's probably a builder tool for it.

Specialty builders, like Photoshelter for photographers, ZenPlanner for fitness studios, or Restaurant Engine, have features specific to the needs of those businesses. The key is to decide if a more generic builder tool will match your business model, or if one more specific will work better. Whatever your business, there's probably a platform built for it. Only consider completely custom when absolutely necessary.

Learn more about building websites at: www.blockbeta.com/diy-websites.html