



WEBSITES

This information sheet is one in a series of nine sheets that were developed to assist seafood producers (fishermen and growers) with using specific tools and platforms to enhance marketing of their products. They are part of an educational publication entitled *Digital Marketing: A Guide for Seafood Producers*.

Each sheet provides an overview of a specific platform, information about using the platform and examples of how it could be used for seafood direct marketing. They are intended for educational purposes only. Prior to getting started with a specific tool/platform, current information - including the costs, requirements and included components - should be reviewed on the tool/platform website.

Websites are an excellent way to allow potential customers to learn more about your business. Nowadays, customers often expect you to have both a website and a social media presence, as they lend credibility and legitimacy to your business.

Your website can be as simple as a single landing page, which contains all the pertinent information about your business (who, what, when, where, why, and how), or a bit more complex with a series of pages with more details and/or stories about your business. With an advanced website, you can also conduct online sales.

Websites will take a bit more time and effort to set up compared to other digital marketing tools, but once developed they typically require very little maintenance. It's easiest to set up and maintain your website using a computer and it takes about 4 to 6 hours (depending on the platform) to develop the content and enter it into a website template. If you choose to include an online sales option, you should plan to spend time updating your product availability on a regular basis.

There are several beginner-friendly website builder platforms that include built-in tools and functions that allow for special media features and online sales elements (see table below for examples).

Content Types and Platform Features:

Text, photos, videos, links, online sales, customer reviews and blog posts.

AUDIENCE

Websites are available to anyone with access to the internet. Prospective and returning customers often visit a business's website to learn about their products and their story.

Websites are not very interactive, but there are several features that promote audience engagement.

- A **newsletter subscription box** is a website feature that allows people to enter their email address and opt-in to receive updates about your business. This feature can be turned on or off and generates a list of prospective customers that you can later

target with email marketing (See Appendix A.2 for more information).

This could be used if you sell regularly at a Fishermen's or Farmers' Market and want to send out notices the day before to let your customers know what will be available.

- A **blog page** where you write short updates about your business usually allows readers to leave comments below the post, providing for some customer engagement.
- A **customer testimonial page** is another website feature that can help build credibility by showing that real customers have had positive experiences with your products. Ask a few of your loyal customers to provide a review (via email, text, a Google Form or a third-party site like Yelp) that you can then display on your website.

COST

The cost of building your website varies and depends on the website builder platform and plan you choose. Many platforms offer a free version, but these come with limited design and feature options. To build a website with features beyond the free version, platforms typically have added fees associated with "advanced" features such as online sales, built-in optimization and analytics tools, and templates that are more customizable.

In addition to the platform cost, you will typically pay an annual fee (\$10-\$20) to register your **domain name** – the unique address that people type into their web browsers to access a specific website.

Websites also allow for paid visibility, meaning you can pay an advertising platform such as Google Ads or Facebook Ads to display your business to people based on their searches. These paid advertisements vary in cost but small businesses may spend around \$100/month on these ads (based on October 2024 prices).

ONLINE SALES

You have the option to include an online sales page on your website to sell your product directly. However, online payment processors typically charge a small fee for sales. The amount varies by provider and can be structured as a percentage of each transaction, a flat fee per transaction, monthly fees, or a combination of these.

CONTENT PLANNING

Most website platforms allow for a variety of content types, including written and visual elements (photos, videos, links, graphics, etc.). Website content should be updated every few years.

Essential Pages:

- **Home** - The first page of your website. This page should clearly communicate what your business is.
- **About** - Typically the second page of your website. Tells the story of your business and gives your customers more information about you and your business.
- **Contact** - Provides your contact information and can include where and when you sell your product.

Note: If your website will only feature one landing page, make sure to include all the above information on that singular page.

Additional Pages:

- **Purchase** - This page should tell your customers how to purchase your product. If you're selling in person, include the products you currently have for sale and where and when they can be purchased. If you're selling online, this page will host your online sales and allow customers to place their order.
- **Store and Prepare Product** - You can consider including a page with information about how to store and prepare your product. If you sell a product customers may be unfamiliar with, this information can be very helpful.
- **Recipes** - Consider including a recipes page with different ways to prepare your product.
- **Blog** - A blog page can be a way to provide updates about your business or share additional timely information about your business and/or products.
- **Events** - If you attend a lot of in-person events, consider having an events page. This typically consists of a calendar displaying the events and times you'll be selling at.

If you have social media in addition to a website, your social media accounts should be prominently displayed on your website's home page.

REVIEWING PERFORMANCE ANALYTICS

Every six months you should review your website's performance to make sure it's being found by your intended audience. Many website builder platforms provide you with analytics but you can also use other resources such as Google Analytics (more information in Appendix C) to review your website's performance and visitation. To increase your website's success, make sure you also optimize your **search engine optimization (SEO)**.

IMPROVING YOUR WEBSITE'S REACH

How many people you reach with your website is largely dependent on its **search engine optimization (SEO)**. This is the process of optimizing your website to rank higher when people search for you online. Search engines like Google* use algorithms that consider a variety of variables to determine which sites to display in response to a search.

When calculating where your website should rank in search results, Google considers your website's credibility. Therefore, it's important to ensure that Google has relevant information about your business. It can help to create a profile for your business on "Google Business Profile." This is a free to use service that allows you to create a profile for your business - this is what will initially pop up if someone searches for your business on Google or Google Maps and can help drive people to your website. Google also prioritizes mobile websites, so be sure that your website is mobile-friendly.

As you build your website, include the following elements to build credibility and improve your SEO:

- **Keywords** – words or phrases that are put into search engines to find information or products – are vital to a strong SEO result. Use keywords related to seafood and your location throughout your website content, descriptions, and meta tags to improve your visibility in search engine results.

Action Item: Add relevant words or phrases that customers might search in Google – “fishermen’s market,” “sustainable seafood,” “Santa Barbara seafood,” etc. - throughout your website.

- **Reviews, mentions in social media, and guest posts** that link to your website will all help your ranking, as search engines prioritize content that is both valuable and reliable to the user. One of the major criteria used to assess the value and reliability of your site are **backlinks**, or links on *other* websites that point to *your* website. These backlinks help demonstrate your website’s credibility.

Action Item: Ask your local fishermen’s association, fishermen’s market or local food groups to include a link to your website on their pages. If you appear in a news story, ask them to include your website in the article.

- **Internal links** help search engines understand your website and index it. Make sure that your site does not contain any broken links or spelling and grammatical errors, as those hurt your website’s credibility.

Action Item: If you include links on your website, routinely check to make sure they’re not broken, and if broken, replace them.

- **Meta tags** – small pieces of HTML code (aka “tags”) that are optional and invisible to visitors – provide information about web pages to search engines, social media platforms, and other systems. Rather than editing the HTML code directly, most website builder platforms have a search engine settings page or an SEO section that you can add your meta tags in.

A **meta description**, or a short summary of a web page’s content that appears in search engine results, is a commonly used meta tag that helps boost SEO.

Action Item: Add meta tags to your website as you’re developing it.


- **Faster loading times** can result in a higher ranking for your webpage. You should maintain a website loading speed of approximately 1 to 3 seconds. You can use online resources like GTmetrix to measure your page speed.

Action Item: Review what features on a website may increase or decrease loading time and try to reduce or avoid features that may slow your loading time when developing your website. Once your website is developed, routinely check your loading time. If your website is taking longer than 3 seconds to load, review what features might be slowing your loading time.

Note: Because Google is the dominant search engine, SEO typically revolves around what works best for Google.

Comparing website builder platforms...

This comparison chart points out key differences across 10 website builder platforms.

 Sea Grant CALIFORNIA	Custom domain included	\$/month	Annual cost	E-commerce potential	Email marketing/newsletter integration	Templates	Customization	Ease of Use
Google Sites	X	\$0	\$0	With plug-in	With plug-in	●	✍	👍👍👍
Mozello	With a paid plan	\$0 - \$16	\$0 - \$192	✓	With premium plus plan	●●●	✍✍	👍👍
Square	With a paid plan	\$0 - \$29 (plus processing fees)	\$0 - \$348	✓	Additional monthly cost	●●●	✍✍ with \$29/mo plan	👍👍👍
Wix	With a paid plan	\$0 - \$36	\$0 - \$432	With a paid plan	✓	●●●	✍✍	👍👍👍
WordPress	With a paid plan	\$0 - \$45	\$0 - \$540	With premium plan	With plug-in	●●●	✍✍✍✍	👍
Weebly (by Square)	At \$12/month and above	\$10 - \$26	\$120 - \$312	✓	✓	●●	✍✍	👍👍👍
Squarespace	✓	\$16 - \$28	\$192 - \$336	✓	✓	●●●	✍✍✍✍	👍👍👍
HubSpot CMS	✓	\$23	\$276	✓	✓	●●●	✍✍✍	👍👍
Shopify	X	\$29 - \$79	\$348 - \$948	✓	✓	●●●	✍✍✍✍	👍👍

Note: There are many other website builders out there. This is by no means a comprehensive list. When selecting a website platform, consider which of the following elements are most important to you and your business: low cost, template options, custom domain, ease of use, ability to integrate a newsletter, ability to integrate social media accounts, and ability to integrate e-commerce.

Additional Notes: Square websites are particularly useful if you're using the Square POS app for in person and/or online sales. Several seafood producers have recommended Square because you don't have to purchase the entire system (you can purchase and use only the features you want), you can accept payments from credit cards using your smartphone or tablet, it easily generates sales reports and can automatically sync with QuickBooks for accounting.

Wix is highly recommended across online reviews as a website builder for small businesses.

Squarespace is one of the most used website builders, but it does not offer a free version.

In summary...

Websites are best for giving your small business a professional online presence, making it easier for customers to discover, trust and engage with your brand.

BENEFITS	CHALLENGES
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can provide a way to sell your product(s) online• Serves as a central hub of all information for your business• Accessible to anyone on the internet	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Takes some time initially to create• Limited opportunity for audience interaction