RESPONSAB

Websites 101: Your Guide to Getting Started

How to plan, build and launch a website that works for your business

Presented with Small Business, Mayor’s Office of Economic Opportunity and Inclusion

Small Business Workshop Series · Session 1 of 3

About these slides

Session 1 of 3: Websites 101

These slides are from the free Small Business Workshop Series, presented by the City of Boston's Small Business team (Mayor's Office of Economic Opportunity and Inclusion) and Responsab.

Maple Lane Bake Shop is a fictional example we follow through all three sessions.

Polls, live tests and exercises happened during the live session. Try them on your own website.

Free take-home handouts for every session are on the same page as these slides.

Websites, tools and statistics were checked in October 2026 and may change.

Need help with your own website?

Book free one-on-one office hours with the Responsab team:

crm.responsab.com/schedule/l/city-of-boston-workshop-series

hello@responsab.com · (617) 890-6010

A partnership for Boston's small businesses

City of Boston
Small Business, Mayor's Office of Economic Opportunity and Inclusion

+

Responsab
Boston-area web agency

WHY THE CITY IS OFFERING THIS SERIES

"To provide all small business owners and entrepreneurs with the tools and guidance to successfully start, grow, and build a business in Boston."
The City's Small Business team

- Your website and online presence are now core business tools
- Free, practical training that fits a small team's time and budget
- Follow-up help so you can act on what you learn

WHAT EACH PARTNER BRINGS

The City
Makes the series free, promotes it in its small business newsletter and supports follow-up office hours

Responsab
Workshop content, live teaching, take-home guides and one-on-one office hours

Office hours: one-on-one help for your business

Questions about your own business after the workshop? Book a time with us.

HOW IT WORKS

- Scan the code and pick a time
- One-on-one, about your business
- Supported by the City of Boston
- Bring your website, listing or questions

No cost to workshop attendees

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BOOK WITH OUR TEAM

Scan to book office hours for your business

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About Responsab

RESPONSAB

Helping Local Business Grow Online

“Responsible” in Haitian Creole

Responsab is a Quincy-based, Black-owned web development agency specializing in high-performing websites for small businesses and digital strategy in Boston and Quincy. With more than twenty years of experience, we build sites that are fast, secure, and easy for business owners to manage.

Meet your presenters



Ralph Francois

CEO & Tech Lead

Ralph is a tech leader, web architect, & entrepreneur with over 23 years of experience in web development & digital strategy. He started his business in 2003 & has since worked with businesses, universities, and organizations of all sizes to build & improve their digital platforms. His entrepreneurial ventures also include founding Quincy Yoga & Massage.



Alaina Tucker

Marketing Director

Alaina is a marketing and demand generation professional with over a decade of experience helping companies define their brand and build their engines for growth. She has an MBA from Boston College's Carroll School of Management.

What we will cover today

1. Why your website matters
2. Speak the language of the web
3. Plan before you build
4. Choose the right platform
5. Build it: structure, content and the customer journey
6. Getting found: search engine optimization (SEO)
7. Your next steps

You will leave with

- A plan for your first (or next) website
- The vocabulary to talk with a developer or a technical person
- A getting-started checklist you can use this week

Meet our sample business



Maple Lane Bake Shop

A family-owned bake shop in Dorchester

A fictional business we will plan a website for, step by step, throughout today's session.

Who they are

Two owners and four staff. Great reputation with strong walk-in business.

Online today

An Instagram account and a Google listing with old hours. Catering orders come in by DM and phone.

The goal

Grow weekday catering orders from nearby offices and schools.

The challenge

Little time, a small budget and no technical background.

Quick poll

Click the Poll button at the bottom of your screen.
Choose one answer and submit.

Where is your business online today?

- A — No website yet
- B — A website I am not happy with
- C — A website that works, and I want more from it
- D — Social media only

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01

Why your website matters

The one piece of your online presence you fully own

“Do I really need a website? I already have Instagram.”

Yes. Here is why.

Social media is rented space: the platform sets the rules and can limit your reach.

Your website is the one part of your online presence you fully own. It is where people check that you are real.

Maple Lane’s Instagram shows off the pastries. Its website is where offices request catering.



98%

of consumers used the internet to find information about local businesses in 2022

Source: BrightLocal, Local Consumer Review Survey 2023

Own it vs. rent it

Your website: you own it

- Nobody can take it away or change the rules
- Shows up when people search for what you do
- Works for you 24 hours a day
- Builds trust with people who do not know you yet
- Takes bookings, orders and inquiries in one place

Social media: you rent it

- The platform owns the relationship
- Does not reliably show up in Google search
- Reach depends on algorithms you cannot control
- Easy for customers to scroll past
- Limited to the features the platform offers

The takeaway: use social media to start conversations. Use your website to close them.

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02

Speak the language of the web

The terms you need to know so you can talk to a developer or a technical person

Website Domain Name

maplelanebakeshop.com

GoDaddy

namecheap

porkbun

- Match your business name
- Try variations if it is taken
- More than one: **dorchesterbakery.com**
- Shorten names that are hard to type
- **Pro tip:** Redirect a search-term domain
- Needs annual renewal

Keep the domain account in your business's name.
A redirect sends a second address to your main site.

Website Hosting

Renting your space on the internet where your website files live

bluehost

SiteGround

HOSTINGER

- Often $5 to $50 a month
- Included with most DIY builders
- CMS sites need hosting purchased separately
- Cheap hosting can mean a slow site

Six more terms to know

CMS

Content Management System: the back office where you (or a developer) edit pages.

Responsive design

Adjusts to any screen. Nearly half of web traffic is on phones.

SSL and HTTPS

SSL (Secure Sockets Layer) encrypts the connection. HTTPS is the padlock web address.

Analytics

Shows who visits and what they do. Google Analytics is free.

Wireframe

The blueprint for your website: a sketch of each page before any design.

UX (user experience)

How easy your site is to use. Good UX means no one has to think.

More terms are in your Term Glossary handout. You can download it now.

What is Artificial Intelligence (AI)?

Why it matters for your business

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is technology that helps you get things done faster, make better decisions, and save time and money.

Think of AI as an assistant for your business. It can help you write emails, create marketing content, answer customer questions, organize information, and handle repetitive tasks.

AI Terms

AI agent

AI that chooses steps and uses tools to work toward a goal.

Generative AI

AI that creates new text, images or ideas from a request.

LLM

Large Language Model: the AI behind ChatGPT, Claude and Gemini.

Prompt

The instructions you type to tell the AI what you want.

AI Assistant

A chat tool that helps you draft, ask questions and revise.

AI site builders

Tools that draft a site with AI. Still need your edits.

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03

Plan before you build

Goals and customers come before colors and fonts

The Website Planning Process

Most first-time website owners start by picking colors and fonts.

That is the last decision, not the first.

Get these six right, in this order, and everything else gets easier. We will follow Maple Lane through all six today.

1	**Customer**	Who are you talking to?
2	**Goal**	What should visitors do?
3	**Structure**	Which pages do you need?
4	**Platform**	Where will it live?
5	**Content**	Words and photos
6	**Design**	Colors and fonts: last, not first

Decision 1: Define Your Ideal Customer



The office catering planner

Office manager at a 40-person company nearby. Orders breakfast or lunch for meetings twice a month.

Busy, organized and accountable to their boss if the food is late.

Needs

- Order ahead, online
- On-time delivery
- An invoice for accounting

Searches for

- “office catering Dorchester”
- “breakfast catering Boston”
- “pastry trays near me”

Trusts

- Photos of real trays
- Reviews from other offices
- Clear prices and minimums

Quick poll

Click the Poll button at the bottom of your screen.
Choose one answer and submit.

Could you describe your ideal customer in one sentence?

- **A** Yes, easily
- **B** Roughly, but it needs work
- **C** I serve everyone
- **D** What is an ideal customer?

Decision 2: Pick Your CTA

CALL TO ACTION: When someone lands on your website, what do you most want them to do next?

Call you

Plumbers, cleaners, contractors

Book a time

Salons, clinics, consultants

Make Purchase

Retail, food, gifts

Join your list

Coaches, creators, nonprofits

Visit you

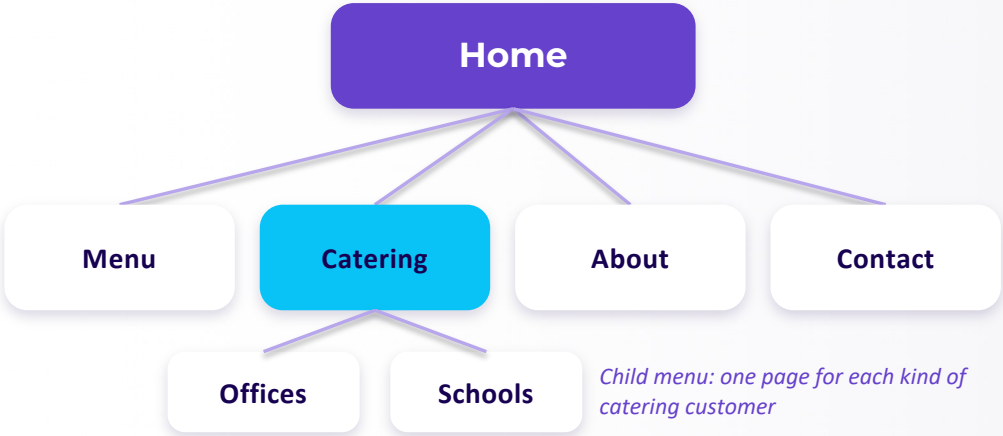
Restaurants, shops, gyms

Maple Lane: request a catering quote.

Second priority: visit the shop. Everything on the site should make that first action impossible to miss.

Decision 3: Create a Sitemap

Map pages first so visitors can find answers and you know what to prepare.
A sitemap is the list of pages on your site.



Child menu: one page for each kind of catering customer

LATER, WHEN YOU HAVE TIME

FAQ | Blog | Gift cards

Start with 4 to 6 pages
Clear pages beat more pages.

Five menu items or fewer
Fewer choices make decisions easier.

Use your customers' words
"Catering," not "Solutions."

One page, one job
Each page answers one main question.

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Your customer, goal and website pages

Question Break 1

Put your questions in the Q&A section.

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04

Choose the right platform

Website builders (DIY), Shopify, custom CMS, AI builders, freelancers

Decision 4: Platform Options

DIY builders
Wix, Squarespace, Shopify

BEST FOR
Owners who want to do it themselves

STRENGTH
Fast setup, drag and drop, hosting included

WATCH OUT
Limited design; harder to move later

CMS Platforms
WordPress, Drupal

BEST FOR
Owners with some technical comfort, complex sites

STRENGTH
Highly flexible and easier to scale

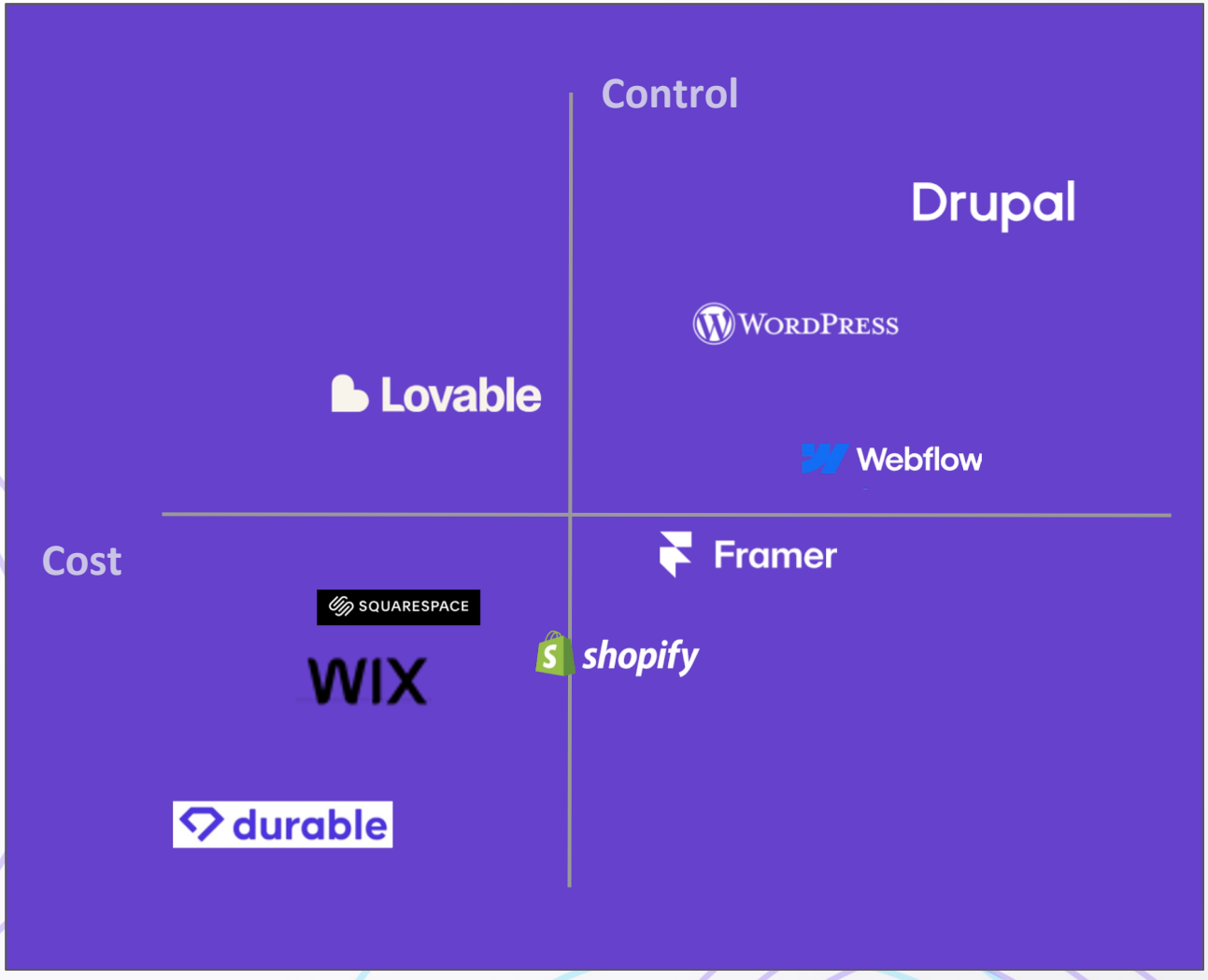
WATCH OUT
Requires technical expertise or professional development

AI Builders
Vibe coding options

BEST FOR
Very simple sites without forms, integrations or other functionality.

STRENGTH
Quick to launch, using natural language and no coding

WATCH OUT
Performance is difficult to control and troubleshoot, generic design



Most website platforms offer some balance of **cost** and **control/flexibility**.

Web Builders (Do It Yourself)

Website builders



WIX

Best for DIY owners with a simple site

Pros: Drag and drop, hosting included, live in days

Cons: Hard to leave later; limits on custom work

Cost: About $17 to $50 a month

Shopify



Best for primarily selling products online

Pros: Checkout, inventory, shipping apps

Cons: Monthly fee plus transaction fees

Cost: About $29+ a month, plus apps

Custom CMS (Content Management System)

Build fully custom websites with more control, flexibility and code you own.
Hire a professional to ensure a high standard.

WordPress

The most common CMS in the world

Pros: Huge plugin ecosystem, buildable without code

Cons: Updates and security need attention

Gives you more control than Wix/Squarespace, without starting from scratch code

· Fits when you want plugins, blogs, forms and room to grow

Drupal

Enterprise - level performance

Pros: strong structure and accessibility

Cons: Needs a skilled developer

· At Responsab we customize Drupal for small businesses

· Goal fit: custom pages, forms and growth beyond a template

Can AI build my website?

The short answer YES, AI technology is here!

What AI site tools are good for

- A quick mockup so you can see a direction
- Putting a rough idea on a page fast
- A starting point you rewrite with real facts

Where they fall short today

- Generic look that could be any business
- Copy that sounds the same on every site
- Weak on your real offer, photos and local details
- You still must own the domain and logins

Tools people use for AI sites (examples)

Lovable

Framer

Durable

Tell-tale signs: same layout, vague buzzwords, stock-looking photos.

Three questions to help you choose

1. **How comfortable am I updating my own site?**
   Not very? Choose the simplest editor, or plan for ongoing help.

2. **How much will my website need to grow and change?**
   A 5-page service site and a 500-product store have very different needs.

3. **What is my realistic budget, upfront and monthly?**
   Builders cost little upfront but charge monthly. Custom costs more upfront.



MAPLE LANE CHOOSES

A website builder

- The owners will update it themselves
- It is a small site: five pages
- Built-in forms and online ordering cover catering requests
- They will revisit in 6 to 8 months if catering takes off

Decision 5: Plan Your Content

Words

- Write the way you talk to a customer at the counter
- Lead with what they get, not your company history
- Short paragraphs and clear headings
- Answer the questions you hear every week

Photos

- Real photos beat stock photos
- Use natural light and a clean background
- Show people: your team, your space, your work
- Describe every image in a short caption (alt text)

Maple Lane: “Breakfast trays for 10 to 40 people, delivered by 8 a.m.” beats “Quality catering solutions.”

Stuck on words? Next slide: use AI to draft, then edit in your voice.

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Domains, hosting and platform choices

Questions Break 2

Put your questions in the Q&A section.

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05

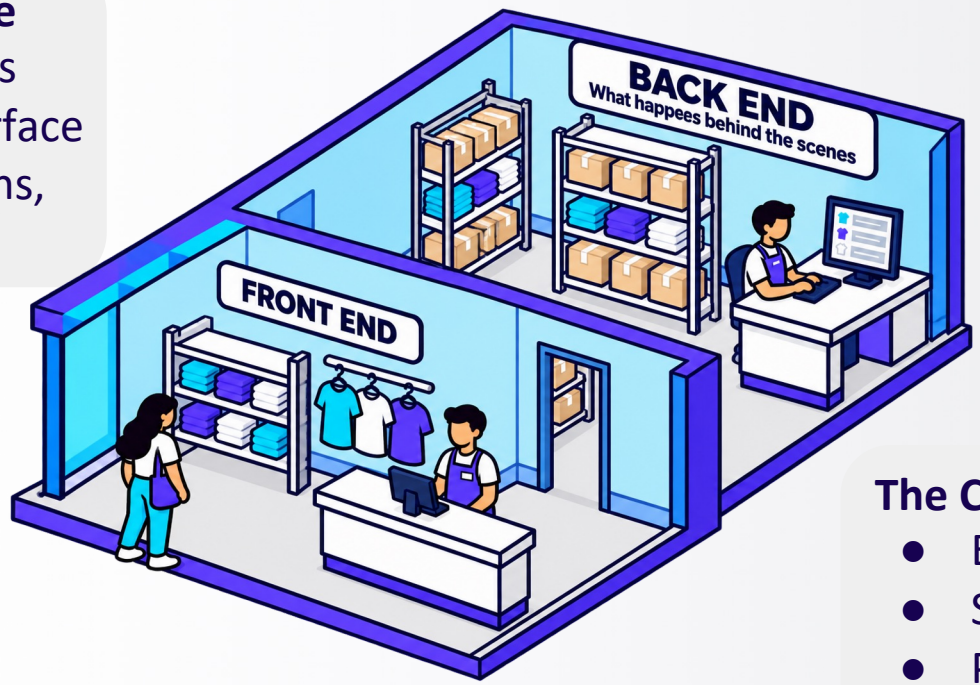
Design & Build

Your platform shapes how you add content, arrange pages and take orders.

Front end vs. back end

The User Experience

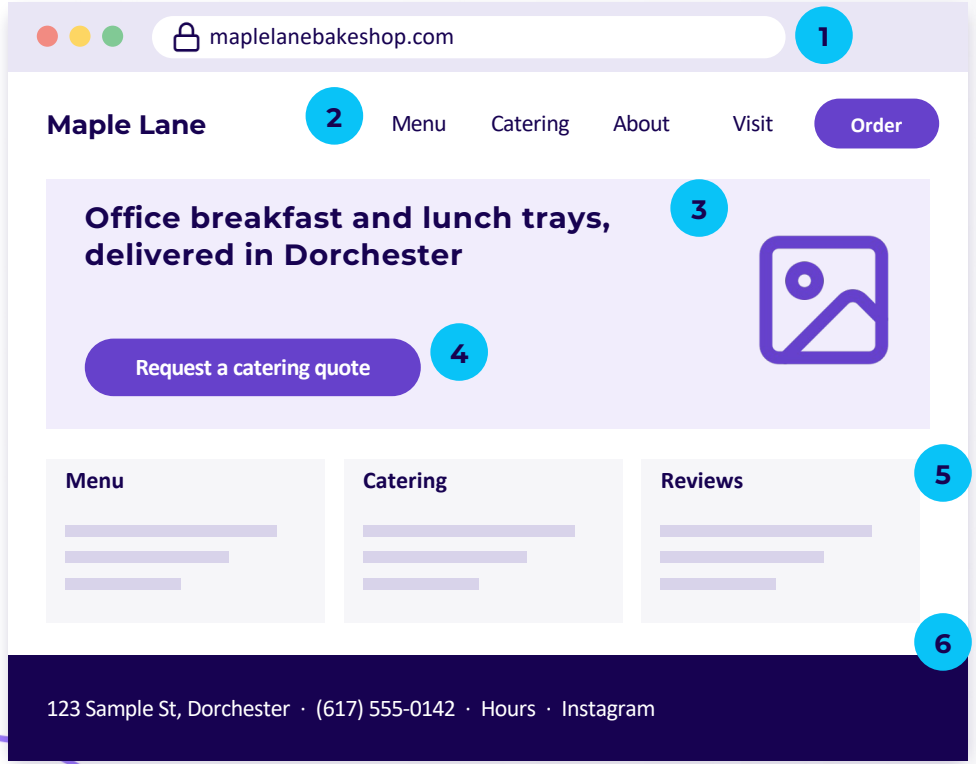
- Visual elements
- Customer interface
- Layouts, buttons, forms, etc



The Content Management

- Editing tools
- Site Setting
- Processes

Anatomy of A Webpage



1. **Page address (URL)**
   Short, readable words: /catering, not /page-12.
2. **Navigation Menu**
   Appears at the top of every page on the site.
3. **Hero & Headline**
   What you do and where, in one line.
4. **Button**
   Start with a verb: Request a catering quote.
5. **Content Blocks and photos**
   Short paragraphs. Real photos with alt text.
6. **Footer**
   Address, phone and hours, the same everywhere.

Use AI as an assistant, not an author

USE AI TO HELP WITH SITE CONTENT

- Brainstorm page outlines and headlines
- Turn rough notes into a first draft
- Rewrite text to be clearer and friendlier
- Draft FAQs and image descriptions

WATCH OUTS

- Check every fact, price and claim
- Add your own voice and real stories
- Never paste private customer information

TRY THIS FOR YOUR HOMEPAGE

“I own a family bakery in Dorchester, Boston. Our best customers are office managers ordering catering. Write five homepage headlines under 12 words that say what we do and who it is for. Use plain, friendly language.”



Decision 6: Design for your customer

Make it easy to read

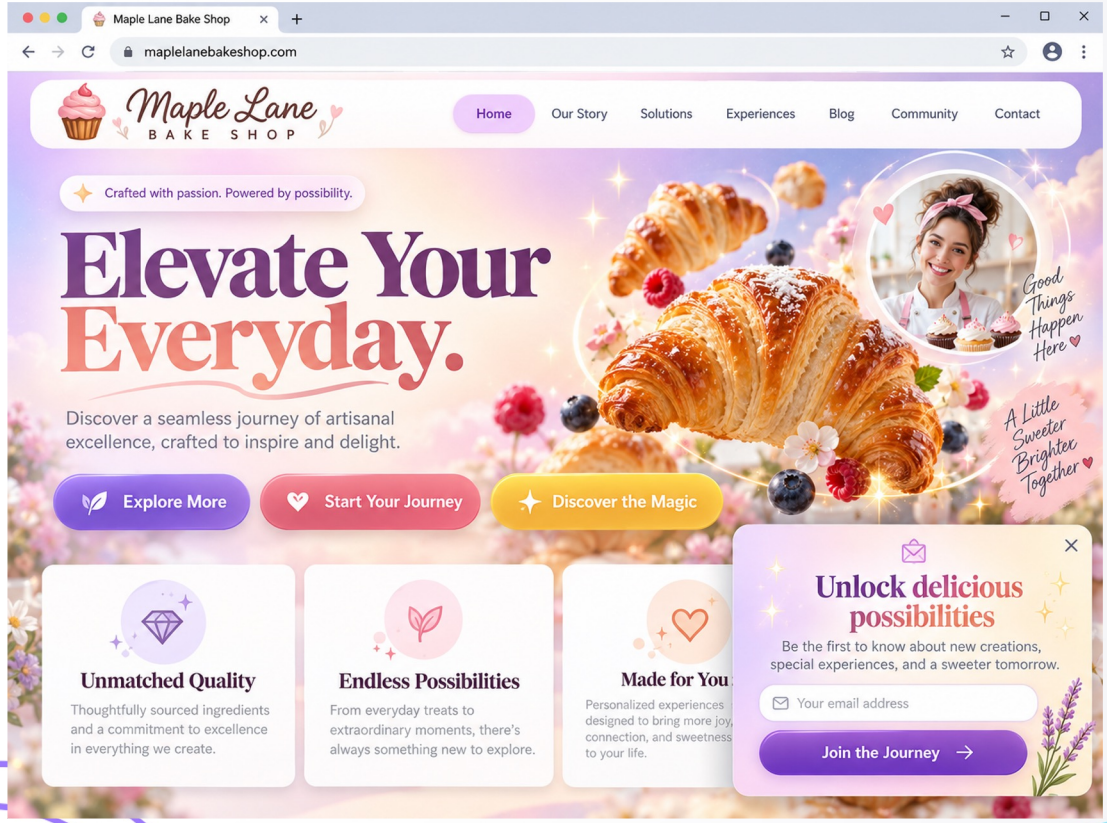
- Leave space around each section
- Keep colors, fonts and buttons consistent
- Use readable text and strong contrast
- Use photos of what customers will get

Make the next step clear

- Say what you offer and where
- Give one main action the most emphasis
- Check the layout on a phone
- Test the menu, links and forms

Maple Lane: warm shop colors, useful food photos and one clear catering button.

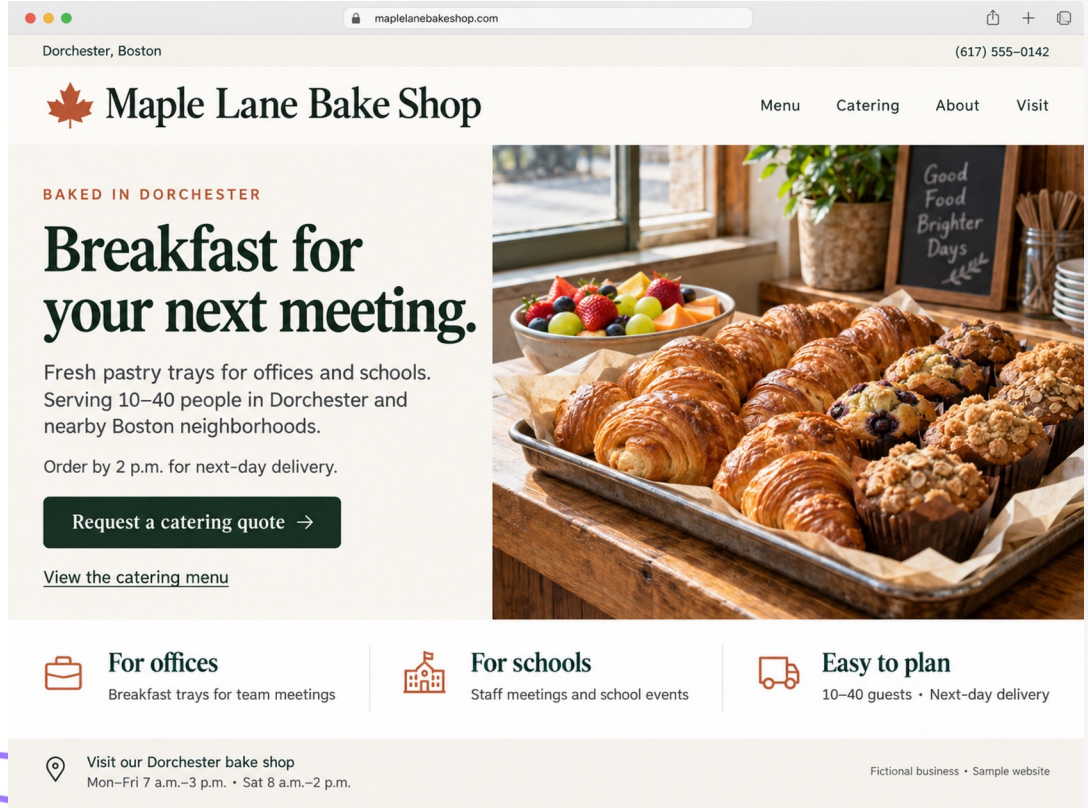
Design: what to avoid



Red flags

- No clear headline
- Too many competing links
- Tiny text on phones
- Stock or fake-looking photos
- Many buttons, no main next step
- Hard-to-read color contrast
- Would you trust this with a catering order?

Design: a clear Maple Lane homepage



What works

- Clear offer and location
- Readable text and spacing
- Relevant product imagery
- One main quote button
- Menu link as a second option
- Order size and deadline
- Phone and hours easy to find
- Simple, high contrast colors

Accessibility: design that includes everyone

Accessibility means people with disabilities can use your site. It is also good business and often required.

Alt text

Describe every important image in a short line for screen readers and Google.

Contrast

Dark text on a light background. Avoid gray-on-gray.

Keyboard

Can someone tab through links and forms without a mouse?

Plain language

Short sentences. Clear buttons. No mystery icons alone.

Captions

If you post video, add captions when you can.

Test it

Zoom your phone to 200%. If it breaks, fix the layout.

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06

SEO Basics

What it is, three basic ideas today. Much more on Thursday.

Why it matters | Vocabulary | Plan | Platform | Build | **Get found** | Next steps

What SEO is and how it works

Search engine optimization (SEO): helping Google find, understand and trust your site.

SERP = search engine results page

The list of results after someone searches. Your goal is to show up there for what you do and where you are.

1 Crawl

Google visits your pages

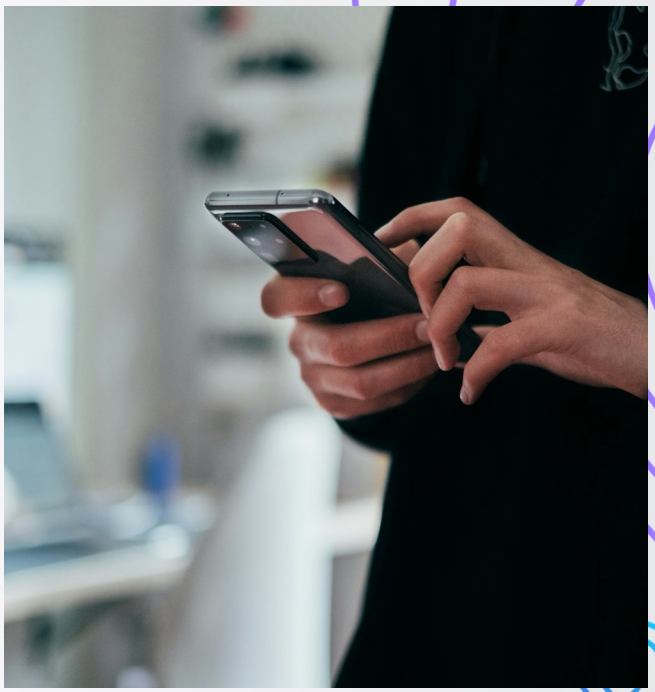
2 Index

Google stores what it found

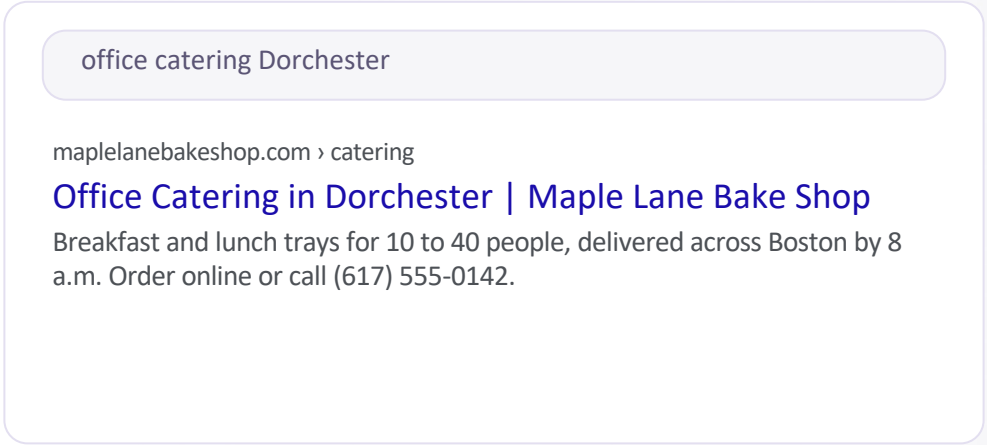
3 Rank

Google decides where you appear

More on SEO and AEO in the next session on Thursday, Oct 22



Meta tags: what Google shows about your page



WHERE TO EDIT THEM

In the SEO settings of each page, on any builder or CMS. Google may rewrite them if they do not match the page.

Meta title (title tag)

The clickable headline in Google and the browser tab. About 60 characters: service, place, business name.

Meta description

The short summary under the title. About 155 characters that earn the click.

Meta tags

Short text in your page settings that tells Google what the page is about. Visitors do not see them on the page.

The Last Step: Testing



Be Sure To Check

- Click through all links on the sites.
- Test on desktop, mobile, and tablet.
- Test both Android and Apple devices.
- Pages must load in less than 2 second.

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07

Your next steps

What to do this week, wherever you are starting from

Why it matters · Vocabulary · Plan · Platform · Build · Get found · **Next steps**

Where are you starting from?

No website yet

1. Decide on your domain name & variations.
2. Write down your one main call to action
3. Choose a platform that fits your comfort and budget
4. Gather your story, services, photos and testimonials
5. Launch simple: 4 pages beats 10

Already have a website

1. Run the five-second test on your homepage
2. Check every link works and every form sends
3. Open your site on your phone (responsive)
4. Test your speed at pagespeed.web.dev
5. Make sure your domain is in your name

The five-second test: what every homepage needs

MAPLE LANE HOMEPAGE, TOP SECTION

Fresh bread, pastries and catering, baked daily in Dorchester

Office breakfasts and lunches delivered across Boston. Order by 2 pm for next-day delivery.

Request a catering quote (617) 555-0142

★★★★★ *“On time, every time. Our team loves the pastry trays.”*

1. **A headline that says what you do and for whom**
   Not just your business name.
2. **A phone number or contact is visible**
   On mobile, make it tap-to-call.
3. **One clear next step on every page**
   A button, form or booking link.
4. **Your location or service area**
   Essential for local search.
5. **Proof that others trust you**
   A review, testimonial or client name.



Free tools to take with you

Google Business Profile business.google.com
Your free listing on Google Search and Maps.

PageSpeed Insights pagespeed.web.dev
Tests your site's speed and shows what slows it down.

Google Search Console search.google.com/search-console
Shows how your site appears in Google search.

Google Analytics analytics.google.com
Shows who visits, from where and what they do.

Your take-home kit

- Getting Started Checklist
- ICP Builder: your ideal customer
- Term Glossary
- Today's slides

Keep going: the rest of the series

Build it right, get found, turn visitors into customers.



TODAY

SESSION 1

Websites 101

Build the foundation

Plan, build and launch a website that works for your business.



UP NEXT

SESSION 2

SEO & Localization

Get found

Show up when nearby customers search for what you do.



UP NEXT

SESSION 3

Web Conversion Optimization

Turn visitors into customers

Make your site clear, easy to use and effective.

Office hours: one-on-one help for your business

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Questions?

Put your questions in the Q&A section.

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