

CHAPTER 2

YOUR ONLINE BUSINESS' BUILDING BLOCKS

"I have one single goal: to give you everything you need to go have your first BIG success online, even if you're new to the business, or have not had any results so far."

- Paola Devescovi -



(Image Credit: <https://www.mindflash.com>)

The most critical factor in any Internet business is YOU. As the owner, you initiate everything. You create action. You stimulate response. You decide what happens, where it happens, when it happens and who makes it happen. Luckily, by now you should know yourself better than anyone else and you should be able to figure out what you are good at, your talents, what you enjoy doing and what you would like to delegate to people with more skills and experience than you.

A WORD OF WARNING: YOU NEED PATIENCE

You need patience as you build up your business and you find your first few clients. You need patience as you wait until you finally have enough clients to produce income to cover your costs and draw a salary for yourself. You need patience to wait and see which marketing techniques work best and what results they produce for your business. You need patience for word of mouth to spread your business around. You need patience to establish a reputation so one day people come to you willing to buy what you offer, then you can pick and choose whom you want to service. You need patience to find the right staff and then find their replacement when they leave you to move on to another or better job.

Ultimately you simply need patience to run a business, full stop. I'm saying this because many people believe – or are led to believe – that the mere fact that you have a business online, results are magically produced in a few months: it takes time to build any business, including an online one.

Having said so, let's move to the more practical things. In this chapter I will describe a number of resources that you need in order to set up, build and run your business online. I recommend them because not only do I use and love them, but I believe they'll save you time and money, while allowing you run your business from anywhere. Many are free or really inexpensive. I've separated them out into useful categories of business. I can't wait to see you using these to create your own freedom in business.

PS These are only the "basic" resources you need to build and run your business. As your business grows, you will certainly need to add additional resources to deal with more customers, add new assets (like a membership site or ecommerce, for example) or widen the range of products you offer (you may want to include video or audio courses for example). You may download a more comprehensive list of my favourite resources from my website: <http://www.projectprosperity.com>.

CHOOSING A DOMAIN NAME

The first thing you need to do is to pick up a domain name. wikiHow gives this definition of a domain name: it is the unique URL or address of a particular website that defines itself from every other website on the World Wide Web. And it should be your website name. For example, my website name is Project Prosperity and my domain name is projectprosperity.com.

1. Keep it short

Choose a name that is not too long and is not too confusing so that visitors have a hard time remembering it. In most situations, the shorter your domain name is, the better it is. This is because people will remember the URL and they will continue to visit your site in the future. Moreover, try to avoid using acronyms, dashes or other symbols as they may also confuse potential visitors and make it more difficult to remember your domain name.

As with any business, word of mouth is the most powerful marketing tool to drive traffic to your site (and it's free too!). If your site is long and difficult to pronounce, people will not remember the name of the site and they may never return.

2. Use Keywords

Try using keywords that describe your business and the products or services you offer. For example; if you're a real estate agent, you may want to register DreamHome.com or AffordableHome.com. Include the keywords that people enter when searching for your products or services. It helps improve your rank on search engines (this is called SEO, which increases traffic) and just makes more sense to your customers.

3. Target Your Area

If your business is local, consider including your city or state in your domain name to make it easier to find you.

4. Be Memorable

There are millions of registered domain names, so having a domain that's catchy and memorable is essential. Once you've come up with a name, share it with close friends to make sure it sounds appealing and makes sense to others.

5. Protect Your Domain Name

Make sure the name you've selected isn't trademarked, copyrighted or being used by another company. It could result in a huge legal mess that could cost you a fortune, as well as your domain!

6. Use an Appropriate Domain Name Extension

- Extensions are suffixes, such as .COM or .NET, at the end of Web addresses. These can have specific uses, so make sure to choose one that works for your business. .COM is far and away the most popular, but here are some other top extensions and how they're often used:
- .co : an abbreviation for company, commerce, and community
- .info : informational sites
- .net : technical, Internet infrastructure sites
- .org : non-commercial organizations and non-profits
- .biz : business or commercial use, like ecommerce sites
- .me : blogs, resumes or personal sites

7. Protect and Build Your Brand

To protect your brand – you and your business are a brand, but more of this in Chapter 5 - you should purchase various domain extensions, as well as misspelled versions of your domain name. This prevents competitors from registering other versions and ensures your customers are directed to your website, even if they mistype it.

This is very important. I have been approached by somebody who claimed to work for the Asian Domain Registration Department in China saying that a company was buying a domain name similar to mine and they offered me to buy domain names to protect my brand. As the exchange of emails with this person went on, it was clear they were trying to cheat me. Anyway, purchasing various domain extensions is important to protect your brand.

Domain names are quite cheap.

- GoDaddy offers probably the cheapest prices: they go from \$ 3.17/year for .com up to \$ 7.99/year for a .eu.
- Namecheap pricing varies from \$ 8.54/year for .com up to \$ 71.02/year for .best.
- Dreamhost pricing starts around \$ 10/ year.

8. Choose your web hosting provider **(Warning: this section is technical but necessary!)**

Choosing a web host is the first step you should consider when starting a website project. In order to have your website available in the World Wide Web, you need a place where to host it. This place is provided by the web hosting provider. The web hosting as a service incorporates the space where your website files are stored, the traffic to your website, and lots of extra services such as firewall protection, technical assistance, email services, FTP access, domain name registration, website building tools and more.

Although free web hosting providers are available, I would recommend that you go for a paid service from the very beginning. After all, you are building a very important asset that will become the "central hub" for your business whose value will increase over time, and maybe be one day you can decide to sell it at a very good price. And it may happen indeed: think of YouTube: they started off as a website where people could upload their videos and they sold it for \$ 2 billion to Google; you never know ;-)!

When you compare hosting providers that meet your budget and technical requirements, go and check for customer feedback. You can find this information on Google, Yahoo or specialized hosting directories (e.g. besthostsdirectory.com and hostsearch.com). You want to make sure the provider is reliable, if replies to technical issues quickly, if meets the uptime numbers promised and if customers like it.

The web host must provide 24x7 tech support assistance. Your technical questions should be answered within 1-2 hours max. Besides the speed of responses, check if the support is technically competent. Phone support is not enough - the phone support lines are always busy when you need them. The most efficient companies use ticketing systems, where you deliver all technical details needed to have your question answered within an hour or less and most good hosting providers now offer chat support service so that you can have milder issues solved in a matter of minutes with an operator guiding you through the troubleshooting process.

The hosting provider should support:

- Email, POP3, SMTP, IMAP, Autoresponders, Email forwarders:
If you have your own website you would probably want to have email addresses at your own domain, for example: info@mydomain.com. You can check for POP3, SMTP (and IMAP) in order to have web mail capabilities. Check out if you can set an email address to automatically reply to the sender with a present message (Autoresponder). See if you can forward a mes-

sage from one email to another for example: all the emails coming to sales@mydomain.com to be forwarded to salesmanager@mydomain.com

- PHP, MySQL, Cron Jobs:
The PHP/MySQL capabilities are becoming more and more important for having a dynamic website. Cron jobs may be needed for programs that you need to be run periodically (e.g. once a day).
- Website tools - Blogs, CMS, galleries, forums:
Your host can provide you with free tools to create your website, such as blogs, CMS, galleries, forums. These tools will extensively facilitate your work on your website and you will save lots of money on web designers and developers. Ensure they provide WordPress integration too: I'm a huge fan of WordPress for building amazing blogs and websites. I will return to this topic later on in this chapter.
- E-commerce option - Shopping cart, SSL (Secure Socket Layer):
If you are planning to run an e-commerce website, you might be needing SSL certificate and Shopping cart. These facilities normally involve a higher price package or additional charges. You will definitely need an SSL certificate if you plan to collect credit card information on your site.
- Control Panel (C-Panel):
This feature is especially important if you want to maintain your site or have someone else to maintain it. From the control panel you will make changes to your site, upload files, change passwords for your account, add/delete an email account, manage databases, etc.
- DreamWeaver, GoLive, Flash:
You may want to create your web site using a web site building software such as GoLive or DreamWeaver. It is good to check if your web hosting provider supports these tools.

Do you feel overwhelmed by all this technical stuff? Relax: you don't have to do everything yourself. If you don't want to deal with the technical part of your business, I suggest to hire a webmaster who can take care of all these more techy things on your behalf. However, it is important that you understand some technicalities to be able to discuss options and solutions with your IT person. Personally, I have chosen Bluehost as my web hosting provider. They are affordable, efficient, they have a very competent and reliable 24/7 support (they have a support chat service too that has saved me several times!).

9. Website Design

I'm a huge fan of **WordPress** for building amazing blogs and websites. WordPress is an open source platform, this means that their codes are open to everybody to use and customize. So any developers and programmers can use WordPress to create their own tools - such as templates/themes or plugins (these are software components that add specific features to a software application, making it customizable) - to share for free, or sell to WordPress users.

This has led to the creation of a very broad range of both free and paid tools so that the WordPress community has grown to more than 65 million websites since the end of 2011.

One of the latest reviews on WordPress I came across (November 2014) reports 26,000 WordPress plugins that are downloaded more than 490 million times. This broad range of themes and plugins enable you (or your webmaster) to customize your website to meet your preferences and specific needs. If you think of writing a blog, WordPress is very easy to use, very similar to Word so I'm sure you will have no problem with it. My webmaster installed the **Thesis** theme (around \$ 87) on my website: it's very flexible and highly customizable. I also know people who have installed **Optimize Press** (\$97).

LeadPages is the easiest way to create beautiful landing pages, launch pages, sales pages and squeeze pages for your website that actually convert visitors into paying customers. Landing pages are a must-have to promote your products and services online.

This used to be a tricky thing that held back a lot of my clients as it involved understanding which software to install, knowing some basic code and work on the page design.

The LeadPages team have done a great job and changed the way in which we do online marketing by making this software so useful and so simple to use (basically drag and drop and customizing text). They also have a WordPress plugin that really makes creating and running landing pages very easy.

10. Outsourcing

You cannot (and you don't have to) do everything on your own. As I have already said about hiring a webmaster to set up your website, there are tasks that you want to entrust with somebody else so that you can focus on the more creative part of your business or on the activities that you really love doing.

Odesk is my favorite online platform for finding great professional people to work with me and my team for short term contracts or projects. You can choose from nearly of over 1 million contractors and they make it very easy to search for the right people, post jobs, interview your potential contactors and hire someone within minutes. You select your budget for the project rate and then post a job description. Candidates will send you their best offers along with a resumé and the information you need for you to decide who you want to recruit.

Odesk automatically take care of your billing and paying your contractors as well as making sure work gets done as agreed upon.

You can find professionals to manage all sorts of things from design to website coding, translation, copy writing, Social Media management up to building a small virtual team for specific projects.

11. Accounting

Let's face it, billing customers and keeping track of expenses is a pain (or at least, it is for me!). Keeping up with outstanding invoices and requests for payment is time-

consuming, to say the least. I'm currently testing **FreshBooks** one of the leading invoicing and financial-tracking solutions for small business owners who need to get organized and make sure they get paid.

You can use it to track your contractors, invoice them and allow them to bill you. It has very neat and user-friendly interface that makes it extremely easy to use. It also includes a 'time-tracking' tool that enables you to track just how much time you spend on a project (very useful when you are paid for your time, as a coach for example).

It is free to use for the first 30 days and then decide to upgrade to a paid plan (paid plans start at \$19.95 per month). Of course, the free plan is limited, but it may work for your business, especially when you are starting small. They also have a free FreshBooks app, so you can send your invoices and do your accounting from anywhere.

My latest discovery: **Shoebboxed**. I love this service! It enables you to keep all those receipts – that in my case normally build up in my wallet or envelope that I can never find – that we need to use to claim expenses. Shoebboxed lets you send receipts, business cards and documents to them via postage-paid envelopes or camera-equipped smartphone for a really low monthly fee.

They scan and data-enter every document and then organize everything in a secure, searchable online account. All of the receipts you send to them are also accepted by the IRS in the US and in many countries (check with the appropriate agency in your country!), so if you are ever audited, just show the images of your receipts from your account.

No more scattered, unorganized receipts, no more expensive scanners, no more data entry or lost documents, and no more stressful tax seasons!

12. Receiving Payments

There are many reliable shopping cart software available. However, **Paypal** is the easiest way to start selling your products, goods or services online. You can start with a free account, link it to your bank account and then you're up and running. You can accept payments via email or through creating email links directly to a PayPal checkout page.

You can embed simple 'Buy Now' or 'Add to Cart' buttons on your site or blog. People can also pay by credit card and they accept over 20 currencies which makes doing business internationally much easier.

With a Pro Account - which simply requires going through some additional security checks - you can offer recurring payments, subscriptions and free trial periods, which is great for memberships or group programs. Charges start at 2.9% plus \$0.30 fee and up.

13. Project Management

I've recently discovered **Asana**. It's free for teams of up to 3 people. You can create specific projects and assign tasks to yourself and your team very quickly. You can manage due dates, leave notes, links and upload documents so that anyone in the team understands the task.

Moreover, you can look at a comments thread live on the specific project or task from your team members. This makes it much easier to communicate on the priorities and task at hand.

14. Communication Without Barriers

Grasshopper is a virtual telephone service where you have complete control of the experience you give your callers.

You can set up multiple extensions, adjust voicemail greetings based on time of day, have your voicemail transcribed and sent to you, and more. Moreover, it has been proven that having your phone number on every page of your website increases sales.

They have no long-term contracts, and prices start at just \$9.95 a month.

If you don't already use **Skype**, start using it now! Skype is my number one communication tool. It lets me stay in touch with my customers, colleagues and team worldwide as well as with my family and friends, for free.

You just need an internet connection and a headset and you're ready to go. It even allows for video conferencing (up to 10 people) and screen sharing, which is super helpful when you need to get things done.

15. Newsletter and Email Marketing

I personally use **iContact**, but I have also tried **Getresponse** and **Mailchimp**, which I've used with many clients.

They are all simple to use and make it very easy to send out newsletters, design and send beautiful emails, manage your subscribers and track your campaigns' performance. They both all a metrics tracking system and you can schedule your newsletters to ensure that your subscribers don't miss anything. I also use iContact to send out surveys to make sure I'm providing my clients and prospects the right content and programs.

16. Social Media Management

Many people I know were surprised to "see me online 24/7" posting, replying to comments and sharing. I'm not online all the time!! I use a fantastic Social Media management tool: **Hootsuite**.

I've been using this tool since 2010 and it has made my life on Social Media much much easier. It's my number one most useful tool in managing my Twitter ac-

counts, my Facebook page, LinkedIn profile, and even more.

I now have a Pro account which allows me to manage multiple accounts, set up columns for keyword searches, see and track all mentions of my Twitter handle or my blog posts so that I can easily respond back to those people. It's also useful for sorting your DMs (direct messages) from your RTs (re-tweets), and creating lists of top people to follow.

It has an analytics feature that allows me to see which of my tweets are most popular. Finally I can add members of my team to be users so that they can help out when needed. You can start with a free plan and upgrade to pro when you want or need to.

17. Productivity

Dropbox is my favourite tool for synchronizing documents across multiple computers and mobile devices. And since everything's saved to the cloud, your data's safe from the hardware failures!

Their free account is great - it gives you up to 2G of space, and allows you to earn up to 6G more through referrals.

Their paid packages give 50G and 100G for \$99 or \$199 per year, respectively.

Has it ever happened to you to receive an email from a person that you vaguely remember? Maybe it's somebody who can change your business forever but you don't know. You can Google their name and see who they are or, like me, use **Rapportive**.

Rapportive is a very useful application right inside Gmail that gives you a real time report of who the person writing to you is. It shows you their name, picture, location, company, social media accounts, other basic information, and then a somewhat comprehensive Google search on their latest web hits. It even has a section for you to make your own notes about each contact. This is a definitely a must-have, especially if you do a lot of networking!

I'm one of those people whose mind is always working and get easily distracted because a fantastic idea for a new project, article, seminar or book suddenly comes to my mind. Luckily I've found **Chrometa** that now helps me become more productive and focused by showing me exactly where my time goes (individual plans start from \$12/month for one device).

It's a fantastic time management tool that "passively" records where exactly your workday and time go. At the end of each busy day, you have an accurate picture of where you spent your time, so that you can continuously improve how you allocate your valuable (and limited) time.

PS I was really depressed when I discovered how much time I used to waste....

Google Calendar, I couldn't do without it. My busy days are easily and neatly organized. I can add notes to my appointments, set up recurring events, share my calendars with my team and check my appointment directly from my smartphone and other mobile devices.

PS. Google has a fantastic and comprehensive suite of free applications that I use along with the ones described in this chapter. And the best thing about them is that they are free! Google has also a paid offering (Google Apps for Work) that allows you to do more and share work with your team to (pricing starting from \$3.30 per user/month)

18. Webinars

I think webinars are a great way to offer a lot of value in one presentation, get feedback, answer questions, build your credibility and reputation and create the right leads for your business.

If webinars are part of your offering, I recommend **MeetingBurner**. To me it is the best webinar and online meeting platform I've used and I've tried many of them. It has a clean and very user-friendly interface, very simple to set up meetings and online conferences.

You can record your meetings, send the link to the participants who can watch the replay at their leisure, and upload them on YouTube and share on social media, or download as MP3 audio files.

Are you feeling too overwhelmed by all these tools and resources? Don't worry, I'll make reference to them and their use and applications in the following chapters as we go through the various aspects of your new online business.