Creating a website that works from the start

Planning the Architecture of your website. (Get your ducks in a row before the monsoon hits)

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Start with the Basics

1- A name for your site.

Purchase your domain - find out if the name you want is available. Often it is not. There's a whole science behind choosing the name. Good luck with that.

2- A home for your site.

Purchase web hosting.

Cheaper is not the best criteria for choosing a host.

I need a website! I need a blog! I need a website with a blog and a store and social media and videos and ads... and... and... and...
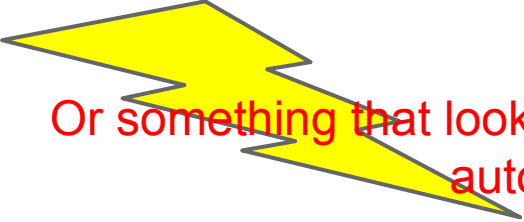
3- Choose your platform.

WordPress

duh!

Install WordPress and start posting.

Hurray! You're done.

Ummmm… not quite.

We need to choose a theme, right? right?
Everybody wants a pretty theme with pretty colors and fancy doodads and a million different sections - like the Pioneer Woman.

Or something that looks heavy metal. With flashy things and music that plays automatically when you open the page.

Or maybe a log cabin with little squirrels that rung across the screen every once in a while… and snowflakes and puppies and Dueling Banjos playing softly in the background.

NO! You are not ready for a theme yet.

Especially not any of those.

Should Your Site Be Responsive?

Probably?

Maybe.

Depends.

Probably.

Logo & Branding

Have something.

It doesn't have to be set in stone and will probably change as your site evolves.

What is the purpose of your site?

Make the decisions about the elements that will make up your site.

Pages

CATEGORIES

Photos

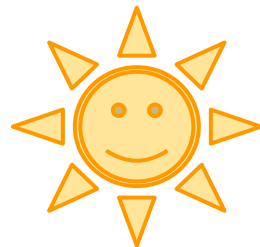Social Media

Monetizing

Promotional

Other

Content is King!

The theme you choose or have designed for your website should be a framework for your content.
Not the other way around.
Choose a theme that complements what you have to offer.

THE TAGLINE!

It's your elevator pitch.
Your chance to shine in a single line!

It's going to show up in the browser tab, so yeah, you need one.

Unless you LIKE "Just another WordPress site" defining your business.

As your designer… it's not my job to figure this out for you.

Just sayin'.

Pages

What is a page?
A page is a non-dated static element. Usually not open for comments or social interaction. Not included in the RSS feed.

How many pages should I have? As many as it takes.

About
Contact

Faq, Portfolio, Terms of Use, Categories
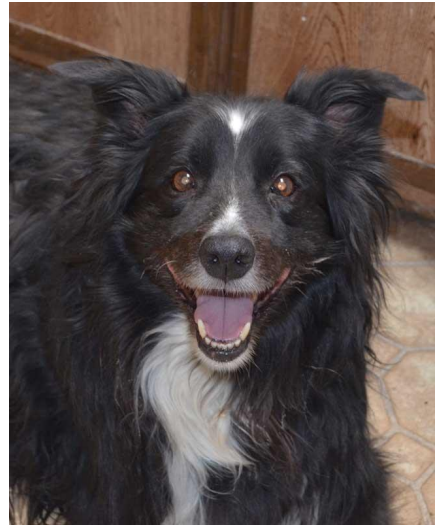
Any and all pages require copy/photos/text/the necessary info
- preferably before the site goes live.

Create some content.

Please and thank you.

About Page

Every site needs an 'About' page.

It should explain who you are and how you can help the customer or reader or whoever is looking at your site.

It doesn't have to be called 'About'. It can be whatever you want to call it, but it should be recognizable as what it is. Don't make people guess… because they won't.

Contact Page

How can I reach you to tell you how amazing/awesome/outstanding you are if there's nowhere on your site to do that?

People gonna complain too, but it's the price of fame.

A simple contact form will do the trick. *There's a plugin for that.*
Or just an email address so I can spam you with my evil spam-erator.

Businesses can add a phone number, address or even a map to your location. *There's a plugin for that too.*

*Individuals who want to include a phone number but are nervous about it - a Google number will keep your personal phone # personal.

Your Blog

Should a business site have a blog?
Yes. Maybe. Probably. It's up to you.

It's a good way to add new content which is recommended for SEO if you keep it updated.
My opinion? YES! Do I keep mine current? ummm… moving on...

CATEGORIES!

Even though it's haaaaaaard to come up with this before you've written very much, or anything at all, make some decisions about what your categories will be.

CATEGORIES 2

What the heck is a category?

It's the method by which WordPress organizes your blog posts. Each post you write and publish will be listed under a category. Even if you don't choose a category the default will be chosen for you. WordPress thinks it's that important. So does Google.

How many categories should I have?

The right amount. More than 1 and less than…??? If you give people fewer categories to click on they are more likely to click on one of them.
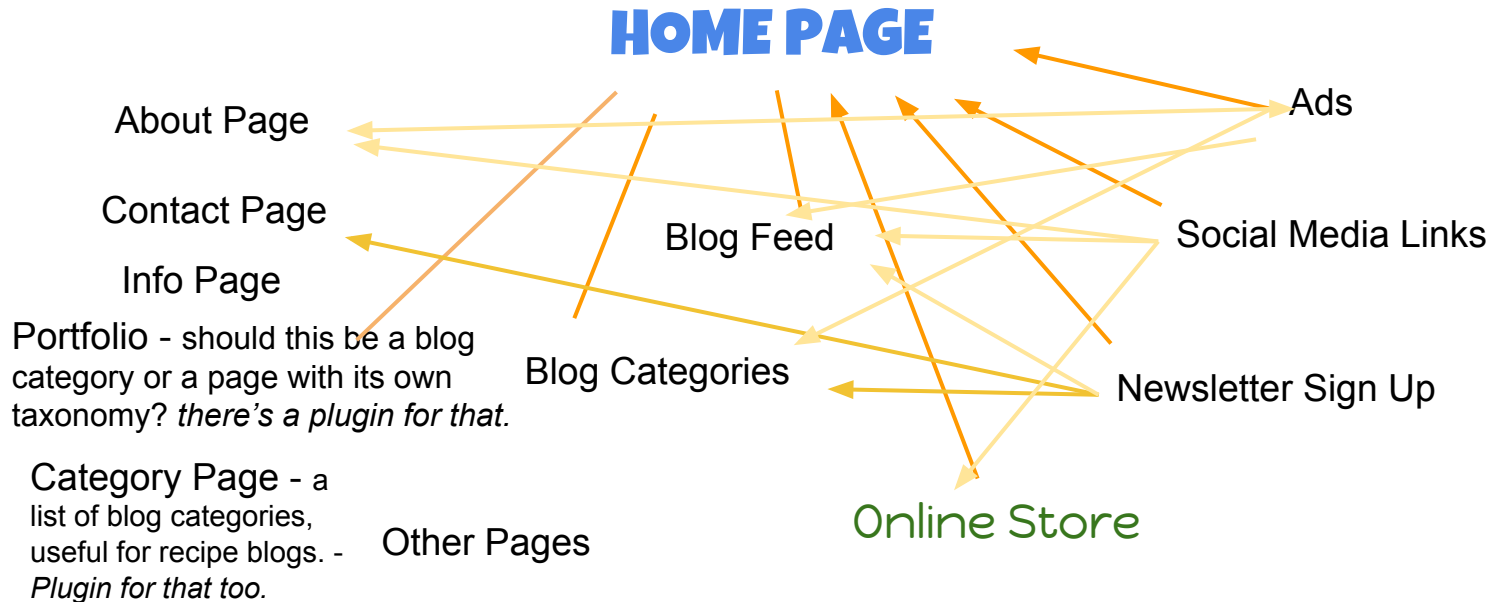Every site is different. That's why it's important to think about this ahead of time.
What do you write about?
What are some of the topics that you will address within the parameters of your blog?
You can always add a category as you go, but it's best to have a few to set up the structure from the beginning.

The Architecture

Here's where you decide how everything connects to everything else.

HOME PAGE

Ads

About Page

Contact Page

Info Page

Blog Feed

Social Media Links

Portfolio - should this be a blog category or a page with its own taxonomy? *there's a plugin for that.*

Blog Categories

Newsletter Sign Up

Category Page - a list of blog categories, useful for recipe blogs. - *Plugin for that too.*

Other Pages

Online Store

- and this is just a SIMPLE outline! ha!

Page Hierarchy and Category/Sub-Category Structure

Info Page

Best practice is no deeper than 2

details

details 2

details 3

more details

other details

Questionable

more details

other details

more details

other details
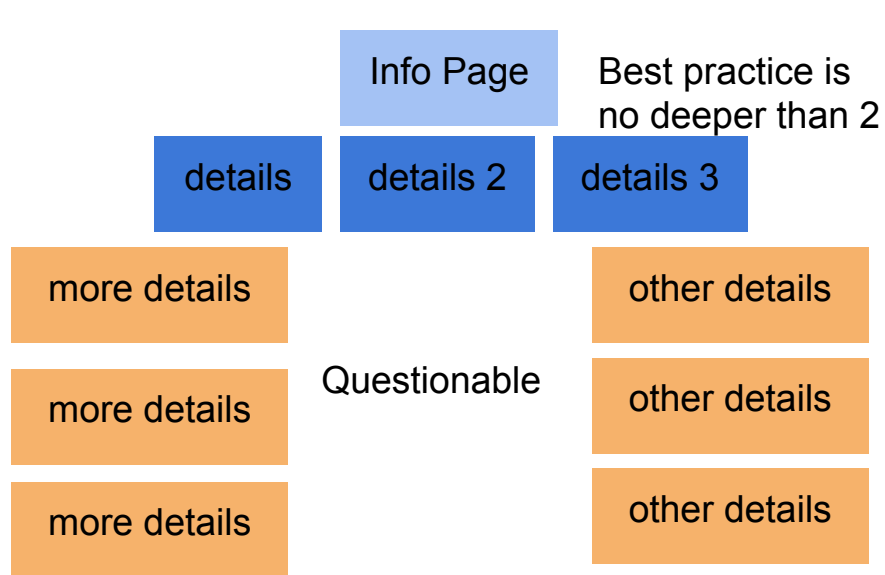
and more

This is not a great idea
and this is REALLY not a great idea
unless you have secret stuff that you are hiding from your mom.

still more

Category

Sub-Category

Sub-Category

and so on...

and so on 2...
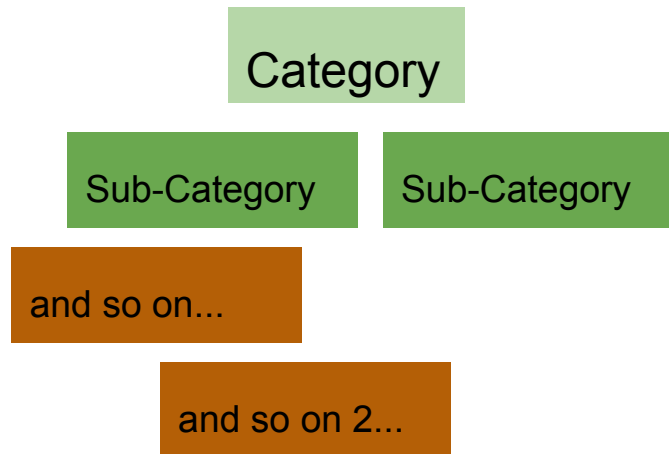
All of the Pages and Nested Pages and Categories and sub-categories can be linked in your menus.
Like so:

Zuzus	Wham-Whams	Stuff	Cool Stuff	Uber Cool Stuff
Purple Zs	Purple Ws	Purple S		Purple UCS
Pink Zs	Pink Ws	Pink S		Pink UCS
Green Zs	Green Ws	Green S		Green UCS
		Orange S		
		Tan S		
		Yellow S		

This is a way to link to pages within pages and categories and sub-categories.
Just keep it user friendly!

In the meantime...

Photos
Where will you get them?
Take them yourself?
Stock images?
~~Steal them from Google images like thieving losers do?~~

What size should the images be?
If Content is King, Consistency is Queen. Choose a size that will fit your column width and try to stay with that size.
(This may be something you have to decide after choosing a theme)

Resize Your Photos!!!!!!

DO NOT upload full sized full resolution images from your phone or your DSLR camera.

Resize and rename (SEO) your photos so your pages will load faster and the Google will love you best.

Resize after upload: *there's a plugin for that - wordpress.org/plugins/imsanity/*

Or

The better option: **resize before upload**: here's a tutorial just for you -

monkeyslovedonuts.com/preparing-your-photos-for-your-blog-using-pixlr/

Social Media

In order to link your site to your Facebook page, Twitter stream, Instagram, Pinterest, Tumblr… you have to have an account with them.
Gather all of your social media info so that you can set them up using a plugin- of which there are many.

I'm talking about the links at the top of the site that direct folks to
"Like us on Facebook"
"Follow Me on Twitter"
"Find me on Pinterest"

"Subscribe to my Rss Feed"

Use only the accounts that you keep updated.
Do as I say… not necessarily as I do… *cough… twitter… *caugh

Not seen from the front but definitely needed

Akismet

Or some kind of spam catcher/blocker because... OMG the SPAM comments!

Akismet is free for personal use. It requires that you have an account with WordPress.com.

It's a small price to pay for such a necessary and affective plugin.

Newsletter

Where's the sign-up form gonna be on your site? In the header? Sidebar? Popup? ew!
Most gurus recommend front and top for this.

In order to send a newsletter, you need an account with a newsletter sending place.

*Aweber

*MailChimp

MadMimi

Constant Contact

Each offers different solutions for different needs.

*Some are free up to a certain number of subscribers.Yay Free!

Monetizing - putting ads on your site

Do you want to make a little dough from your online endeavors without opening a store?

Yes!

Well then you need some advertisers.

Do some research to figure out who and what is going to be your best option/return for space on your page.

You probably don't need this info right away if your site is just getting started.
If it is your intent, then keep it in mind when setting up the structure of your site so that you have a place for it when you're ready. (a space above the header, in the sidebar, in the footer. Most advertisers want a spot above the fold.)

You know those sites that are all covered with blinking crazy flashy things… the video ads that start playing automatically… that make your site so slow to load that I click away before your page is loaded? Those kind?   Try to avoid that. Thanks.

Analytics

Google Analytics.
You can find out almost anything about the
traffic to your site.

StatCounter Plugin

JetPack

Online Store

If you are opening an online store - this also requires naming categories and getting photos and setting up payment gateways and shipping and a whole list of other things that need to happen before your site can launch.

There's nothing like waking up in the morning to the smell of freshly brewed coffee and seeing that money has magically appeared in your account overnight. YAY!

OK… it's not really magic. It's hard work, but it's still pretty great.

In the end...

It's not about you

Unless your blog is just for you personally and you don't care if anyone ever visits or comments or reads what you have to say...

Even though you write about your cat and your insane neighbor and all the crazy things that are going on in your life…
It's not about you.

Your site is designed and created for the people who will visit.
Always remember that. Make it easy for the reader to find their way around your site.

It needs to be pleasant for you to maintain and update… because that part IS about you. You should love your site and be proud of it.
But…
It must be functional and reader friendly and do what **I the reader** need it to do.

Thanks!

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