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— A FIELD GUIDE FROM THE DESIGNER REVIEW

The Website Clarity Kit.

A strategic guide to planning the right website before
choosing a platform, template, or designer.

For service businesses, creators, and founders building a professional
online presence in the AI era.

INTRODUCTION — WHY THIS GUIDE EXISTS

Most website problems start before the design process **ever** begins.

Building a website has never been easier. AI can generate layouts in seconds. Templates are everywhere. Website builders promise you can launch by the weekend.

But most businesses still end up with sites that feel unclear, forgettable, or disconnected from what they actually need.

Not because the platform was wrong. **Because the strategy was never clear to begin with.**

The goal of this guide is not to help you create the “perfect” website. It is to help you avoid the most common mistakes people make **before** they ever choose a builder, template, or designer.

A good website should do a few things **exceptionally well.**

- 01 Explain what you do quickly
- 02 Build trust
- 03 Guide the right people toward action
- 04 Support your business goals
- 05 Feel clear and credible online

That is what this guide is designed to help you do — **before** the screenshots, the swatches, or the sales call.

PART ONE — FUNCTION — WHAT YOUR WEBSITE ACTUALLY NEEDS TO DO

Before you think about design, think about function.

Most people start with aesthetics — colors, layouts, inspiration boards, animations, templates. But visitors are asking much simpler questions when they land on your site: **What is this? Is it for me? Can I trust them? What should I do next?** If your website answers those clearly, it is already ahead of most small business sites online.

01 Explain what you do quickly

A visitor should understand your business within a few seconds of landing on your homepage. Clear beats clever almost every time.

GOOD "Custom websites for wellness businesses."

WEAK "Elevating digital experiences through intentional storytelling."

02 Build trust

People decide very quickly whether a business feels credible online. A simple website that feels trustworthy will outperform a complicated one that feels confusing.

TESTIMONIALS

PHOTOGRAPHY

CLARITY

PROFESSIONALISM

CONSISTENCY

CASE STUDIES

REVIEWS

MESSAGING

03 Guide action

Every website should guide visitors toward a next step. If a visitor has to search for what to do next, the website is not doing its job.

- Book a call
- Submit an inquiry
- Purchase a product
- Join a list
- Visit a studio
- Request a quote

04 Support your business goals

A portfolio site, a local service business, and an online educator all need different things from their websites. Before choosing tools or layouts, ask: **"What does this business actually need the website to accomplish?"**

05 Make your business feel clear

Many websites fail because they try to communicate too much at once. Clarity creates confidence. Simple messaging almost always converts better than overly polished complexity.

PART TWO

02

Choose your website based on **business needs**, not trends.

The “best” website platform depends entirely on what your business needs. A designer portfolio, a service business, and an online store should not all use the same setup.

The next two pages walk through five questions to ask honestly before choosing a builder or hiring a designer — followed by a simple typology of the kind of website most businesses actually need.

■ 5 DECISION QUESTIONS ■ 4 WEBSITE TYPES ■ ESTIMATED READ — 6 MIN

WORKSHEET 01 — ANSWER THESE HONESTLY BEFORE CHOOSING A BUILDER OR DESIGNER

Five questions to ask **before** you build anything.

QUESTION 01 How important is visual branding to your business?

Examples: photographer, interior designer, creative studio, luxury service business. If visuals are central, design flexibility matters more.

YOUR ANSWER

QUESTION 02 Will you update the site yourself?

If yes, prioritize ease of use over maximum customization. A simpler platform you can confidently manage is usually better than a complex one you avoid touching.

YOUR ANSWER

QUESTION 03 Is search traffic important to your business?

If people will primarily find you through Google, structure and SEO setup matter more. Common cases: therapists, service businesses, local businesses, consultants.

YOUR ANSWER

QUESTION 04 Does your business need advanced functionality?

Memberships, ecommerce, bookings, gated content, advanced automations. Not every business needs a highly customized setup — be honest about what you actually use.

YOUR ANSWER

QUESTION 05 Do you need to launch quickly?

Sometimes speed matters more than perfection. A clean, simple website launched now is usually more valuable than an overbuilt one delayed for months.

YOUR ANSWER

FIELD REFERENCE — WHICH TYPE OF WEBSITE DO YOU ACTUALLY NEED?

Most businesses need **less complexity** than they think.

Simple Service Business 01 BEST FOR Consultants, therapists, photographers, local services, wellness businesses. PRIORITIES Trust · clear messaging · contact forms · mobile experience · local SEO. USUALLY DOES NOT NEED <i>Complex animations, custom development, highly advanced functionality.</i>	Creator or Personal Brand 02 BEST FOR Educators, creators, writers, influencers, coaches. PRIORITIES Content · email capture · audience trust · personal positioning · flexible content management. WATCH FOR <i>Confusing one site that does too many things — a personal brand is its own product.</i>
Portfolio Focused 03 BEST FOR Designers, artists, architects, studios. PRIORITIES Visual presentation · project organization · typography · image quality · branding consistency. WATCH FOR <i>Beautiful work buried in a homepage that never explains what you do or who hires you.</i>	SEO Focused 04 BEST FOR Local businesses, service businesses, blogs, niche publishers. PRIORITIES Content structure · search visibility · page speed · clean hierarchy · ongoing publishing. WATCH FOR <i>Visually impressive sites that bury text under scripts — search engines (and customers) need clarity.</i>

PART THREE — CONVERSION — WHAT ACTUALLY IMPACTS CONVERSION

Good websites are usually **clearer**, not more complicated.

Many businesses assume conversion comes from expensive design, flashy effects, or trendy layouts. In reality, conversion usually improves when a website becomes easier to understand, easier to trust, and easier to navigate.

01

Clear headlines

Visitors should immediately understand **what you do, who it is for**, and **why it matters** — in that order, in one breath, above the fold.

02

Strong calls to action

Every important page should guide visitors toward a next step.

[BOOK A CONSULTATION](#)[REQUEST A QUOTE](#)[START YOUR PROJECT](#)[VIEW SERVICES](#)

03

Real photography

Authentic imagery builds trust faster than generic stock photos. This does not mean everything needs to look highly produced — it simply needs to feel believable and aligned with your business.

04

Testimonials & social proof

People trust businesses more when they can see results, reviews, client experiences, and recognizable credibility markers. Specific quotes outperform generic five-star ratings every time.

05

Simplicity

A website should reduce confusion, not increase it. Too many pages, too many offers, and too many competing messages weaken clarity — and clarity is what converts.

PART FOUR — AI & YOUR WEBSITE

AI is helpful. It is not strategic.

AI can dramatically speed up website planning and content creation. But AI still depends on direction.

If your positioning is unclear, AI usually amplifies the confusion instead of solving it.

The businesses getting the best results from AI are usually the ones that already understand:

- Their audience
- Their offer
- Their goals
- Their positioning

**Use AI as support,
not replacement thinking.**

SMART WAYS TO USE AI DURING PLANNING

01 Brainstorm homepage headlines

Strongest prompts include audience, offer, tone, business goals.

02 Clarify your offer

Simplify service descriptions, customer pain points, positioning language.

03 Draft FAQ sections

FAQs build trust and improve usability. AI is best for first drafts.

04 Organize site structure

Outline pages, navigation, content categories, service breakdowns.

05 Refine existing copy

AI is often more useful for improving messaging than inventing it.

PROMPT LIBRARY — COPY, ADAPT, PASTE — 10 PROMPTS FOR WEBSITE PLANNING

Ten AI prompts that **actually** move a website project forward.

PROMPT
01 Act as a strategic website consultant. Help me clarify what my business actually needs from a website based on my business model, audience, and goals.

PROMPT
02 Help me write a clear homepage headline for a **[business type]** that immediately explains what we do and who we help.

PROMPT
03 Based on this business description, what pages should my website include and why?

PROMPT
04 Help me simplify this service description so it sounds clear, professional, and easy to understand.

PROMPT
05 What trust elements would help a potential customer feel confident hiring this business?

PROMPT
06 Help me identify the strongest call to action for my website based on my business goals.

PROMPT
07 Review this homepage copy and tell me what feels unclear, generic, or confusing.

PROMPT
08 What are the biggest mistakes small businesses make when building a website in my industry?

PROMPT
09 Based on this business description, which website platforms would likely fit best and why?

PROMPT
10 Help me create a simple website structure that feels professional without unnecessary complexity.

Tip — the more context you give about your business, audience, and tone, the better the output. AI rewards specificity.

PART FIVE — HIRING — IF YOU HIRE A DESIGNER

A good designer should improve **clarity**, not just aesthetics.

Hiring a designer can absolutely be valuable. But before investing in design work, it helps to understand what separates strategic design from surface-level visuals.

SECTION A • GREEN FLAGS

Good signs to look for.

- + They ask thoughtful questions about your business.
- + They discuss goals before visuals.
- + They simplify complexity rather than add to it.
- + They talk about usability and customer experience.
- + They care about messaging, not just aesthetics.
- + They explain their decisions clearly, in plain language.

SECTION B • RED FLAGS

Warning signs to walk from.

- ✗ They focus only on trends or visual style.
- ✗ They cannot explain why decisions matter.
- ✗ They overcomplicate simple needs.
- ✗ They avoid discussing your business goals.
- ✗ They push expensive solutions immediately.
- ✗ They prioritize aesthetics over usability.

The right designer charges for **judgement**, not just pixels.

WORKSHEET 02 — READINESS — TICK THE BOXES YOU CAN ANSWER WITH CONFIDENCE

Before launching, make sure these fundamentals are clear.

If any of these feel uncertain, that is the work to do **before** you choose a platform or hire someone to design the site.

01 Business Clarity

- ☐ I can explain what my business does clearly.
- ☐ My audience is specific.
- ☐ My main offer is obvious.
- ☐ My website has one primary goal.

03 Trust & Conversion

- ☐ I have testimonials or social proof.
- ☐ My imagery feels authentic.
- ☐ My contact information is easy to find.
- ☐ Visitors can quickly understand why they should trust me.

05 AI & Tools

- ☐ I understand what AI can help with.
- ☐ I am not relying on AI for strategy alone.
- ☐ I chose my platform based on business needs, not trends.

02 Website Structure

- ☐ I know which pages I need.
- ☐ My navigation is simple.
- ☐ My calls to action are visible.
- ☐ My mobile experience is strong.

04 Content & Messaging

- ☐ My homepage headline is clear.
- ☐ My copy sounds human and specific.
- ☐ My services are easy to understand.
- ☐ I am not trying to say too much at once.

SCORE YOURSELF

15 or more checks — you are ready to build. 10 to 14 — close, but tighten your positioning first. Under 10 — do the planning work before the platform.

DATE COMPLETED

END OF GUIDE A SHORT NOTE BEFORE YOU GO

What comes next.

The Website Clarity Kit is the first step.

The full **Website Planning System** goes deeper — page-by-page content prompts, a launch checklist, and a structured brief you can hand to any designer or AI tool.

It is in development, and comes to the list first.

CONFIRMATION

You're on the list. We'll be in touch.

THE
Designer Review

thedesignerreview.com — Design judgment for the AI era.