A Guide for Designing and Managing a Farmers Market Website

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       Food Icon Images, Farmer Profile Questionnaire, Demo Content

Part I: Essential Components of a Farmers Market Website

Each farmers market website will be unique to the region that it serves and should be designed to reflect the programs that the individual market offers, as well as the culture of the surrounding communities. Yet, there are a handful of common elements that are very likely to be common across all websites that represent these markets.

1. Home Page:

This is the essential landing page for most visitors and, unless your organization is initiating a digital marketing campaign that includes paid online advertising, this will be the first point of contact for your visitors.

2. About Page:

The "About" page for any nonprofit or community organization is the most essential page. New visitors and funders will likely visit this page learn about the farmers market, its mission, vision, values, and history. In many cases, this is also the first entry point for individuals and families looking to discover what kind of food programs (SNAP/WIC) are accessible at the market.

3. Events Page:

Farmers markets typically run a wide variety of programs and, at the very least have one day a week on which they operate. Since managing content can be challenging for small organizations, it is essential to have this page with all of the individual market days planned out for the entire season. You can always make changes to individual events if special programming is added or subtracted from a day. Having regular content on a website is important for search engines to index the site and be able to identify that your market is operating on a regular basis. This will be an essential, and in some cases the only, component of a Search Engine Optimization strategy.

4. See What's Fresh:

The name of this page could be different, but the concept is important. Depending on the region, farmers markets will have varying types of produce available throughout the market season. The Willimantic Farmers Market uses icons to represent the produce available each month throughout the year. If your market opts not to design individual produce icons, then a simple solution will be post the produce calendar available from your state's USDA website. Included with this guide is the Adobe Illustrator design file that was used to create the icons. Any individual is welcome to use and make changes to those icons to suite their markets. It is important, however, to note that this specific set of icons is representative of produce available in Connecticut throughout the year. Your state or region may need a few additional icons.

5. Farmer/Vendor Profiles:

Farmer/Vendor Profiles are highly recommended for all farmers markets, but not essential. Your farmers are vital to the identity of your market and are not always likely to have their own digital presence. You provide a service by giving them the access to profiles on your website. It also provides them the opportunity to market their produce or other goods that they offer at the market. For farmers that are more comfortable with digital technology, you can develop a way for them to build their own profiles. In Willimantic, this was the original plan, but it quickly became clear that the core group of farmers would not adjust well to managing their own profiles, so the profiles became a feature managed by the market master.

6. Contact Us:

Every website needs a simple contact page. It should include a secure contact form, phone number, and properly formatted address. As more visitors begin to access your website via mobile devices, they will expect to be able to simply tap the screen and get directions. Additionally, a properly formatted address will help search engines properly identify and promote your address when people look for your market online.
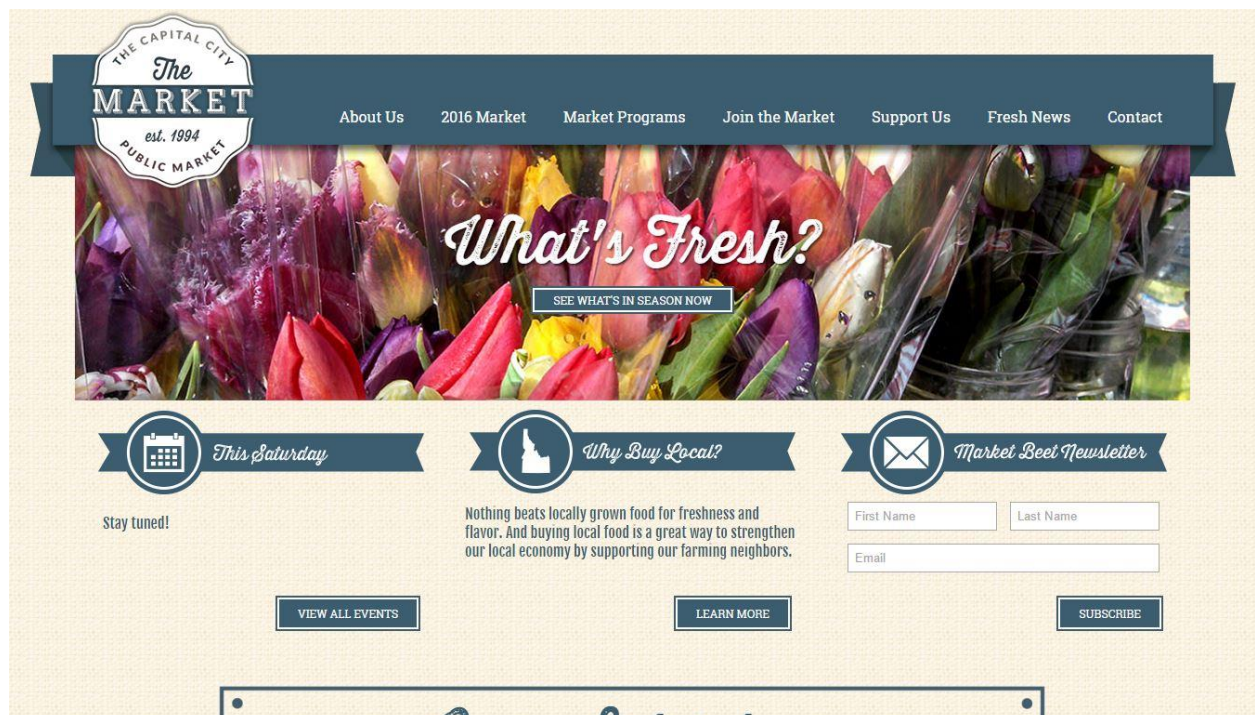
FIGURE 1:

**The Willimantic Farmers Market decided that it wanted to also include recipes from farmers and community members that used local foods. Recipes are a fantastic way for community members to share and interact with each other through your new website.

FIGURE 2:

FIGURE 3:

Part II: Your Website as an Extension of Your Market's Brand

Many professionals still believe that a website is a tool exclusively for people to find information. However, it has in fact become a place where visitors expect to interact with an organization's brand. It can, and should, be a reflection of a farmers market's identity. The content, the logos, the images, the colors, and even the fonts all have an immediate influence on you visitors and within seconds will allow them to make a judgement about your organization. Depending on how you have identified your target market and how you are implementing a strategy to attract new customers to the market through the website, you will need to make sure that your website, on every page, is an obvious extension of your brand. It is also especially important to understand how a logo is used as a component of digital identity.

Elements of an Effective Digital Identity

Having a single logo is no longer sufficient for your brand. When you work with a designer to create a logo that reflects a fresh vision for your farmers market, it is important to make sure that you receive all of the various parts that you need. Please be aware that is list is based on current (2016) trends in web development and may need to be updated periodically.

The reason that digital identities for organizations have become so complex is that the digital world has become incredibly expansive and exists across many different computers, web browsers, mobile phones, and tablets. All of them have different capabilities and internet access speeds. In addition, you will want to account for things like contrast and quality for printing. Print logos should be available in both full color and simplified in black and white. They will also need to be many times larger in both physical size (pixels) and file size (megabytes). By contrast, digital logos should all be optimized for the web, which is a specific setting designers use when creating these brand elements. It is important for you to be aware of these things and ensure that the designer you hire is aware of and capable of providing all of these things to you.

When considering a logo that will be consistent in both digital and print publications, it will be essential to keep graphic elements and color pallettes simple, and limited in number. In addition, the font in your logo should be identified by name and used where applicable throughout the website. In many cases, however, identifying an font that accents the logo text will work just as well. Typically, digital logos should be within the Red, Green, Blue (RGB) color spectrum and print should be within the Cyan, Magenta, Yellow, and Black (CMYK) spectrum. While there are numerous reasons for this, it is most important for you to know to ask for a logo version in each spectrum. RGB is optimized for computer/device screens, and CMYK is optimized for the way that printers combine ink/toner colors.

Digital logos should also be available in a variety of sizes. This means that whatever design you choose, make sure that it will maintain a proportional consistency no matter how large or small it becomes. A good logo will be easily associated with an organization's brand even when it is illegibly small. Newer devices also come with a feature called a Retina Display, which has a higher pixel density and will therefore show sharper images. In this case, "Retina-Ready Logos"

should be exactly twice the size of the regular logo that you add to your website. Some services like WordPress and Squarespace will provide a specific place to upload a retina logo.

Digital font sizes will need to vary depending on how they are used. Sans Serif fonts are typically ideal, but consulting with a designer, or your marketing team is recommended. A good WordPress theme[i] or web designer will program a range of font sizes and relationships for different headings and visual elements of the website.

Willimantic Farmers Market Digital Identity

Logo

Icon (Favicon)

Typically Very Small
(30px by 30px)

Primary Font:
Google Fonts: Oswald

Accentual Font:
Google Fonts: Open Sans

Color Palette

	#17633f		#e8eab9		#020202
	R: 23		R: 232		R: 2
	G: 99		G: 234		G: 2
	B: 63		B: 185		B: 2

Color Pallet: What you're seeing in the color palette are a numbers that represent each color in computer code. The six character number is called a hex code[ii]. It is the simplest way to represent the colors of your brand in a digital environment, like your website. The RGB[iii] numbers are another way to represent your brand colors. RGB was previously mentioned.

Part III: Finding the Right Web Designer

There are some standard skills that a good web designer should have. While the list could potentially be very long, here are a few key concepts that he/she should be able to discuss and implement when working with you.

- **Responsive[iv] Web Design:** Responsive web design has two key components. The first is that your website will resize to look and function in a similar way no matter what device (computer, phone, tablet) your visitors use to access it. This can be tricky, and an inexperienced designer may tell you that it isn't particularly important or may neglect vital details that ensure your website functions the same for all visitors. In addition, responsive websites have an order of operations to them that stacks up visual components in a specific order when your website's content is resized for smaller screens. Your designer should emphasize the importance of responsive design and be able to implement it as a key concept. Responsive websites are already being prioritized by Google in search listings, and will eventually become a requirement for any entity with a web presence. Responsive is also different
- **Search Engine Optimization[v] (SEO):** SEO is another concept that can be a challenge for some individuals to understand and implement. However, if your designer does not understand how to implement the basic principles of SEO, then your will likely need to find additional assistance to ensure that your market will have a presence in search engines. If your local community members are unable to find your farmers market within a few clicks, you risk losing them permanently to competing markets that have a better search ranking. SEO is also about more than just Google, as some people still use Yahoo or Bing to search the internet. All search engines index (rank) websites in a different way. Google, for example, uses automated programs call "Spiders" that crawl you website looking for keywords and making notes. If you are set up appropriately for SEO, it will be easier for the spiders to navigate your content and take the right notes to ensure that you show up in search results.
- **Security:** For any organization or individual operating on the internet, security should be a primary concern. If your designer does not emphasize strong passwords and implement as many security measures as possible on your website, then it will be important to bring that up with him/her. Additional security features in WordPress include Captcha[vi] features on all forms and plugins[vii] like Wordfence or iThemes Security, which regularly scan for website risks and vulnerabilities. In addition, if you decide to accept payments or donations through your website, he/she should have at least a basic understanding of PCI Compliance[viii] and how to protect your donors from identity theft. No designer can guarantee 100% protection against hackers, but he/she should be capable of protecting you as much as possible.
- **Platform[ix] Knowledge:** Depending on your needs, your designer should be able to make recommendations for the right platform to fit your needs. A platform is an environment in which your website will be built. Within which, there will be all of the accoutrements that you'd expect a website to have. Platforms might include

WordPress, Squarespace, Nation Builder, Wix, Drupal, Joomla, or even more. You designer should have a body of work use the platform that he/she recommends using, but should also be able to listen to your needs and ascertain your capacity to manage a website and make a determination based on what you actually need, not just what he/she is comfortable building for you.

He/she should also be able to listen, visualize, and adapt to the feedback that your organization provides when discussing its needs for a website. For example, if you only need a simple website that provides information to visitors, then your designer shouldn't be recommending a complex website with a lot of moving parts. On the other hand, if you would like to host recipes and farmer profiles, like the Willimantic Farmers Market, or even take the concept further and offer it as a mini-social network for the farmers, then the project begins to get more complex and will require more extensive web development.

If your farmers market is small, you may attempt to go with the most affordable option possible. In some cases, this may be the only option. However, it is important to note that while some individuals may claim the ability to build a website, they may also lack an important understanding of design principles and a general understanding of how contemporary websites should work. A lack of understanding of these concepts will inevitably cause trouble down the road, as your website will not hold muster to rank in search engines and people may not be able to find or access your website when using mobile devices. It doesn't always have to be pretty, but it does have to work.

Part IV: Options for Designing & Managing a Website

You will probably come across a myriad of options and recommendations for building a website. Wading through and understanding all of the information you find might be stressful for you. The most important concept to understand before navigating the world of website building options is the Content Management System (CMS). A CMS is designed to make it easy for you to organize and manage your websites pages, blog posts, images, videos, and other types of content that you want to make available on your website. To make the rest of your research a little easier to conceptualize, here are a few basic options you will find and a note about their biggest pros and cons.

WordPress: WordPress is an open source[x] (see glossary) CMS, which means that you have a massive community of support behind it. The underlying software is free to install and there are a wide range of free plugins and themes to use. There are also paid versions that come with technical support. PROS: You have a nearly limitless potential for customization and interactive features, at a low/no cost to you. After you adjust to it, the system is very easy to use. CONS: It requires a little more maintenance and set up can be a challenge for non-curious or non-technical people.

Squarespace: This is a CMS that you pay a single monthly fee to use and that is it. It allows you to choose a theme, build a website, and update it all from a few easy-to-navigate pages. It is run by a company rather than a community, which has the benefit of being stable and

consistent. **PROS:** You do not need set up an account with a host[xi] or install any software. Everything you need to manage a website is in one place and you can call for customer support. **CONS:** You are VERY limited in the ability to customize and extend the functionality of your website. A website that needs anything beyond basic functionality (About page, Contact page, Blog, etc) will not work well on Squarespace.

Other Options to Consider: WIX, Drupal, and Joomla are all additional options that you may hear about or consider, however, they have significant cons that do not make them ideal.

- WIX is as affordable and easy to setup as Squarespace, however, its website templates are not fully responsive, which is a significant problem for those who do not plan to make significant changes to the website in the near future.
- Drupal and Joomla are open source projects like WordPress, but they do not have communities as large as WordPress, and therefore can be limited in their extendibility. They also require significantly more technical expertise to manage than WordPress.

NOTE: The author of this report has no financial stake in promoting or demoting a for-profit entity in this report. Please do not consider the inclusion of any of these options to be anything other than an analysis and recommendations of the best options for a farmers market.

Part V: Setting Up a WordPress Website

Setting up a WordPress website has never been easier. At every stage in the process, you have technical support teams, extensive documentation[xii], and community support forums that address specific problems you may be encountering. If you want a customized website, WordPress is the simplest and most comprehensive tool to help you accomplish that goal. Below are the basic steps. For all other references you should refer to the WordPress Codex, an encyclopedia of information on all things WordPress related.

1. Pick your domain name[xiii] and a web hosting service
2. Choose and install a WordPress Theme
3. Choose and install the necessary WordPress Plugins
4. Customize your theme
5. Add your pages and other content

While those steps may seem simple, there are multiple aspects to each and you will need to do your homework ahead of time, in order to begin.

Before you Begin

Before doing any work setting up your website, you should begin by looking at other farmers market websites to see what you like and don't like. In addition, you should have a logo prepared, and your brand colors prepared ahead of time. You should also have the content for each page prepared – primarily text and images – as well as a general understanding of how you want to lay out the content (you can use a hand drawing or a digital wireframe)[xiv].

You can also find helpful information here: https://codex.wordpress.org/First_Steps_With_WordPress.

1. Pick Your Domain Name and Web Host

We recommend choosing a managed WordPress hosting service. Here are three that we know are very good. Prices may vary, but in most cases, a farmers market will do very well with a basic pricing tier. If your market is in a large metropolitan area, you should consider upgrading your plan to accommodate heavy website traffic.

- SiteGround WordPress Hosting – $9.95/month for the Startup Plan
  - Free Domain Name with Purchase
  - $3.95/month if you purchase 12 months at once
- GoDaddy Managed Wordpress – $7.99/month for Basic Plan
  - Free Domain Name with Purchase
  - $4.99/month if you purchase 12 months at once
- WP Engine – $29.00/month
  - Best WordPress hosting service available for complex websites
  - Recommended for advanced/very high traffic website

If you choose a managed WordPress hosting service, then the WordPress software will already be installed for you. If you have a host that you are familiar with and would like to use that service, then you should look for a "one-click" installation. If you have not done this before, you can contact your hosting company and have them help. Here is what the "one-click" installation button might look like.
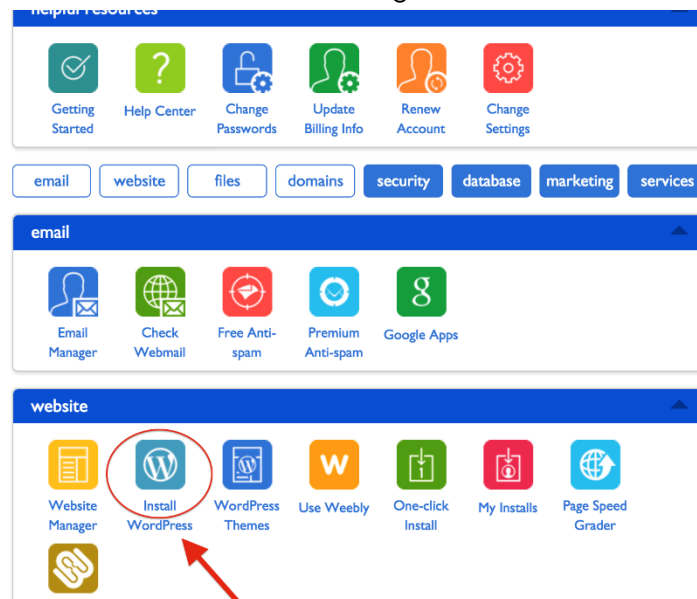
2. Choose and Install a WordPress Theme

There are two safe places to find themes that will come equipped with the features you need to make an excellent website.

- WordPress.org ›› Themes
  - An extensive library of free themes

- It is important to note that the free themes can be great, but you should do you research to make sure that they have enough features for you
- Never download a free theme from a website other than WordPress.org
  - ThemeForest.net
    - An extensive library of user-reviewed themes for sale
    - Be careful purchasing WordPress themes from websites that are not peer-reviewed. ThemeForest.net has a reputation for being safe and secure.
    - The Willimantic Farmers Market purchase the Avada theme from this marketplace

Note: Be sure to only choose a theme that clearly states that it is "Responsive."

After you have chosen a theme you can follow these steps (from WordPress) to install it on your WordPress website. https://codex.wordpress.org/Using_Themes

3. Choose and Install WordPress Plugins

Plugins extend the functionality of your website. If you choose a free theme, you may need to install many plugins to make your website as customized as you would with a paid theme. Some paid plugins have a good reputation and can be purchased through developer websites. We recommend doing extensive homework first.

Only download free plugins from this website: https://wordpress.org/plugins/, as there is no guarantee that you will be downloading safe files. There are currently **44,331** plugins that have been downloaded over 1.2 Billion times. That can be a lot to sift through, so below you will find helpful hints on how to choose a good plugin, and a list of some very good plugins that every website could find useful. For most users, you do not need to download and upload plugins anymore. It can all be done from within your website. However, you should recognize the elements of a good plugin.

Anatomy of a Plugin Page

1. Menu: Each of the items in this menu is helpful for answering any questions you have about what a plugin does or how to use it.
2. This section is essential for identifying a good plugin.
    a. Requires: The version of WordPress you need to have in order to use it
    b. Compatible up to: The version of WordPress it has most recently been tested with. You want that number to be the current version of WordPress.
    c. Last Updated: Most plugins in this repository are maintained by volunteers and don't get frequently updated. If you see that one hasn't been updated in 6 months or more, it probably isn't safe to use. Out-of-date plugins are a security risk to your website.
    d. Active Installs: the number of people currently using the plugin. A higher number is usually a good sign.
3. Rating: The community will often rate a plugin. The more stars the better. Sometimes you will see a high number of installs with a poor rating. Avoid those plugins.

Note: For a list of helpful plugins, go to the Plugins Section of this Guide.

4. Customize Your Theme

When you are ready to begin customizing your theme – i.e. adding a logo, changing colors – then there are two possible place you will go. You will either go to the Sidebar Menu ›› Appearance ›› Customize section or you will find your theme's options panel. If you theme has an options panel, then you should follow the instructions that came with the theme. It will most likely be located in the Sidebar Menu ›› Appearance ›› Theme Options

If you don't purchase a theme, there is a good chance that you will be using the Customize option. Here is the best place to find information about how that works and what it looks like: https://codex.wordpress.org/Appearance_Customize_Screen.

5. Add Your Pages and Other Content

Most of the content for your farmers market website will be added as pages to your website. You can also add blog posts and will want to set up menus. The process for doing this is the same for all WordPress websites and is explained in detail in the WordPress Codex, linked in the next section. The most important thing to keep in mind is that you have prepared your content ahead of time and have at least drawn a visual layout on paper. Then you can add the content according to how your specific theme is set up.

As the process for adding content will vary slightly depending on your theme it is more important to understand what each aspect of WordPress is called, and then you can just type it into the WordPress Codex and get the help you need. If you have a paid theme, you can also contact those people for help. If you have a web designer, then you don't have to worry.

Part VI: Basic Components of WordPress

WordPress is designed to have only a few major component to keep it simple enough for anyone to learn, and to make sure that users and developers are all speaking the same language. Below are the essential components that you will need to know in order to set up and manage a website in WordPress. Rather than use this guide to explain each part in detail, you can choose which aspects you'd like to explore by visiting the WordPress.org website to learn more.

- Themes:
    - Learn: https://codex.wordpress.org/Using_Themes
    - Find: https://wordpress.org/themes/
- Plugins:
    - Learn: https://codex.wordpress.org/Plugins
    - Find: https://wordpress.org/plugins/
- Dashboard:
    - Learn: https://codex.wordpress.org/Dashboard_Screen
- Pages:
    - Learn: https://codex.wordpress.org/Pages
- Posts:
    - Learn: https://codex.wordpress.org/Writing_Posts
- Media:
    - Learn: https://codex.wordpress.org/Media_Library_Screen
- Appearance ›› Menus:
    - Learn: https://codex.wordpress.org/Appearance_Menus_Screen
    - Learn: https://codex.wordpress.org/WordPress_Menu_User_Guide
- Appearance ›› Widgets:
    - Learn: https://codex.wordpress.org/Appearance_Widgets_Screen
- Appearance ›› Themes:
    - Learn: https://codex.wordpress.org/Appearance_Themes_Screen
- Appearance ›› Header
    - Learn: https://codex.wordpress.org/Appearance_Header_Screen
- Settings:
    - Learn: https://codex.wordpress.org/Settings_General_Screen

Helpful Plugins

This is not intended to be a comprehensive list of WordPress plugins. This list has just been very helpful to the Willimantic Farmers Market. For a comprehensive listing with reviews, use your favorite search engine and the keywords "Best WordPress Plugins," followed by the current year. These are all free plugins. For paid plugins, we recommend doing your homework first.

Contact Form 7

Purpose: Add contact forms and other data collection fields to your website

Find It: https://wordpress.org/plugins/contact-form-7/

Ease of Use: Easy

Captcha by BestWebSoft

Purpose: Limit spam login attempts to your website

Find It: https://wordpress.org/plugins/captcha/

Ease of Use: Easy

Google Analytics Dashboard for WP

Purpose: Add Google Analytics to track your website traffic

Find It: https://en-ca.wordpress.org/plugins/google-analytics-dashboard-for-wp/

Ease of Use: Easy

Google Language Translator

Purpose: Add language translation to your website

Find It: https://wordpress.org/plugins/google-language-translator/

Ease of Use: Moderate

Mailchimp for WP

Purpose: Add a MailChimp sign up form to your website for seamless integration

Find It: https://wordpress.org/plugins/mailchimp-for-wp/

Ease of Use: Easy

Really Simple Captcha

Purpose: Add a Captcha element to your contact forms for security

Find It: https://wordpress.org/plugins/really-simple-captcha/

Ease of Use: Moderate

The Events Calendar

Purpose: Add events management to your website

Find It: https://wordpress.org/plugins/the-events-calendar/

Ease of Use: Moderate

W3 Total Cache

Purpose: Make your website faster which has a lot of benefits

Find It: https://wordpress.org/plugins/w3-total-cache/

Ease of Use: Difficult

Wordfence

Purpose: Keep your website secure

Find It: https://wordpress.org/plugins/wordfence/

Ease of Use: Easy

Yoast SEO

Purpose: Optimize your website for search engine placement

Find It: https://wordpress.org/plugins/wordpress-seo/

Ease of Use: Moderate

Part VII: Project Budget and Basic Setup Costs

Project budget for website development can vary widely. Here is an estimate for building a WordPress website.

Startup costs:

Domain Name & Web Hosting for One Year: $50 to $100

Purchasing a Paid WordPress Theme: $65

Having a Logo Designed: $200 to $400

Estimated Startup Cost: $315 to $565

Hiring a WordPress developer can range from $50 to $100 per hour depending on their skill level and work volume. Going for the cheapest designer is not always the best approach as it can be very common that amateur WordPress developers will charge $50 per hour because they can and will complete a project without important elements of a good website.

Part VIII: Endnotes: Glossary of Terms

[i] **Theme:** The basic design framework for your WordPress website, containing many of the essential features you need to design an attractive and effective website.

[ii] **Hex Code:** A six digit alphanumeric code that represents colors in computer code.

[iii] **RGB:** Stands for Red–Green–Blue and represents the colors as a combination of numbers that display on computer screens.

[iv] **Responsive:** Refers to the ability of a website and its content to adapt to different screen sizes without dramatically changing how the content is displayed.

[v] **SEO:** Stands for Search Engine Optimization and refers to the practice of making a website's content easily found on search engines.

[vi] **Captcha:** An alphanumeric code that must be entered before a user submits a form. It protects your website from spam.

[vii] **Plugin:** An add–on feature that is easily installed on a WordPress website to extend its functionality.

[viii] **PCI Compliance:** Refers to a set of standards designed by credit card companies to protect the identities of their customers who are submitting information for online payment.

[ix] **Platform:** A digital service that facilitates the creation of a community of users and acts as a central point upon which individuals can build websites and computer programmers can develop additional features to improve the functionality of the platform as a whole.

[x] **Open Source:** Computer code that is publicly available, at its core, and supported by a community of software developers.

[xi] **Host:** A company that stores your website on its servers and makes sure that visitors to your website are able to access your content.

[xii] **Documentation:** Instructions for how to use elements of a WordPress theme or plugin.

[xiii] **Domain:** The reference point given to your website's location on the internet.

[xiv] **Wireframe:** A line–drawn layout for the content and menu items of your website, similar to an architectural blueprint.