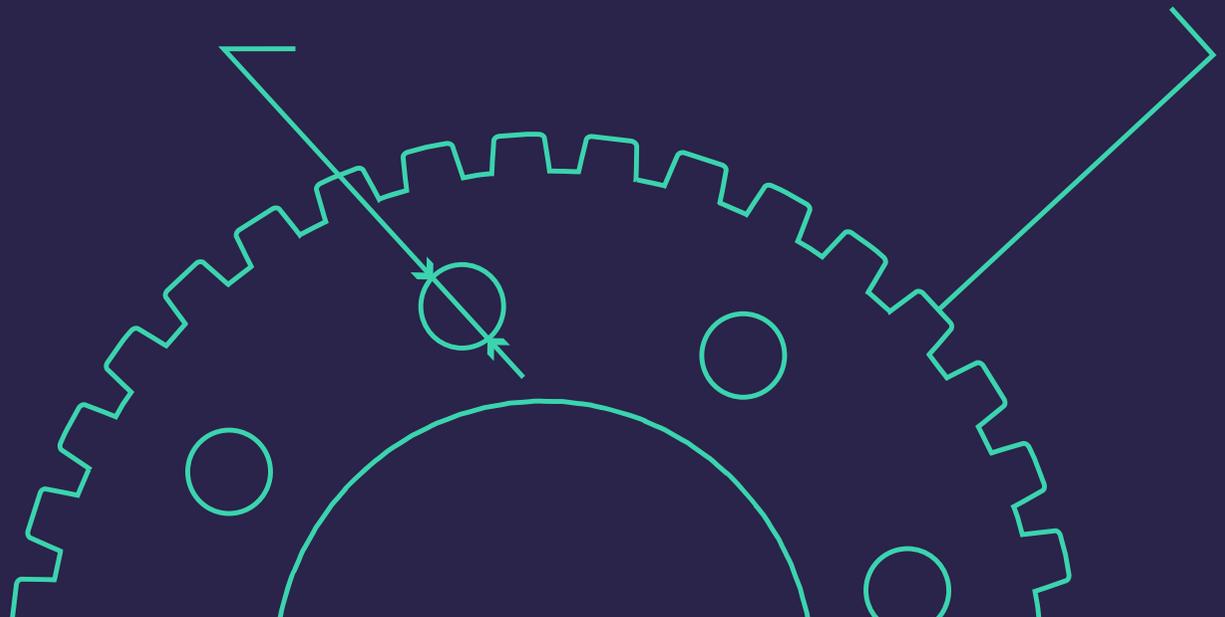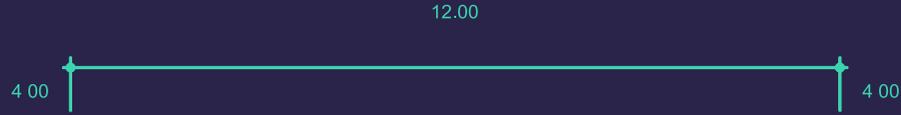# Building a website

Know what's important

# It starts with quality foundations

As any builder will tell you, creating a great structure starts with quality foundations. You begin with a solid base, followed by a strong framing system and then finally you add the external elements that make it look good. Creating a quality website is not that much different. The result you see is really only a small part of the total effort. But when the foundations are good, it's easy to extend and make improvements later on. With a multitude of tools available for building websites these days, it's hard to know what's the best approach. That's why we've put together this handy 12 step guide that walks you through the process from start to finish. It covers all the basics for getting it right.

# Get a domain name

# Set up your business email

A domain name is often the first step when creating a website. It is your digital address that people will use to connect to your website. For example, the domain name for this website is www.neoncollective.one  If you're ready to register a domain name, some popular and affordable international domain name providers are GoDaddy or 1&1 Ionos. And if you're looking for a cheap .com.au provider then Crazy Domains is a good option – just keep in mind that you'll need a valid ABN to register your .com.au address. Domains usually cost between $10 – $30 per year, so it's worth shopping around to get a good price. You can easily check if the name you want is available and how much it will cost at each website.

Having your email set up to match your website address is an important part of presenting your business professionally. Having a gmail address simply doesn't cut it. Luckily, connecting your email to your domain is really cheap and easy to do. Once you've got your domain name, you can use it to create a business email like steve@123company.com. From just $5 a month, you can set up a Google G Suite email account that will provide you with reliable email. Plus you'll be able to add additional emails as you need them in the future.
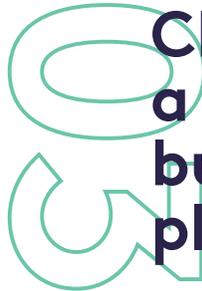
## Choose a web building platform

There are dozens of popular platforms available for building a website. WordPress. SquareSpace. Webflow. Silverstripe. The list goes on and on. They all have strengths and weaknesses. The secret is in choosing one that allows you to achieve what you want now, with the flexibility to add what you need later. And you should be able to do all this cost effectively. As a general rule, the more popular the platform, the more supported it will be in terms of tools and services you can add in the future. If you're a small business with basic needs, then WordPress offers a good all round platform that balances functionality and affordability.

## Select a hosting provider

For people to see your website, it will need to be placed on a server connected to the Internet. Your domain name will point to this server. Companies that specalise in providing these types of web servers are called hosting providers. As a general rule, the less you pay for hosting, the more unreliable your service is likely to be. In short, you get what you pay for. Decent business hosting packages start at around $20 a month.  To ensure your site downloads quickly make sure your provider hosts your site on SSD drives. These are the fastest drives available.  Some reliable Australian based hosting providers include Panthur and Digital Pacific. Also, keep in mind that your domain name provider and your web host do not need to be the same company.

## Tell your brand story

When some people hear the word 'brand', they immediately think of a logo design or a slogan. Yes these things are a part of a good brand, but they are just a small part it. Your colours, your language, your imagery - all these things help to communicate your brand story. What's more, every great brand has a clear purpose. If you can't describe your purpose in a single sentence, then you haven't done enough work to define what your brand stands for. Once you know exactly what you stand for, it's much easier to express how you're going to communicate it via your website.

# Imagery that's web ready
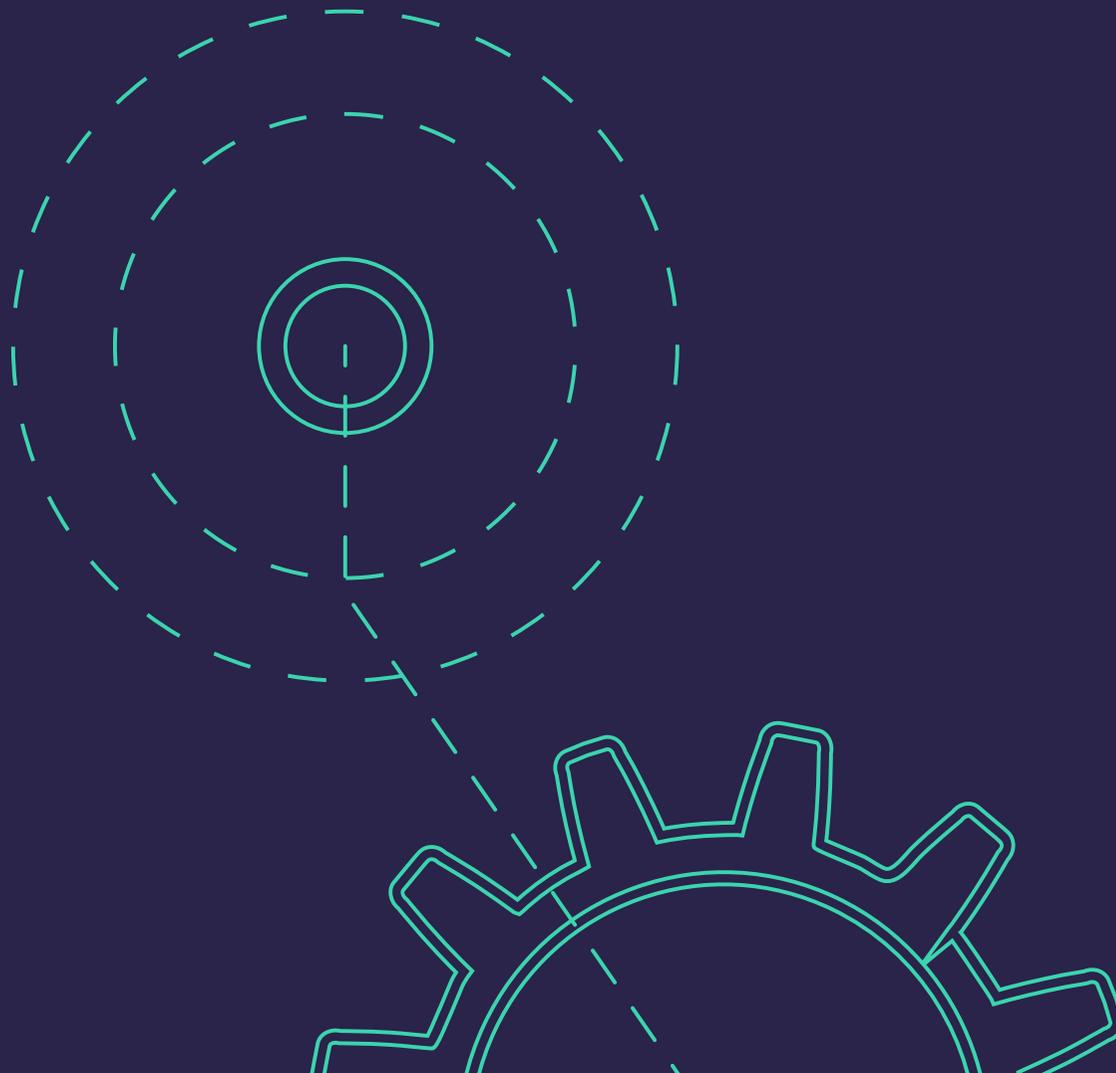
To create a professional looking website, you'll probably need to add photography and iconography. Hiring a photographer or a designer to create these from scratch can be an expensive process. Another option worth considering is to source these from royalty free websites. These sites offer extensive libraries of images that you can use for free. Some good ones include Stocksy and Unsplash. Using these sites can save you a small fortune. Of course, there may be times when hiring a photographer makes perfect sense. For example, if you need staff photos, then hiring a photographer is going to be the only way to get a great result.

# Search engine optimisation

Search Engine Optimisation or SEO as its often referred to, is the process of setting up your website so it ranks as high as possible within search engine results. Because sites like Google are constantly changing the rules on how they rank websites, then you will need to make regular updates. A great way to establish how much SEO work your site requires is to run an automated tool that gives your site a ranking. These tools will give you advice on what changes you need to make. Some of the popular SEO ranking tools include woorank.com and seoptimer.com. And best of all, these tools are free.
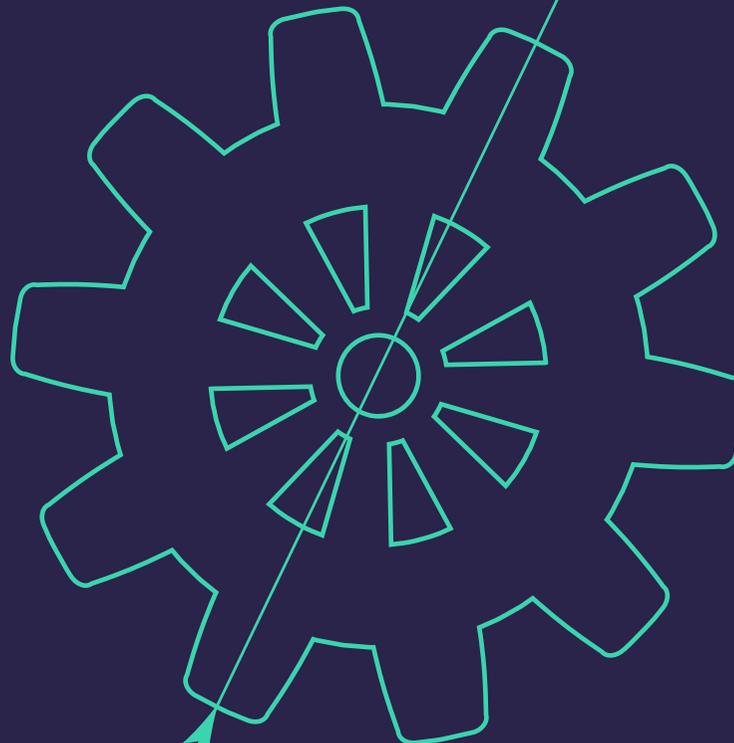
# Speaking to your audience

Once you have your website up and running, you'll need to drive traffic to it. Do not assume that thousands of customers will coming flooding in without having to do anything. This is simply not going to happen. There are literally thousands of sites out there just like yours. And that's a lot of competition. For this reason, consider advertising or other promotional activity that can bring in a steady stream of traffic. Google Adwords is a fantastic place to start. These are small text ads that appear at the top of Google's search results. Because they relate to the topics that people are search for, they can often deliver good performance. Another good option is to run ads on popular social media sites. These ads can match to people who have expressed an interest in something related to your field of business.

The great thing about these advertising services is that you can start really small. You only need to invest a few hundred dollars to begin testing a few ads. And you can refine them as you go. Once you hit on a winning ad formula, you can then boost your spend to amplify the results.

# Google analytics

Google Analytics is a free service that provides statistics about the type and volume of visitors that land on your site. To run Google Analytics, you'll need to register an account with them. They'll then provide you with a small piece of code that you embed in your website. This will track all visitor activity and give you a daily snapshot of how your site is performing. Google Analytics is an essential tool because it allows you to measure the performance of your marketing efforts. For example, if you post an article on Facebook, you can track the exact number of visitors who arrive at your site after reading that post. Over time, Google Analytics will tell you which marketing initiatives are providing good value and which are not performing. If you're not sure how to set up Google Analytics on your website, Neon Collective can assist you.

# Social media

# Security

# Ongoing improvements

Social media now represents an important marketing tool for most businesses. Services like Facebook, Instagram, Linkedin and Pinterest all provide unique opportunities to grow your exposure and drive new business. While posting on social media is free, creating high quality content can be time consuming. So before trying to promote yourself across every social media site, give some thought as to where your target customers are spending their time. If you're an Interior Designer, then visual sites like Pinterest and Instagram will deliver maximum value - so focus your efforts there. If you're a Business Consultant, then LinkedIn is likely to give you more bang for your buck. Be wise with your time and effort. And if funds permit, consider hiring a social media expert to get you on the right path.

Security is an important part of maintaining a website. You want your customers data to be safe and your own business information to remain private. Make sure that your running the latest version of your site's software to prevent the chances of your site being hacked. Another good tip is to avoid publishing your email on your website. If you do, you're likely to end up getting heaps of spam email. A  smarter option is to add a contact form that's connected to your email. This will make it harder for people to email you unnecessarily. Also, make sure you're web host provides your site with an SSL certificate. These cost around $40 a year. It will tell your site visitors that your website is safe and can be trusted.

One of the key drivers of your website's search ranking will be the amount of fresh content you bring to your web pages. For this reason, you want to add new and engaging content as often as possible. Many businesses use blogs or video updates to maintain the interest of their customers. This type of content is fantastic. But you don't have to do anything over the top. Simply updating your site with regular special offers is a fantastic way to keep customers coming back. The secret is being consistent. While you're doing this, have a long-term plan in place for the evolution of your site. Set some goals for developing new tools and features and work toward implementing them. This will keep your website fresh and functional.

# Making it all come together

Neon Collective is a Melbourne consultancy focused on creating high impact brand & digital communications. We love helping our clients succeed.

Need help with a website? Want your brand to come to life? Want help with brand strategy? We work with our clients to bring their brands to life.

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