

# On the Upgrade

*Consider website technology before web design*

**WHAT COMES FIRST, THE WEBSITE** technology or the website design? This is a question many business owners are contemplating right now, as they upgrade websites to meet the consumer and technology demands of 2018. In most cases, website developers bring a technology to you, and suggest that it is the perfect technology to solve your website needs. Unfortunately, this is a backward approach. You must always clarify strategy, goals, and vision before selecting a website technology.

Of course, some performance and content elements absolutely must be present

as a minimum standard necessary to compete. New in 2018 is the requirement that all websites be designed “mobile first,” which means designed for use on mobile devices as the primary focus. This is not the same as “mobile-friendly.” Mobile first is a complete change in design thought-process, which makes desktop design secondary to mobile.

Other requirements include:

- Maximum three-second load time per page
- Simple, flexible navigation options
- Up-to-date privacy and GDPR pay programs, policies, and visitor notifications

- The ability to easily add new content (articles, images, video, etc.) on a near-constant basis

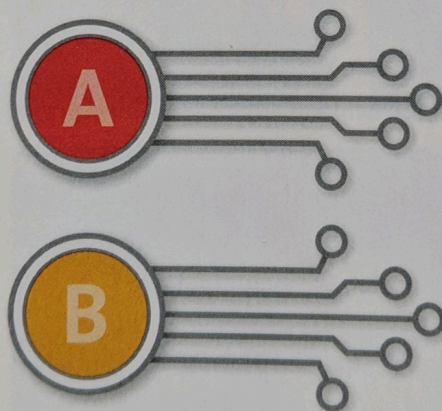
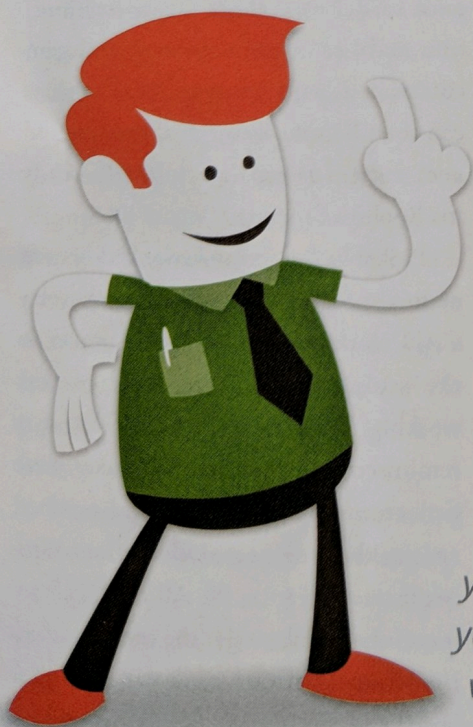
- The ability to easily update the database, code, and “template” or “skin” of the website to readily respond to advances in technology and security

No matter which technology you choose, all the feature and performance requirements mentioned above must be present. Knowing that won’t help you choose a new technology, but it can help you eliminate some.

## IDENTIFYING WEBSITE NEEDS

So how should a new website design process be managed? By starting with the purpose, goals, and objectives of the website. Let’s look at a few examples, and how that relates to technology choices.

- Julie is a jewelry designer who is doing pure internet sales. She has a very large product line, and the price points range from very accessible (less than \$100) to pricey. Her website goals are sales and marketing. Her main focus is to offer an online store, which she will promote using paid advertising and SEO (search engine optimization), organic SEO, and social media. She doesn’t want to write a blog, and that’s okay for her because she adds new products every week. Why does this matter? Because adding new products every week fulfills the online competitive requirement for new content. As



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long as she's creating exciting new copy for each product that leads to new SEO links and new reasons to share, she's accomplishing the same goal as a blog. She wants to know if Shopify is a good platform for her...and it is! Shopify was designed to fulfill the needs of an e-commerce-first business.

- Michael is a retail jewelry store-owner. He is just getting his products online, and most of them are in the price range of \$1,200-\$4,800. These aren't great price points for online sales, but he still needs to get them online. Why? Because the way to get foot traffic in a retail store today is to give consumers the information they need to browse and shop online—then bring them into the store to buy. So e-commerce is not Michael's focus, though sharing his entire catalog of products (and selling them online when customers want to buy that way) is.

Michael's website needs to do many other things besides sell products. The website must engage consumers in the custom design process, allow consumers to book online for custom design appointments, and make his store come alive to virtual shoppers. Michael plans to run constant online promotions and events to drive traffic to the store. He also must integrate his website with his Edge software and customer relationship management software for marketing and sales management. He also needs a content management system (CMS). Software systems such as Wordpress, Joomla, or Drupal will be the solution for him.


The cost of ownership must also be considered because the more sophisti-

cated the technology, the higher your long-term cost of ownership. Systems such as Shopify have a clear month-to-month fee plus a percentage they take on sales. You should assume those fees will go up over time. Open-source CMS technologies give their software for free, but you will pay a development partner to set up and manage them unless you have those skills yourself or in-house. To choose the right technology, you must have a clear idea what you want your website to do, and what that website performance will be worth to you.

After you clarify what you want your website to do, compare the various technologies to your expectations for perfor-

mance, cost of ownership, ease of use, and commitment to long-term development. This may seem daunting, but it's really no more challenging than buying a car or a house—you don't need to know how to build them, you just need to know the right questions to ask.

So why don't most website firms approach website design from this direction? In most cases, it's because they have mastered and specialize in a specific technology solution. It takes time and effort to master each technology, so it's not surprising that most companies focus on just one. But focusing on one technology is their strategy—it doesn't have to be yours. ♦




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