

WEBSITE BASICS FOR RACING BUSINESSES

DESIGNING, building and maintaining your own company website is easier than ever these days. With many useful tools on the market, you no longer have to be a Silicon Valley computer programmer to achieve a very attractive site.

If do-it-yourself website work sounds unappealing, there are several businesses that will expertly design, build and maintain your company's site for you—and a colossal bank account certainly isn't necessary to get it done.

Yet, even with a wide selection of simple, inexpensive options, many racing businesses still don't have a company website. In our annual Racing Business Survey that appeared in the January 2015 issue of *Performance Racing Industry*, just over half of all respondents claimed to have one. While most of these PRI readers said they use some form of online social media to help promote their businesses, curiously, the company website remains

an untapped—or at best, underutilized—platform for many across the industry.

"In today's world, any business without a website is rapidly losing its battle with its competition," said John Herbkersman of Jacksonville, Florida-based Web.com. "Not having a website can be compared to not having a phone—limiting your business's ability to reach out to your customers."

Herbkersman told us that building and maintaining a website depends on how much time you have to spend on it and what you want the website to do for the business. "Like anything else, the more knowledge you have and the more time you spend using your website to engage with your audience, the more success you should have," he said, adding that fees for maintaining a website range from \$20 to \$1000 per month, depending on a business's needs.

A beautiful and branded website is the first and fundamental step in building a robust online presence, according to

Eric Mason of Wix.com in San Francisco, California. "These days it is almost a necessity for all businesses across all verticals and sizes—and this includes the racing business, and even individuals in the racing industry via a personal portfolio site—to have a website. If you want to be taken seriously, start with a great website.

"People are turning to the web—on their phone, tablet, laptop or desktop—for just about everything," Mason continued. "If your racing business doesn't have a professional online presence, you're already out of the slipstream. Luckily, putting your business online isn't the complicated and costly endeavor it once was."

"You get what you pay for," confirmed Mike Johnson of Keyser's Port City Racing, Coopersville, Michigan. "To put it another way, a website costs as much as a car. What kind of car you're willing to settle for can determine how well it will perform for you."

Building and maintaining a company site can be simple and rewarding, as a variety of resources are now available to advance a business's marketing message to an ever-growing audience.

Quoting statistics from digital research agency eMarketer.com, Melanie Kalembe of e-commerce company Bigcommerce in Austin, Texas, told us that worldwide online retail sales for 2015 were forecasted at more than 7 percent of the total retail market, or nearly \$1.7 trillion. "This presents a tremendous opportunity for retailers that currently do not have an online presence to reach the expansive global market to grow their business.

"With the advent of online retail, brick-and-mortar businesses have the opportunity to sell across the country and even outside of the US. Since many racing products can serve more audiences than those in close proximity of a physical store, business owners should strongly consider selling through their own online channel," she continued. "Additionally, marketplaces can help your business close more sales, but the more you're able to build your business through your own website, the higher your margins and the stronger your brand will be in the long run."

Following, we'll look at how to start on

a website for your business, the relationship between social media and a company website, and tips about building and maintaining an online presence.

Getting Started

Whether choosing a do-it-yourself option or a professional website company for assistance, it is important to research the website landscape beforehand.

S-K Speed Racing Equipment in North Lindenhurst, New York, which has had a website for more than a decade, rolled out its current site earlier this year. The new site was designed by Frooition and is hosted by Bigcommerce. "Our Internet business has grown quite a bit on eBay and Amazon, so we launched a better website that we can finally bring into automation for us," Kevin Krieg said. "It processes the credit cards right on the website, and it's going to talk to my point-of-sales system and take care of the inventory."

Krieg said word of mouth and a lot of Internet research, including talking to other racing businesspeople on web



Websites are essential marketing tools for millions of companies across a wide range of industries, including motorsports. In fact, they have proven to be highly effective for racing operations of all sizes. "In today's world, any business without a website is rapidly losing its battle with its competition," explained a representative from Web.com. "Not having a website can be compared to not having a phone—limiting your business's ability to reach out to your customers."



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forums, helped him find his new website providers. "Of course, when you go to any good website, you can see who the developer is at the bottom [of the page]," he said. "Just going around the Internet and being the computer guys that we are, we came up with Bigcommerce as one of the major players in website hosting and building. We're very happy."

If a racing company doesn't currently have a website, Kreig suggested the first steps are getting a domain name, a website host, and a great design team for the website's look and feel.

Researching the proper platform to support an online business is essential, according to Kalemba at Bigcommerce. Before starting, one must consider what financial resources are available, as there are options at different price points.

"Do you want to build a store in a matter of weeks or months? How much time do you want to spend on development? Many e-commerce platforms can connect you with a recommended partner to meet your needs," Kalemba explained. "Do you plan to grow your business or stay the same size? You want to find a platform that can scale with growth, or help you become more efficient."

"Will you need the option to make changes often? Cloud-based platforms allow for constant changes, while on-premise platforms need to allow for more development," she added.

If a racing entrepreneur just wants a basic website, Herbkersman said a typical DIY website package, which begins at around \$20 a month, would be the best way to start simply on a limited budget. "With our DIY package, Web.com offers a 'do it with me' solution that provides extensive live coaching to help you build your own website—at no additional cost. 'Do it for me' (DIFM) websites can begin at around \$100," he said.

Mason at Wix.com told us that business owners can easily create stunning websites using simple drag and drop tools, "and you don't need to know an ounce of code. Be sure to optimize your website for mobile, which is easily done with the Wix Mobile Editor, and beef up its SEO



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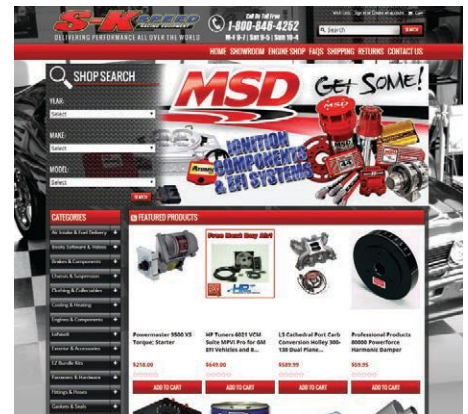
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Building and maintaining a website depends on the amount of time and resources available, as well as what purpose that website will serve for the business. "Like anything else, the more knowledge you have and the more time you spend using your website to engage with your audience, the more success you should have," said one contact, adding that fees for maintaining a website range from \$20 to \$1000 per month, depending on a business's needs.

(Search Engine Optimization). This way, no matter what device people are on, they'll be able to find you."

After doing business with various website-hosting companies over the years, Hedman Heddors of Whittier, California, signed on with eTool Developers in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in 2010. "Since our company is very active in SEMA and its councils, we had heard about a company that specialized in the automotive aftermarket and had a website management system that would allow us to manage both the data and website content at the same time," Hedman's Marc Lewis said of eTool Developers. Hedman's site contains a variety of useful features, including built-out sections for contingency prize winners, warranty registration, online catalogs, dealer information and more.

Social Media Pros & Cons

Our contacts emphasized that social media outlets—Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, etc.—offer numerous benefits, such as communicating with customers and driving traffic to a business's website.

For example, Bud Hodge of Pro Line Racing in Ball Ground, Georgia, said that Facebook is an effective place for a business to start branching out into

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social media. "Setting up a company profile is pretty straightforward, and it's easy to use on a phone or a computer," he explained. "We have found that the posts that get the most attention are relevant photos and videos. People will follow you because they are interested in what you do, so post about what you do. We get a much greater response from engine pictures than complete race cars, probably because people are following us to see our engines. Facebook also allows users to ask questions and comment on your posts, which could show prospective customers how much your company supports its products."

Hodge also told us that his company's racing videos on YouTube have helped bring people to Pro Line's website. "After viewing a video showing a 4000-horsepower turbo Pro Mod on the track, they

said. "You own your website. You can control its look, feel, and content, and you can change it as the market changes. You can't control how social media evolves. History has already shown that what is popular today can fall out of favor tomorrow, like with MySpace. And the demographics of today's popular social media outlets—Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, Pinterest, etc.—differ greatly and are constantly changing. Can you keep up with the changes on social media? It is better to use social media as an extension of your online brand rather than rely on it as the only source."

Along the same lines, Mason at Wix.com considers social media platforms amazing tools that should be seen as complementary to a company's website. "As distribution platforms they can be incredibly helpful in sharing your brand

"In today's world, any business without a website is rapidly losing its battle with its competition."

can click on our website to see what powers that car and find a phone number or email address to contact Pro Line to get a quote," he said.


Keyser's Port City Racing, which is also an eTool Developers customer, maintains a presence on social media, from Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to racing forums and blogs. "The pros to social media are that you have a chance to connect with your audience anytime and anywhere," Johnson said. "The cons are that with the increase in 'noise' out there in Internet-land, your company has more competition than ever for your audience's attention. Couple this with ever-changing algorithms that filter what content your viewer sees on their feeds, and it becomes a full-time job to be creative enough to keep up with all the communication that is needed to stay in the game. A website is only as good as the content that it holds. Like a car that doesn't drive itself, a website doesn't drive traffic to itself, either. That's what marketing is for, whether that be by social media or other means of advertising."


"The key is ownership," Herbkersman

and story online. However, a website is the only real estate you ever actually own 100 percent online," he said. "Twitter only allows 140 characters; Vine is six-second snippets of videos; Facebook is changing configurations and settings all the time; and the list goes on and on. All of these platforms are important and vital, but only a website allows you to be exactly who you want to be, 140 characters or 1400 or 14,000...long videos or short...your color scheme, your content, and your brand."

"Social channels are frequently used best when they ultimately drive people back to your website to purchase a product or service, see galleries, sign up for a newsletter, or any other number of transactions or messaging that can only be delivered there," Mason added.

Due to the nature of social media as a medium, its ability to become a strong revenue channel on its own is limited, said Kalemba from Bigcommerce. "As a standalone channel, social media cannot replace a website, since it lacks the necessary capabilities that enhance the customer experience, such as a support portal or product reviews," she explained.





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"Social media is an ideal tool for businesses to drive traffic to their website, but it should not serve as an alternative to a website for a company that intends on scaling and succeeding."

Regarding 'flame wars' (arguments between Internet users) on social media, Pro Line Racing's Hodge advised using restraint when replying to posts on sites like Facebook. "Everyone has the right to their own opinion, but if you disagree so strongly that you feel the need to respond, you should take time to remember that all responses from your company's page should reflect your company's values," he advised. "Be thick-skinned, and remember that the people who follow and support your page will usually step in when necessary."

Building a Site

No matter the budget, a website is a living, breathing entity in the sense that new designs, features and functions can (and should) be introduced. In other words, a website is never fully completed.

Luanne Brown of eTool Developers told us her company now builds sites that basically work from product information data. "Our tools are set up for PIES (Product Information Exchange Standard), the aftermarket standard for how to organize your data," she explained. "It gets very technical because we need to have all that product information in order to populate a website—shopping cart, too. We design what the site will look like and work with the client to organize their data. It is a long process and takes a budget to make it happen."

"There are some small companies that build sites for racers that are kind of 'cookie cutter,' but they at least get a site up and running for a small business," she continued. "The racing company is going to be responsible for creating the content for the site—the words, the images, the video, everything that one would have in a site. The more content, the better placement the company will have in the search engines."

As an eTool Developers client, Keyser's Port City Racing went from a static website that was generated from the

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pdf files of its catalog to a fully customized system tailored to its needs, according to Johnson. "This is something that those online 'Build Your Own Website in Minutes' sites couldn't deliver," he said.

Since its inception nearly 20 years ago, Hedman Hedders' website has changed completely, noted Lewis. "In addition to product information, our website now has a blog containing interesting product stories, projects, articles from the media and event coverage," he said, adding that the site also accepts parts orders, and then redistributes those orders to the company's dealers for fulfillment.

If a retailer is interested in becoming a Bigcommerce client, the company's Standard plan runs just \$29.95 per month. The Standard plan offers businesses hundreds of built-in features, plus unlimited products, storage and

consoles can tell him how many people visited the site, and what type of device they used—PC, Android or Apple. "You also get search engine data, what customers typed into the search, and the results the software gave them. This helps to correct search problems," he said.

For Pro Line Racing, Hodge said the site's most important features are its Engine Lineup and the Contact Us section. "Our customers can do their own research before calling the shop. This can make it easier to explain something to a prospective customer. We can have a discussion on the phone while looking at a product on the website."

At Web.com, if business owners have additional resources to spend on improving their websites' effectiveness, and depending on their needs, they can add features such as outbound email

"It is better to use social media as an extension of your online brand rather than rely on it as the only source."

bandwidth. Additionally, merchants are equipped with reporting tools, and the ability to accept credit cards and PayPal.

"As retailers grow their business, cloud-based platforms are scalable and can support that growth," Kalembe said. For Bigcommerce, the next pricing plan is the Plus plan, available for \$79.95 per month. The Plus plan offers merchants all the features of the Standard plan, as well as real-time carrier shipping, best-in-class payment providers, abandoned cart saver, omni-channel sales tools, advanced customer segmentation and checkout hosted on the store's domain.

"Many of our clients are finding the Enterprise plan works best for their business; this is customized, [with] price based on the business' needs," Kalembe said. "This plan includes all of the features from the Plus plan, as well as setup and data migration, priority support, a personal account manager, product filtering, Google trusted stores, dedicated SSL and IP address, maximization of SEO with site wide HTTPS and uptime SLA."

At S-K Speed, Krieg said he likes the fact that his website's management

marketing, pay-per-click advertising, SEO, custom website design, Facebook Boost, online marketing to boost ratings on key search engines, local leads, and more, Herbkersman told us. "You can also move to a DIFM website, where your partner builds and maintains your website for you. DIFM websites begin at around \$100 a month and, based on your needs and sophistication, they can run into the thousands of dollars per month," he said.

At Wix.com, Mason said it is possible to build a beautiful and highly functional website simply by selecting a template and launching the company's editor in a web browser. "Not only is there no expensive software to download and configure, we've taken all the technical jargon and necessity out of the process," Mason explained. "It's easy, quick and many even confess, fun, to build a website on Wix. We've developed a platform that truly allows anyone the power to create, manage, and build a fully functional online presence, and do it all from a single unified platform on the web, no coding required."

Building a basic website at Wix.com is free. Wix premium features range from

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Consumers go online—via their smartphone, tablet, laptop or desktop—for just about everything these days, reported one industry source, emphasizing the importance of business websites. Regarding a link between expenses and performance, another source compared the cost of a website to that of a vehicle. “What kind of car you’re willing to settle for can determine how well it will perform for you,” he said.

about \$4–\$20 per month, and include connecting a domain, removing the “powered by Wix” branding from the free site, ecommerce, analytics, premium VIP support, site booster tools, and free premium apps from the Wix App Market.

Maintaining a Site

In step with the extremes of time and money to build a website, maintaining a website can run the gamut, too. It all depends on a company’s resources.

“Maintaining and growing a site and your online presence can be as involved or as hands-off as you like. That said, you’ll be rewarded by keeping your site up to date and current,” Mason said. “As the prime real estate online, your website is the most critical place for telling your story and articulating your brand. The benefits of keeping it in-house greatly increase the chances that your voice and brand shines through. Outsourcing, of course, has its place, too, but be sure it’s always with a firm or person you know and trust and who really, truly knows your brand.”

On the other hand, while ongoing management of a website is crucial, Brown from eTool Developers said one problem with keeping it in-house is employee turnover. “There are many different ways to build sites, and that knowledge walks out the door each time an employee quits. It can be hard on an owner. That is why

Global Perspective



“The PRI Show is a great opportunity for me to meet existing as well as new partners, and to take part in the development of our common businesses. To achieve the same results by visiting everybody in their individual locations would be impossible.”

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outsourcing works: You have a professional to turn to when you need help," she said.

At Keyser's Port City Racing, eTool Developers manages the back end of the site, and Port City uses the Content Management System that eTool developed to update the front end. "We are updating our site on almost a daily basis," Johnson said. "It is crucial to keep content updated with new products, news, and any other changes to keep the site fresh in order to attract new visitors and keep current ones coming back."

Lewis at Hedman Hedders said management of his company's website is a team effort, as Hedman handles all of the product data and website content management. Meanwhile, eTool Developers performs regular maintenance, troubleshoots website problems when they

sourcing components like hosting to a third-party.

"If having autonomy and full control of every aspect of your website is a priority, a self-hosted option may be better. However, by outsourcing this to a third-party provider, you can free up investments to fund additional sales/growth initiatives, as well as focus on running your business, not the technology behind it," she added.

Krieg at S-K Speed highlighted NCR CounterPoint (National Cash Register), a point-of-sale software system that his company uses, and praised Bigcommerce for offering a format that has become very compatible with the NCR software.

"I also use another company called ChannelAdvisor, and they are like a search engine optimizer; they help you

"As the prime real estate online, your website is the most critical place for telling your story and articulating your brand."

occur, and programs changes to how data is displayed on the front end, as well as changes on the back end that assist with product management or how data is exported.

Outsourcing a company's web presence to an expert can increase its online success, according to Herbkerman at Web.com. "The most important factor is finding a partner who understands that creating a 'good looking' website isn't your objective; you need someone who knows how to create the right online solution that reaches and engages your target customer in an effective manner," he said.

If launching quickly and having access to new functionality on a regular basis is a priority, a cloud-based platform may be better suited to that company's needs, according to Kalemba at Bigcommerce. "For brands with aggressive growth goals, a scalable platform is critical; otherwise, you may find yourself needing to re-platform when your business realizes success," she said. "When purchasing a cloud-based platform, you cede some control over your store, as you are out-

with the verticals, which would be eBay and Amazon," Krieg said. "A vertical is any selling venue you want to sell on. You can sell on Sears; you can sell on Walmart. We chose Amazon and eBay because that's where most of our customers are. Those guys also get me connected to DCI data and SEMA data, and we get all of the current jobber pricing."

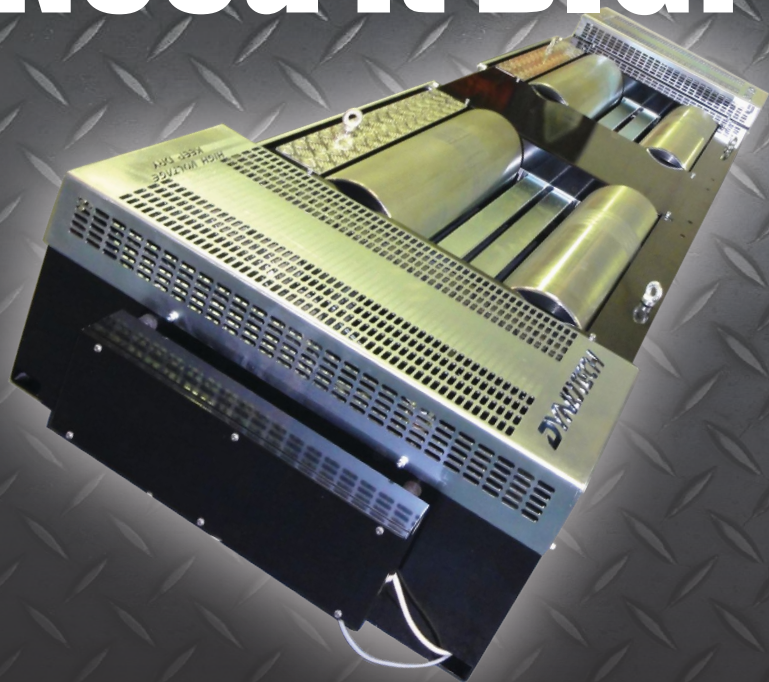
Website Advice

Our contacts supplied a wealth of tips for racing businesses that either have a website or are considering launching one.

"If your website isn't mobile enabled, fix it," Herbkerman advised. "Studies have shown that 75 percent of online searches are now done via a mobile device, and over 80 percent of these searches result in some type of action taken by the customer/consumer. Another area to improve is Search Engine Optimization, which will greatly improve your search results."

Mason at Wix.com said, "Take a moment to understand your audience. Ask yourself, who will my website be for? Hint...it's not you. Decide what's most important to them and consider how you

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will deliver that message online via visual, images, content, video, and organization. Then, dive in.

"Understanding how and where to grow and refine your website really comes down to your understanding of your audience," he continued. "Not sure what your audience is asking for? Consider asking them, or add analytics to your site so you can begin to see what pages are getting visited most often. Email is still a very effective and easy-to-use marketing channel, so think about placing a 'get subscribers' contact form on your site and encourage visitors to sign up for a monthly or quarterly newsletter.

"Finally, the web is more and more visual all the time. Take a look at your images. If you're still showing pictures in tiny thumbnail size, consider going big. Images are powerful tools in delivering your message," Mason added.

"Do your research, ask lots of questions, and don't just think about your immediate needs when researching for a web developer," Johnson said. "What will happen when your business expands? Will your website still meet your increased needs? How easy is it to change your content? Are you allowed to change the content or do you have to pay a developer each time a change needs to be made? Also, no one's job is done once the site has gone live. How are people going to see your new site? What tools are available to determine the effectiveness of the site? How can you use those tools to make proper business decisions?"

As for website tips, Hodge offered, "If your goal is to get people calling your shop, then you need to give them a reason—interesting content—to visit your website. Contact professionals who can help with website design, initial setup, and Search Engine Optimization. As far as maintenance, if you or someone who works with you is technologically inclined, website and social media updates could be done in-house by the people who truly understand the parts/services you offer. If not, I'd suggest finding some sort of freelance marketing company to help keep your site updated."

