

# How to Buy Your Next Website

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# Introduction

The process of buying a new website can often be a minefield. With so much information online and a myriad of options to choose from, as a marketer or business owner, it can be challenging to sort through the noise and find just what you're looking for when it comes to buying your first, or next website.

We've worked in the industry for many years and have helped hundreds of businesses and charities of all sizes find their perfect website. We know first-hand how the buying process can often be overwhelming, especially as buying a new site is not something you do very often, so we wanted to use our combined experience to help you get the right answers and ask the right questions.

In this eBook, we're going to address the two main areas of the purchasing process:

## Part 1

This section will cover how to brief your agency, and will include the questions you need to answer to ensure you're communicating your requirements and giving the agency the right information from the start. We've also included a briefing template with each of these questions, ready for you to complete and submit as your brief to your prospective agencies.

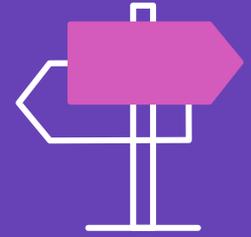


## Part 2

This section will explore the questions you need to ask the agencies themselves to ensure they're the best fit for your needs and that they have the relevant experience and skillset to help you achieve your digital goals. Similar to Part 1, we've also included a template with each of these questions, ready for you to give your prospective agencies to complete.



When you've finished reading this eBook, you'll have all the information you need to make more informed, confident decisions about how to approach your website project and achieve success.



## Part 1

# How to Brief Your Agency

In this section, we'll outline what information you need to include in your briefing document and how to define your answers.

## 1. What does your business do?

The first part of your briefing document should outline your business name, goals and positioning in your industry. You may already have a document that describes your key services and values. This information is essential in helping your agency get to know your business.

## 2. What problems or challenges are you looking to address with a new website?

The next step is to consider what business challenges you want to solve with a new website. This could be anything from creating brand awareness or generating new business leads, to freeing up your own time from answering questions and supplying evidence of previous work.

**Related content:** [How a website could solve your business challenges](#)





### 3. Why isn't your current website addressing this?

If you don't already have a website, you can skip this step. If you do, then you need to tell your agency why it isn't performing for you, so that they can address this with the new one. It could be that you've experienced a drop in traffic, a reduction in online sales or new business leads. Or it could be something less tangible. Perhaps your existing website is outdated or not reflective of your business' position in the market. If you can understand and articulate why your current site isn't working, your new agency can address how they might fix this.

**Related content:** [9 reasons why your website isn't performing](#)

#### 4. What have you tried before that didn't work?

If you've already tried a specific approach or strategy that didn't work in the past, it's vital to let your new agency know so that they can avoid wasting time proposing a solution that won't work. If you can communicate to your agency what different things you may have tried that didn't work, they may be able to understand why, and perhaps come back with a better approach. At the very least, it will help ensure they avoid any common pitfalls, giving you the best chance of success in the future.

#### 5. What have you tried before that did work?

Similar to the previous point, if you've tried an approach or strategy that yielded fruitful results, then it's vital that you also communicate this to your new agency so that they can factor this into their proposal. If something works well, then there's no point in ditching it just for the sake of being different, and a good agency will want to leverage your previous successes to help you achieve even greater results in the future. This could also help you avoid wasting valuable time and money trying untested and unproven approaches.

## 6. What worries or concerns do you have about commissioning a new website?

It's normal to feel worried about buying a new website. Telling your agency what concerns you have early on in the process will allow them to put your mind at ease and address these straight away. Some common concerns include cost, security, maintenance, the ability to be found online, and trust.

**Related content:** [The 5 biggest concerns brands have when commissioning a new website](#)



## 7. Have you worked with a web design or digital agency before, and if so, what was your experience?

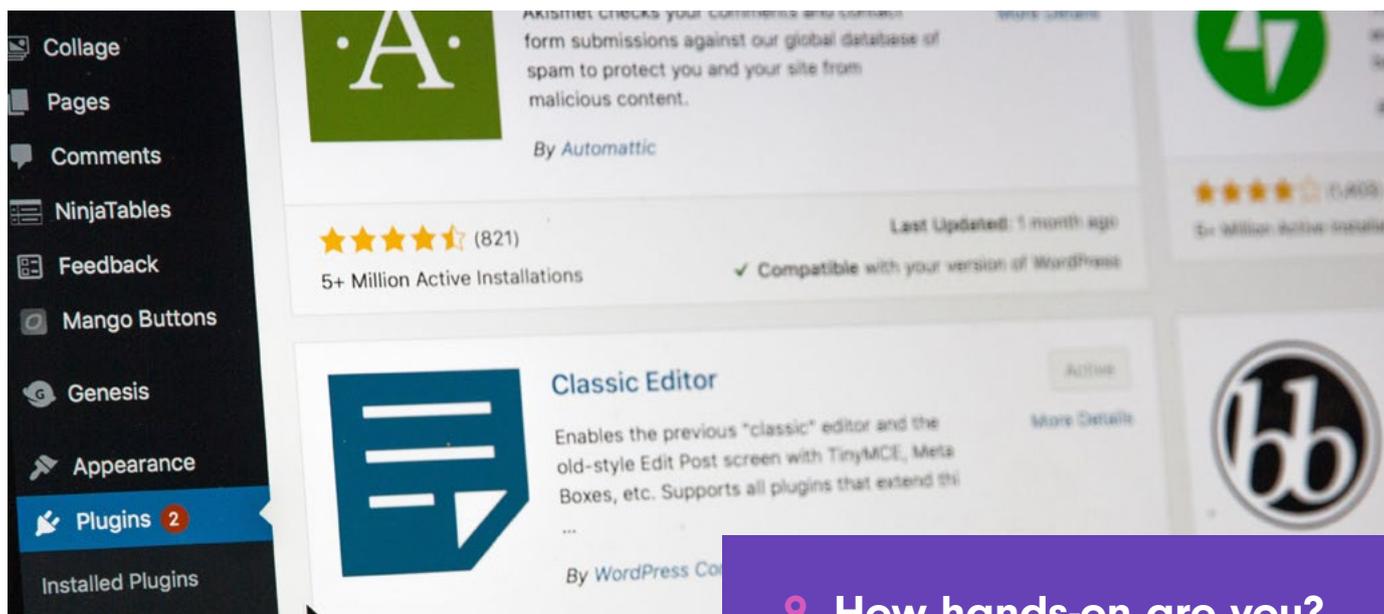
If the answer is no, you can skip this step. If you have worked with another agency before, then this information is invaluable and will help other agencies understand what works well for you and what doesn't. It'll also tell them what you're looking for from a partnership with them.

A typical answer to this question might be: Yes, we've worked with an agency before. However, we only communicated via email every so often, they never came into our offices, and we didn't feel that they were very innovative; they didn't bring any new ideas to the table, and everything we achieved was as a result of ideas generated by our internal team.

OR: Yes, we worked with an agency for multiple years, we had regular face-to-face meetings and weekly catchups with them during the course of our web build and this relationship continued post-launch with the team regularly pitching new ideas to us.

Regardless of whether your past experiences were positive or negative, it's important to communicate this to your new agency. The client-agency relationship is a two-way process, so it's crucial to find an agency where there is chemistry and mutual trust.

**Related content:** [Finding the right web agency for your business](#)



## 8. Who is your target audience? What action(s) do you want them to take on your website?

Do you know who your target market is? If so, you should outline this in your briefing document, going into specifics for each type of customer you have. If you've already invested time in defining your ideal customers or clients, then it's essential to share this with your new agency so that they can come up with solutions that cater to them. If you don't have this information yet, then it might be worth finding an agency who can also work with you to research and define your target market.

Another thing to consider is what you want visitors to do once they get to your website. This should echo the answers you gave in the earlier question about the problems or challenges you're looking to address with a new website. Do you want visitors to make a purchase, download something or submit a form? It's important to outline which actions you'd like each audience type to take so that your agency can help map out the user journeys for your new site.

**Related content:** [How to define your target audience](#)

## 9. How hands-on are you?

Have you had experience in creating a website before? Perhaps you've used an online website builder such as Wix or Squarespace, to develop websites yourself. Maybe you've worked with web agencies previously and know the process of creating a new website quite well. Or perhaps you've never done this before, and it's all new to you. There's no right or wrong answer for this one, but it's important to let your new agency know so that they can tailor how they work with you.

If you're a novice, then there would be nothing worse than an agency that makes you feel embarrassed or inferior. Likewise, if you've done this a few times, you'll enjoy the process more if you can find an agency who respects your experience and who you can bounce ideas off.

The process of creating a new website can take months, but the relationship you have with your agency can last a lot longer, so it's crucial to find one where you both feel mutually respected and appreciated.



## 10. Do you have a budget in mind?

If you know how much you're looking to spend, roughly, it's good to provide this information to your prospective agencies during the briefing stage. Don't be afraid to disclose this, as it's an essential factor for the agency to be able to work out if they're able to work with you. The right agency won't just be looking to spend every penny you have; they'll be looking to work out what you're hoping to achieve, how much you're looking to spend, and whether they can make the two meet.

It's important to remember that with web design, like most other industries, you get what you pay for. While web agencies and designers can vary wildly in terms of what they charge, the price of a new website is generally a combination of how long it takes, what quality it's produced to, and what associated costs the agency has. A large agency with a big office and an experienced team will naturally charge more than a smaller, less experienced agency.

It might be that the agency you're talking to can't achieve what you're looking for within your budget, in which case you'll be able to whittle these out quickly. Even if an agency is too expensive for your budget, they may be able to recommend another agency who can work to a lower budget.

**Related content:** [How much does a WordPress cost?](#)

## 11. What is most important to you?

When you're talking to potential agencies, it's vital that you consider what your priorities for the new website are and what you think is most important. Do you want it delivered quickly? Do you want it created to the highest quality? Is cost the most crucial factor for you? Is the service you receive from the agency top of your list? Or, is your main focus the results that the new website should generate, such as increased revenue or an uplift in sales?

While it would be lovely to think that you can find an agency who can deliver all of these, the reality is that some of these priorities are naturally at odds with others. In general, the more complex the website and the higher the level of quality and detail, the longer it takes to produce and therefore, the more expensive it will be. You may need to make trade-offs to determine your top priorities.



### 13. When would you like to launch your new website?

This will tie into your priorities from the previous question, so realistic expectations are essential. If you've got a date in mind for your go-live, make sure you detail this here so that agencies can tell you whether or not this will be possible based on your budget and desired functionality, as well as their availability.

How hands-on and available you are will also influence how quickly the website can launch. If you can be readily available to attend meetings and sign off key deliverables, then this will help the whole process run a lot smoother. If you're busy or unavailable, then this may slow the process down. Content creation and population can also create an unexpected bottleneck, so it's crucial to find an agency who will help you plan for that part of the process too.

### 14. Final thoughts or suggestions

If you have anything specific you would like to include that we haven't touched on, this is the place to list it. Think about what functionality your website needs to have, or a specific feature you have or haven't got that you'd like to see on your new site. Ideas might include a booking calendar so that customers can book an appointment with your business without contacting you or leaving your site. Or it might be that you need a customer login area where users can access their personal information.

The more specific you can be, the better equipped your agency will be in proposing a new website that not only meets your budget but delivers what you need.

## 12. Who are your closest competitors?

It's important to know who your competition is, whether this is online or offline. Your prospective agency will need this information for their discovery piece so that they can see what others in your industry are doing and how to ensure your site is a league above.

**Related content:** [How to define your competitors](#)

# New Website Project Brief

Name:	
Company name:	
Your role:	
Telephone:	
Email:	

## 1. What our business does:

## 2. What problems/challenges we're looking to address:

## 3. Our current website doesn't address these because...

**4. We've tried the following before and it didn't work:**

**5. We've tried the following before and it did work:**

**6. Our concerns about commissioning a new website are:**

**7. We've worked with a web agency before and had the following experience:**

**8. Our target audience and the action(s) we want them to take are:**

**9. Our experience in creating websites is:**

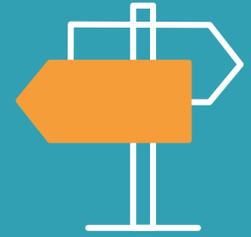
**10. Our budget for our new website is:**

**11. Our most important priority for the project is...**

**12. Our closest competitors are:**

**13. We would like to launch our new website on / by:**

**14. Final thoughts and suggestions:**



## Part 2

# Questions to Ask Your Agency

With the list of priorities for business owners and marketers continuously growing, it's no surprise that most businesses choose to outsource their website design and build to an agency that can make it their sole priority.

Communicating to your agency what you're looking to achieve is the first hurdle, but during the process, you'll also want to ensure you're asking the right questions so that you can be confident you've chosen the right agency for you. In this section, we'll outline the top 15 questions we get asked when meeting new clients and the responses you should look out for when asking your prospective agencies.

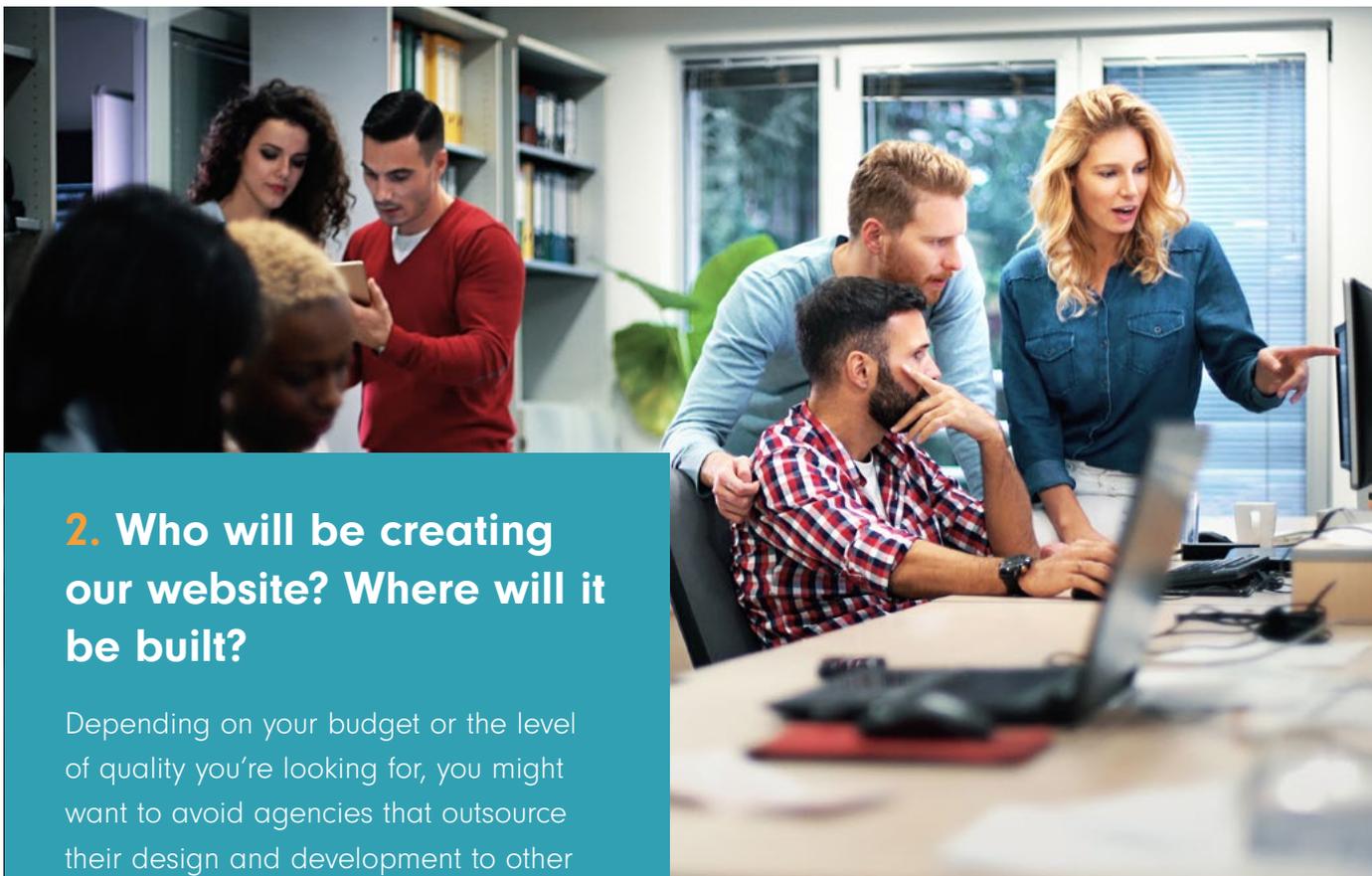


### 1. How will you create the website?

It's crucial to find out if your agency is using an established, well supported CMS like WordPress, or if they're using a niche or bespoke solution. We'd recommend avoiding bespoke platforms so that you're not limited to any one provider, (i.e. the agency you choose) which can be complicated long-term. It also means you wouldn't be able to find training resources or help online, so you'll always be reliant on the agency that created your site.

If they are using an established CMS, you should also ask if they'll be using an off-the-shelf theme or if they'll be creating a fully customised design for you. This answer will inform the price, and help you ensure you get value for money.

**Related content:** [Niche CMS: Why you should avoid being wedded to a platform](#)



## 2. Who will be creating our website? Where will it be built?

Depending on your budget or the level of quality you're looking for, you might want to avoid agencies that outsource their design and development to other businesses or freelancers, UK-based or not. Outsourcing might give you a lower cost, or the agency a higher profit, but they won't be fully committed to your project. You also won't be able to guarantee the quality of the work, and neither will they. It can also become complicated when it comes to feedback, as this will be passing through many people before reaching the one that's working on your website.

Ask the agency if it's possible to visit their offices and meet the team. From our experience, this will give you a better level of engagement with those working on your project, making it much easier to iron out the inevitable issues that arise with any project. It will also help to establish strong, long-term relationships, all of which contributes to creating a great website.

## 3. Have you created websites like ours before?

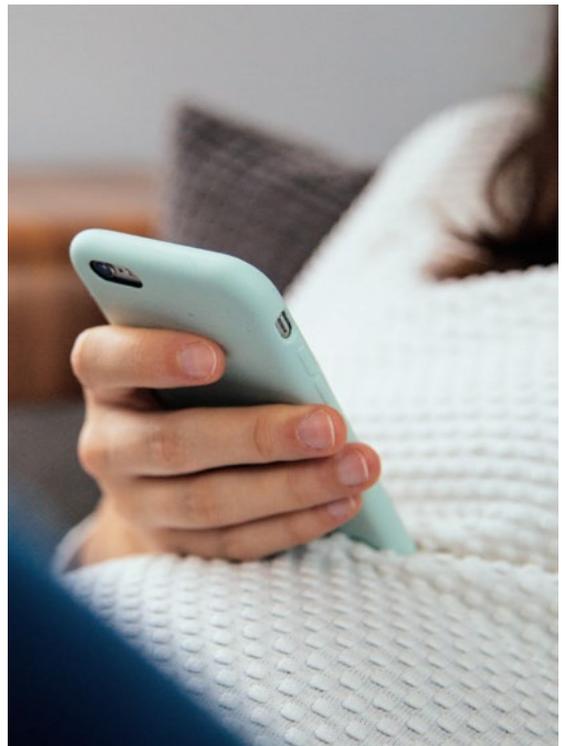
Seeing a portfolio of completed projects, similar to what you're looking for, will give you the confidence that the agency can deliver to your brief. It's also an excellent opportunity to see what sectors they've worked in before, and how established their client base is.

If they've delivered projects like yours in the past, this will give them a better chance of achieving success for you, as they'll come armed with knowledge and insights of what works in your industry. But don't discount an agency if they haven't worked with a business or enterprise like yours – a good creative agency should be versatile and adaptable, and the fact that they don't come with any preconceptions means they may bring new ideas that could give you an edge over your competitors.

## 4. Will the website be responsive?

Having a responsive website is vital for a variety of reasons, and nowadays it's a given that a new website should be fully responsive, quick to load and optimised for mobile devices and tablets as well as desktop computers. Make sure your agency is designing your website with a 'mobile-first' mentality to give your site the best standing when it comes to speed, ranking and user experience. Be sure that they're also not designing the website to serve a reduced experience on mobile devices, as this can be frustrating to users who may have seen a particular piece of content while viewing the site on their laptop, only to find it gone when viewing the site on their mobile.

**Related content:** [Why is having a responsive website important?](#)



## 5. Will we own the website once it has been created?

Once your website has launched, you'll want to be able to edit and maintain this in-house, especially if you're looking to manage a blog. Find out early on if the agency plans to hand over admin access post-launch, especially if you want to have full control. While some agencies may offer a monthly subscription for the website instead of a full one-off cost, the subscription model may mean you are in effect only renting the site and will therefore never actually own it.

If you are going to have full control of the website, it's also worth finding out how much support or training the agency will give you with the content management system (CMS) ahead of launch. You'll want to ensure you know how to make basic edits, and if you can go to them if there are any issues further down the line.

## 6. Will the prices be one-off, or will there be ongoing costs?

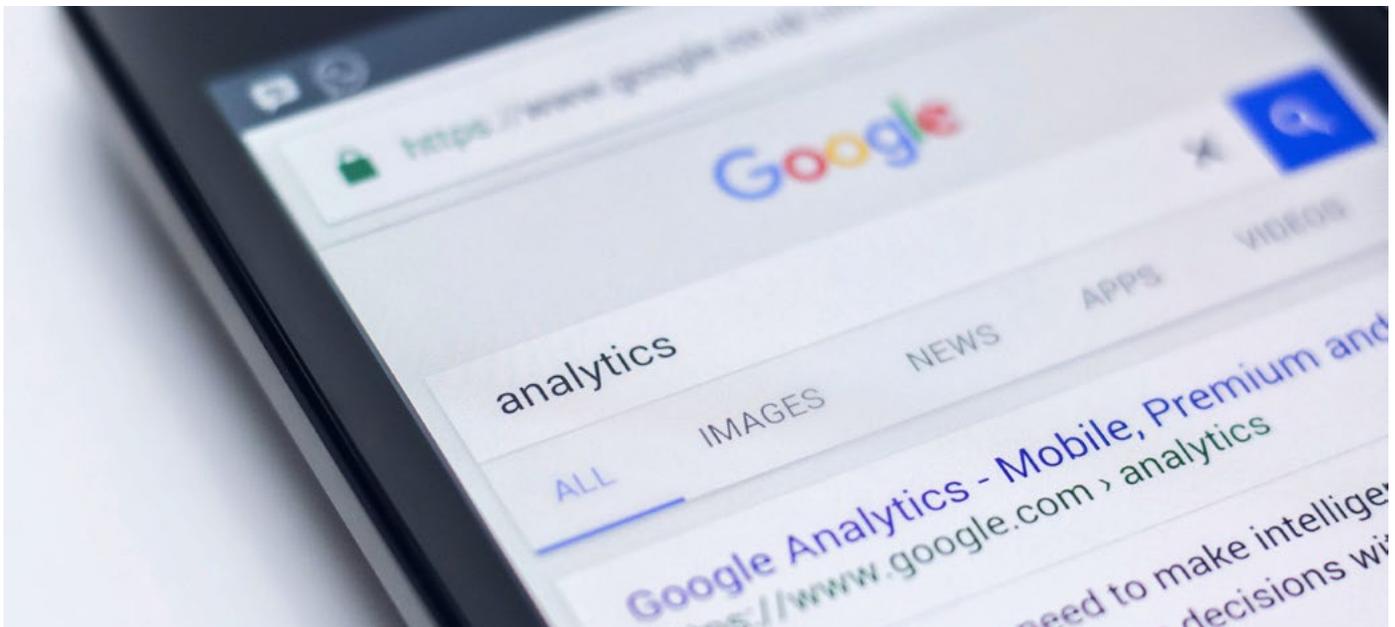
Most agencies should only charge you once for the design and build of your website. The only ongoing costs should be if you're opting for hosting or a maintenance/road-mapping retainer. Otherwise, if you spot any additional fees, be sure to question what these are and how your business will benefit from them. Sometimes agencies will charge an artificially lower cost for the initial website, only for the client to later find out that they have very restrictive access and can't undertake even the most basic of content updates. They then find that they are tied into expensive ongoing maintenance contracts, and have to ask the agency every time they want to update text or images.

**Related content:** [The true cost of eCommerce](#) & [How much does a WordPress website cost](#)

## 7. Will the website be able to integrate with third party systems?

With more established platforms such as WordPress, it's pretty easy to integrate with almost anything. The majority of leading 3rd party systems will usually have a plugin or other off-the-shelf solution to link to a popular platform like WordPress. Depending on which CMS (content management system) your agency is using for your new website, you might find successful integration limiting or non-existent.

If you're using a CRM (customer relationship management) system, Marketing Automation software, a payment gateway, or even a contact form manager, it's likely you'll want this to integrate with your new website. Be sure to check ahead of time whether or not you'll be able to achieve this easily with the system they're proposing, or if the agency will need to build a custom solution. It's worth finding out upfront, as a custom integration could mean significant additional time and costs on top of the website.

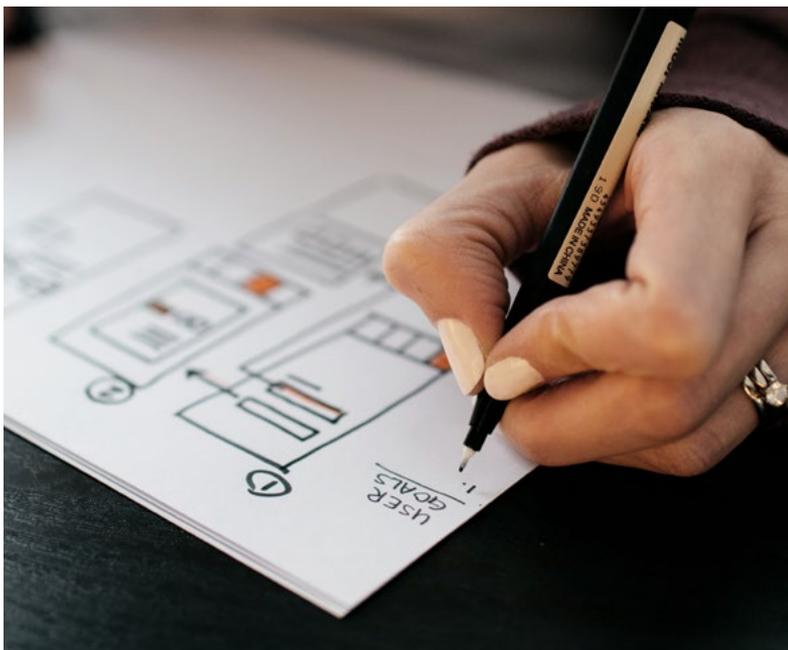


## 8. How will you ensure the new website ranks well?

It's important to find out from your prospective agency if they're using a search-engine-friendly CMS (content management system) and clean, well-structured HTML markup which will make it easier for Google to crawl your website. It's also worth asking them how they will handle things like 301 redirects for URL changes to avoid crawl errors.

You should also ask them if the CMS can include an SEO management feature which will allow you to control the keywords, meta title and meta description for each webpage, which is critical if you want to rank well on Google. Other features such as site speed, SSL certificates and Schema.org microdata are also significant contributors to successful search rankings.

**Related content:** [How to rank on Google](#)



## 9. What user experience best practices will you follow?

Keeping the user in mind throughout the whole process should be a key priority as the user experience can make or break your website. Ask your agency how they approach UX and what testing practices they follow. Ideally, they should have tools and processes to involve real-world users at various stages of the website's development.

**Related content:** [The importance of user experience](#)

## 10. How will you ensure the website loads quickly?

Website speed is a critical factor in the success of your new site. It can also have long-term SEO implications, and it affects the overall user experience. The longer a user has to wait for your website to load, the more chance they'll leave to go to one of your competitors. Ask each agency how they will tackle website speed during the build process, and which benchmarking tools they'll use to measure this. You could even ask them to commit to a certain level of performance ahead of the launch.

**Related content:** [3 reasons why speed matters](#)



## 11. Can you import content from our existing website?

If you've already created content for an existing site, manually migrating this could take hours or even days. Or if you're creating new content for your website, the process of adding this to the CMS can be equally as time-consuming.

It's worth finding out if your agency can migrate your content or if they can populate your site's content in-house rather than giving this to you and your team. Sometimes this may mean paying them to manually populate the content for you, which could be beneficial if it frees up your time for more important tasks, but the agency may also have automated tools that make the process much quicker.

Content is the last part of the website to be completed but can usually be the most time-consuming and is often the biggest blocker to launch, so be sure to tackle this early on to avoid missing your deadlines.



## 12. Will hosting and an SSL certificate be included in the project?

If your agency is using a self-hosted platform like WordPress, then hosting is something you'll need to consider. Additionally, your website is going to need a domain name and SSL certificate if you haven't already got one. Hosting can often be an afterthought, but if you're going to be investing thousands of pounds on a new website, then it makes sense to invest in decent hosting to support your new investment. The price of hosting can vary wildly, so it's worth finding out whether they'll provide this or if you'll need someone else to handle it for you.

**Related content:** [What is website hosting?](#) & [What is an SSL certificate?](#)

## 13. What steps will you take to ensure the website is as secure as possible?

Regardless of whether security is a top priority for your business or not, you should raise this in the hiring process to determine if the agency follows best practices. Every CMS handles security differently, so it's essential to ask them to outline what steps they'll be taking to maximise security and if there's anything else you might need to look into to help enhance this.

**Related content:** [WordPress: is it secure enough for my website?](#)

## 14. What steps will you take to ensure the website is GDPR compliant?

If you're not already aware of GDPR, then you should check out the official [ICO website](#). Your agency should, however, already have an in-depth understanding of the legislation and will be able to explain to you how they'll ensure your site is being compliant. This needs to include a privacy statement explaining how you'll be collecting and using visitor data, as well as an explicit 'opt-in' for those wanting to receive marketing emails from your organisation.

## 15. Will there be a backup solution in place?

While nobody likes to think it could happen to them, it's crucial to have a backup solution in place in case your website goes down, is hacked, or if there was some other issue with your website that stops it from working. If the worst does happen, it's worth finding out how your agency will manage backups, where they keep them, how many of them there are, how frequent they are, and if you have access to them.

Backup solutions aren't just for if the worst happens. If you're updating the website's plugins or core system, it's wise to take a backup first, so it's also worth finding out if this is part of your agency's maintenance programme.

# Conclusion

While buying a new website might seem overwhelming at first, it shouldn't be. Arming yourself with the right information to make an informed decision should take the stress out of the buying process. Taking the time to choose the right agency for you can make the whole process of creating your new website an enjoyable and engaging experience, and one that leads to a fruitful relationship for years to come.

Hopefully, from reading this eBook you now feel much more confident and informed in making the right decision. If there's anything you're still unsure of, or if you have your own thoughts, suggestions or experiences you'd like to share with us to make this eBook even better, we'd be more than happy to hear from you. Please feel free to reach out to us on the details below.

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# Web Agency Questionnaire

Agency name:	
Key contact name:	
Key contact role:	
Telephone:	
Email:	

## 1. How will you create the website?

## 2. Who will be creating our website? Where will it be built?

## 3. Have you created websites like ours before?

**4. Will the website be responsive?**

**5. Will we own the website once it has been created?**

**6. Will the price a be one-off, or will there be ongoing costs?**

**7. Will the website be able to integrate with 3rd party systems?**

**8. How will you ensure the new website ranks well?**

**9. What user experience best practices will you follow?**

**10. How will you ensure the website loads quickly?**

**11. Can you import content from our existing website?**

**12. Will hosting and an SSL certificate be included in the project?**

**13. What steps will you take to ensure the website is as secure as possible?**

**14. What steps will you take to ensure the website is GDPR compliant?**

**15. Will there be a backup solution in place?**