# PracticeWeb

# The complete guide to websites for accountants

## updated edition

# Contents

# Introduction

## Welcome to the updated PracticeWeb complete guide to websites for accountants.

If you're an accountant setting up your first practice website and keen to start generating leads, or represent an established accountancy firm that's ready to grow, this PracticeWeb complete guide to websites is for you.

A website should always be designed to serve your business goals – it's a functional tool that needs to deliver a return on your investment.

We hope our guide will make you a smarter buyer, help you ask the right questions and highlight some issues to be aware of in this particular specialist market.

This guide is one of our most comprehensive yet, covering everything you need to know to get the right website for your accountancy firm – one that will help you meet your business and marketing goals, achieve maximum return on investment and stand out in the marketplace.

By the end of reading it you should be able to understand:

- What a good accountancy website looks like in 2022 and beyond.
- What role SEO should play in helping to get you noticed.
- How you should plan and set out copy and content on your website.
- Why and how you should measure return on investment for your hard work.

If your business isn't scaling how you want it to, it's worth addressing the basics: starting with your website.

With technology always changing, if your website is stuck in the past your potential new prospects may well think your business is too. A website health check is always a good starting point to review your existing site's performance.

# The Basics

## Most of you will be able to skip this section, but just in case, here's a very quick primer on the what, why and how of websites.

First, just so we're absolutely clear: a website is a set of interconnected web pages, usually with a distinct name (eg YouTube) and domain name (eg youtube.com), stored on a web server and made available on the internet.

There are lots of other ways to have a presence online that don't amount to having a website – a business page on Facebook, for example, or a Twitter profile. They're out of the scope of this guide, but you might want to take a read of our Beginner's guide to social media.

There are various ways to get a website, at various price points.

For example, you might get a free website from a provider such as Wix or a cheap one from IONOS (formerly 1&1), with limited functionality and based on off-the-peg templates.

Equally, you might pay a web designer or agency to produce a completely bespoke website with a unique interface, look and functionality.

Most businesses choose an option somewhere in between, for reasons we'll get to later.

Let's get into it, then, with one big question: **does your accountancy firm actually need a website?**

# Do we need a website?

## The straight answer here is yes – you need a website if you have any intention of attracting new clients and nurturing existing ones.

In the 2022 post-pandemic world, having a robust and engaging digital presence has never been more important. Where having bricks-and-mortar premises once served to attract new clients, or a social media presence was enough to drive leads, a website is now key to attracting new business.

In 2019, a survey by the AI company Glass found that only 30% of registered UK businesses had a website, although this varied a little by sector. While this is likely to have changed a bit in recent years, it still means there's a huge number of companies out there without an optimised core for generating enquiries.

The world of accounting has changed markedly over the last few years, too. It's moved away from simply maintaining your client's books and submitting them to HMRC every year, and towards a full-spectrum digital advisory service that incorporates cloud-based accounting software and a deep understanding of your clients' businesses.

This means your website is more important than ever, especially as more and more millennials and Gen Z-ers come of age and start businesses of their own. The current generation's buying habits are increasingly digital, a trend only accelerated by the pandemic.

That's something to keep in mind not only for attracting new clients, but also for attracting new talent – to maintain a modern culture and bring the right staff into your firm, you need to appeal to the younger generations as a workplace.

So, in addition to needing a website to get in front of this expanding market, you need to have a site that conveys expertise, authority and trust.

According to Google, customers get up to 60% of the way through the buying process before they're ever ready to pick up a phone and talk to anyone. This is all pointing one way: you need a website, and it needs top-tier content.

# OK, but do we need a new website?

**That depends on a few things: how old your current website is, whether it's achieving what you want it to, and whether your goals and priorities have changed since it was built.**

Trends in design change over time, of course, as do the expectations of business-to-business buyers, and the technology we use to access information.

For example, hardly anyone was browsing on mobile devices a decade ago. Now, mobile accounts for approximately half of web traffic worldwide. In the fourth quarter of 2021, mobile devices (excluding tablets) generated 54.4 percent of global website traffic.

With all that rapid change going on, it's very easy for a website to look out of date and tired. But also, standards change – what was technically fit for purpose then won't be now.

For example, web designers used to strive to design pages that would fit within certain standard dimensions to suit desktop PC monitors. They would also bend over backwards to avoid making users scroll because received wisdom was that content 'below the fold' was likely to be ignored. (More on that later.)
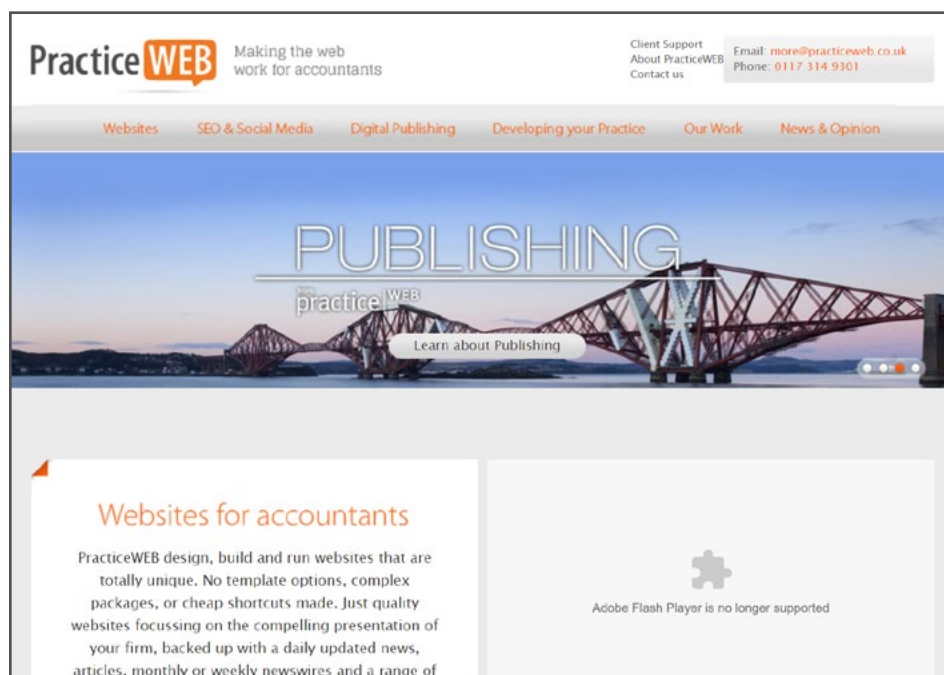
Take the PracticeWeb website from 2012, (pictured above) thanks to the magic of the [Wayback Machine](), as an example.

It was designed so that the main content would fit within an 800 pixel wide space, hence all that grey at either side, and used a Flash plugin – now seriously out of favour for various reasons.

What was best practice then, and sent a signal to users that this was a professional, modern website, now makes a website look tired.

And that's before you even get into the expectations of search engines.

Besides the changes in design and technological trends, your own firm will inevitably have changed over the course of a few years. Often, when we first sit down to talk with clients about their firms, we find their website doesn't accurately represent their current focus and the people they want to attract.

Rather than leaving your website unchanged until it's completely out of date, it's best to continuously review its performance, adjusting and building on it as you learn from user insights.

Then, if you find there are fundamental issues getting in the way of your website doing what you need it to, the chances are you'll need to look at getting a new one.

Here are a few quick tricks for working out if your website needs attention, without getting bogged down in technicalities.

**1. Think about your goals.** Do you want to grow your firm? Bring in more of a particular sector or type of client? Introduce a new service, or refresh your brand? Your website should be supporting you, whatever your overarching aims.

**2. Gather inspiration.** Get together a list of websites you like – and not just accountancy firms. Break down what you like about each and the values you think they put across.

**3. Review the competition.** What are your immediate competitors doing well? What are they doing badly?

**4. Then look again at your own existing website.** Are there annoyances from your competitors' websites which you're also guilty of committing? Are there things the websites you like are doing that yours isn't?

# What does a good accountancy website look like in 2022 and beyond?

## To be effective and appealing to clients, your website needs to meet a basic set of best practice requirements.

First, **it must be responsive**. Responsive websites adapt to whichever device they're being viewed on, rearranging and resizing content on the fly to ensure it always fills the screen.

Here's an example of one of the accountancy firm websites we've built on our Horizon platform as viewed on both mobile and desktop.
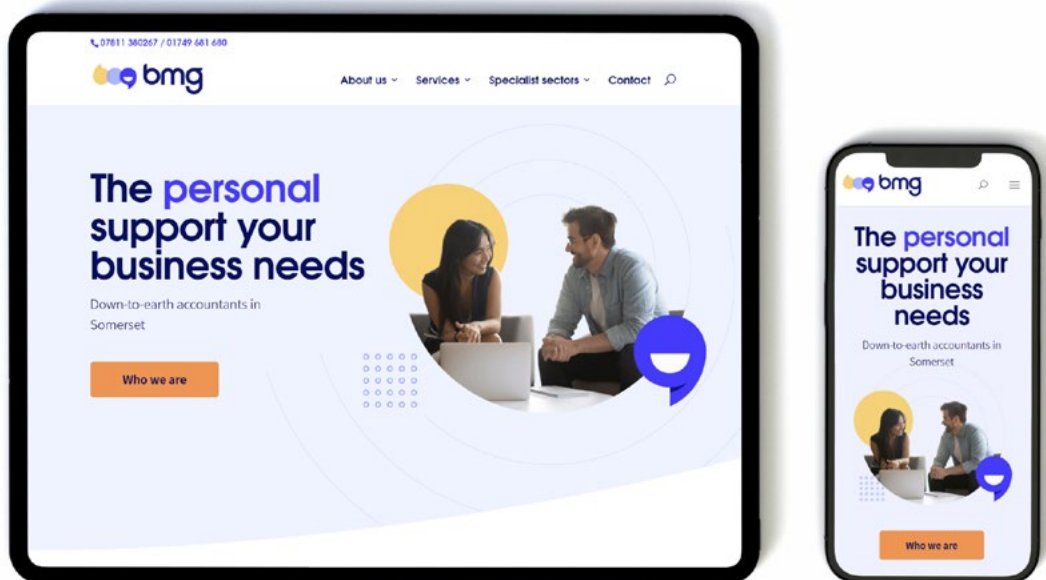
This is important not only because it looks better than tiny text or tons of blank space but because of how Google assesses the value of websites.

During 2018, [Google started rolling out mobile-first indexing](#) which uses the mobile version of your website when ranking your content. If your site isn't mobile friendly, or you have a separate mobile version of your site, it's likely you'll rank lower.

Pages on a 2022-ready accountancy website are also more likely to have a carefully chosen set of pages with substantial content that requires a bit of scrolling on the part of the user rather than hundreds of separate pages with only scraps of text.

As one of our designers [wrote on the PracticeWeb blog](#): "Current [user experience] thinking is that users are happy to scroll – think about what it's like to use Facebook, Amazon and Twitter these days – but if more than one or two clicks are required to find the page they need, or the copy makes it hard to work out what's where, they'll get frustrated."

Of course it's complicated: research from Nielsen Norman Group suggests that 'above the fold' content still has more value.

What a good web designer can do is use that prime real estate to hook a user's attention and then design an interface that draws them down the page, into the content, towards a contact form or other conversion.

Behind the scenes, any decent website these days will have a content management system (CMS) which gives you, the website owner, the power to add, remove and edit content quickly and easily. You certainly shouldn't be emailing change requests to a remote 'webmaster' and waiting days for them to filter through.

You'll also want to have HTTPS encryption. The S in HTTPS stands for 'secure' and HTTPS is effectively a seal of approval guaranteeing the safety of the connection between a user's browser and the website in question.

Stats from Google suggest that desktop users load more than half of all web-pages they view over HTTPS and that they spend two-thirds of their browsing time on HTTPS pages.

If your website address begins with HTTP rather than HTTPS, not only will users feel less confident in the safety of your site but you might also find that Google ranks it lower.

# Search engine optimisation

**Search engine optimisation (or SEO to its friends) is the process of developing website content, back-end set up and links to encourage Google and other search engines to rank your website higher in search results.**

The process is often regarded as a bit of a dark art but, implemented correctly, it can produce a consistent stream of really high-quality traffic full of users ready to convert into leads.

There's a direct correlation between how your website ranks in search engines and the amount of visits it gets, and then how many of those visitors go on to become leads. Users see higher ranking as a trust signal, which encourages them to click on your link and head to your site.

The key to getting SEO right is finding the right partner to work with. There are a lot of self-professed SEO "gurus" out there with an approach to SEO that can be actively harmful to your site. You need to find a partner who knows you and your industry, combined with a deep understanding of current SEO best practice.

Once upon a time it was enough to stuff your page content full of keywords and spammy links in your website footer, but things have moved on a lot since then. Now SEO is about content quality, and how that quality meets the needs of

your users. The Google algorithm is now incredibly complex and is more than capable of reading your website content and working out how it relates to your users.

To get the most out of your SEO you need to first discern what keywords you want to rank for, what assets you have that can rank for them and then how to align the two so that your content surfaces in relevant searches. This is where SEOs come in. Working out the relationship between the two is an art in itself and, while you can do this yourself using tools like Google's keyword planner, an expert can lend real value here.

It's not just your content that will determine your ranking in search engines; there are a myriad of other factors that go into making an SEO-friendly web presence. Some are as simple as making internal links to your service and sector pages, and some are a lot more complex, like working out canonical tags and page indexing.

Whether you choose to brave it alone or take advantage of our in-house SEO team, there has never been a better time to get online and start optimising your site, and then watching those leads roll in.

Further reading: The beginner's guide to SEO for accountants

# Website architecture and structure

## Function dictates form, not the other way round.

Architecture refers to how the information on your website is structured, including hierarchy and connections between items of information. It's about arranging your content to provide the user with easy-to-find information that can be changed and improved with data.

Structure refers to concrete questions of which pages you have on your website, how they're organised and interlinked, and how they're displayed in the navigation.

When we're building websites for clients, this is often where we start, compiling a list of the information we have and want to convey, and then sketching out a structure.

As a rule, avoid coming up with a clever-clever structure for the sake of being different.

Certain conventions have arisen purely because they work for users and provide familiar reference points to help them on their journey.

For example, eCommerce websites often have a big search box at the top and centre of the screen, because user testing over the years has shown that people expect it to be there.

In the case of accountancy websites, though there aren't quite the same well-rehearsed expectations, certain elements of good practice have emerged. Think of the dream client visiting your site for the first time – what do they want to find?

Well, first, they might want proof that you offer the specific accountancy service they're looking to acquire. In which case, it's important to have information about your offer on your homepage.

Then, assuming they want to know more, they need to be able to find a more detailed note on exactly what your service includes without hunting around. In practice, that probably means an element in the navigation bar that says 'Our services', or some close synonym, linking through to individual service pages.

If you work across multiple industry sectors, a 'Sectors' menu is also a good idea, directing prospects to individual pages demonstrating that you really do know their industry and explaining how you tailor your service to its particular requirements.

Or let's say they want more general proof of your expertise and experience – what will they be looking for? Partner profiles on a 'Meet the team' page under 'About us', perhaps, telling a compelling story about how your team developed its unique mix of skills.

Maybe they want to know about your firm's culture – do you share their attitudes?

Are you the kind of people with whom they can do business? This is where

'How we work' or 'Our approach' comes in, setting out a philosophy and approach.

And if they just want to get in touch, there has to be an obvious place to 'Contact us'.

That's just a snapshot of some of the key sections your website might need. Depending on your firm's specialisms, you might need more pages, or fewer.

Another general rule: in terms of SEO, the more pages the better, within reason. The more text you provide, the more there is for Google to get to grips with, and the more likely it is that you'll meet the needs of users who have come to your website looking for information or answers.

# Branding and graphic design

## How your website looks and feels is an important part of the mix along with its functionality and usability.

The fonts you use, the colours you choose, the quality of your logo and the photography or illustration you employ all tell a story.

First, a strong, clean, contemporary look tells people that your firm is active, up-to-date and keen to impress.

Secondly, each choice you make is an opportunity to convey brand values and personality.

Serif font (those little flicks on the ends of letters such as Times New Roman), deep blues and sober photography? Yours is a serious, professional firm, perhaps a little traditional, that wants clients to feel they're getting a premium service.

Sans-serif (the lack of little flicks on letters such as Arial), lime green, yellow and pink, with cartoon illustrations? It's a modern, informal firm that wants clients to feel welcome and relaxed.

The point is to stand out, at least a little – to find a hook that makes your firm distinct from the competition.

That not only helps grab the attention of potential clients but also makes it easier for them to call you to mind when they're making purchasing decisions.

What will prevent you from standing out? Well, one thing we've observed is that accountancy firms tend to default to blue as their corporate colour and often fall back on generic stock imagery of calculators, piggy banks and cash.

When it comes to imagery we'd always recommend, if your budget permits, commissioning some professional photography or bespoke illustrations. It's the only way to guarantee a unique look for your website and to ensure that it really reflects your office, your team and your personality.

Otherwise, make sure you've got a clear visual strategy so that your use of imagery is consistent and fits with the image you want to put across.

**Best practice is to work on your brand identity in this order:**

1. **Brand values and personality**.
2. **Visual style** – palette, typography and so on.
3. **Logo**.
4. **Specific products**.

In an ideal world, your logo should be the ultimate distillation of what your firm is about – everything boiled down to a single recognisable mark.
But that doesn't always happen. As a result, clients sometimes come to us with logos that were designed for print, not online use, without reflection on brand values or identity.

Rather than attempt to design a website around those logos, we'll usually recommend a refresh or complete redesign of the logo to bring it up to scratch.

It can be all too tempting to start at point four and work backwards because the products are more tangible and immediate but the chances are that you'll end up with something less distinctive, in which you feel less pride.

## Further reading

[Sourcing, editing and optimising images](#)

# Copy and content

## Copy and content are the meat on the bones of your website – its reason for being.

The best and most effective websites are those built to deliver a particular message or service to a particular audience in a particular voice.

To achieve that, you should avoid stuffing your website with for-the-sake-of-it content and off-the-peg copy.

Generic copy is bad at conveying personality. It's also bad for your search engine ranking, as set out in the section on SEO, above.

All copy and [content] needs care and attention but while some should be polished and crafted to perfection other elements can and should be more spontaneous.

The hierarchy is something like this:

1. **Firm name**. You've got to live with this for a long time.
2. **Tagline**. You'll see this a lot.
3. **Website homepage copy**. Your primary showcase.
4. **Other website copy**. The 'About us' page, service pages and so on.
5. **Blog posts**. They need to be well written but regularity and topicality is more important than perfection.
6. **Social media posts**. These need to be fast and probably fun rather than

We've run naming exercises on behalf of clients, coming up with 400 different names which we then test by, for example, mocking up business cards, or answering the phone to see how each sounds spoken aloud.

When we work on taglines for client logos, we'll often come up with 20 or so alternatives, workshopping them back and forth with input from copywriters, designers and accountancy firm marketeers or partners.

The entire copy for a homepage, though crafted to the Nth degree, will typically take about as long to put together as the perfect five or six-word tagline.

You get the idea.

Headings and brand-led website copy – the shop-window stuff on the homepage and 'About us' page – should be trimmed back, honed and carefully composed.

As you get deeper into the site, it needs to have more weight. Service pages need to offer plenty of detail – they can't be fluff.

Blog posts, even if they're topical and quick to put together, should feel substantial – what will the user learn that they didn't know before? And what will they be motivated to do once they've learned it?

# Buying a website

**Of course, we hope at this point that you'll pick up the phone and talk to us. But because we hate being on the receiving end of a hard sell as much as anyone else, here's some advice we think will be useful whomever you decide to approach.**

## 1. First, set a budget.

Know how much you can afford to spend and be honest with the agency you're talking to about that budget.

In most cases, they won't be trying to make you spend more than you can afford and knowing your budget upfront will help them work out which product is best for you.

For example, we offer packages of different sizes depending on your requirements. Websites vary hugely in price, from £200 to £10,000 – so knowing what you want and who you want to work with will help you to set a realistic budget for the project.

Remember, if you can put in the extra investment for professionally-written content and a bespoke design, you're setting yourself up for future success.

## 2. Secondly, pose awkward questions.

If you've read above, you know what a good website looks like, so you'll want to ask:

- Does it have a content management system?
- Will I be able to add, remove and edit pages and blog posts myself?
- Will the content be unique or is it shared with other sites?
- If there is non-unique content, will it be [no-indexed](#)?
- Is web design and copywriting done in the UK or outsourced abroad?
- What steps will you take to make my site stand out against the competition?
- What is your experience in designing websites for accountants?
- How will my wishes be taken into account during the design process?
- Can you put me in touch with a couple of previous clients?

## 3. Thirdly, pin down deadlines, due dates and who is responsible for what.

Make sure you know what is expected of you, by when, and when you can expect to see work-in-progress from the agency.

This relates to the final question in the list above – it's better to give feedback at each stage throughout the process rather than receive a finished product you aren't happy with.

# Measuring ROI

## Once you've got a website for your firm, or if you're trying to assess the effectiveness of an existing site, measuring traffic and user behaviour is essential.

As an accountant, you'll already know the value of data – and of turning it into actionable insights that inform an organisation's strategic and tactical business decisions.

You'll be working with various business intelligence tools, presenting analytical findings in reports, summaries, dashboards, graphs and charts to clients, providing intelligence about their business finances.

Google Analytics does something similar only in this instance it's about assessing how well your marketing activity is performing in driving traffic to your website, what your visitors do once they land on your site and, most importantly, whether your website is converting traffic into enquiries and leads.

Google Analytics is a free and extremely powerful tool that Google offers to help you monitor and track your website traffic in as much detail as you'll probably ever need.

It doesn't take long to set up and makes it possible to see quickly how visitors are interacting with your website. Which pages are they arriving via? What are they clicking on? Which pages do they hang about on, absorbing the content?

All of this provides vital insight to guide your wider marketing and business strategy.

As you become more familiar with Google Analytics, you'll be able to analyse the data it provides to assess return on investment. It's vital to be able to see which marketing activities are working, what needs changing and how marketing is driving commercial value for your firm.

For example, if the stats reveal that your page on 'accountancy services for dentists' is getting three times as much traffic as 'accountancy services for catering', it might help you narrow your focus on a profitable niche.

If you run social media campaigns or pay-per-click advertising, Analytics will also help you track how well those are performing in terms of driving traffic to your site.

Once you know how users are interacting with the content on your website, you can also carry out controlled tweaks to encourage them to stay longer and engage more.

Beyond Google Analytics, there are also some rough calculations you can run that will help you work out how quickly you'll recoup the cost of investing in a new website. Let's say your website costs £3,500 to build – how many leads would you need to generate and convert to pay for that?

Two or three, perhaps.

---

### Further reading

[The beginner's guide to Google Analytics for accountants](#)

---

# Conclusion: takeaways

## It's sensible to reckon on needing to at least refresh your web presence every few years as technology and standards change.

We'd advise any accountancy firm that wants to be sure of projecting a professional image to commission from an experienced provider rather than attempting to do the job themselves.

And retain focus on the endgame which is:

- ⊘ **to generate the right kind of leads**
- ⊘ **at the right volume**
- ⊘ **and be the obvious choice over the competition.**

Your website was important long before we'd ever heard of COVID-19 or imagined lockdowns. But now, for almost every growing accountancy practice, it will take centre stage as a platform to communicate, showcase your brand and to drive sales.

**Time to upgrade?**

Taking all of the above into account you should be able to get a pretty good idea of whether your website is doing your brand justice or whether it needs a review.

We specialise in building and maintaining high-performing websites for accountancy firms, and advising on digital marketing strategies to ensure they continue to deliver a return on investment.

This guide was created by the PracticeWeb team

# Appendix

Throughout this guide we have referenced from blogs that the PracticeWeb team has written.

For further reading please find the links to these below:

**Website strategy**

Is your website harming your brand?
The importance of having a current updated site
Four things your website does wrong - and how to fix them
How to get more leads for your accounting firm through SEO
Why isn't my website converting?
Is it the end of referrals?
Is your website ready for mobile-first indexing?
Why Google My Business short names are big news

**Website design and structure**

Minimalism is cool but it doesn't generate leads
Writing an 'about us' page
'Meet the team pages' for accountancy firms
The importance of service pages for accountancy websites
Choosing, editing and optimising images for accountancy websites
Fonts for accounting websites

# We create digital marketing strategies, insight, high-quality content and websites for ambitious accountants.

0117 915 0420
hello@practiceweb.co.uk
practiceweb.co.uk

**Intelligent marketing
for accountants**