Building Your Own Website with Free or Low-Cost Online Tools

DECAL
Thriving Child Care
Business Academy

Learn how to use free or inexpensive online tools to help you build your own website.

What is a website? A very general definition is that a website is a collection of related online pages found under a single domain or internet address. But for your child care business, a website is much more than just a collection of pages. Your website is a central source for you to promote your services to prospective families, draw in potential employees, and provide your current families with information on any topic you'd like to share. It used to be that you needed specialized skills to design and create a website, but this is no longer the case. These days there are a variety of free or low-cost tools that you can use to create your business website and to market your child care program. Often small business owners are overwhelmed by the prospect of creating their own websites, but the process does not need to be complicated or time-consuming. Website building tools have been created so that even if you have no experience, you can feel confident in designing and creating your own website. In this resource, we will walk you through the benefits of building your own website and some of the potential steps you will take as you utilize free or low-cost website design tools.

What are the benefits of building your own business website?

When it comes to your website design process, you may be tempted to hire a private website developer. While this does eliminate the need for your involvement in the website building process, there are some disadvantages.

Disadvantages of hiring a website developer:
- More expensive than using website building tools;
- Potential for long-term contracts that may be difficult to exit;
- Loss of creative control;
- Potential future ownership issues; and
- Less flexibility when making changes.

In comparison, using website building tools to design your own website is often a more attractive option for many reasons.

Advantages of using website building tools:
- Free or inexpensive;
- Full creative control;
- Convenient to update;
- Designing is intuitive and easy to learn; and
- Many tools to choose from.

Building your own website is a great way to take ownership of the marketing of your business. It allows you to control the message you would like to convey and allows you to update your site at your convenience. While there may be a small learning curve when you start using any of the variety of tools, you will soon find that tools are designed to walk you through the process of designing a site that looks professional with no experience needed.

How do I create my business website?

The following section outlines the steps you can take to get started on building your own website.

Select your Domain Name

Before you make your decision on how you'll build your website, you must create and register a domain name. This is your website's address (it's how people will find your website). Domain names end in extensions such as .com, .net, and .info. You will have to pay to register and maintain your domain name and keep in mind that domain names ending in .com are the most expensive to maintain. You'll want to make sure you budget for the monthly or annual cost of keeping your domain name so that you do not lose access to your website. While some services offer a trial period, the cost of domain hosting does vary greatly from service to service. Some companies offer hosting for as little as $40 per year, while others can cost $500 a year depending on the options they offer. It is recommended that you research the cost of hosting and also inquire about how much hosting will cost after the first year. You will also want to keep in mind that some plans may require you to pay for more than one year at a time.

Your domain name should be easy to remember and tied to your business' name, you'll be using it on all of your marketing materials and social media going forward. At times it can be frustrating to find a domain name that isn't currently being used. Consider adding your town name to your domain name so that anyone searching for you is sure that they found the right site and you are less likely to have issues with finding a domain

name that is available (An example would be www.123childcarekidsville.com for a business named 123 Child Care located in Kidsville.) There are many sources online that will help you check the availability of your desired domain name and walk you through the domain registration process. As you consider a name, be sure to think about the length of the name, as you don't want difficulties later on trying to fit this information on a business card or other marketing materials.

Choose a Vendor to Build your Website

It's exciting to begin the process of building your website, but first, you need to decide which vendor to use. You will want to do your research into what each brand of the tool offers, and while we do not endorse any particular vendor, popular options include Google Sites, Wix, Wordpress, Zyro, Godaddy, SquareSpace, and Weebly, to name just a few. You will want to think about your own style of expression and your business marketing approach to find the tool that is right for you. You will have many layout and design options to consider when creating your site, and as you research the tools available you may read about the different design options available for each. Here are some definitions to help you decide what options are best for you:

Options	What do the options do?
Templates	Designs that determine your website's overall appearance (you may read that some programs offer more templates than others, which gives you more design choices.)
Premade Layouts	The way text and photos are positioned on a page (take time to look at different available layouts to make sure the tool you are using offers layouts that make sense for the style of your website.)
Blocks	Simple ways to add different elements on a page (with many tools the majority of the text on your pages will be created and inserted in blocks, which are very easy to use.)
Cut and Paste availability	Allows you to copy and insert information from another location to use on your site (You are probably already familiar with the cut-and-paste function.)
Drag and Drop feature	User-friendly way to modify the position of photos and text on a page (This option makes it very easy to move the location of items on the page and is available in the majority of tools.)
Animation	Allows for action and movement on a page and can be very eye-catching and interesting (While inserting animations may seem difficult, many tools make using animations easy.) Be careful not to overdo it, as too much can be distracting from your content and messaging.

In addition to design options, you will also want to consider what other features, services (usually available for a fee), and help functions are available for that tool. The cost will also be a consideration. Some programs are free for a predetermined amount of information and storage on your site and some programs offer low monthly costs that offer different levels of services. Keep in mind that you will be paying those monthly fees going forward. You will want to make sure to account for any ongoing fees in your marketing budget.

Only you know what features and options are right for you. **The following is not an endorsement for any brand of tool,** but rather a list of options to help you decide which tool you would like to use:

Brand of Tool	Amount of templates	Easy help features	Type of editing feature	Free Option	Additional Information
Wix	800+	Articles and Q&A	Drag and drop	Yes	Easy to modify site for mobile devices
Google Sites	Templates are limited, offer themes	Instructions and help community	Drag and drop	Yes	Can integrate other google options
WordPress/ Bluehost	Number of templates depends on the plan purchased	Resource center	Drag and drop	Low monthly cost depending on the type of site	Difficult to see options unless subscribed
Zyro	100+	Live Support	Drag and drop	Free trial, money-back guarantee	Has products other than website building
Godaddy	100+	Virtual assistant, prompts	Drag and drop	No, billed monthly or yearly	Has some free marketing tools
Weebly	Offers themes	Articles	Drag and drop	Yes	Easy to insert video feature
SquareSpace	100+	Articles, guides, and videos	Drag and drop	Free trial	One of the more popular tools (although there are monthly fees)

The Next Steps

After deciding on which program to use, the fun part begins – now you get to design your site! If you want inspiration, think of sites that you like the look of. Remember to use the colors you use on your marketing materials so you have a cohesive look. Think

about what you would like to include on your site. Some good ideas for what to include are:

- Location;
- Hours of operation;
- Ages served;
- Rates;
- Who you are and your vision for your program;
- What sets you apart from other child care programs and what benefits your program provides;
- Policies and procedures;
- Events – calendar;
- How to enroll – schedule a tour/appointment;
- A page for prospective employees (you can include an option with a link to apply, a list of the benefits available, the requirements for employment);
- An indication that your business is Quality Rated; and
- An indication that you accept CAPS scholarships.

Take time to determine what you'd like to include before you start your layout. Make sure to write text and gather files of photographs that best illustrate your business. If you are including any pictures of children that you care for, make sure to obtain written permission from their parents/guardians before posting. It is recommended that you have parents/guardians sign a document stating that they give you permission to use their child's photograph on your website or in advertising without any additional compensation. This document, also known as a waiver, will help to protect you and your business from any legal action that could occur if a parent does not approve of a photo being included on your website. You can find many waiver templates online by searching "photo consent waiver/template."

If you are unsure of what you would like to include when designing your site, visit child care business websites that you admire for ideas. Be careful not to directly copy other websites. Instead, use them for inspiration and ideas for what will work well on your own original site.

Beginning the Website Building Process

Now that you've picked your tool and know what content you would like to include, what's next?

1. Pick your template to choose the overall look of your site.

2. Edit your homepage to add text such as the name of your business, your logo, a brief description of the services you provide (or your mission statement), and a

portion of your contact information, such as your phone number. You will be able to add descriptive links to the other pages on your site, usually located at the top of the home page. You can select the font style, size, and text colors from the options menus, often found on the right or left sides of the page.

3. Create multiple pages to include all of the information you've decided to feature on your site. You will be able to insert photos and add any other elements you'd like. Get creative and experiment with the layout.

4. You can stop and save your work at any time. You may want to enable the auto-save feature available in most tools so that you do not lose your hard work!

5. Once you have created all of the pages you'd like, it is a good idea to have another set of eyes take a look at what you've created. They can offer suggestions and help you proofread the site. You may also want to take the opportunity to see how your site will look on multiple devices, since your site may look different on a phone or tablet. Most tools have an option that allows you to also design your site for devices other than a desk or laptop.

6. You can now choose to go live and "publish" your site. Remember, your site is not live until you publish it. At any time after publishing your site, you can update information, add additional pages and photos, and change your layout. While you won't want to change the entire look of your site too often, you will be able to make as many changes as you like going forward.

7. Don't forget to create a schedule to revisit and update your site, you'll want to make sure your site is always current. Add this schedule to your marketing calendar and make it a part of your routine review of your marketing plan.

Please note that all business records, including but not limited to audio, video, photos, written documentation, social media posts, and other electronic information must be accessible by DECAL and made available for inspection upon request.

Additional Resources

If you have questions or need help, assistance is available.

[GaPDS Website](#)

[DECAL Thriving Child Care Business Academy Website](#)

[Georgia Licensing Rules and Regulations](#)

To Find Other Study Guides: Click on [Resources](#) on the Academy home page

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For questions about coaching or study groups: Email GAcoaching@civstrat.com

To Find Other ECE Resources: Visit the [DECAL Website](#)

For General Questions about the Academy: Email thriving@decal.ga.gov

For More Information:
[Family Child Care Learning Home Rules and Regulations](#)

[Child Care Learning Center Rules and Regulations](#)