



Creating a simple website for free

If you're simply looking to provide a professional looking but simple web presence then using a free website builder could work for you. There are plenty of websites on the internet that have been created using free services.

The basics

Most of the online builders work in the same way.

1. Create a free account
2. Choose the look and feel of your website from a list of design templates
3. Edit the text and images until you are happy
4. Publish the site to the web

Limitations

You will not get your own web address. This will mean that your URL will look something like this `mikesbikeshop.webbuilder.co.uk`, instead of `mikesbikeshop.co.uk`.

You also won't get email addresses for your domain.

There will be a limit on the number of pages. Normally somewhere between 5 and 25.

You won't be able to use advanced features. Forums, videos, online shop etc, will normally only be provided within a paid package

The company will advertise on your site. It's not normally imposing (ie a small banner at the bottom of each page), but every free site will carry advertising of some kind.

Recommended online website builders

www.wix.com
www.squarespace.com
www.webstarts.com
www.moonfruit.com

Finding the best builder for your company

Firstly, remember that nothing is truly free. If you spend two weeks building your 'free' website, then it's cost you two weeks of time. The four builders listed above all function in slightly different ways - some you'll find easy and intuitive, others will take time to master.

Here are our top tips for finding the right free website builder for your company.

Try each builder out

There's always the temptation to simply stick with the first one you try, but we'd recommended trying each in turn (for 10-15 minutes), and getting a feel for what you like and dislike about each of them.

Move on quickly

It's tempting to spend ages choosing a template to work with - but don't. It's better to choose something quickly and get on with testing how it works. You can spend longer choosing a template once you've decided which online builder you're going to use.

Don't worry about the fine detail

When you trial a website builder, don't worry about using genuine text and real images. Simply use gibberish text and any old pictures you have to hand. At this stage you want to play with the interface and get a feel for what you can do with it.

Think what you'll need

During this trial period, make sure you establish that you're happy doing some basic operations. Here's a brief list of things you might want to try...

- Adding a new page
- Editing text
- Uploading an image and positioning it on the page
- Changing text colours
- Adding a link to another site (for testing try linking to www.google.com)

You can't break it

Don't be nervous to try things - you won't break it, and no-one will ever see your testing website.