A Business Owner's Guide to Building Websites

Prepared for:

Jennifer Hawkins
Molokai Small Business Specialist
Kuha'o Business Center
County of Maui Office of Economic Development

Mark Moran
Owner
Akamai Websites LLC
307A Kamani Street
Honolulu, HI 96813

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction. Websites are a necessary online marketing tool for many businesses. A website is defined not just by its technical scope, but by the services it performs, the information it provides, and how well it serves potential customers.

Elements of a Website. It is important to understand the 3 parts of a website and how domain name availability, web server technology and website software systems (either open source or proprietary) relate to one another, as each have different advantages and disadvantages.

Methods for Website Creation. Some of the most popular DIY solutions are WordPress, Wix, Squarespace, and Weebly. If the process is outsourced then five things should be considered when hiring a web designer: personality, experience, communication, software (systems and training) and pricing.

Comparative Analysis. Each website building solution is compared as they relate to four main concerns for business owners. Functionality relates to what the website system can do, cost is the investment amount, ease of implementation is the amount to learn to implement the system, and time frame is the time required to have a finished website. The comparison of results shows that hiring a website designer is the preferred method.

Conclusion and Recommendations. While hiring a website designer is generally preferred, given the needs of business owners on the island of Molokai, a better solution would be using the Wix website builder due to its ease of use and lower cost.

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1.0 Introduction

Websites have become an essential lead-generating marketing tool for businesses, large and small, around the world. The necessity for businesses to have an online presence will continue to grow in the coming years.

1.1 Purpose

This report is written for the County of Maui Office of Economic Development's Kuha'o Business Center to provide their clients — primarily local businesses and entrepreneurs on the island of Molokai — with resources, education and recommendations on current methods and best practices for business owners to design and launch a website without technical know-how or a background in website design.

1.2 Definition

A website, at its core, is a collection of interlinked digital files that reside on a computer (known as a web server) connected to the world wide web (the network of web servers around the world). These files, either textual, graphical, audio, or video in nature, are downloaded and distributed to computers around the world with the purpose of interacting with, educating or entertaining the website's visitors.

Beyond this technical description, a website serves as a hub of information and interactions around a given topic. For businesses, websites provide an opportunity to connect with existing clients, educate potential customers on their products and services, and sell those products and services through ecommerce ("electronic commerce") functionality. A website's ability to serve as a major component of a business's online marketing initiatives, which are any marketing efforts which a business does through their website, email, social media or social networks. The ultimate goal of a business website is to serve the specific needs of its existing and potential customers using the available features and functionality that a website may provide.

1.3 Sources

The information in this report has been compiled through a survey and analysis of software and systems available for businesses to use in the creation of a website. In addition, information has been prepared through an investigation of current trends, methods and standards in website design and development. A full list of sources is available at the end of the report.

2.0 Elements of a Website

When considering methods for building websites, it is important to understand their constituent parts. Websites consist of three primary elements:

1. Domain name: the website address, such as *google.com*, also known as a URL (universal record locator)
2. Web server: a computer with a constant connection to the internet where a website's files reside
3. Website software: the media, files and database from which a website is built

Each method for website creation provides some or all of the elements necessary to have a functioning website. By understanding how these parts work together a business owner can better analyze the viability of products offered by website building services.

2.1 Domain name

A domain name is a sequence of letters or numbers followed by a top level domain extension (see Fig. 1.) Domain names are purchased through a domain registration service ("registrar"), which sell the right to use the domain name for a period of 1 to 10 years. The costs of registering a domain name depend on several factors such as the registrar's standard rates, the type of domain extension, and whether or not that domain name is already under someone's control. The average cost of a new domain name with a ".com" extension is between $10.00 and $13.00 per year (WP Site Care, 2016) with a discount for longer periods of time.

Fig. 1 The components of a domain name

(First Site Guide, 2016)

Many website building services provide free domain registration upon sign up. However, registering a domain name with those services can be problematic. Separating the two services is better for website security and when moving a website from one web server to another (Nuts and Bolts Media, 2012).

Another consideration when selecting a domain name is to make sure the name is also available on various social networks, such as Facebook or Twitter (WP Site Care, 2016). If a business name is still being selected, it is preferable to also consider availability of the name across various website and social media platforms.

2.2 Web Server and Website Software

A web server and website software work in tandem. A web server's system, which includes the operating system, database system, and installed web programming languages, determine the available types of website software. The opposite is also true with the website software used to build a website determining the available types of web servers.

There are two options related to the web server and website software used to build a website:

1. Open Source: An open source system provides freely available software allowing website owners to either move their website software to a different web server, or use different website software on the same web server.

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2. Proprietary: A proprietary system is owned by a specific company or organization and requires a commitment to use their integrated web server and website software product.

There are advantages and disadvantages to each system which will be discussed later in this report.

3.0 Methods for Website Creation

There are two primary methods to create a website:

1. Do It Yourself ("DIY"): These methods require the website owner to learn either an open source or proprietary website building system
2. Hire a Web Designer: This method outsources the work of building a website to a skilled contractor who works with a client to create a website based on specific requirements.

In general, the DIY method is less expensive but more complex and takes longer to implement. On the other hand, hiring a web designer is more expensive, but takes less time and simplifies the process. Ideally, both methods provide a Content Management System ("CMS") which allow website owners to adjust and add new content to their websites.

3.1 DIY Solutions

Of the hundreds of DIY solutions available in the marketplace, this report will focus on five currently popular solutions, one of which is open source with the rest being proprietary. For each method their respective features and costs are presented.

3.1.1 WordPress (www.wordpress.org and www.wordpress.com)

With almost 60% market share of website CMS (see Fig. 2), WordPress is a preferred website system for website builders. WordPress as a website system is unique because it comes in both an open source and a proprietary system.

Market share trends for content management systems for websites

This report shows the market share trends for content management since October 2015.

	2015 1 Oct	2015 1 Nov	2015 1 Dec	2016 1 Jan	2016 1 Feb	2016 1 Mar	2016 1 Apr	2016 1 May	2016 1 Jun	2016 1 Jul	2016 1 Aug	2016 1 Sep	2016 1 Oct	2016 28 Oct
WordPress	58.6%	58.6%	58.7%	58.8%	59.1%	59.2%	59.2%	59.3%	59.5%	59.5%	59.6%	59.2%	58.9%	58.7%
Joomla	6.7%	6.6%	6.5%	6.4%	6.4%	6.4%	6.3%	6.3%	6.3%	6.3%	6.3%	6.3%	6.3%	6.6%
Drupal	5.0%	5.0%	5.0%	4.9%	4.9%	4.9%	4.9%	4.9%	4.9%	4.9%	4.9%	4.9%	4.8%	4.8%
Magento	2.9%	2.9%	2.9%	2.9%	2.9%	2.9%	2.9%	2.9%	2.8%	2.8%	2.8%	2.8%	2.8%	2.7%
Blogger	2.8%	2.7%	2.7%	2.7%	2.7%	2.8%	2.8%	2.7%	2.6%	2.6%	2.6%	2.6%	2.5%	2.5%
TYPO3	1.5%	1.5%	1.5%	1.5%	1.5%	1.5%	1.5%	1.5%	1.5%	1.5%	1.5%	1.5%	1.5%	1.5%
Bitrix	1.2%	1.2%	1.2%	1.3%	1.3%	1.3%	1.4%	1.4%	1.4%	1.4%	1.4%	1.4%	1.4%	1.4%
PrestaShop	1.3%	1.3%	1.3%	1.3%	1.3%	1.3%	1.3%	1.3%	1.3%	1.3%	1.3%	1.3%	1.3%	1.3%
Shopify	0.9%	0.9%	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%	1.1%	1.1%	1.1%	1.1%	1.2%	1.2%	1.2%	1.2%	1.3%
Adobe Dreamweaver	1.5%	1.4%	1.4%	1.4%	1.4%	1.4%	1.4%	1.3%	1.3%	1.3%	1.3%	1.3%	1.3%	1.3%
Squarespace	0.8%	0.8%	0.8%	0.8%	0.8%	0.9%	0.9%	0.9%	0.9%	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%
OpenCart	0.9%	0.9%	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%	0.9%
FrontPage	1.1%	1.1%	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%	1.0%	0.9%	0.9%	0.9%	0.9%	0.9%	0.9%
DataLife Engine	0.8%	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%
vBulletin	0.9%	0.8%	0.8%	0.8%	0.8%	0.8%	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%	0.6%	0.6%
DotNetNuke	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%	0.5%	0.5%
Wix	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%
ExpressionEngine	0.6%	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%
phpBB	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	0.4%
Bigcommerce	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%
Discuzl	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%

Fig. 2 CMS Market Share Trends

(w3techs.com, 2016)

The open source version of WordPress, available at www.wordpress.org, is a downloadable CMS designed for the Linux-Apache-MySQL-PHP ("LAMP") web server configuration. This is the most popular configuration used on over 50% of all web servers (see Fig. 3), and is offered by the majority of web hosting providers.

The cost of the open source WordPress CMS is free. However, it requires purchasing a web hosting service, which costs between \$5 and \$25 / month for starter packages. It is outside the scope of this report to provide an analysis of various web hosting providers, as there are many variables that should be considered for this decision.

The open source WordPress CMS is appropriate for tech-savvy business owners who want to learn new skills, or those who are hiring a web designer to build a website.

Usage of web servers for websites

This diagram shows the percentages of websites using various web servers. See technologies overview for explanations on the methodologies used in the surveys. Our reports are updated daily.

How to read the diagram:
Apache is used by 51.5% of all the websites whose web server we know.

Request an extensive market report of specific web servers.

Learn more

Server	Percentage
Apache	51.5%
Nginx	31.3%
Microsoft-IIS	11.9%
LiteSpeed	2.3%
Google Servers	1.3%
Tomcat	0.6%
IdeaWebServer	0.3%
Apache Traffic Server	0.2%
Node.js	0.2%
Cowboy	0.1%
Tengine	0.1%
Lighttpd	0.1%
Oracle Servers	0.1%
IBM Servers	0.1%

W3Techs.com, 29 October 2016
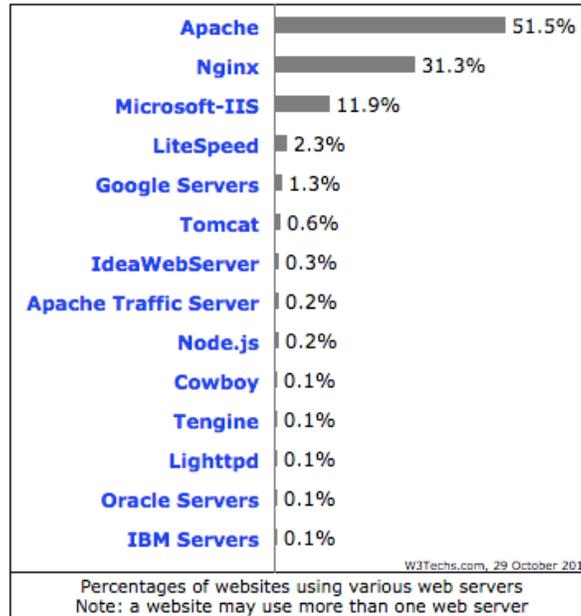Percentages of websites using various web servers
Note: a website may use more than one web server

Fig. 3 Usage of web servers for websites

(w3techs.com, 2016)

The proprietary version of WordPress, available at www.wordpress.com, is a website hosting system based on the core WordPress technology. The proprietary WordPress system starts with a free plan. Additional enhancements such as ad removal, custom domain names, additional file storage and website analytics are available at monthly rates between $2.99 to $24.92 (WordPress.com, 2016). However, WordPress is not a drag and drop website builder which means it is not as easy to use as other options such as Wix, Weebly or Squarespace.

This system is ideal for website builders who want some of the robust features of the WordPress CMS, but do not want to install the open source version on a web server.

3.1.2 Wix (www.wix.com)

Wix is a proprietary website building platform designed to be easy to use and implement. Outside of WordPress it has the largest market share of website builders (EquityNet, 2013) and is known for beautiful business-focused website templates and an easy drag and drop interface.

Wix has a free starter plan with limited options, but allows for expanded functionality at 5 different price tiers from $60 / year to $300 / year (Wix, 2016). The flexible builder and templates come with some restrictions, including no ability to change website themes, and some challenges when viewing websites on mobile devices.

Wix is a good solution for those who need an intuitive website builder and a large number of templates and site gadgets. It lacks a few key tools of other website systems, such as traffic tracking, but still provides a lot of functionality options for business owners.

3.1.3 Squarespace (www.squarespace.com)

Another proprietary drag and drop website building system, Squarespace is popular among artists and creatives due to award winning website design templates. With well integrated e-commerce functionality, they have also become popular among online business builders who sell physical or digital products (Website Builder Expert, 2016).

While Squarespace is known for beautiful designs, a good blogging system, and a robust feature set, their website design editor has also received some criticism for being hard to use, and their prices are higher than other services with comparable offerings. They also limit their e-commerce system to Stripe, an online payment processor, and do not use PayPal, which is much more popular among many business owners.

Monthly rates for a personal site are $16 (or $12 if paid annually), and can go up to $46 at their more advanced service (see Fig. 4), which includes extensive e-commerce and business-related functionality (Squarespace, 2016) While the prices are higher than other drag and drop website

builders, it is considerably less than you would pay a professional website designer to custom build a similarly designed website from scratch.

Squarespace Pricing Plans	Monthly Plan ($/month)	Annual Plan ($/month)	Savings (%)
Personal	$16	$12	25%
Business	$26	$18	31%
Basic (eCommerce)	$30	$26	13%
Advanced (eCommerce)	$46	$40	13%

Fig. 4 Squarespace pricing plans
(Website Builder Expert, 2016)

Squarespace is a good option for business owners who want to present a high end feel for their brand, or creative professionals and artists who want to sell their artwork and products online using the Stripe system. However, the complexity of the design interface may not be ideal for less technical business owners.

3.1.4 Weebly (www.weebly.com)

Weebly is known for being the easiest to use website builder on the market (Website Tool Tester, 2016). Through the Weebly app store additional functionality can be added to a website for costs starting at $8 / month. A recent update to Weebly adjusted their themes to look more modern and be fully mobile responsive (PC Mag, 2016).

Weebly's photo editor may not be powerful enough for image-heavy websites. The Weebly system also does not provide the ability to revert back to previous versions of web pages.

Depending on the latest version, either Wix or Weebly are in the first or second place on most website builder reviews. As stated by a review in Superb Website Builders, "As there are dog and cat people, there are Wix and Weebly fans", which is to say, the decision to use one over the other is often a matter of personal preference over a comparative analysis of their respective systems.

3.2 Hiring a Web Designer

There are five things to consider when hiring a web designer, each of which contribute to knowing if working with a web designer is a good decision, or if a specific designer is a good fit. The five considerations are:

1. Personality
2. Experience
3. Communication
4. Software (system and training)
5. Pricing

3.2.1 Personality

Due to the collaborative nature of website design, matching a designer and client's personalities is important. Personality types range from intuitive, artistic and introspective, to confident, creative and outgoing. There is no one "web designer" personality type so it is important to spend time with a designer to determine issues of compatibility.

3.2.2 Experience

The experiences and education of a designer determines their approach to a project. Their suitability can be better understood by reviewing their portfolio of past work. It is important to ask about their specific roles since a website design has many different levels of involvement. Did they design the visual elements? Did they write the website code? Understand their skill set to better see how those skills can benefit a website's business.

3.3.3 Communication

It is important to determine how a website designer communicates before hiring them. Ask whether they prefer email, phone calls or meeting in person. Find out if they send daily status reports or set up weekly touch base meetings. The job of a good designer is to always keep their clients in the loop with the method that works best for both of them. As Troy Dean of WP Elevation says, "If a client asks what is going on, then I've failed as a web designer" (WP Elevation, 2016).

3.3.4 Software (system and training)

Given the multitude of software options with websites, it is important know the type of content management system being used, as well as the website designer's process for training their clients to update the website. Determining the method of control, software systems used, and training received on the system, will allow the website to be functional and useful after it launches.

3.3.5 Pricing

There are no standard rates for website design services, and designers can charge either by the project, by the hour, or some combination of the two. A survey of 30,000 successful web design project booked through the design job site, Crew, prices range from $3,000 for a basic website, to $20,000 for a more advanced website (How Much Does a Website Cost, 2016).

4.0 A Comparative Analysis

There are four primary concerns for business owners when it comes to building a new website:

1. Functionality: What can the website do?
2. Cost: How much will the website cost?
3. Ease of Implementation: How easy will the website be to set up and use?
4. Time Frame: How long will it take to have a finished website?

We will look at each of these aspects as they relate to the website building methods shared above.

4.1 Functionality

Functionality relates to the various features and technology available in a website system. For example: contact forms, buttons, photo galleries, video integration and more. It is beyond the scope of this report to provide details on each website method's available functionality. Each method is ranked in the order of the availability and diversity of various functions which can be implemented.

1. **Wordpress.org Open Source Software:** Due to extensibility of the software the variety of available functionality is virtual limitless.
2. **Web Designer:** Since a qualified website designer can implement whatever technology may be required for your website, the functionality here is also virtually limitless, limited only by the web designer's skill set.
3. **Wix.com:** The strength of Wix's functionality is the constant updates to their features and themes made every month. They add new functionality on a weekly basis which means that whatever features might not be available now, will probably be available in the near future.
4. **Squarespace.com:** The strength of Squarespace's functionality is in their customizable designs and themes. The ability to customize the look of a Squarespace site puts it slightly ahead Weebly, although they share much of the same functionality.

5. **Weebly.com:** The available features of Weebly, while still allowing for a functional website, are not at the same level of robustness and detail as other methods. They also do not upgrade their feature set too frequently.

6. **Wordpress.com:** Functionality is limited, and even with a paid account some of the features available with other free services are not available.

4.2 Cost

Cost is related to the investment required to get a website up and running. It is important to note that some of the free options for website builders are not a viable option due to the limited functionality available at that subscription level. Therefore, the cost of the systems is based on the price point for a similar set of functionality across all services.

1. **Wordpress Open Source Software:** The cost of utilizing the Wordpress open source software is not in the software itself since it is free. Instead the cost comes from paying for web hosting and premium plugins which provide additional functionality. Given the tens of thousands of availbale Wordpress plugins, most of which are free, it is possible to build a robust Wordpress website without paying for premium plugins or themes, but often times the cost savings are not worth the additional headaches of testing and sorting through the potential options.

2. **Wordpress.com:** Their prices, topping out at $24.92 / month, don't quite make up for the lower feature set available on their system.

3. **Wix.com:** Among proprietary systems Wix provides the best service for the cheapest price. Even paying for additional functionality such as an online store, is reasonably priced at $25 / month (Wix, 2016)

4. **Squarespace.com:** While there is no free plan at Squarespace, their price range — from $12 to $46 / month (see Fig. 4) — is reasonable when considering their feature set.

5. **Weebly.com:** Given that Weebly's functionality offerings are less than other proprietary systems, it seems counterintuitive that their premium price for their top tier package is more expensive at $49 / month.

6. **Website Designer:** Naturally a custom designed website is going to be the most expensive option. As mentioned before (3.3.5), prices typically start between $1,000 to $5,000 for a basic website and can grow considerably depending on the scope of the project and technology requirements.

4.3 Ease of Implementation

It is worth noting that the cost of a website project can also be measured in terms of the time required for a business owner to build and launch a website. Time is also directly related to the ease of implementation, which includes the amount of education necessary to learn how to use a content management system, whether it is proprietary, open source or custom built.

1. **Website Designer:** While each designer is different, most provide a structured website development process for their clients. Website designers typically manage the production of the website, provide status updates and consult with clients to resolve issues. Working with a competent website designer makes this process easy, while working with a website designer who doesn't have a proven process can cause frustration and delays. Typically, more expensive website designers are also the ones who make the process the easiest for their clients.
2. **Weebly.com:** Weebly is considered by many to be the easiest proprietary website building system available. Their interface is easier and system more intuitive than other services. However, since their functionality also has some limitations, it may or may not be appropriate for the requirements of a given business.
3. **Wix.com:** Also utilizing an easy-to-understand drag and drop website builder, Wix isn't as easy to use as Weebly, but has more features which may be necessary for a business.
4. **Squarespace.com:** The drag-and-drop interface makes creating a website easier, but Squarespace is also known for having an extensive amount of extensibility with their page design system, which may be overwhelming for non-artists or non-technically minded business owners.

5. **Wordpress.com:** Since the WordPress site management system is a backend system, you cannot see changes made on the site until you save and then view the website page. This is not as easy to use as drag-and-drop systems.

6. **WordPress Open Source:** This website system is not much more complex than Wordpress.com. However, the act of setting up a web server and installing WordPress software is often the part of the process that confuses most DIYers.

4.4 Time Frame

A common misconception about building a website is the scope of work required by a business owner, and the time it takes to build it the right way. Designing a website, regardless of the system you use, takes time — not just for the designer, but for the client as well (Lift Interactive, 2014).

Much of that time is due to the business owner determining the use case scenarios and technologies or features that their customers require from their website. Not all businesses require the same features so it often takes time to make the right determinations.

For this evaluation, all issues related to content development, copywriting, collection of assets, images, graphics and media files, and delays typical of this process, are assumed to be consistent across each system.

1. **Website Designer:** Having website design outsourced means less time required of the business owner. Having someone else implement a website is always faster, especially if they are a qualified professional.

2. **Weebly.com**: Given Weebly's easier interface, implementing a website in the Weebly system is also faster. The less time spent learning to use a system, the faster a project will be finished.

3. **Wix.com**: Similarly, Wix provides a drag and drop system that is relatively easy to pick up and learn.

4. **Squarespace.com:** The Squarespace design system can be challenging to customize, but if you are utilizing one of their pre-existing themes, then Squarespace, like Weebly and Wix, can be relatively quick to implement.

5. **Wordpress.com:** Without a drag and drop interface, it takes longer to see the impact of changes made to the website since it is necessary to toggle back and forth between the backend builder and public-facing website.

6. **WordPress Open Source Software:** With the high level of complex customizations available, WordPress open source software is the most time consuming to learn, taking the longest to implement

4.5 Comparison of Results

Table 1 assigns each option a point value where 1 is the best option and 6 is the worst option. The lower the total value, the better the system.

	Web Designer	Wordpress.org	Wordpress.com	Wix	Weebly	Squarespace
Functionality	2	1	6	3	5	4
Cost	6	1	2	3	5	4
Ease of Implementation	1	6	5	3	2	4
Time Frame	1	6	5	3	2	4
TOTALS	10	14	18	12	14	16

Table 1. A comparison of website building methods across four areas

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

Table 1 shows that the best (lowest) score is given to hiring a Web Designer. However, of the D.I.Y. options, the best ranking was Wix.com. These results indicate that hiring a web designer is the best option, which may be true across the pool of all businesses. However, the results must be viewed as they related business owners based on the island of Molokai.

In speaking with business owners in the community, and after consultation with the Kuha'o Business Center, one of the main considerations for business owners on Molokai is their lower revenue which is a result of the lower population, depressed local economy, and lack of tourism on the island.

With that in mind, it doesn't make sense to recommend hiring web designers for business owners on Molokai, and instead the best recommendation would be utilizing the Wix.com website building system. While it doesn't provide the best solution, it is adequate enough to be a good solution for the majority of users. Total costs for the top of line Wix.com system will cost either $30 / month or $300 / year.

However, for those businesses able to afford a website designer, they will need an initial investment of $3,000 to $5,000, with recurring maintenance costs between $79 to $150 / month (GoWP, 2016), for a total year one cost of $3,948 to $6,800.

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