




# **THE WEBSITE WAKE-UP GUIDE**

## **FOR LOCAL PERSONAL SERVICE BUSINESSES**

**How to Tell If Your Website Is  
*Helping You*  
Or Quietly Costing You Clients**

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30+ years building practical  
websites that actually work.*

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# 1. Introduction

## Why This Guide Exists

### Most local business websites don't fail loudly.

They fail silently — with slow load times, missing trust signals, outdated content, or no clear reason for a visitor to act.

As someone who's been building and fixing websites for over 30 years:

### I've Seen It All...

- A **contact form that looked fine** — but didn't send messages anywhere (for 6 months).
- A site that **took 14 seconds to load on mobile** — with the phone number buried in the footer.
- A homepage that looked okay on desktop... but on mobile, **the whole site was shoved into a left-side column** 40 pixels wide.
- A contractor's site with a big hero image of **a smiling family in a kitchen** — but no mention of what the company actually *does*.
- A “book now” button that **linked to a blank page**.
- A client paying \$600/month for “SEO” — but their **Google Business Profile hadn't been claimed**.
- A law firm website with **12 menu items**... and *not one of the pages* said “Get in Touch.”
- A plumber whose homepage started with “Welcome to Our Website” — while **his competitor's site led with “Emergency Leak? We'll Be There in 90 Minutes.”**
- An entire site that **hadn't been touched since 2013** — still showing Flash content (which no modern browser supports).
- A contractor whose **domain name had expired** — but they didn't know because the web guy had all the login info and ghosted them.

This guide exists because **you deserve to know if your website is helping you — or quietly costing you leads, clients, and money.**

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## Who This Is For

This guide was made specifically for **local personal service business owners** — the kind of people who:

- Get most of their clients by word of mouth
- Know their site “probably needs some work” but don’t know where to start
- Don’t want to get scammed by overpriced marketing packages
- Just want honest, clear answers in plain English

Whether you're a tradesperson, therapist, lawyer, coach, or mobile service pro — this guide is for you.

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## What You’ll Be Able to Do

By the time you finish this book, you’ll be able to:

- Run real tests on your own website using free tools
- Spot the biggest red flags and weak points holding your site back
- Score your website using a 17-point checklist
- Understand how to improve your site **without hiring anyone**
- See how “agency work” is often just fluff — and know how to verify it

You’ll walk away with clarity, control, and a plan — not confusion.

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## What This Is *Not*

Let’s be clear up front:

- ✗ This is **not** a teaser for a service
- ✗ You will **not** be contacted
- ✗ This is **not** a gateway to some \$997 course

I’m not trying to upsell you. I’m not trying to “capture” you.

This guide is here to help you **avoid spending \$150+ on an audit** by showing you exactly how to do it yourself.

You’ll be able to spot agency BS, fix your own problems, or — if needed — go hire someone better informed and in control.

**That’s it. Nothing else. No strings.**

## 2. How to Think About Your Website

### Your Website Is Not a Brochure — It's a Silent Salesperson

Many small business owners still think of their website as an “**online brochure.**”

That thinking is outdated — and it's costing you money.

Your website is more like a **silent salesperson**. It's working for you (or against you) 24/7.

Unlike a human salesperson, though, your website has just a few seconds to answer three unspoken questions in a visitor's mind:

**Can you solve my problem?**

**Can I trust you to do this well?**

**Can you prove it?**

If your site fails to answer those questions quickly and clearly, the visitor leaves. No contact form. No call. No second chance.

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### Emotion Drives Action — Logic Justifies It

Visitors don't decide with facts.

They decide with **emotion** and use **logic** to justify the decision afterward.

That means your homepage — especially the part that shows first on mobile — needs to speak to:

A **problem** they're trying to solve

A **feeling** they want to get rid of (stress, overwhelm, confusion)

A **result** they want to achieve (relief, safety, progress)

Then you can show the logic: testimonials, credentials, years in business, staff bios — but only **after** you've earned attention.

**Pro Tip:** Start your homepage with a strong emotional headline.

✓ “Worried your basement will flood again? We've got you covered.”

✗ “Welcome to Our Website! We've been in business since 1999.”

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## Why Most Websites Fail Silently

Most bad websites don't look broken — they look fine.

But they're **invisible to Google**, or hard to use on a phone, and fail to answer basic questions.

Here's what I see often:

- A pretty homepage with no clear service area
- A "Contact Us" page with a form that doesn't work
- An About page that takes up the entire homepage
- No testimonials, no blog, no local relevance
- A slow, clunky mobile version that gets abandoned in 3 seconds
- And the business owner says:
- *"Well, we have a website... we're good."*

**No — you might be bleeding leads without knowing it.**

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## A Real Example: What Actually Works

One of my long-time clients runs a law firm that gets over **10,000 visitors per month**.

Most of that traffic doesn't come from the homepage — it comes from **articles and blog posts** that answer real legal questions like:

"How do I file for divorce in Bergen County?"

"Should I update my will if I remarry?"

The site works because it:

- **Answers questions**
- **Builds trust**
- **Offers next steps clearly**

**Slogan we live by:**

**"Answer 80% of their questions for free. Charge well for the other 20%."**

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## What to Keep in Mind Going Forward

Every test you'll run in this guide, and every score you'll track, should be based on this idea:

Your site must **solve**, **build trust**, and **prove** — in that order.

Now, let's dive into the self-audit and see how your site stacks up.

# 3. The Website Self-Audit: 17-Point Checklist

## How to Use This Checklist

This is a **17-point website self-audit** you can complete in just 10–15 minutes.

For each question, mark **Yes** or **No**. Since you're reading a digital copy, you can:

- Print this document, or
- Write down each question number and your answer on a notepad

When you're done, you'll tally your score and check your results in Section 9.

Each item represents a key **trust**, **functionality**, or **visibility** factor.

You'll answer each with **Yes** (✓) or **No** (✗), and at the end, and tally your total score.

✓ Many of the checks come with tool links or a simple browser test.

🧠 Others are based on perception and content.

Together, they form a clear snapshot of whether your website is helping or hurting your business.

Let's begin.

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## ● Section A: Mobile & Speed

### 1. Is your website easy to navigate on a phone?

Use your own phone. Are text and buttons readable? Is it smooth to scroll and click?

Yes  No

### 2. Does your site load in under 3 seconds on mobile?

Use this tool. <https://pagespeed.web.dev>

✓ 80+ score = good ✗ Below 60 = red flag

Yes  No



Performance



Accessibility



Best Practices



SEO

### 3. Does your site pass Google's Mobile-Friendly Test?

All should be over 80.

Yes  No

If you fail this, mobile users will likely leave.



Performance



Accessibility



Best Practices



SEO

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## ● Section B: First Impressions

### 4. Does your homepage speak directly to the visitor's problem?

It should say more than "Welcome." It should reflect what the customer needs help with.

Yes  No

### 5. Can a visitor tell what you do and where you do it in 3 seconds?

E.g. "Hamilton Electrician" or "In-home massage in Houston"

Yes  No

**6. Is your call to action (CTA) clear and visible above the fold?**

E.g. “Request a Quote,” “Call Now,” “Book a Visit” — not buried at the bottom.

Yes  No

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**● Section C: Trust & Credibility**

**7. Do you display real testimonials or reviews on your site?**

Bonus points if they’re specific (name, location, result).

Yes  No

**8. Is your contact info (phone number, email, service area) easy to find?**

Don’t hide this in the footer or just on the Contact page.

Yes  No

**9. Is your site secure (uses HTTPS with a padlock in the browser)?**

If not, modern browsers may warn visitors your site is “not secure.”

Yes  No

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**● Section D: SEO & Visibility**

**10. Does your site appear in Google when you search site:yourdomain.com?**

If nothing shows up, your site isn’t indexed — a major problem. If only few pages are listed and you know have many more – time for a closer look.

Yes  No

**11. Does your homepage have a descriptive, keyword-friendly meta title?**

E.g. “Toronto Electrician – Emergency and Residential Services”

(Not just “Home” or “Welcome Page”)

Yes  No

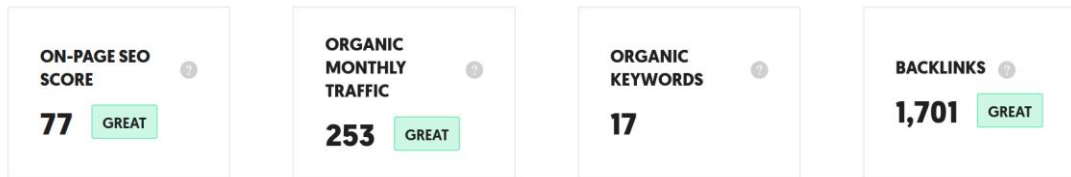
## 12. Run a free SEO audit using Ubersuggest.

This tool is the one I use the most to audit a website. Now you can do it yourself for free.

### [Ubersuggest - Free Keyword Analysis and Checker Tool](#)

You will get one free audit. Select Site Audit in the left menu.

Sample:

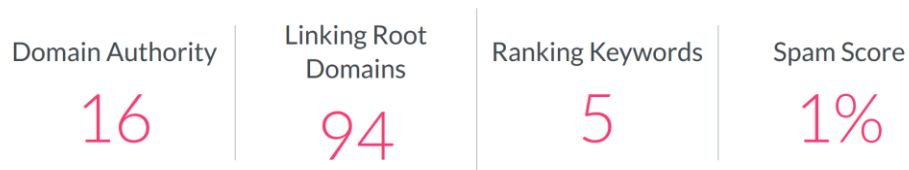


Are at least 3 of 4 Great?

Yes  No

## 13. Check your site's Domain Authority score

<https://moz.com/domain-analysis> to check your site's Domain Authority score



✓ DA > 15 = decent ✗ DA < 10 = needs improvement

**Is your score at least 10?**

Yes  No

### What Is Domain Authority — and Why It Matters

Domain Authority (DA) is a score between 1 and 100 that predicts how well your website is likely to rank in Google. It's not from Google directly — it's a third-party metric from tools like Ubersuggest or Moz — but it's widely used in the industry. A new site starts around 1. Most small local businesses land between 10 and 30. The higher your DA, the more trust and visibility your site tends to have. If your score is under 10, it often means your site has little content, few backlinks, or has been neglected. A DA above 15–20 suggests your site is gaining some traction — and may be starting to show up for more search

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## ● Section E: Conversion & Contact Flow

### 14. Is your contact form easy to find — and does it work?

Test it. Make sure it goes through, sends confirmation, and reaches your inbox.

Yes     No

### 15. Is your phone number tap-to-call on mobile?

If a visitor has to copy-paste your number, you're losing calls.

Yes     No

### 16. Do all pages end with a call-to-action or invitation to connect?

E.g. "Book a Consultation," "See Our Services," or "Call for a Free Quote"

Yes     No

### 17. Is your site registered on Google Search Console/Analytics and Bing Webmaster?

Yes     No

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## Scoring Rubric – How many YES?

- ✓ 13–17 = **Strong site**. Tweak for growth.
  - ✓ 9–12 = **Serviceable**, but you're probably leaving money on the table.
  - ✓ 5–8 = **Leads and trust are being lost**. Fixes needed.
  - ✓ 0–4 = **Site is likely hurting your business**. Time for a serious update.
- 

✓ Tally your score and write it down.

You'll use this later when evaluating what to fix and whether you can do it yourself.

Ready to go deeper? Next, we'll walk through the **tools** to check everything above.

## 4. Toolbox: Free Tools to Run Your Own Tests

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You don't need to hire anyone to check your website's performance, visibility, or credibility.

These **free, trusted tools** will help you evaluate your site the same way pros and agencies do — without the fluff, sales pitch, or jargon.

Each tool below matches specific checklist items from your self-audit in Section 3.

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## ● 1. Google PageSpeed Insights

<https://pagespeed.web.dev>

### **What it does:**

Analyzes how fast your site loads on mobile and desktop. It also shows which parts are slowing it down.

### **Why it matters:**

Slow sites lose visitors. Google uses speed in its ranking algorithm, and customers judge your professionalism in seconds.

### **What to look for:**

A score of **80 or higher** is good

Red/Orange = needs attention

Focus on mobile score

### **Checklist items it helps with:**

- ✓ #2 – Load time
- ✓ #3 – Performance rating

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## ● 2. Google Mobile-Friendly Test

<https://search.google.com/test/mobile-friendly>

### **What it does:**

Checks if your site works properly on smartphones.

### **Why it matters:**

Over 70% of local searches happen on phones. If your site fails this test, you're frustrating potential customers.

### **What to look for:**

Green "Page is mobile-friendly" = ✓

Warnings about small text, clickable elements = ✗

### Checklist items it helps with:

- ✓ #1 – Mobile usability
  - ✓ #3 – Google’s own mobile score
- 

## ● 3. Ubersuggest SEO Audit

### [🔗 Ubersuggest - Free Keyword Analysis and Checker Tool](#)

#### What it does:

Provides a free SEO audit including:

- Domain Authority (DA)
- Backlink count
- Top-performing pages
- Keyword rankings

#### Why it matters:

It shows how strong your site is in Google’s eyes — and whether your agency (if you use one) has done anything useful.

#### What to look for:

**DA (Domain Authority)** above 15 = decent

Too many backlinks from spammy or unrelated sites = red flag

Pages missing meta tags or descriptions = easy fix

#### Checklist items it helps with:

- ✓ #12 – SEO audit
- ✓ #11 – Meta issues
- ✓ #8 – **Backlink profile**

### Why Quality Backlinks Matter (and How Bad Ones Can Hurt You)

Backlinks — links from other websites that point to yours — are one of the most important factors in how search engines rank your site. But not all backlinks are equal. A few links from respected, relevant websites (like news outlets, trade associations, or local directories) can do more for your ranking than hundreds of low-quality ones. In fact, **spammy backlinks can actually damage your credibility**. One of my clients had over 600 backlinks — sounds great, right? But when I ran an audit, **over 80% were from junk sites**, including adult content domains and expired blogs with high spam scores. That doesn't just fail to help you — it puts your domain reputation at risk. Always prioritize quality over quantity and **never buy backlinks** from shady providers.

Here is a screenshot from Ubersuggest audit of their backlinks.

SOURCE PAGE TITLE & URL   TARGET PAGE	DOMAIN AUTHORITY	PAGE AUTHORITY	SPAM SCORE	ANCHOR TEXT	FI SI
HD wallpapers concrete floor finishes base Source: 3570.ga/files/images... Target: .../ima...	1	1	87%	get free high quality hd w...	
High quality images for basement floor co Source: 7793.ga/photos/do... Target: ...com/ima...	1	1	87%	download hd wallpapers ...	
Source: 7713.gq/photos/dow... Target: .../ima...	1	5	84%	download hd wallpapers c...	
Welcome to GTA Blog. We are currently ur Source: 1800followme.com/ Target: ...om/	3	10	82%	concrete in hamilton	
Source: 30love9.ml/photos/d... Target: ...com/ima...	11	15	79%	download hd wallpapers c...	
HD wallpapers basement floor finishes wa' Source: wall111.gq/files/imag... Target: .../ima...	1	1	79%	get free high quality hd w...	
Source: nashr.xyz/info/kerma... Target: .../	5	15	78%	nashr.xyz	
High quality images for staining basement Source: 802desktop.gq/phot... Target: .../ima...	1	5	78%	download hd wallpapers s...	
HD wallpapers concrete basement wall de Source: 530design.cf/files/im... Target: ...	1	1	77%	get free high quality hd w...	

There are dozens of backlinks with a spam score over 50. No wonder this 3-year-old site has a Domain Authority of 2. Note the Source and Anchor text. Nothing related to his business. This is killing his site.

## ● 4. Google Site Search Check

Search on Google:

site:yourdomain.com

(Replace with your own domain)

### **What it does:**

Shows how many pages from your site are indexed by Google.

### **Why it matters:**

If your site isn't indexed, it can't appear in search results — no matter how pretty it looks.

### **What to look for:**

Homepage should show up first

Several pages indexed = good

Nothing found = your site isn't being crawled correctly

### **Checklist items it helps with:**

✓ #10 – Index visibility

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## ● 5. Google Business Profile

 <https://www.google.com/business>

### **What it does:**

Allows your business to appear in Google Maps, local packs, and on mobile when people search for your service.

### **Why it matters:**

This is a huge trust signal — especially for service businesses that rely on local visibility.

### **What to look for:**

Do you have a profile?

Are your hours, phone, and reviews current?

Do you have recent photos and posts?

### **Bonus:**

Even if your site is weak, a strong GBP listing can generate leads.

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## Other Tools Worth Checking

### Bing Webmaster Tools

 <https://www.bing.com/webmasters>

Helps you see how your site performs in Bing — which still has a surprising amount of local traffic.

### Google Analytics

 <https://analytics.google.com>

Track who visits your site, how they find it, and where they drop off.

### Google Search Console

 <https://search.google.com/search-console>

Helps monitor indexing, keyword visibility, and page performance. Also alerts you to technical issues.

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These tools — combined with your score from the self-audit — give you **real control and visibility** over your website's health.

**Next up:** I'll show you real-world screenshots and examples from these tools so you know what good (and bad) looks like.

## 5. Screenshots & Examples

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Plain-English checklists are powerful — but **seeing the difference** between a good and bad website in real life makes everything click faster.

Below are real examples of what your visitors see — and what Google sees — when they visit or analyze a website.

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### A. Mobile Homepage: Good vs. Bad

**63% of all searches comes from mobile devices.** Is your current website mobile friendly? Google now **penalizes sites** for being non-responsive. If your site looks like the one on the right you might be losing over 50% of all inquiries. We have converted dozens of “older” sites into mobile-friendly sites.



## ✗ Bad Example

- Tiny text
- Image header dominates the screen (nothing actionable)
- No CTA in view
- Menu is hard to find or cluttered

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## ✓ Good Example

- Clear headline that speaks to a problem
- CTA visible without scrolling
- Service type and location mentioned immediately
- Button to call or get a quote is tap-friendly



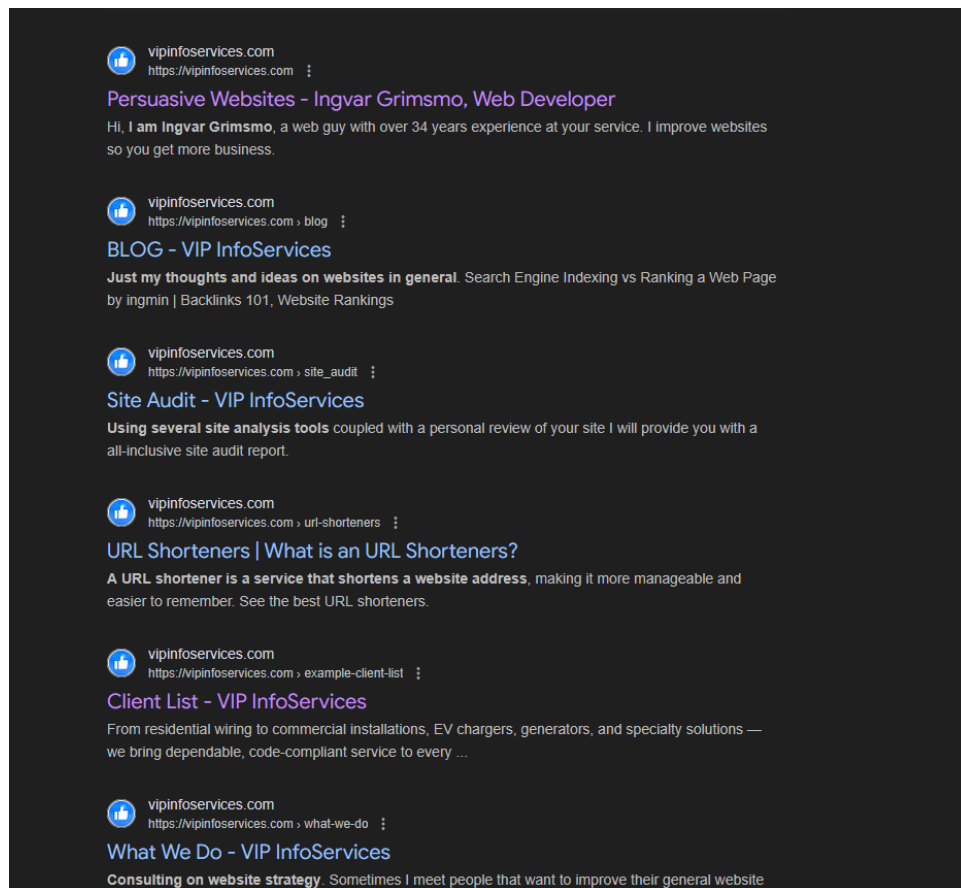
## D. Google Search Visibility (site:yourdomain.com)

Try it yourself:

site:yourdomain.com in Google search bar

### What to Expect:

- Homepage should be indexed
- Internal pages (services, blog posts) should appear below
- Meta titles and descriptions should be readable, not default



## E. Clear Trust & CTA Example

 Good sites show:

A 5-star review badge or testimonial

## Windmill Appliance Service Reviews

★★★★★  
Great advice, helped me to sort out what to do with an appliance he doesn't service- knew exactly what the problem was for my Samsung fridge- ice maker not making ic...  
[Read more](#)

**H Helen Kelly**  
12 March 2025

★★★★★  
We contacted Bob with regards to our dishwasher leaking. Bob was great with communication and did his best to get our issue fixed asap. Very kind and...  
[Read more](#)

**T Tara AVILA**  
3 March 2025

★★★★★  
Awesome same day service!! My elderly Mother had her fridge "die" and she was beside herself! I call Windmill Appliance at 9am and left a message and within 1.5...  
[Read more](#)



**L Leanne Pacey**  
30 October 2024

"This year the agitator stopped working properly. As his previous drum repair is still working well, we didn't hesitate to call Bob again. It was a Friday before the Thanksgiving weekend and he had several calls before us but managed to come the same day." - Stoney Creek, ON

"Bob really knows his appliances, had the parts we needed both times, doesn't mind showing and explaining the problem and even let me clean the agitator before re-installing it. I would not hesitate to recommend him to anyone looking for reliable, knowledgeable service at a fair price." - Grimsby, ON

"Bob is great we texted him on Facebook on the long holiday weekend and he texted us back quickly! He came to our home on Tuesday when he could pick up the parts needed for our dryer repair. He was awesome - solved my problem in one hour.. prices are reasonable and he is a great person and awesome reliable worker... we would highly recommend him and would call him immediately next time for any appliance." - Smithville, ON

A clear CTA near the top

 **CALL NOW**       **EMAIL NOW**

**Home**    **Who we are** ▾

Based in Stoney Creek, MM Products is a locally owned company proudly serving our community since 1972.

## WHAT WE DO

**We do Full bathroom renovation from Design, Tear out, to manufacture and full installation.**

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### 🕒 Tips for Evaluating What You See

- Is it clear what the business does?
  - Does it *feel* trustworthy within 3 seconds?
  - Is there an obvious next step to take?
  - Is contact info always within reach?
- 

This section is meant to help you **see what works** — so you can spot problems instantly on your own site or others.

**Coming up next:** We'll cover **fixes that actually move the needle** — quick wins and improvements you can do without needing a developer.

## 6. Fixes That Actually Help

Not every website needs a full rebuild — but almost every site can be improved. This section focuses on **simple; high-impact changes** you can make right now to improve credibility, usability, and visibility.

These aren't fluff tips — they're **based on real-world results** from fixing websites for local businesses over the past three decades.

### Quick Wins

#### ✓ 1. Add a Strong Headline That Speaks to a Problem

Use emotional language: “Tired of No-Shows? We’ll Confirm Every Appointment.”

Make it local: “Trusted Grimsby Electricians Since 2004”

Keep it short and above the fold.

#### ✓ 2. Replace “Learn More” Buttons with Clear CTAs

Use: “Book a Free Quote,” “Get a Price,” “Schedule a Visit”

Avoid vague: “Click Here,” “Submit,” “Learn More”

#### ✓ 3. Add or Update a Testimonial

Use a review from Google or an email. Keep it short and specific.

“They fixed my panel in under an hour and were super professional. Would hire again.”

#### ✓ 4. Move Contact Info to the Top of Every Page

Make your phone number **clickable** on mobile

Add a short banner: “Call now: (905) 123-4567 — Free Estimates”

#### ✓ 5. Write a Blog Post That Answers a Real Question

Focus on a service + location keyword:

“How much does it cost to install pot lights in Hamilton?”

Answer it clearly in plain English — this attracts search traffic over time

#### ✓ 6. Embed a Map of Your Service Area

Use Google Maps. Add “Proudly serving [City] and surrounding areas” under it

## ⚠️ Common Myths That Waste Time and Money

### ✗ “Sliders and animations make us look modern”

Reality: They slow your site, distract from your message, and rarely convert.

### ✗ “As long as I have a website, I’m covered”

Reality: A website that looks fine but doesn’t load fast, build trust, or convert is a **silent business killer**.

### ✗ “People will call if they’re interested”

Reality: People bounce fast. If your site doesn’t guide them clearly, they leave and find someone else.

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## 🌐 How to Add Local Relevance (Without Rebuilding Your Site)

Add city names to headlines and page titles:

“Massage Therapy in Mississauga That Comes to You”

Write location-specific blog posts:

“How to Check Out a Contractor in Grimsby”

“Why Guelph Homeowners Are Choosing Metal Roofing in 2025”

List your full-service area on a dedicated page

Link to your Google Business Profile from your homepage

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## 🚀 How to Fix Your Website Speed Score

Site speed isn’t just a technical detail — it’s one of the biggest **conversion killers** out there. Google also considers it a ranking factor, especially for mobile searches. If your site loads slowly, people leave. It’s that simple.

### 🖼️ The #1 Speed Killer: Large Images

In almost every site audit I’ve ever done, **oversized images** were the main reason for poor speed scores.

What usually goes wrong:

- Uploading giant raw photos straight from a phone or camera (2MB, 5MB... even 12MB+!)

- Using full-size banners or hero images without compression
  - Uploading 10x the size needed for mobile view
- 

## ✔ Quick Fixes

### 1. Resize Images Before Uploading

- Most site images don't need to be wider than **1200px**
- For thumbnails or mobile images, even **600–800px** is often enough

You can resize using:

- Canva
  - Pixlr
  - Photopea
  - Or your favorite image editor
- 

### 2. Compress Images Automatically with a Plugin

If your site runs on **WordPress**, there are several great plugins that **automatically shrink and optimize** images:

#### Recommended Plugins:

- **Seraphinite Accelerator**  
(What I use. Includes image compression, lazy loading, and other performance tweaks.)
- **ShortPixel Image Optimizer**
  - Excellent balance of compression and quality
  - Works well even for older media libraries
- **Smush**
  - Easy to use
  - Free version available, good for small sites
- **Imagify** (by WP Rocket)
  - Premium compression

- Great for WooCommerce or media-heavy sites
- 

### 3. Run a New Speed Test After Fixing

Use [PageSpeed Insights](#) or GTmetrix to recheck your scores.

Look for:

- Mobile score above 80 (ideal)
  - First Contentful Paint under 2 seconds
  - Fewer red flags about image size or load delays
- 

#### Pro Tip:

If you see “Defer unused JavaScript” or “Reduce initial server response time,” those usually relate to your theme, plugins, or hosting — not images. But **images are almost always the low-hanging fruit.**

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#### Final Tip: Track Something

Even if you’re not technical, set up at least one of the following:

- ✓ Google Business Profile (shows calls, messages, reviews)
- ✓ Google Analytics (shows visits, sources, time on site)
- ✓ Google Search Console (shows keywords and index health)

We’ll give brief explanations in the next section — but these three tools alone will tell you **if your site is working** or not.

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**Up next:** *Web Persuasion 101* — how to use words, trust cues, and emotional clarity to convert more visitors into real-world clients.

## 7. Web Persuasion 101

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Even if your site is technically solid, fast, and mobile-friendly — it still won't convert if it lacks **persuasion**.

What is persuasion on a website?

- It's the ability to:
- Speak to the visitor's emotions
- Make them feel understood
- Guide them to act without friction or confusion

Most local websites miss the mark here. They assume a visitor will “figure it out.” But a confused or uncertain visitor doesn't call — they leave.


This section shows you how to apply simple, persuasive structure and language to your site — no copywriter needed.


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### **Start With Emotion — Not Information**

Visitors make fast, emotional decisions.

They arrive with a problem. If your site doesn't speak to that problem **immediately**, they'll bounce.

 Bad: “Welcome to ABC Services. We are committed to excellence.”

 Good: “Frustrated with power outages? We install whole-home backup generators — fast.”

Always lead with **what your visitor is feeling** and how you solve it.

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## **Then Layer in Logic**

Once the visitor feels understood, you can present:

- Trust signals (reviews, certifications)
- Service details (what's included, how it works)
- Answers to FAQs
- Your years of experience

This is where you “justify the decision” with proof.

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## **Use Real Visual Proof**

People trust what they can see.

Add:

- A photo of you on a job
- A project before-and-after
- A review screenshot from Google
- A short video walking through a result

These human touches add **confidence** — and they help separate you from your competitors.

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## **Use the “Three Trust Questions” Formula**

Every homepage should answer:

### **Can you solve my problem?**

“We fix leaky basements in Burlington — permanently.”

### **Can I trust you to do it well?**

“Rated 4.9 stars on Google. 300+ satisfied homeowners.”

### **Can you prove it?**

“Read our reviews, see our work, and book a free inspection.”

If your homepage doesn't do this, rewrite it until it does.

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## 💡 7 Persuasive Phrases That Convert

Try swapping generic copy for phrases like:

- ✅ “Locally trusted since 2012 — over 1,000 projects completed”
- ✅ “Fast, honest, no-pressure quotes”
- ✅ “We answer every call — or call you back within 1 hour”
- ✅ “100% licensed and insured”
- ✅ “If it’s not right, we make it right — no extra charge”
- ✅ “You’ll never wonder where we are or when we’re coming”
- ✅ “Proud to serve [City], [Town], and surrounding areas”

These phrases work because they speak to **certainty**, **trust**, and **local presence** — the core drivers of decision-making in personal service businesses.

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## 👉 Call-to-Action (CTA) Principles That Work

A strong CTA:

Starts with a verb: “Get,” “Book,” “Call,” “Download”

Explains what happens next

Is repeated on every page

- ✅ “Book Your Free Estimate”
- ✅ “Call Us Now — We Answer After Hours”
- ✅ “Get Your Quote Today — No Pushy Sales Pitch”

Avoid vague CTAs like “Submit,” “Learn More,” or “Click Here.”

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## Always Repeat Yourself

Persuasion isn't just about being clever — it's about being **clear** and **consistent**.

Repeat:

- **Who you are**
- **What you do**
- **Where you do it**
- **Why someone should trust you**

Most visitors won't read every word — but if they scan and find consistency, they're more likely to take action.

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**Next up:** Let's cover the final warning signs... how to spot agency nonsense and get real clarity on what you're paying for.

## 8. Agency Red Flags & ROI Reality Check

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If you've ever paid an agency to “take care of your website,” this section is for you.

Some agencies and service bureaus provide real value — but many small business owners are **overpaying for outdated, vague, or useless services**. And unless you know what to look for, you won't realize it until years (and thousands of dollars) later.

This section helps you figure out:

- Whether you're getting what you paid for
  - What red flags to watch for
  - And how to hold vendors accountable — even if you're not technical
- 

### Red Flags That Your Agency Isn't Earning Its Keep

These are based on real stories from clients I've worked with over the years.

#### You're being charged monthly, but you don't know what's being done

Ask for a plain-English activity summary every month. “SEO maintenance” is not a real deliverable by itself.

**✘ You don't have login access to your own website, analytics, or hosting**

If you can't get in — you don't own it. And that's a hostage situation.

**✘ You're paying for blog posts, but haven't seen new content in months**

Ask: "Where's the content? What's it targeting? What keyword does this help with?"

**✘ You were promised SEO improvements, but nothing shows up in Google**

Run your own test: site:yourdomain.com — see if any pages are even indexed. If not, they've done nothing.

**✘ Your backlinks look like garbage**

Run a free Ubersuggest audit. If your backlinks are from low-quality, unrelated, or spammy sites — it's hurting you, not helping.

**✘ They charged extra for "submitting your site to search engines"**

This is 1998-level nonsense. Modern sites with sitemaps are indexed automatically. You don't need to pay for this.

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 **Simple Questions to Evaluate ROI**

Even if you're not tech-savvy, these business questions will tell you a lot.

 **Has your revenue gone up since you hired the agency?**

If not — why not? What did they promise would change?

 **Are you getting more phone calls or contact form submissions?**

Ask: "How many leads are we getting from the website per month?" If they can't answer, no one's tracking.

 **Do you track where new clients come from?**

If not, start now. Ask every new caller: "How did you hear about us?"

 **Is your business showing up in local search results?**

Google your business name. Then try:

"[Your service] in [Your City]"

If you're invisible — ask what you're paying for.

## Do you own your website?

If you cancel their service, does your site stay up? Can you take it with you? If not, you're renting — and that's a dangerous place to be.

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### Real Example: One of My Clients Paid \$800/Month...

...for over two years. The agency promised SEO, content marketing, speed optimization, and monthly performance reports.

Here's what I found when I audited the site:

- No blog posts since the site launched
- PageSpeed score under 50
- Sitemap not updated in 18 months
- Contact form didn't work
- 600 purchased backlinks — many from spam and adult sites

And he didn't even have access to his own hosting account

He thought he was "covered." He wasn't.

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## What to Ask Your Agency Right Now

Use this checklist in your next email or phone call:

"What are we doing this month to improve site performance or visibility?"

"Can I see a list of the backlinks built?"

"How many people visited our site last month — and how did they find us?"

"Do I have full admin access to my website, hosting, and analytics?"

"Are you monitoring mobile speed and indexing status regularly?"

If they can't answer clearly — or don't want to — it's time to take back control.

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**Next section:** Let's wrap it all up. You'll score yourself and decide what to do next — all without needing to hire anyone.

## 9. Your Website Score Summary

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You've now reviewed:

- 17 essential website checks
- Free tools to validate everything yourself
- Red flags to avoid with agencies
- Tips to improve your site's clarity, speed, and credibility
- Real-world examples of what works

Now it's time to **tally your self-audit score** and see where you stand.

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### **Your Final Score (out of 17)**

Review your answers to the checklist in **Section 3** and count the number of  Yes responses.

Write your total here:


**Total:** \_\_\_\_ / 17

---

### **What Your Score Means**

#### **13–17: Strong Website**

Your site is well-structured, fast, and trustworthy.

-  Focus next on growth: content, blog posts, local pages, reviews.


#### **9–12: Functional, But Losing Leads**

Your site is serviceable — but it's not optimized.

-  Some quick fixes could result in noticeable increases in calls or conversions.

#### **5–8: Underperforming**

Visitors may not trust the site, can't find what they need, or can't use it easily.

-  You're likely missing out on leads — and your competition is picking them up.

#### **0–4: Time for a Rethink**

Your site might be actively hurting your business — especially on mobile or search.

-  It's not working as a modern credibility tool. You need a new approach.

## Ask Yourself

Use these final reflection prompts to think about your next step:

- Am I confident visitors **understand what I do** within 3 seconds?
- Does my website make **me** feel proud and credible?
- Is my site working hard for me — or just sitting there?
- Do I feel like I'm in control — or dependent on someone else to explain my site?

If this guide helped answer those questions, you've already done more than most small business owners ever will.

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## What to Do Next

- ✓ Fix the easy wins (contact buttons, testimonials, homepage headline)
- ✓ Use the tools again every few months to track progress
- ✓ Keep blog content fresh and local
- ✓ Only work with vendors who give you transparency and control

And most importantly — remember:

**You don't need a new website. You need a working one.**

You now have the tools to make that happen — on your terms.

## 10. Closing Words

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You made it to the end.

That puts you ahead of 90% of local business owners — most of whom will keep paying too much for websites that don't perform or will never know their site is silently costing them opportunities.

You now know:

- What makes a small business website work (or fail)
- How to measure performance using free, trustworthy tools
- How to evaluate your own marketing spend
- And how to fix what's broken — without hiring anyone

You don't need to become a web expert.  
You just need to stay in control.

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### **A Few Final Reminders**

People buy for emotional reasons and justify with logic

Most visitors leave within 10 seconds if they don't trust what they see

A clean, trustworthy site with clear answers beats flashy animations every time

If you remember **nothing else**, remember this:

**“Can you solve my problem?”**

**“Can I trust you?”**

**“Can you prove it?”**

That's what your website needs to answer — clearly, honestly, and fast.

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### **What Happens Now?**

That's up to you.

You've got the tools. You've got the checklist. You've seen the red flags.

Whether you make the changes yourself or hire someone smarter this time, you're now in a much better position than before.

## **11. What to Do Next**

Now that you've scored your website and identified what's working — and what's not — the natural question is:

**“How do I actually fix this?”**

The answer depends on a few key things:

- Who built and currently controls your website
- How easily changes can be made
- Whether the issues are small fixes — or signs that you need to start fresh

Let's walk through what you need to consider next — based on how your site was originally built.

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### **First: Who Controls the Site?**

This is the first roadblock for many business owners.

I've seen it all:

- A site built by your **cousin** (who's now in another country)
- A site created using a **GoDaddy or Wix template** — with no access to change anything beyond text
- A **local web developer** who doesn't respond anymore
- A marketing **agency that “manages everything”** — but won't give you logins or clear reports
- Or you built it yourself... and forgot how

Before you can make meaningful improvements, you need to:

1. Know where the site is hosted
  2. Confirm you have login access to your website editor or CMS
  3. Know if your domain and email accounts are tied to it (so nothing breaks)
- 

### **Option 1: Make Targeted Improvements**

If your score was decent (9–12 or even higher), and you have access, it may be enough to:

- Add clearer calls-to-action
- Swap your homepage headline
- Speed up your mobile experience
- Add local blog posts or testimonials
- Update your Google Business Profile and indexing tools

You can either do this yourself (if you're comfortable) or **hire someone who charges by the hour** — and give them a prioritized list based on your checklist.

If you're going this route, keep control of your site and make sure **you own all accounts** (Google, hosting, domain, etc.).

## Option 2: Rebuild from Scratch

If your score was low, or the site is outdated, clunky, unresponsive, or locked down by a developer or agency, it's usually not worth trying to patch it.

You're better off:

- Starting with a clean build
- Making sure **you control everything from day one**
- Writing clearer messaging
- Structuring it around **what customers need to see** — not what a designer wants to show off

In my experience, rebuilding a site is often **faster and cheaper** than fixing a deeply broken one.

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## Important Note About Me

This guide exists to help you evaluate your own website — without pressure or a service pitch.

But for the record, I **don't work on other people's sites**.

I don't "tweak" things.

If I'm ever involved, I start from scratch and replace old websites completely — **with permission, full access, and clear expectations**.

So, whether you work with someone else or do it yourself — just know that the key to success is **control, clarity, and content that builds trust**.

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## Final Takeaway

You now have:

- A diagnostic of your current site
- A score that reflects your strengths and weaknesses
- Tools to verify everything you've seen
- And a clear path forward

Whatever you choose next — make sure it moves you toward **a site that helps your business**, not just exists for the sake of it.

## Bonus: What to Look for When Choosing a Web Designer

Hiring someone to build or fix your website can feel like stepping into a maze. There are freelancers, agencies, cousin Vinny, and endless “experts” with confusing jargon and wildly different prices.

Here’s how to cut through the noise:

### ✔ **Look for *local if possible* — but not too big**

Small shops (1–3 people) often give you better value and more attention than big agencies. Agencies often churn out high-volume, templated sites with generic design and bloated fees. The best web person for you may be a freelancer in your town — or someone highly referred from another business owner.

### ✔ **Ask who’s really building the site**

Some “web firms” outsource everything overseas. That’s not always bad — but you should know whether you’re dealing with the actual person doing the work, or a sales rep farming it out.

### ✔ **Get references, not just portfolios**

It’s easy to show off pretty sites. What matters is whether those sites bring in leads, run fast, and convert. Ask:

- “Did your traffic improve?”
- “Do you get more calls?”
- “How was communication during the project?”

### ✔ **Understand what you’re paying for**

Make sure you know what’s included:

- Are edits after launch extra?
- Who owns the domain and hosting?
- Can you make changes yourself?
- Is content writing included?

If someone can’t clearly answer these, walk away.

### ✔ **Know what you actually *need***

If all you want is a simple brochure-style site, and you don't expect search traffic or leads — go ahead and use Wix or Squarespace. Just know you're trading control and SEO power for ease of use. Nothing wrong with that *if it matches your goals*.

But if you want real results, don't hire the cheapest offer off Craigslist — or assume a \$5,000 “agency site” guarantees success.

✓ **In short:**

- Get referrals.
- Keep it small and personal.
- Make sure they speak your language (not tech babble).
- Know your goals — and what success looks like.

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**Because in 2025 and beyond, “having a website” isn't enough.  
You need one that actually works.**

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**Thanks for reading.**

— Ingvar Grimsmo

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