

Get started building

your website

Part One: Planning



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Starting a business is a test of persistence and sometimes sanity. Add in startup costs, building a website, a thousand other things that you've thought of and perhaps a thousand others that you haven't.

It's tough.

Fortunately, building a website doesn't have to be a headache. Whether you're starting a business or just want a personal site, creating a website has become relatively easy, manageable and fun.

If you're reading this, chances are you're more than capable of creating your own website. You've already made the decision to create one, and that's the hardest step.

This guide will help you organize and outline your ideas so that you can build a website that you are proud to show the world. After all, there are **more than 800 million websites** out there and counting. It's time for you to have your own.



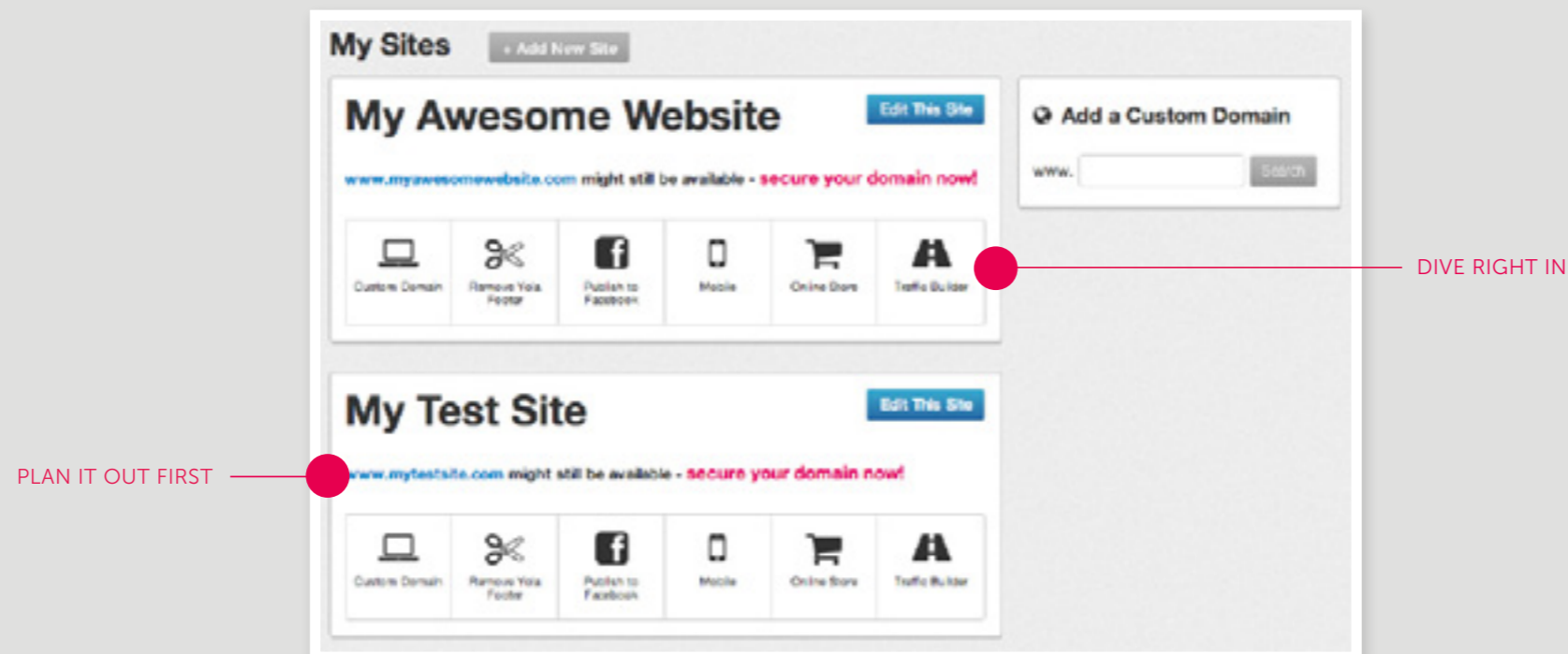
Planning Your Website

There are two ways to build a website: dive right in or plan it out first.

However you go about building your website, keep in mind the core goal, or reason for doing so. Fortunately, the Yola free account allows you to create two websites.

We recommend creating a test site and then come back to planning, when you're ready. (If you need more sites under one account, you'll need to [upgrade to one of our premium packages](#).)

If you are the type of person that likes to jump head first into the water, go right on ahead to our [Design 101 chapter](#) in Part Two of this eBook and start learning how to build a site. If you prefer to have a bit more preparation, continue here.



Branding and Messaging

Whether you are starting a business, creating a resume website or just want a place to post articles and pictures for friends and family, building a successful website still requires some planning.

Your website is often your first chance to make a lasting impression on your visitors. What is the first thing you want visitors to see and feel when they come to your website? What is your site's purpose?

One important aspect to keep in mind is to not get overwhelmed and to stick to that core goal, mission or reason for building your site. This is the first step in **building your brand**.

We find it best to keep it as one, easy sentence. We've done it here at Yola:

MISSION: To provide the tools that allow people and businesses to build awesome websites that help them be independent, creative and get online without hassle, high cost or fear.



In order to have an engaging and successful website, it should have a simple and clear message that any and all visitors can understand.

Yours can be as simple as “To get a job” (resume website) or more complex like “To help people get fit, stay healthy and learn how to lead wholesome lives” (fitness website).

In essence, what do you want your website (or business) to accomplish?

My mission is:

To

Congratulations! You have your mission and are on your way to developing a business or personal brand that your audience will remember.

When you start **writing content for your website**, make sure that you always come back to this main idea.



Your Audience

The next step in the planning process is to understand your audience, or who will be visiting and/or buying from your website. If you don't plan on driving a lot of visitors, you can **skip to here**.



Understanding the needs, wants and problems your audience faces will help you create powerful messages and improve the effectiveness of your marketing campaigns and how you engage your visitors (this remains true for email marketing and social media).

The rule here is listen to what your customers tell you. And more importantly, listen to what they

don't. When dealing with online visitors, there's a lot of information to sort through.

You can see what your visitors are doing as well as what they are not. Both are valuable in **how you grab their attention**.

The rule here is
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tell you.

Since you don't have a website just yet, try to define your audience by asking a few friends, customers and strangers.

For example, let's say you are selling jewelry and want a website to complement your Etsy store and Facebook page. Your audience could encompass several different **personas**, or archetypes, such as:

- A woman shopping for herself
- A woman looking for a gift for a man/woman
- A man looking for a gift for a man/woman
- A man shopping for himself
- Parent for a child
- Child for a parent

As you can see, the list can grow. It's best to come up with two to three personas and be as specific as possible. This will help you when writing and compiling content that speaks to your audience.

For your personas, include age range, demographics, gender, problems or challenges and key characteristics.

Continuing with our example, a persona for our jewelry shop could look like this:

Jane: a woman between the ages of 25-45, mid- to high income, has a specific taste in jewelry but doesn't necessarily know what she wants, carefree but purchase cautious, family-oriented, likes knowing that companies are socially responsible.



Write down a little bit about who buys from you.

(If you're a new business or creating a portfolio, wedding or personal website, write down the type of personas who you want to visit your site.)

PERSONA 1

Description:

PERSONA 2

Description:

PERSONA 3

Description:

Planning a Site that Attracts Visitors

Now that you have an idea of who your buyers are or who you want to visit your site, the trick is getting them to find you. Driving traffic to your website is a bit of an art and a science.

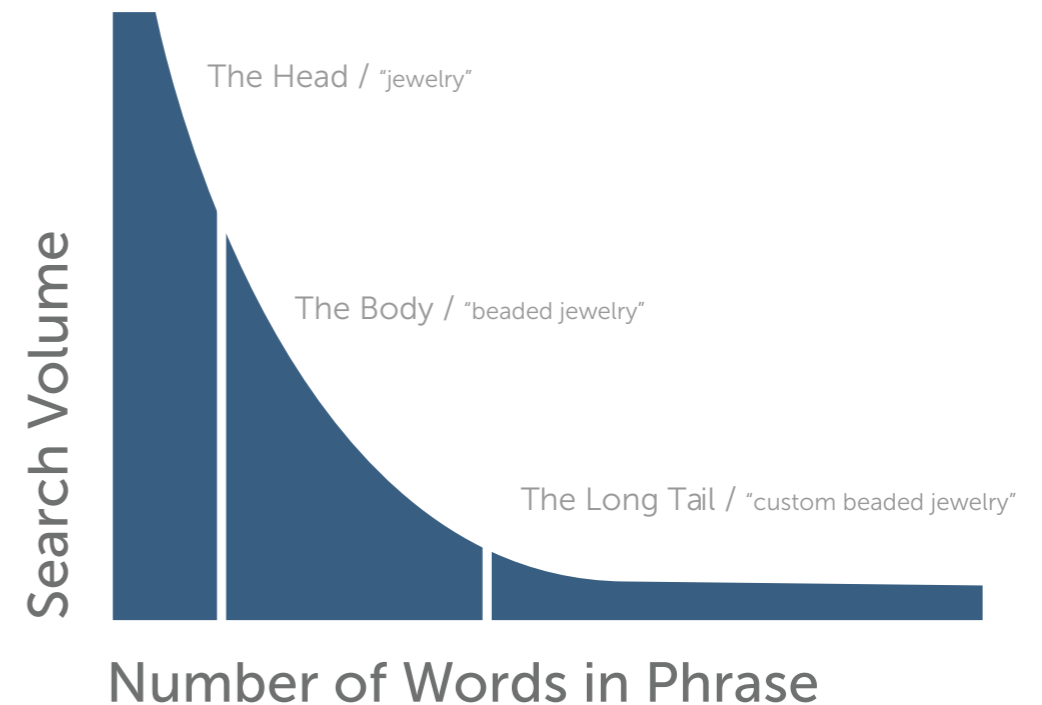
Before you build your website, planning out how both search engines and humans view your site will certainly keep your website ahead of the curve. This process is called **search engine optimization** and is generally an ongoing effort.

Still, there are plenty of things you can do in the building process that will help make it easier for you to optimize your site and welcome visitors.

The first on the list is to do a bit of **keyword research** to see how people are searching for the products, services or anything else that you want to add to your site.

Sticking with our jewelry business, we can think of a few keywords right off the bat:

- custom jewelry designs
- beaded jewelry
- custom necklaces



After deciding which keywords to target, you'll want to speckle these into the content that you write for your pages. Consider writing a page that is specific to one keyword. (For example, you could have a page that is called Custom Jewelry Designs and integrate the keyword "custom jewelry designs san francisco".)

It also helps to have a good keyword in your **domain name**.

Go on, show off your keywords:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Make It Flow

An effective website provides visitors a clear direction, a flow with pages labeled and updated accordingly. Most sites today are opting for a fewer top-level navigation tabs. This does not necessarily mean less content, which is a critical component for your website's success.

This, instead, means more people are opting for a simpler path, rather than having scores of pages at the top. If you're selling a product or service, you want your visitor to follow along the fastest path to purchase. You can always add **submenus** to your navigation.

For example, the Features page on Yola's website is actually nine pages, but the top-level navigation only indicates one page. This way, when visitors interested in learning about our features know exactly where to find them.

The screenshot shows the Yola website homepage. At the top left is the Yola logo with the tagline 'taking business online' and a 'WE'RE HIRING!' badge. The top navigation bar includes links for Home, Features, Pricing, Site Gallery, About Us, Blog, and Help, along with 'Log In' and 'Sign Up' buttons. A blue banner below the navigation reads 'We make it easy. You make it great.' The main content area features a sidebar with icons for 'Ad-Free Websites', 'Powerful Personalized Pages', 'Mobile, Facebook, and Web Publishing', 'Domain Names', 'Online Store', 'Business Tools', 'Marketing and Social Networking', 'Reliable Hosting', and '24/7 Support'. The central banner promotes 'Create a Free Professional Website' with a 'Start Building for Free' button. Below this are two columns: 'Fast' (Create and post your ad-free website in under 30 minutes!) and 'Easy' (Customize your page easily with our drag and drop Sitebuilder).

The best way to begin is to create a list of all pages that you want on your site aside from homepage and contact. Then choose which pages should be on your top navigation. A good rule of thumb is many pages and fewer top-level navigation tabs.

1.	_____
2.	_____
3.	_____
4.	_____
5.	_____

6.	_____
7.	_____
8.	_____
9.	_____
10.	_____

11.	_____
12.	_____
13.	_____
14.	_____
15.	_____

Now think of which pages should be part of your main navigation.

We recommend three to five.

1.	_____
2.	_____
3.	_____
4.	_____
5.	_____



Adding Content

The next step in your site-building journey will be deciding on content. This includes your header down to your footer and any copy, images or videos in between.

Creating website content may seem straightforward: Type out some copy, drag and drop a few images, upload a video – voila, you have a website.

Well, you can certainly create a site this way, but the truth is, your content can often determine the overall success of your website.

Site visitors will have decided what your company is, what it offers and whether or not they will stay on your website in roughly 10 seconds.

That's not a lot of time.

You may want to consider dedicating more time to your content. It's the easiest thing to change that can have a significant impact on your website.



Writing Website Copy

An important thing to keep in mind when writing your site's content is that your copy should appeal to your audience. Overwhelming your visitors with advanced vocabulary pertaining strictly to your industry may only appeal to a specific market.

Understand your audience and cater your words to their needs, **creating an appropriate tone**. However you structure your copy, keep in mind that personable, conversational writing is a lot easier to digest. It's better to talk to visitors than at them.

Be clear and concise in your content, making sure to highlight your business's personality.

Your goal should be to **have visitors feel welcomed and to offer value**.

Let's take a look at a few copy examples.



You recently decided to join a fitness gym, but are not quite sure where to start. For all intensive purposes, you are a novice. After much research, you decide a personal trainer is the best way to comfortably lose weight and understand your nutritional goals. You scour the Internet and find two options readily available in your area:

Option A: I am a personal trainer specializing in the utilization of heavy lifting and high cardio while maintaining a balanced CKD, high in amino acids while eliminating complex carbs to drop that BMI to an ideal number.

Option B: I am a personal trainer specializing in building your fitness transformation from the ground up. Together, we will create efficient workout routines paired with well-balanced meals specifically catered to you and your goals.

Being the workout-novice that you are,
which do you choose?

The trainer in Option B makes you feel comfortable and confident. Option B also indicates, in a clear and concise way, exactly what is being offered and the benefits to you, the visitor.

List all the problems your company solves for your customer, keeping in mind the personas you created in the previous chapter.

If you can't think of any problems, write down any benefits a visitor might enjoy from visiting your site or using your products and/or services.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

When writing website copy, your mantra should be “Why should I care?” You can see in the example above, Option A doesn’t really cater to what the persona is looking for whereas in Option B does. The problems or needs of the visitor are to lose weight and understand their diet.

Now pick one or two of the problems (or benefits) your company or website solves and write a few sentences and tell us why we should care after each sentence.

Sentence 1:

Why should I care?

Sentence 2:

Why should I care?

Nicely done! Now go ahead and write out a few sentences for each of your pages. We promise to wait.

Choosing the Right Images

When it comes to content, endless copy can be monotonous – images are a great way to separate blocks of text. Images are vital to your website and can significantly improve how visitors view and navigate your website. They can help grow your brand, create memories and



lasting impressions with your site visitors, making your message more impactful. Also, articles with relevant images receive **94% more total views on average** than those without.

When looking for images, consider the purpose behind the image, as well its relevancy to your site. The images displayed throughout your site should work to drive home the points within your copy.

Real photos tend to look better than stock images. Although, many of us don't have the time or money

to spend on professional photography. There's nothing wrong with using stock photography, but take advantage of any opportunities to take photos while at work.

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If you decide to use stock photography, there are a few tips you can follow so that your website and images **don't look like everyone else**.

Ask yourself if the images you've chosen look natural, authentic and modern and if the image looks familiar. Have you seen it on other websites? Is it overused? Your website is unique, using stale images can bring down the quality of your offering.

Take a close look at the photos.

Are the clothes the people wearing from this era? Could you imagine seeing this person walking down the street? If not, then it may not be the right image for you. The same rules apply with technology images - is the laptop featured a mid-nineties desktop or a new MacBook Pro?



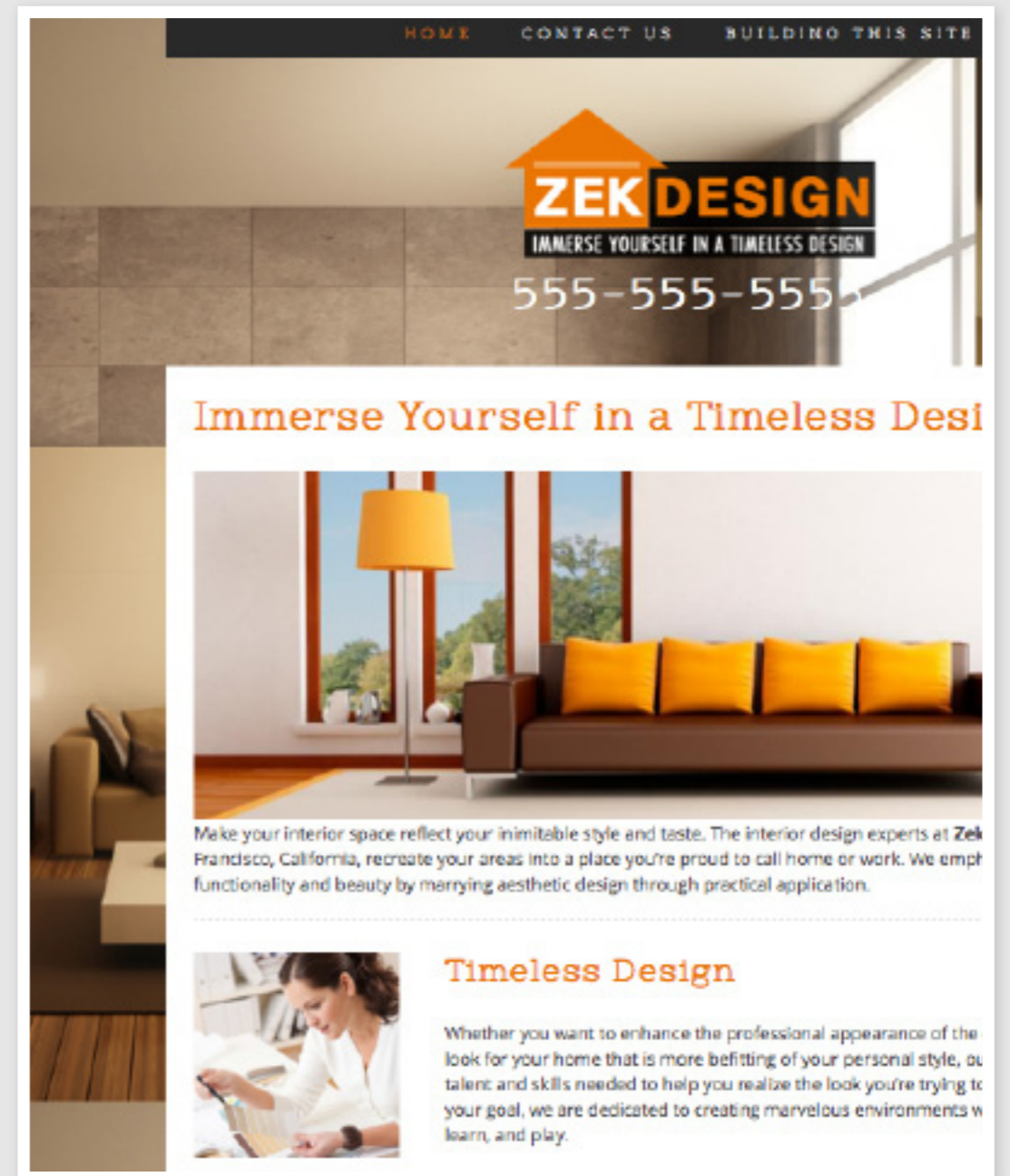
OR



If in deciding on an image, there isn't a strong connection between the two, no need to settle – keep looking!

Within Sitebuilder, we have a whole gallery of stock photography that you can browse through, even if it's just inspiration for taking your own photos.

Take a look at the following website for **Zek Designs**. You can see the use of visuals really match the color scheme and break up the copy in an inviting way. You can tell that this site was designed with intent and use of images.



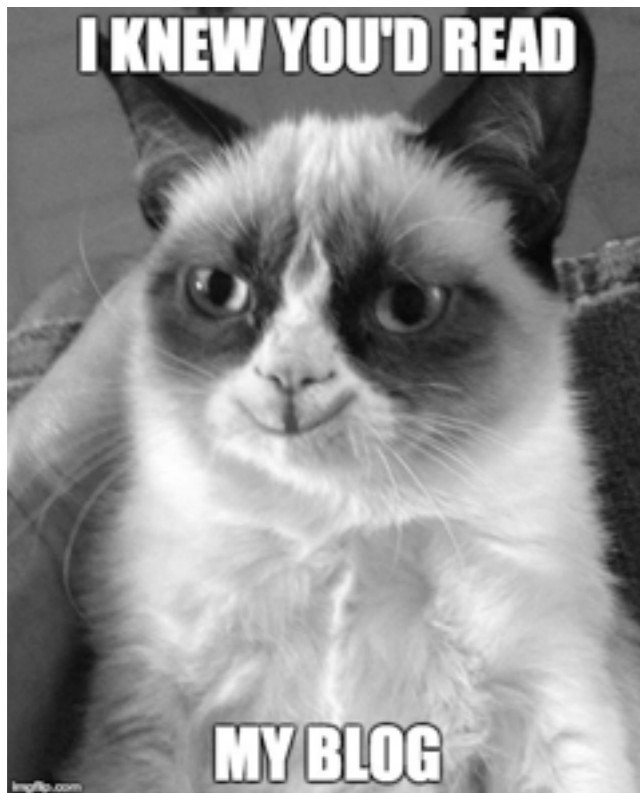
Having an idea of the types of images you want to have on your website can help a great deal.

Re-read the copy you wrote and list out the types of images that would work well with your website or business industry:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Updating Your Blog

The world of blogging is one that every business should tap into. It allows you to reach out with your users by connecting with them while simultaneously



displaying a personality for your business. These are a few of many reasons as to **why you should start a blog**.

You'll also have the chance to show visitors the time you've dedicated to improving your business, building customer loyalty one reader at a time.

In addition to keeping customers current with your exciting new features, frequently updating your

blog is a major factor in driving traffic to your website. According to **Content Plus**, 60% of consumers feel more positive about a company after reading custom content on its site.

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Blogs help your search engine ranking for a few different reasons:

- **Backlinks** – Consistently creating intriguing blog posts is a great way to get others web users to link back to your entries. Visitors will enjoy reading your tips, and in turn will share your content on their own blogs and social media networks.
- **Internal links** – Once you start updating your blog on a regular basis, before you know it, you will have a library of posts to link back to. Use this database to feature links from previous posts to current ones. This will give new readers a chance to browse your other useful articles, and will simultaneously help you rank better for those keywords you listed above.
- **Static Content** – Search engines are always looking for fresh content and up-to-date websites. Blogging does just that. Keep posting regularly, and you'll have plenty of visitors before you know it.

The next hurdle is what to write about.

Don't worry, we've got plenty of ideas for you:

- **New features:** Keep users excited and in-the-know by regularly updating your blog with what's available and what's in the works.
- **Industry trends:** Write about different trends in your industry, showing customers that you're up-to-date with what's current.
- **Customer testimonials:** Highlight your customers rave reviews, showing potential customers you are reputable and giving existing customers the recognition they deserve.
- **Top sellers:** Write about what products or services are most popular among customers and why.
- **Tutorials:** Give your visitors step by step how-tos for something they may not know that you are knowledgeable about.
- **Ranked lists:** Whether it be "Top ten reasons _____," or "Four ways to _____," people are drawn to lists. Create attention grabbing lists pertaining to your industry.

You can always write blog posts about how.

They've worked for us [here](#) and [here](#).



Ideas and recommendation are great.

Now it's time to brainstorm for your own business blog. We've found that it helps our users to commit to a post.

Go ahead, write down three blog posts to write in the future and add three main points you'll touch on throughout the article.

Here's an example:

How to build a photography website

- Feature a great photography website homepage.
- Talk about the importance of a good photo gallery and website page load times.
- Highlight the important parts of contact page.

1. I promise to write the following post:

-
- _____
 - _____
 - _____

To be completed on:

2. I promise to write the following post:

-
- _____
 - _____
 - _____

To be completed on:

3. I promise to write the following post:

-
- _____
 - _____
 - _____

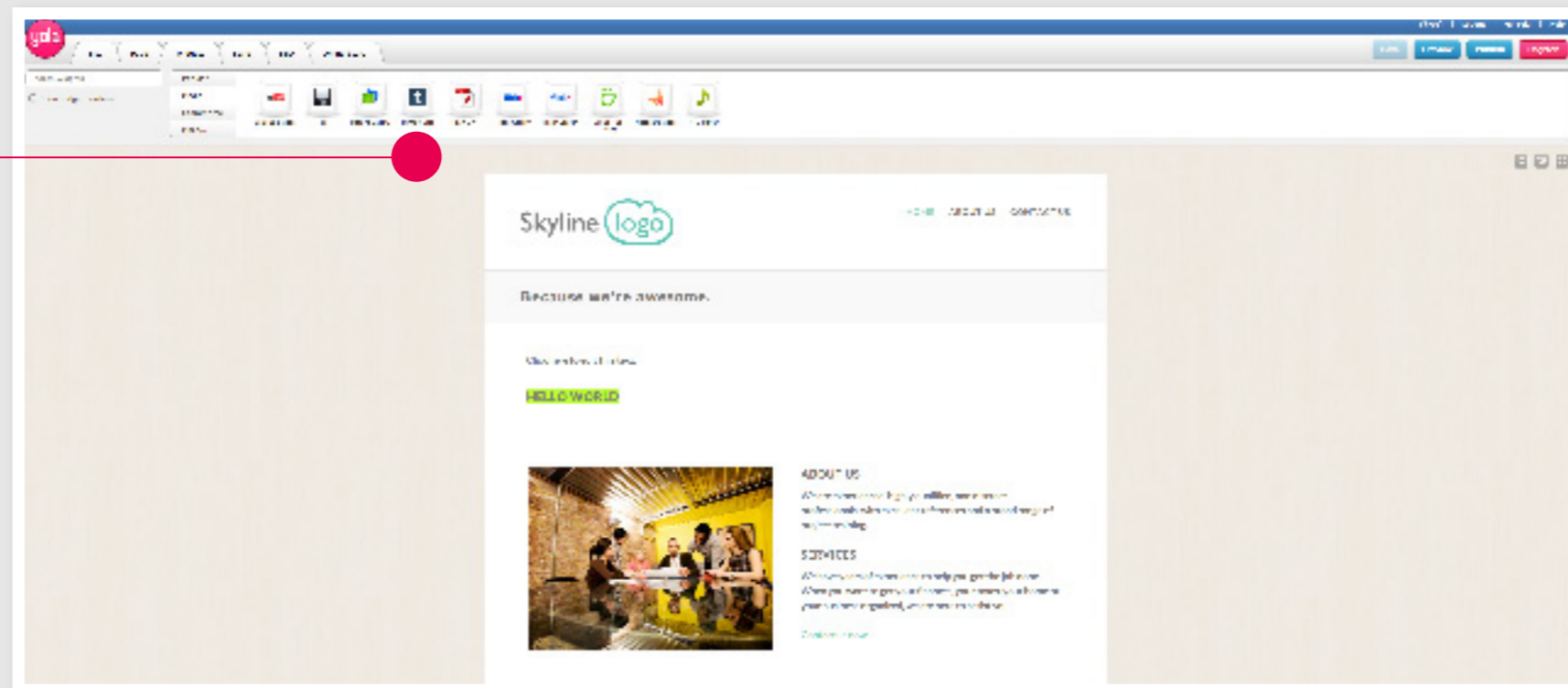
To be completed on:

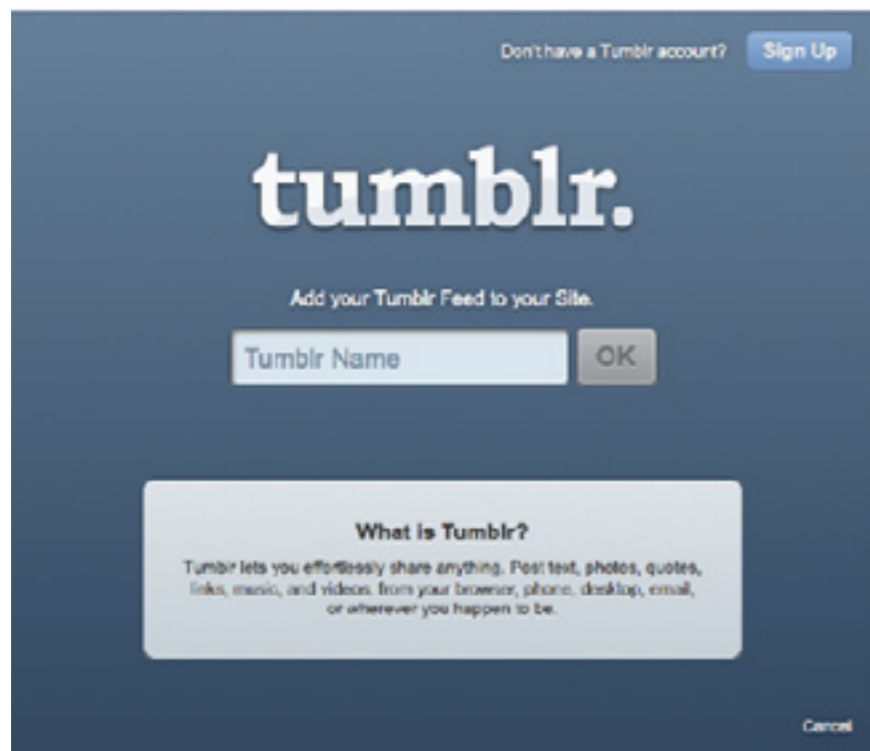
Ok, now that we've convinced you of the value of having a blog, know you're probably wondering:

How can I add a blog to my site?

With the use of the Tumblr widget, adding a blog to your site is easy. **Add a new page on your website** designated specifically for your blog. Then simply drag and drop the Tumblr widget from the Media section on the Widgets tab. From there you will be prompted to connect your site with your Tumblr account.

TUMBLR WIDGET





Don't have a Tumblr account? No problem. Click the "Sign Up" button in the top right corner, choose a username and password, and you'll have an account in no time.



Once you've chosen your login info, you will be prompted to choose your URL, layout and customize your properties – you're now a blog owner! (We talk about URLs and custom domains in the last section of this guide.)

You can also update your blog directly from the Tumblr website or mobile app. Since your blog is now connected to your website, it will update automatically here. Next, you can [optimize your blog for search engines](#).

Congratulations!

At this point, you should have the basic blueprint of your site. You know the mission of your business, who your customers are and how to speak to them. You've written copy, chosen images and you may have even added a blog to your Yola site.

You have all the core pieces, now onto putting them together and publishing your site to the world!

Check out Part Two to learn about how to execute the design of your site. Here we will detail everything from Style choice and logo placement to layout, color and fonts.

Keep up the momentum, and you'll be finished in no time!



It's easy to have complete control over your website.

Create a professional website in minutes with Yola.



Start building for free