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The Ultimate Guide to Building a Real Estate Website

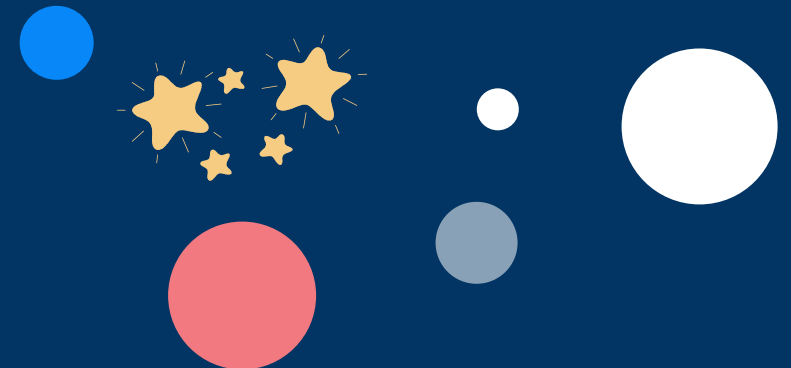
Everything You Need to Know to Become a Smarter Real Estate Agent

Chapter 1

Introduction

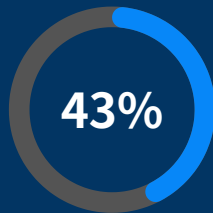
Your real estate website is more than just an online business card: it's the most powerful tool in your marketing arsenal. Look at any major brand (real estate or otherwise) on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, or Pinterest: there's always a link back to their homepage.

To be sure, social networks are great for sharing your content and engaging with prospective customers. But buyers and sellers are also discovering you through search, and oftentimes the first point of contact they have with you is your website.

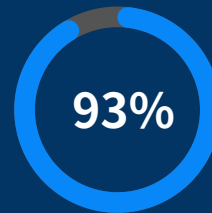


As the hub of your online universe, your website serves various purposes. From building trust and brand awareness to nurturing online visitors through your sales cycle, a well-structured, artfully-designed website can honestly do wonders for your business. Just have a look at the numbers:

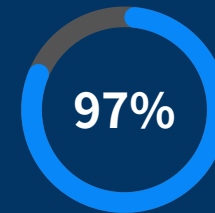
More and More Home Buyers Are Searching Online



43% of home buyers looked online first for properties for sale



93% of real estate firms have websites



97% of all home buyers say they frequently use the internet to search for homes

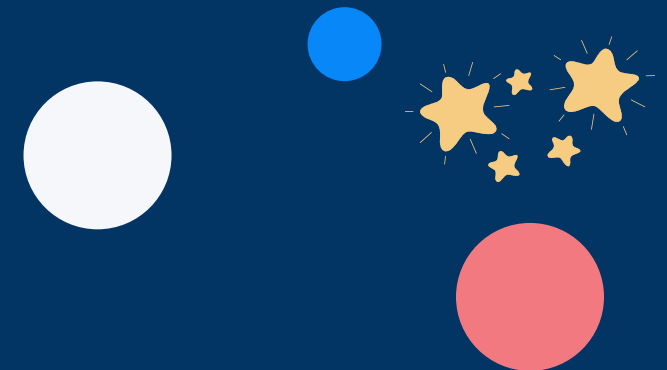
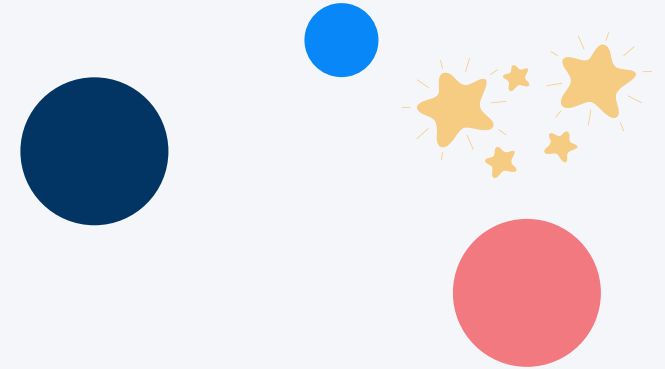


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Chapter 2

Choosing A Real Estate Website Domain Name

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If the URL for your name or the name of your company is out there, you should definitely own it. That being said, it shouldn't necessarily be the primary way people find your site. The fact is that while existing clients might be able to remember your name, it's unlikely that anyone else will know the name of an agent they have never met. More realistically, your prospects won't be searching for you. Instead, they'll be searching for what you have to offer.

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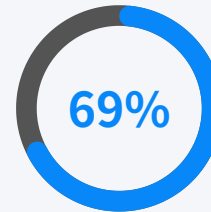
Seth Price

VP of Product, Placester

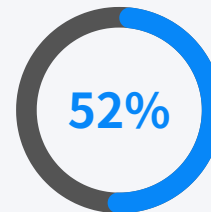
We hate to be the ones to break it to you, but most prospective home buyers aren't searching for YOU on the web: they're searching for properties. They're not going to Google (or Bing or Yahoo!) and type in "Joe Agent real estate." Instead, they're typing in things like "Boston homes for sale" and "houses for sale in Boston."

It's not the "who" that they're focused on, it's the "where" and "what." So, when choosing a domain name for your real estate website, what kinds of search terms do you think you should focus on? If the word "LOCAL" just popped into your head, you're 100 percent correct.

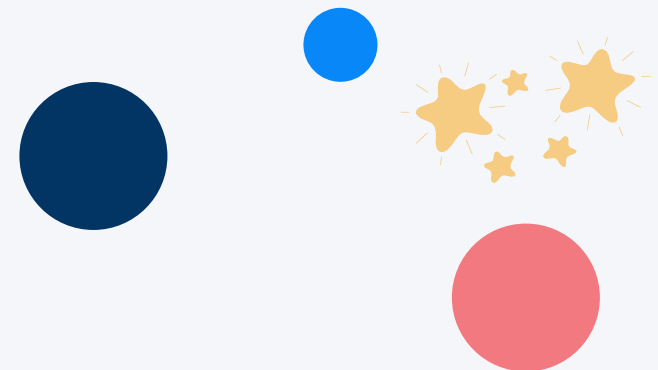
Why Should Real Estate Domain Names Include Local Search Terms?



69% of people who take action on a real estate site start with a local search term. — **Realtor.org**



52% of actions taken on real estate sites come directly from a local search — **Realtor.org**



Domain Name Dos and Don'ts



DO focus on local.

Add a bit of your personal brand to the local search terms you're targeting.



DO be specific.

Lots of folks sell real estate in Boston, but far fewer specialize in selling luxury condos. In this case, "BostonLuxuryCondos.com" would help you drive targeted traffic more than a generic option like "BostonHomesforSale.com."



DO act quickly.

And don't be afraid to get creative. Add a bit of your personal brand to the local search terms you're targeting.



DO make it easy to spell.

Use the phone call test: call a friend, say your domain name out loud, then ask your friend to spell it. If they struggle, you might want to consider simplifying the name.

Domain Name

Dos and Don'ts



DON'T use hyphens.

There's no proven SEO value in using hyphens. Search engines can recognize the individual words in "BostonLuxuryCondos.com," so breaking it up into "Boston-Luxury-Condos.com" will only make the domain name clunkier and harder to say out loud.



DON'T choose a ".net," or ".org," extension over ".com."

.com is popular, it's got history on its side, and people naturally type it in when they're visiting a website directly.



DON'T make it too long.

A short domain name is a memorable domain name. "BostonLuxuryCondominiumsForSale.com" is an example of an overly long name.

Chapter 3

Diving Into Design

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I'm amazed at how a beautiful site can draw someone in — humans are visual creatures after all. But if the site is too unwieldy, cumbersome, or filled with broken links, they're gone. The science in site design should be about making sure it works, then using analytics to float relevant content to the top.

”



Nobu Hata

Denver Metro Association
of REALTORS®

The look and feel of your real estate website are critically important. Even with a great domain name that drives tons of search traffic, a website will ultimately fail if visitors aren't engaged. Cluttered headers, ugly color schemes, confusing (or broken) navigation links are all things that can cause visitors to bounce from your site and move on to a competitor. When building a real estate website, balancing art with science is essential. In addition to looking beautiful, your site needs to lead visitors down the path from interest to conversion.

Choosing a Real Estate Website Design Solution

The majority of website design solutions belong to one of two broad categories:

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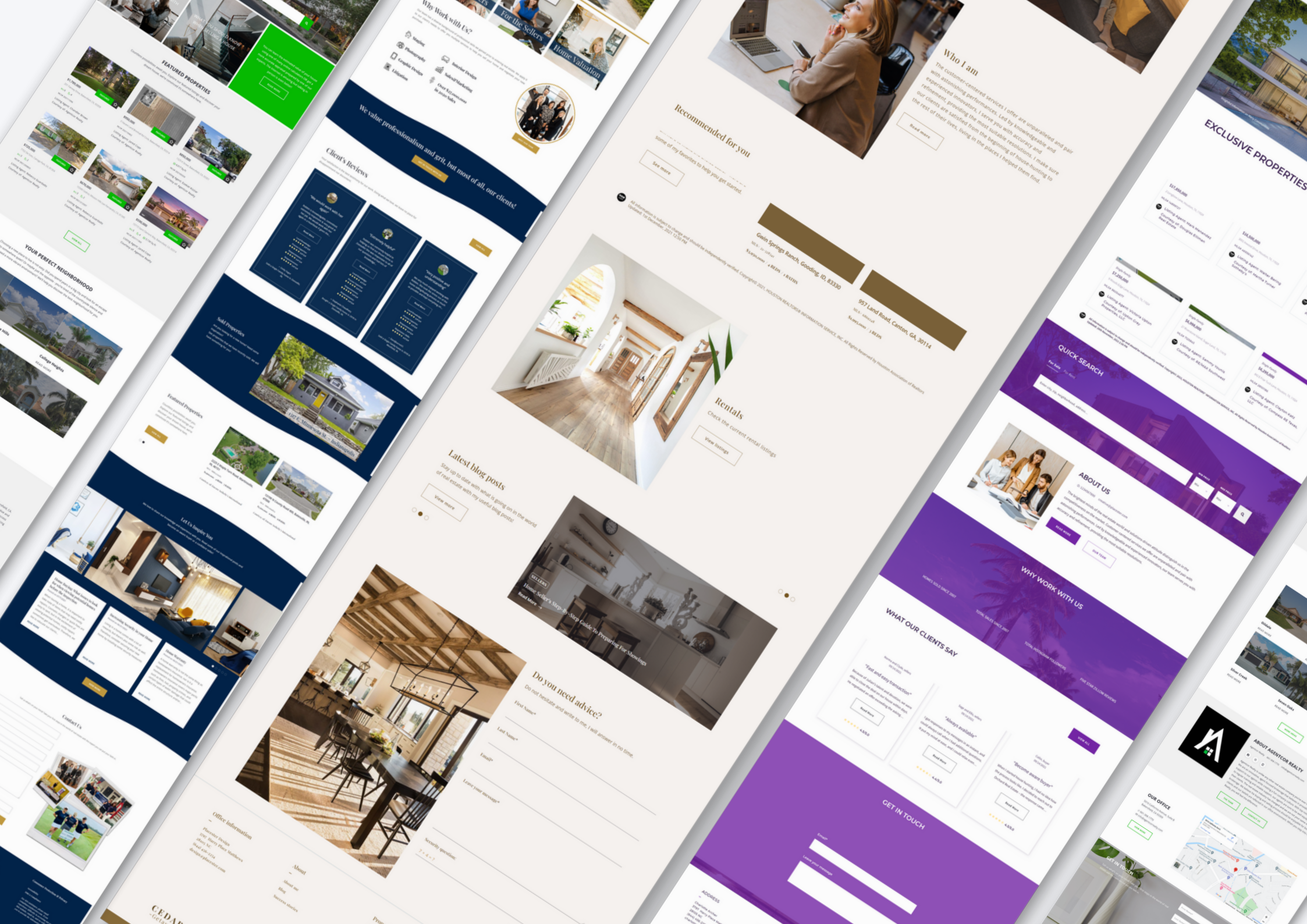
Custom

A custom site is created “from scratch,” in the sense that a web designer starts with a blank canvas and builds a site according to a client's precise specifications. With a custom site, you're getting something that's entirely unique. However, web designers are often expensive, and the design process can take months.

Personalized

In comparison, a personalized site starts with a templated design, which you can then add to and adjust. With a personalized site, you can add your logo, change the color scheme, create your own navigation links, and add widgets to sidebars and other areas of your site.

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Custom

- Unique
- Tailored to your specifications
- Long development time
- Requires a Web designer
- Set in stone
- Cost = \$\$\$\$

Personalized

- Structured
- Based on a template
- Up and running quickly
- Do-it-yourself design

(we have the Do It For Me option!)

- Easily changed
- Cost = \$

4. Secondary Call to Action

While visitors might be hesitant to give you their email address when they first arrive on your site, after scrolling through some of your content — and reaching the footer — they might be convinced. That's why the footer is a great spot for a secondary call to action, such as a form where they can sign up for your newsletter. These four elements are by no means the only elements you can include in your footer. Abbreviated “about” sections, agent photos, and even videos have found their way into the footers of successful sites.

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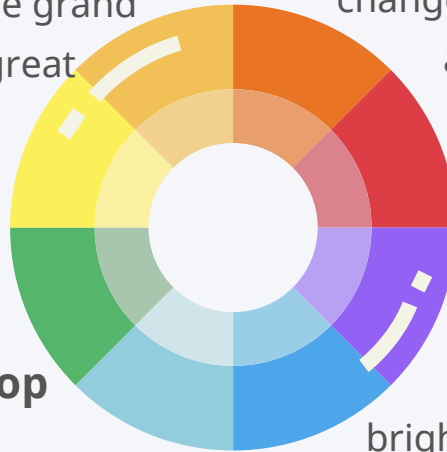
Color Considerations

Just as a cluttered, confusing layout can cause visitors to leave your real estate website, so can an ugly or distracting color palette. In the grand scheme of things, MLS integration and great content is more important, but having a pleasant, agreeable color scheme can definitely add to your site's value.

5 Tips for Making Your Website Pop

1. Let your logo guide the colors you choose for your site.

For example, if you have a blue and green logo, use those same shades for elements like call to action buttons on your site (example: the Match Realty Group).



2. Play with saturation and brightness.

Using the exact same shade of a color EVERYWHERE on your site can get a bit repetitive. To switch it up, keep the hue (tone of the color) the same, but change the saturation (intensity of the color) and/or the brightness (amount of black or white in the color).

3. Use a complementary color.

Even with changes to saturation and brightness, a single-tone site can come across as boring, visually. A second color that doesn't clash with your logo can help add a bit more excitement to your site design.

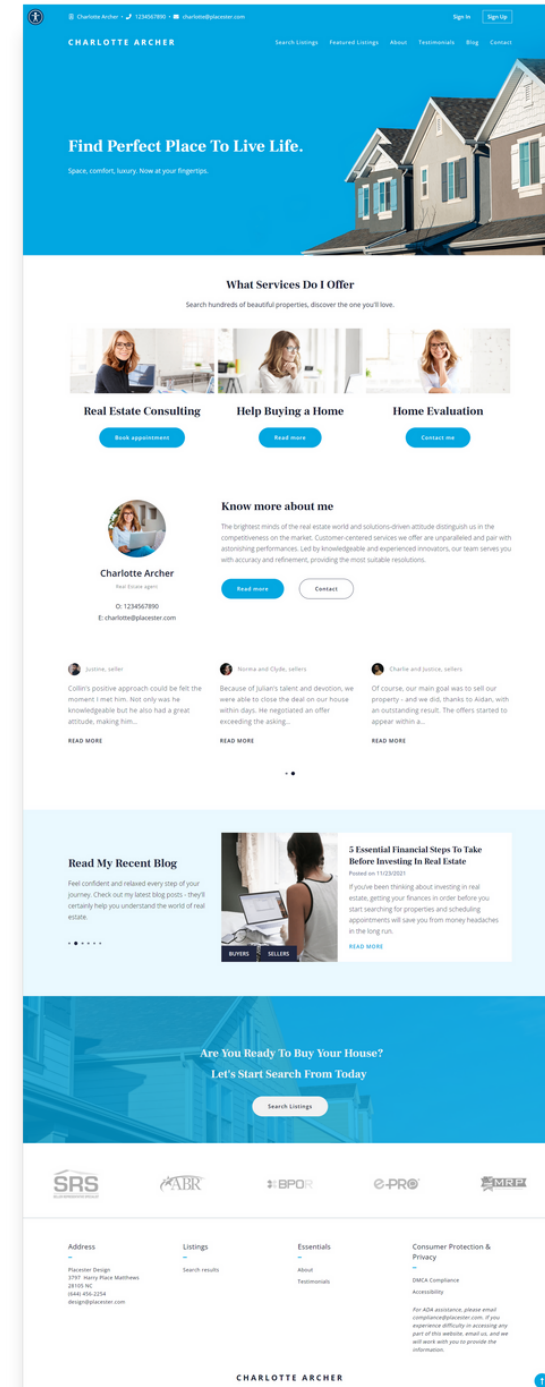
4. Just don't go TOO crazy with colors.

The more colors you add to your site, the more likely it is that your site will come off looking like the Crayola factory exploded on your homepage.

5. Pay attention to contrast.

Just as using too many colors can negatively affect your website design, so can using colors in the wrong places. As a general rule, always put dark-colored text on a light background and always put light-colored text on a dark background.

This contrast in color will make navigation links and copy easier to read.



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Chapter 3

Website Components

In any profession, a slick-looking website is a sign that you take your job seriously—but it's even more critical for real estate agents, whose clients often either find their agent online or do a bit of stealthy clicking before reaching out to connect.

Yes, it's true that buyers and sellers will expect certain things from your website, and you should certainly be providing them with the basics. But it's also true that you can exceed their expectations by offering something extra that nobody else in your market is delivering.

Header

How to Build an Effective Header in 4 Easy Steps

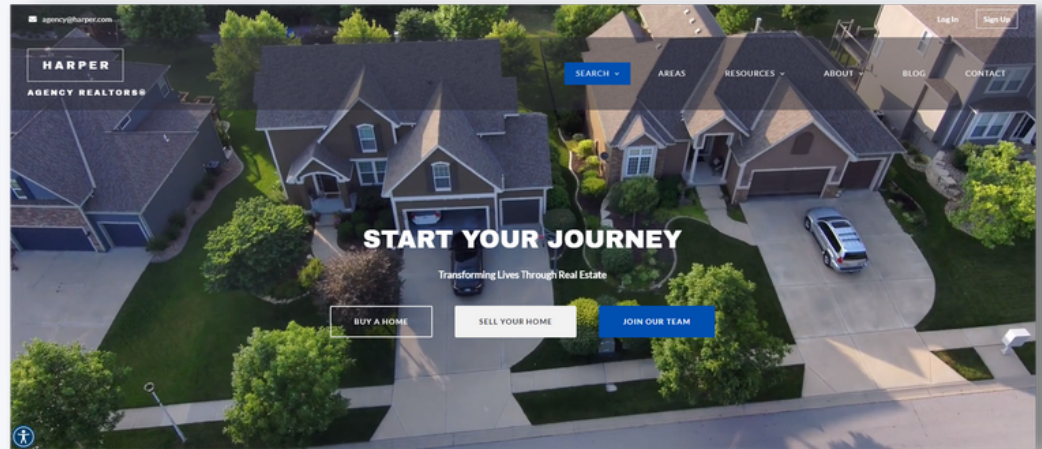
Step 1: Start with your logo.

Don't have a logo? You can hire a designer to make one for you or find a font and color that you like and make a simple, text-based logo yourself. There are several programs you can use to do this: PowerPoint, Keynote, and Photoshop are just a few.

Step 2: Add your Unique Value Proposition.

One of the most meaningful pieces of advice that new real estate agents get is to create a unique value proposition, or UVP, which helps articulate why a buyer or seller might want to hire you.

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Step 3: Add navigation links.

Make it easy for visitors to get around your site and find what they're looking for by including navigation links in your header.

Step 4: Add contact info.

Including your email address and/or phone number in the header makes it convenient for folks to reach out to you, as they won't need to navigate to your contact page to find your contact info.

Footer

Fill Your Footer

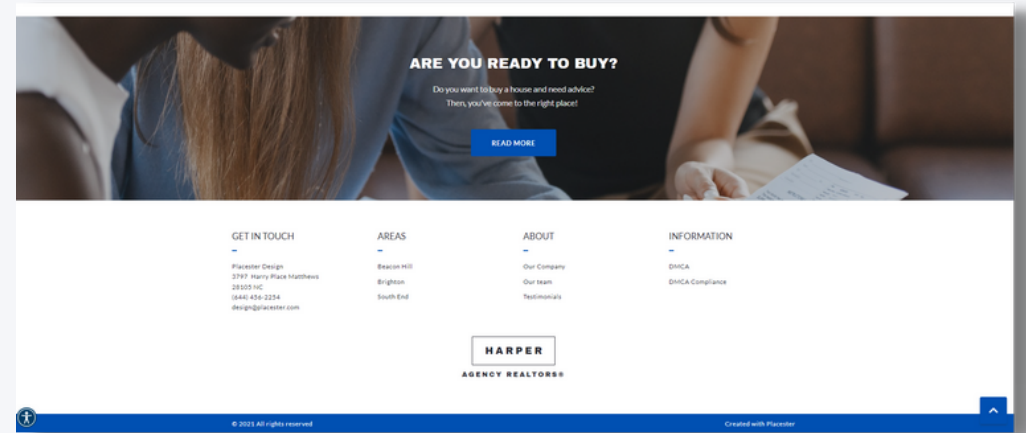
Your website's footer is more than just a container for copyright notices and credit links: it's valuable real estate that you can use to drive engagement.

Four Features of a User-Friendly Footer

1. Navigation

Don't make visitors scroll all the way back up to your header so they can find what they're looking for on your site. Adding navigation links to your footer helps eliminate scrolling, which is a major inconvenience for your site visitors.

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2. Contact Info

Just like you don't want visitors scrolling like mad to find a particular page on your site, you don't want them scrambling to find your contact info. Make it as easy as possible for folks to contact you by putting your name, email address, physical address, and phone number at the bottom of the page as well as the top.

3. Social Buttons

Give your visitors every opportunity to connect with you through their social networks by putting Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, and Pinterest buttons in your footer.

8 Standard Components Every Agent's Website Needs

1. IDX search

Buyers visiting a real estate website will want to search local homes for sale, and thanks to the beauty of IDX, you can (and should!) give them the option to find those homes without leaving your pages.

Level up: 'Coming soon' page

In a real estate market with low inventory and lots of interested buyers (which describes almost every market in 2021), buyers are just as intensely interested in what's about to hit the MLS as they are in homes that have already been listed; if they can start their research early, they might even be able to

decide whether or not they want to walkthrough the home before it's listed on the market. You'll want to make sure your "coming soon" page is compliant with your MLS and brokerage guidelines, of course—giving buyers a glimpse into the homes that haven't quite hit the market yet (but are about to) will be well worth the attention to regulatory detail!

Level up: Street-level tours

Many buyers who start their home search online know enough to be wary of listing photos, but there hasn't been a better way to take a look around the outside of the house and the neighborhood where it sits.

Enter street-level tours (Google Street View, which allows you to embed walking tours around the house into your website, giving buyers another way to stroll down the road and see just how far away that park or convenience store really is.

2. Home valuations for sellers

“How much would my house be worth today?” might be the question that real estate agents get asked the most, along with “how’s the market?” That’s why automated home valuations are useful to include on your website: Sellers can get an instant answer to their question, with an offer to explain more about the number and how they might maximize it.

Level up: Local pricing explainers for sellers

“It’s all well and good to tell a seller how much their home is worth, but even more valuable is to offer some explanation or insight as to why. Perhaps the demographics in one neighborhood mean that buyers trend toward smaller bedroom and bathroom counts instead of larger ones—but your homeowner isn’t necessarily going to know that information intuitively.

Details about what a typical “ideal” home in the neighborhood looks like can help potential sellers understand whether and how their home might deviate from that ideal picture, and that information also gives them the power to decide how much (if any) money they might want to sink into aligning their property with the norms before listing it for sale.

3. Mortgage calculator for buyers

Buying a house is financially complicated, and the burning question that buyers most often have surrounds the monthly mortgage payment. If they put down \$X today, what will that mean for their payment in a few months? What kind of additional burden will taxes and insurance add?

Calculators that tackle this complicated math can give buyers a baseline understanding of whether or not they could actually afford a house in that particular price range.

4. Mortgage rates plug-ins

Your website visitors might have heard that mortgage rates have been hovering near historic lows throughout 2021, but what's the rate today—and what might they qualify for with their current credit score and debt-to-income ratio? A mortgage rate plug-in can help them benchmark where rates are so they can start to answer these questions.

Level up: Neighborhood demographics

These don't change nearly as often as mortgage rates, but buyers find them endlessly fascinating for similar reasons. How many people in the neighborhood are owner-occupants, and how many homes are rentals? How many of those homes are short-term or vacation rentals instead of long-term rentals? How many homeowners have an associate's degree, and how many have a master's degree or higher? What's the median income? How many are families with kids?

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5. Neighborhood guides

Many real estate agents provide some kind of guide or orientation around different neighborhoods, from the retail shopping available to community features such as parks or rec centers. Buyers who are moving from out-of-state, or even local buyers who simply aren't very familiar with where you work, can get a quick sense of what to expect; many agents find a lot of engagement by posting neighborhood video guides and physically walking their visitors through the landscape.



Read the article:

[14 Steps to Building Your Reputation As a Real Estate Community Expert](#)

6. School ratings

GreatSchools is the best-known provider of school ratings; if you operate in a neighborhood with a significant number of families with school-aged children, then you can expect to hear lots of questions about school ratings and reviews. Giving visitors those details upfront on your website can save time, and it offers a level of transparency and self-service that many buyers appreciate.

7. Contact forms

Website visitors who want more information or would like to learn more about you will need a way to do so, and contact forms can be a hassle-free way to capture some facts around who they are and what they're seeking before you enter a conversation. Adding a form as a sidebar option is convenient to invite a visitor to ask a question or start a discussion.

Level up: Chat box

Sometimes, waiting for a real estate agent to read your question, consider the answer, and formulate a reply is not the most ideal setup from a client perspective. Also, many buyers and sellers have a very real fear of getting spammed incessantly if they offer up an email address or phone number right away—the fact of the matter is that there are some real estate “professionals” who have given the industry a bad rap.

One solution is a chat box, where your website visitors can ask questions (if they have them) in a no-pressure, hassle-free environment. Depending on your visitors' needs, your chat service might offer some prewritten scripts for common questions, or perhaps you'll find it worth the expenditure to have a live human who can provide white-glove service on the other end of that chat box.

Level up: Newsletter sign-up

In addition to a contact form and chat box, some agents send newsletters about local happenings, real estate news, or any other relevant knowledge and insights about the area; for those agents, embedding a newsletter sign-up box into your website (along with a description of how often recipients hear from you and the general contents of the newsletter) is a fantastic way to capture new subscribers and give your website visitors an easy way to keep in touch with you. (Make sure your newsletter is set up so that any replies or questions go directly to your inbox!)



Read the article:

[42 Engaging Real Estate Newsletter Ideas](#)

8. Testimonials

Some clients put more faith in testimonials than others, but their very existence speaks to one fact: A certain number of buyers and sellers enjoyed working with you enough to take the time to document that experience in writing. So it's wise to include them on your website if you have them (and you should be collecting them!); even though few clients are likely to make a decision based solely on a testimonial, they'll be reassured by the fact that the testimonials are there at all.



Read the article:

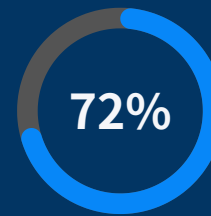
[Leverage Your Real Estate Reviews in 5 Steps](#)

Chapter 4

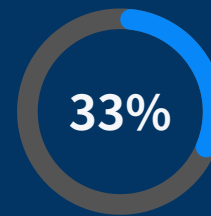
Mobile Responsiveness

Smartphones, tablets, and other mobile devices are fast-becoming the most popular means for browsing the web and — more specifically — for real estate searches.

Why a Mobile-Friendly Design is a Must



72% of home buyers used a mobile or tablet search device in their home search. — National Association of REALTORS®



33% of all buyers said that it's important that an agent has a mobile site to show properties. — National Association of REALTORS®



Mobile First?

The internet has been part of real estate since its inception, so it's easy to hear advice like "your website needs to be mobile-responsive" and think "surely it has to be at this stage." Well, not necessarily! With 97% of buyers looking for homes online at some point during their search, and the proportion of mobile-to-desktop users continuing to increase every year, more of your clients are leaning ever more heavily on their mobile devices to help them navigate a home purchase or sale.

As you've no doubt experienced yourself, a website that looks gorgeous laid out on a desktop might not load as quickly or look as clean on a tablet or a smartphone. A number of different variables come

into play, including your overall website navigation, the typefaces (or fonts) that you use, the color contrast, all the interactive components (IDX, anyone?), and many more, all of which will affect how much buyers and sellers enjoy spending time on your website.

Your website platform provider should already be doing the heavy lifting for you in terms of creating website designs that look beautiful and work well on both desktop and mobile devices. But it's easy to check and see for yourself just how responsive your website is if that's not a service your vendor providers (or if you're just curious).



Read the article:

[How to Test Your Real Estate Website for Mobile Responsiveness](#)

Chapter 5

Integrations

Now that you have tools and perspectives you need to get started, it's time to talk about the future.

Technology promised to make everyone's life easier, but until the wide world of integrations opened up—allowing different technology tools to communicate smoothly with each other—the effects were arguably hit-or-miss. But now we're living in an era where you can integrate Venmo with your bank account without having to think very hard about it—or use your email and your social media login information for just about any account you could imagine.

Integrations have become so common that many vendors will build custom ones for you if the list of existing integrations doesn't quite fit what you want to do.

But you can't take advantage of tools you've never seen! From the most basic integrations available in real estate to sophisticated new opportunities you probably didn't know existed, we've curated a list so you can get a sense of what's out there. ([And, of course, if you need any help navigating the available integrations as a Placester customer, our support team can help guide you through the steps!](#))

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CRM integrations

For most agents, their CRM is the most important weapon in their arsenal to stay top-of-mind with their sphere and capture as much repeat and referral business as they possibly can.

Integrating your CRM with your website can help you automate ongoing tasks like creating new leads in the CRM for any new website leads, form submissions, account sign-ups, or pop-up submissions; you can also assign tags and add comments to CRM contacts based on website input.



Calendar integrations

A calendar integration gives you more control over your schedule while also increasing your flexibility and availability to your clients.

Digital calendars are a huge blessing to all of humankind in many ways, especially to real estate agents; if you're using a popular one like Google Calendar, you can probably immediately integrate your website and your calendar so that events are created and canceled based on different triggers. You can even set up a push notification within your calendar to let you know when someone has asked for a meeting via your website or one of its integrations.

Project management

Are you using an app like Trello or Monday.com to handle any tasks that need to be taken around leads or transactions, to help keep everyone involved in the loop? Integrations with your website can create new cards or boards, archive items, and handle other tedious tasks that would otherwise require spending time to reconcile data sets.

Zapier can also help you integrate your website with platforms like HelpDesk, which give you a little bit more leeway in terms of customer support and guidance, by creating new tickets, adding people to existing tickets, and any number of other customer service-driven options.

Marketing automation

Email newsletters, drip campaigns, and other strategies can be amazing ways to keep tabs on the people in your network and deliver valuable, timely information to them. Integrations between your website and your preferred marketing automation or email marketing channel can help add new contacts to your lists; integrations can also alert you when certain links are clicked or pages are visited from an opened email, or when someone unsubscribes from (or subscribes to) a specific newsletter.

Team communication tools

How did workplaces even operate without Slack? (Well, there were probably a lot more conversations happening out loud, but that's neither here nor there.) This "chat tool" is a lot more powerful than that description would indicate.

Email

No doubt you're using email to communicate with support staff, clients, vendors, fellow agents, and others who are doing business with you; it's hard to imagine working without email in this day and age. If you're using Gmail, you can probably already integrate it with your website to send a "welcome" email to anybody who fills out a form or asks to schedule an appointment. Still, there are also advanced options available that can give you the ability to automate email labels, replies, attachments, and more based on different website triggers.

Phone and SMS

Do you already use phone and SMS tools like Twilio or RingCentral? Website integrations can send SMS messages, book video calls, and even send faxes based on different triggers; you can create triggers around call recordings and voicemails, too.

Social media accounts

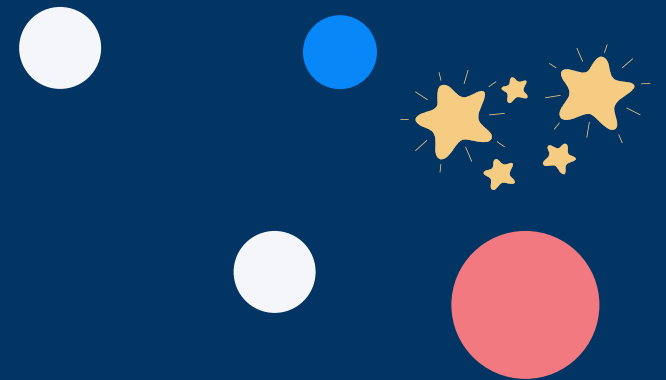
Not every real estate agent is a social media power user. Still, those who are probably can't get enough of the ability to connect and engage (and do business) with people from a simple phone screen. Wrapping your website into your social media strategy can allow you to create alerts for search terms, capture leads or even give you a heads-up when someone else whose account you're monitoring acquires a new follower.

Facebook offers some integration potential with Pages; you can set triggers to display new posts in the appropriate place and help automate and streamline posts to your page, to name two quick examples.

Thank you!

Thanks for checking out The Ultimate Guide to Building a Real Estate Website.

For more insight into the world of real estate marketing, be sure to visit our [Real Estate Marketing Academy](#).



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Looking to set up a new real estate website with built-in IDX/MLS search, premium themes, and indexable property pages? Head to Placester.com and get started with a 30-day free trial.