FIELD GUIDE 09 · WEBSITES

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The Website That Works

Twelve checks for a business website where design, copy, speed and accessibility pull in the same direction, so it looks good and does its job.

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DRAFT · NOV 6, 2026

The original e-book's premise was that designers make pretty sites and marketers make sites that sell. In my view that's a false choice. Good design is how a site communicates. The real split is between sites built around a goal and sites built around a look.

Its 22 mistakes overlapped a lot (clutter, too many visuals, overcomplication and analysis paralysis are mostly one idea), and several leaned on statistics I couldn't verify, so I won't repeat them. What's left is a solid set of checks. I've grouped them into twelve, in roughly the order I'd fix them.

Purpose

1. Every important page has one job

The e-book's first point was that the homepage isn't where money is made and that ads should go to focused landing pages. Mostly true. The homepage orients people; service pages and landing pages convert them. For each key page, write down the one action it exists to produce.

2. Know the visitor before choosing the look

Before colors and layouts: who arrives on this page, what problem brought them, and how does your offer solve it? Answer those three questions in writing and share them with whoever designs the site.

3. Tell people exactly what to do next

A clear, specific call to action ("Get a quote in 2 minutes," "See pricing," "Book a 20-minute call") beats "Learn more." Visual cues like contrast and placement help people find it. Not garish. Just obvious.

Clarity

4. Copy and design get equal attention

A beautiful layout with vague words doesn't convert. Neither does great copy crammed into a messy page. Write the words first, then design around them.

5. Readable type

Comfortable font size, good line spacing, strong contrast, few typefaces. The W3C's WCAG 2.2 sets contrast and readability expectations worth following, and they help everyone, not only people with disabilities.

6. Cut clutter

One focal point per section. Remove visuals that don't explain something or support a decision. Fewer choices, clearly organized, tend to make decisions easier.

7. Real images over generic stock

Photos of your actual work, team and place build more trust than generic stock. If you use AI-generated images, don't present them as real projects or real people, and label them where a reader would reasonably assume they're photos.

Performance

8. Fast on a phone

Test on a real mid-range phone, not your office desktop. Google's Core Web Vitals give targets: Largest Contentful Paint within 2.5 seconds, Interaction to Next Paint under 200 milliseconds, Cumulative Layout Shift under 0.1. PageSpeed Insights and Search Console's Core Web Vitals report show where you stand. Common culprits: huge images, heavy sliders, too many plugins and scripts.

9. Responsive by default

The e-book's mobile advice was framed for 2017. Today responsive design is the baseline. Check forms, menus, tap targets and pop-ups on small screens specifically.

10. Easy to find things

If your site has more than a handful of pages or products, offer search or very clear navigation. Make sure important information is available as real text (not only inside images or video), which also helps search engines and AI search features understand the page.

Iteration

11. Capture interest respectfully

Most first-time visitors won't buy. Offer something genuinely useful in exchange for an email, and make the consent clear. The e-book suggested capturing emails "from now until kingdom come." I'd rather send fewer, better emails and make unsubscribing easy (which U.S. CAN-SPAM rules require for commercial email anyway).

12. Launch is the start

Measure what pages lead to inquiries, fix what’s broken, test meaningful changes and update content that’s gone stale. A site is closer to a storefront you maintain than a brochure you print once.

WORKING WITH A DESIGNER

Give them the goal of each page, the audience answers from check 2, your real photos and your copy. Ask them to show you the page on a phone first. Most “designer mistakes” are really briefing mistakes.

WORKSHEET

Page-by-page job list

PAGE	THE ONE JOB	MAIN CALL TO ACTION	WORKS ON PHONE?
Home			
Main service / product			
Second service / product			
About			
Contact / booking			

Visitor brief (for you and your designer)

Who arrives on the main page?

What problem brought them?

How does the offer solve it, in one sentence?

What proof can we show (real photos, reviews, process)?

CHECKLIST

Twelve-check quick scan

- [ ] Each key page has one written job.
- [ ] The visitor brief exists and the designer has it.
- [ ] Calls to action are specific and easy to spot.
- [ ] Copy was written before (or alongside) design.
- [ ] Text is readable with strong contrast.

- [ ] No decorative clutter competing with the main message.
- [ ] Images are real, or AI images are not passed off as real.
- [ ] Core Web Vitals checked in PageSpeed Insights or Search Console.
- [ ] Forms, menus and pop-ups tested on a small phone.
- [ ] Search or clear navigation; key info in real text.
- [ ] Email capture is useful, consented and easy to leave.
- [ ] A monthly review is on the calendar.

SOURCES CHECKED NOVEMBER 6, 2026

- Google Search Central, "Understanding Core Web Vitals and Google search results" (developers.google.com/search/docs/appearance/core-web-vitals); PageSpeed Insights (pagespeed.web.dev).
- W3C, WCAG 2.2 (w3.org/TR/WCAG22).
- Google Search Central, "AI features and your website" (developers.google.com/search/docs/appearance/ai-features), on keeping important content in textual form.
- U.S. FTC CAN-SPAM Rule, 16 CFR Part 316 (ecfr.gov).

How this guide was made

This guide started as a long agency e-book in my reference library listing 22 website “mistakes” it blamed on web designers. I kept the useful checks, merged the overlapping ones and dropped the designer-bashing. I rewrote it from the ground up for how marketing actually works in late 2026, then checked the platform-specific parts against official documentation on November 6, 2026. Platforms change their menus, defaults and policies often, so treat anything tied to a specific tool as “true as of that date” and recheck before you spend money.

A few ground rules I hold myself to in these guides:

- **Examples are illustrative.** Numbers in worked examples are made up to show the math. They are not client results, forecasts or promises.
- **No guarantees.** Nobody can promise you rankings, AI citations, leads or a return on ad spend. Anyone who does is guessing or selling.
- **Named ideas keep their names.** Where a framework comes from someone else, I say so.
- **AI helped, a human decides.** This draft was prepared with AI assistance and is pending my review. If you use AI in any workflow here, keep a person responsible for accuracy, privacy and the final call.

About Jay Minakhom. I build businesses, test technology, and share what I learn about making work and life better. Writing lives at jayminakhom.com. Client marketing work runs through J Squared Productions at jsquaredproductions.com. My newsletter is called *Since you didn’t ask* (working title).

This is a draft for review dated November 6, 2026. Not legal, tax or financial advice.