



East Gippsland Shire Council

Event Management Toolkit

WEBSITE DESIGN AND SURCH ENGINE OPTIMISATION FOR EVENTS

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Introduction to websites: Domain & Content Management System

All websites need

- A domain
- A content management system (CMS)
- Hosting

Your **domain** is your website address. Your domain should be the first thing you organise: www.yourevent.org.au (or .com.au or .com or .au). This can be registered in many places, such as [VentralP](#), [Webcentral](#), [GoDaddy](#), [Digital Pacific](#).

FAQ – What type of domain should I register, .com.au or .org.au?

If you are a not for profit organisation, you can register a .org.au domain. If you are a private business or company you will need to register a .com.au, or a simplified Australian domain (.au only).

FAQ – Do I need .au or can I just be .com?

You can go with .com or .org if you prefer, however using a domain ending in .au indicates that you are an Australian event and adds credibility to your website.

Your **content management system (CMS)** is the structure of your website, where it is built and where you can login and make changes to the website. There are a range of CMS options available. If you work with a website developer, they will most likely have a preferred CMS. If you are building your own website, there are some excellent systems available that are simple to use and produce a professional design. See the section on choosing a content management system for more information.

Your **website hosting** is the land that your website sits on allowing it to be published to the internet. Some content management systems include hosting in their subscriptions; others require that you purchase a hosting plan which can usually be done where your domain is registered.

Your **email hosting** is separate to your website hosting. This can be purchased and set up where your domain is registered. Alternatively you can use [Google Workspace](#) or [Microsoft 365](#) subscriptions for quality email and cloud storage options.



Choosing a website developer

When building a website, you will need to have an ongoing relationship with your designer/developer. This can mean everything from technical support to content updates and upgrades as time goes by. Ensure you find a designer who you trust, who you know can turn things around quickly for you, and who will be proactive about giving you ideas and a heads up as design trends and technology algorithms change. For example, it's important to know why Google may no longer be ranking your website and what is needed to fix this – before it happens!

Websites can be expensive to maintain, and it's important to know how much of the ongoing 'servicing' you will be doing yourself, and ensuring that your website is built using a system you can access and use comfortably. Some content management systems are easier than others to use, and if you feel like your team or committee will be doing most of the updates ongoing, make sure you choose a content management system which will be the most user friendly (See notes on CMS to follow). WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get i.e. making changes does not require learning coding) style website builders are a good option if you are going to be doing a large amount of updates yourself.

Tip:

It's common for event committees to have had a website built by a past committee member's child or friend, and as the event and roles have evolved, passwords have been lost, access to the site is confused, no one knows how to get into the domain and other issues arise. Working with a website developer ensures that there is a professional, central, and neutral access point for all systems.

Doing it yourself

If you decide not to use a developer, there are a great range of tools out there to help you get a great website up and running, such as Wix, Weebly, Squarespace for CMS, and Canva, which can help you create engaging backgrounds, graphics and banners.

These tools make it easy for anyone to build a website, but be aware that there is a difference between building a website versus building a website that works. If you decide to build your own, ensure you do some reading about user journeys, search engine optimisation and digital marketing basics before you choose this method.

Recommendations to get started:

Register your domain at www.ventraip.com.au

Build a simple event website with www.squarespace.com

Follow Squarespace instructions to update your DNS records to point to Squarespace and you will have a website live, quickly and easily.

Set up a Google Workspace account for an email address such as info@myeventname.com.au: at <https://admin.google.com> with a shared Google Drive for your committee to access documents and photos.

Selecting a Content Management System

Your CMS is the system your website is built on that also lets you log in and make changes, such as publishing, editing, managing and deleting content. CMS systems are usually categorised as open-source or closed-source. Whilst Wordpress (open-source) has been the most common system used in the past, there has been a big increase in closed-source systems which are geared towards ease of use. These systems are rapidly redefining the website space, improving security, usability, search engine optimisation and removing the need for jargon and complex code.

System type	Examples	Pros	Cons
Open-source Some are free to use, though you still need to purchase hosting and engage your website developer to maintain the site's security over time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wordpress• Joomla• Drupal• Magento	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Best for very complex functionality requirements• No contracts• 100% ability for customisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can be costly to maintain and build custom functionality• Needs manual updates and server maintenance• Can be harder to make updates with coding required
Closed-source Have a monthly subscription fee which includes the CMS, hosting, security updates and support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Squarespace• Wix• Weebly• Shopify• Webflow	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Many are WYSIWYG with excellent usability and ease of making changes• Cost effective and simple pricing with maintenance and security taken care of• Ability to extend functionality using widgets and plugins	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Monthly contracts• Limitations in modifying code• Your website is contained within the CMS and you are restricted to their future changes and fees

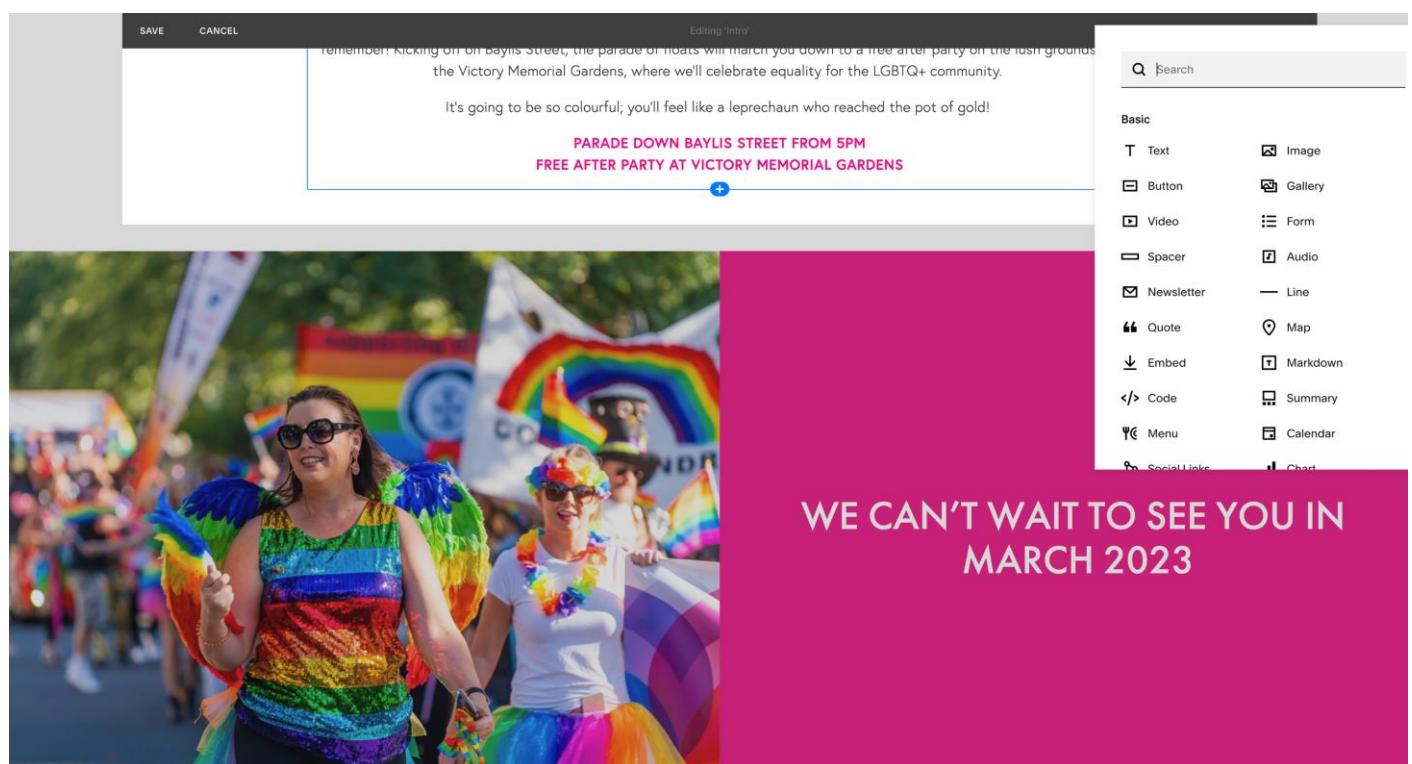
From a custom-built coded system to your simple DIY systems and everything in between, choosing your CMS can be the biggest decision.

- **Custom coded** – ideal when you have unique and complex requirements, or a large site (over 100 pages). Custom developed websites will cost from \$5,000 to \$100,000+ depending on the scope and what is required
- **Open Source – e.g. Joomla, Wordpress, Drupal** – an open source platform is usually free (although you will need to pay for your hosting). It may cost you in other ways, for example ongoing security maintenance and updates. Whilst open source gives you access to hundreds of thousands of 'widgets' and 'plugins' if these aren't maintained and updated over time, they can create cracks in your website which make it vulnerable to hackers trying to spread malware. If your website gets hacked, it is an expensive process to get a new site up and running and back on Google's search results.
- **Closed systems e.g. Shopify, Wix, Squarespace** – these have the ability to build excellent websites with fantastic functionality. Some have additional App stores, and you can also use external

resources and Zapier to extend the functionality of your site. Although some of these are classified as DIY systems, many website developers can build your website on these platforms which will give you the ease of maintaining these ongoing. Many of these are classified as WYSIWYG.

- **Easy to use: What you see is what you get (WYSIWYG)**
 - No coding knowledge required
 - Edit text quickly like you would in Microsoft Word
 - Drag and drop elements such as images, videos, buttons and text blocks
 - Resizes images to fit the space and optimise for the internet
 - Automatically adapts for mobile
 - Hit save and it is live

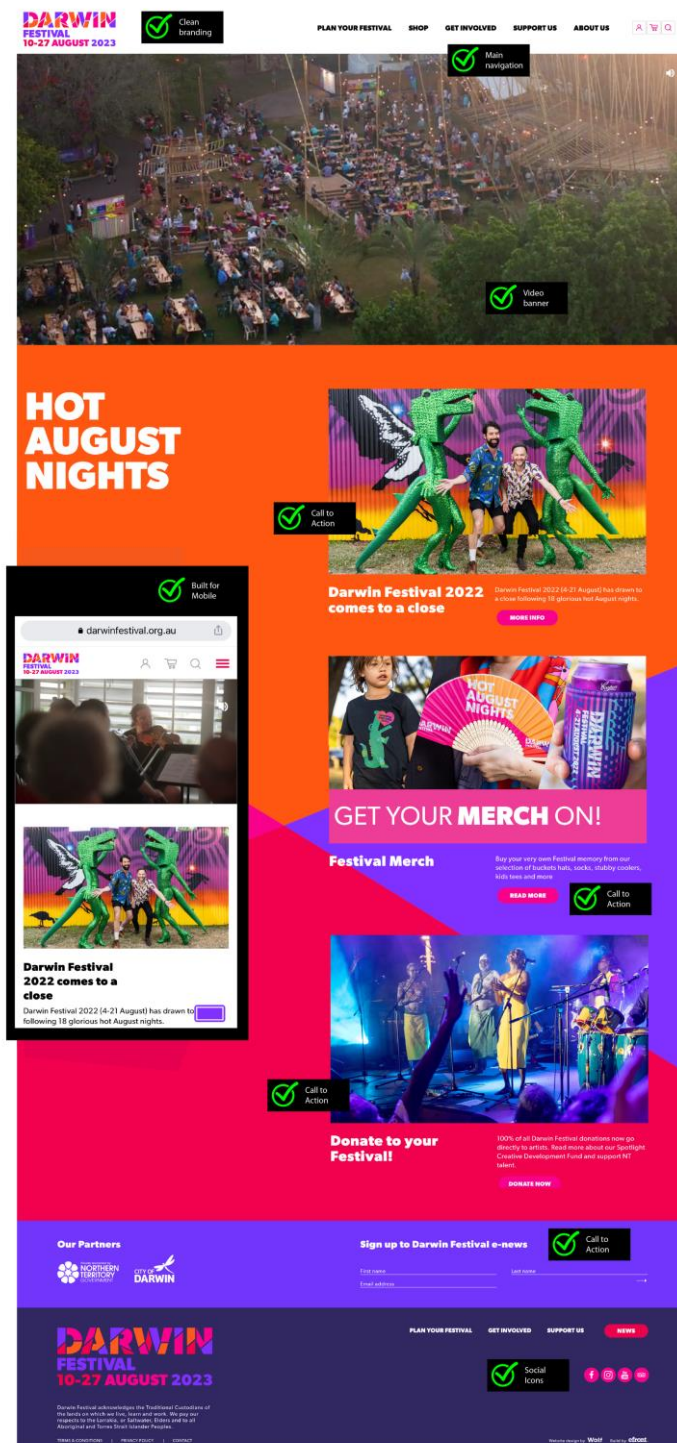
The image below shows the back end of Squarespace – it's as simple as working in a Word document, and very quick to learn the basics of.



Website design and development steps

Step 1: Get inspiration

A great source of information to guide you can come from other sites. Do your research by looking at other websites and figure out what you like from a design and content perspective. Are there any features you like? Start making a list.



Some event websites we love:

- darwinfestival.org.au
- flavoursofmudgee.com.au
- cabinfeverfest.com.au
- echofestival.com.au
- winterlightsfestival.com
- noosaalive.com.au
- horizonfestival.com.au
- festivale.com.au
- newcastlepride.com.au
- grapesofmirth.com.au
- hamiltonislandraceweek.com.au
- parrtijimaaustralia.com.au
- adelaidefringe.com.au
- gourmetescape.com.au

Step 2: Plan out your structure and pages

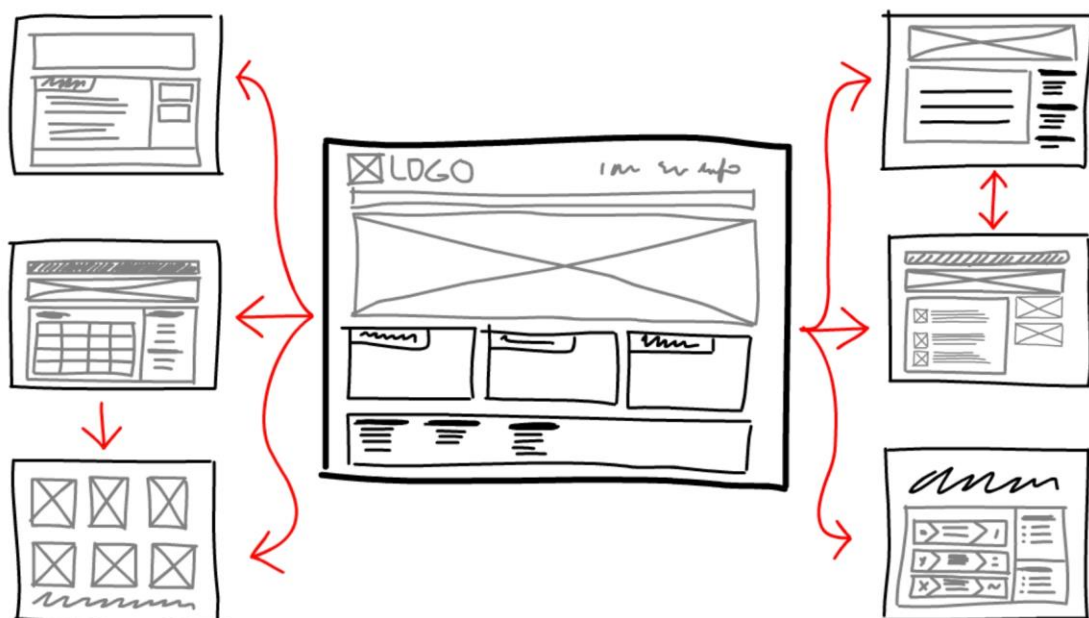
When you first start the website building process try to have as clear an idea of what you want as you can. Look at other sites, mock up a map of your site, work out what content needs to be included, then go to your designer to start building.

Understandably you may not know what is and isn't going to work until it is in the site, you will still need to make some changes. If you go in with no clear plan and make constant changes, then process can take a long time, which could increase the cost of the website, or you might end up with a website that is incoherent and doesn't have a good flow.

Again look at existing sites to work out what tabs you will need across the top, what buttons and banners you'll have, and which calls to action (e.g. Buy tickets, or Register).

- Most event websites will have pages for Home, About, Program, Tickets, Get Involved / Volunteer, Destination Information, Contact
- Tell your website visitors where your **destination** is.
- Provide info that addresses niche interests.
- Avoid information overwhelm.
- Build your website to be social. For example, use user-generated content if you can.
- Provide ideas for what else to do in your region.
- Link to complementary destination and tourism sites for your region.

Start by sketching out a rough idea of how you want the website to flow:



Step 3: Make your calls to action clear

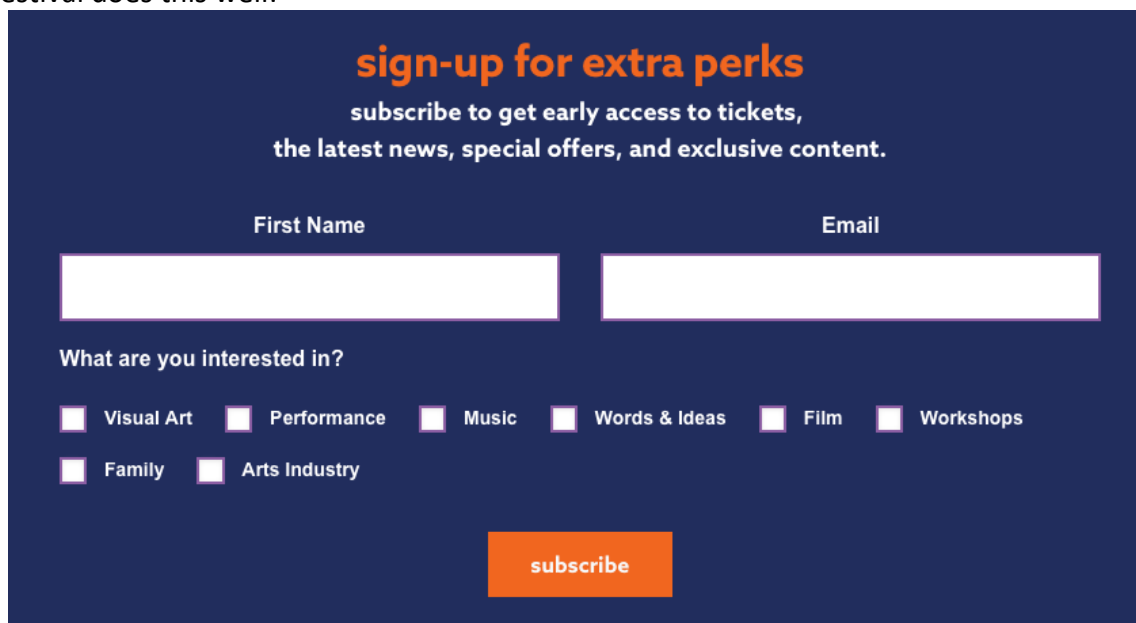
What are your ultimate goals? Figure out the key things you want people to do on your website and gear it towards these outcomes.

What do you want users to do on your website?

- Purchase tickets
- Sign up for a newsletter
- Follow your social media
- Read your blog
- Sign up to volunteer/sponsor/be a food vendor

If you want people to sign up for a newsletter, show them the types of blogs and content and value they will receive from it. Use the subscription as an opportunity to find out more about your attendees so you can plan content that will connects with them.

Horizon Festival does this well:



The image shows a newsletter sign-up form for Horizon Festival. The form has a dark blue background with orange text and buttons. The title is "sign-up for extra perks" in orange, followed by the subtitle "subscribe to get early access to tickets, the latest news, special offers, and exclusive content." in white. Below this are two white input fields for "First Name" and "Email". Underneath the fields is the question "What are you interested in?" followed by a row of checkboxes for "Visual Art", "Performance", "Music", "Words & Ideas", "Film", and "Workshops". Below this row are two more checkboxes for "Family" and "Arts Industry". At the bottom center is an orange button with the word "subscribe" in white.

Tip: Responsive design for mobile and device

With up to 80% of web traffic coming from mobile phones, ensure your CMS has a mobile friendly version. Essentially this means that, during your initial sketching and planning phase on paper, it is best to focus first on the site's mobile layout. Only the most important content necessary to the functioning of your site will be displayed on smaller screens. Your mobile layout assumes a more vertical design that inspires scrolling, rather than the wide landscape of a desktop. For example, if your product page displays listings in a grid of three across on desktops, then usually your mobile layout will display them as just a single column.



Website Design Tips

- **Video:** Many event websites feature a hero video banner. This can help convey the energy and themes of your event quickly.
- **Images:** Well-chosen photos can showcase your event much more effectively than words. Use photos to help your users understand what your event is about, evoke emotion, inspire trust and confidence.
 - o Instagram feeds are a great way of keeping a homepage fresh with new content without having to constantly update it yourself.
 - o If you haven't hosted your event yet, use stock images to paint a picture of the vision for your event. Free stock photo websites include:
 - [Flickr](#)
 - [Pixabay](#)
 - [Unsplash](#)
 - [Pexels](#)
- **Create a news/blog section:** Search engines love words and they love new fresh content. Having a spot on your website to talk about the latest news and updates is a way to build your search engine presence.

FAQ – How often should I blog?

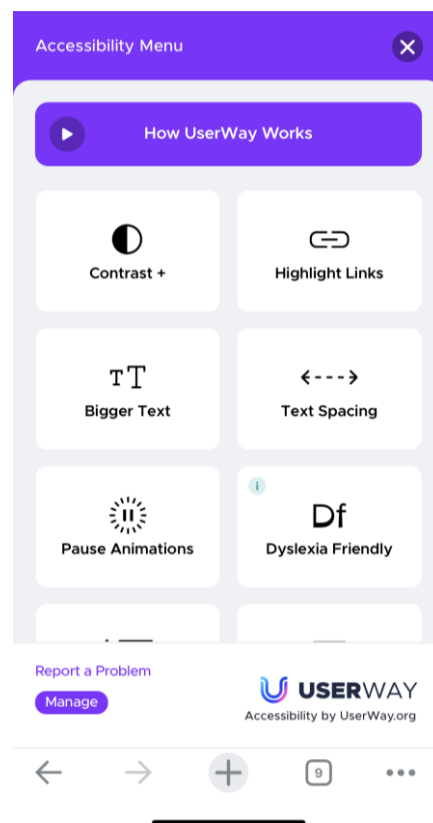
As often as you can. Create a plan of what articles you will write and share the task of writing articles: approach guest bloggers, local personalities, or complementary businesses or events. Once you've posted the content to your site, share it in as many places as you can to drive people back to the website to read more.

- o Ideas for blog content:
 - Top 10 things to do while you're in town for the event
 - Top 5 reasons families love coming to the event
 - Q&A with a committee member
 - Behind the scenes with one of the bands
 - Accommodation packages
 - Festival checklist – what to bring on the day
 - Answer a FAQ
- **Build your database and social following:** Connect a [Mailchimp](#) sign-up form to start building a database, and add links to your social media feeds to promote other ways people can engage with your event.
- **Enable easy communication:** Make it easy for visitors to communicate with you, such as chat boxes, forms, and easy to access phone numbers and email addresses so visitors can ask questions and get answers using their preferred communication method, which could help them make a decision to attend.

- **Accessibility:** Web accessibility means that websites, tools, and technologies are designed and developed so that people with disabilities can use them. Conduct an access assessment of your website, using the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#)

Tips:

- Choose a content management system that supports accessibility
- Use headings and subheadings correctly to organise the structure of your content
- Include proper [Alt Text](#) for images (a written description of images)
- Give your links unique and descriptive names
- Ensure your website uses [accessible colour contrast](#)
- Design your forms for accessibility
- Ensure all content can be accessed with a keyboard in a logical way
- Include [captioning](#) on all videos
- Use a web plugin that enables browser modifications for accessibility, e.g. <https://userway.org>



- **Go live as soon as you can!** A website doesn't need to be 100% complete before you go live. It just has to be better than your current site. If you are launching a brand new website, be aware that it can take time for your website to show up in search engines, so the sooner you can get something live (even a simple one-page placeholder) the better.
- **Get listed:** As soon as your website is live, ensure your domain is included on your Australian Tourism Data Warehouse (ATDW) listing, and across all of your digital listings including social media:
 - Update your ATDW bio link
 - Update your Facebook bio link and 'learn more' button
 - Update your Instagram bio
 - Update your Google My Business listing
- **Measure and tweak:** [Google Analytics](#) will give you fantastic insights into where people are coming from, and what they're looking at on your website. If your popular content is hidden three clicks into the website, bring it to the home page as a prominent button. If more people are visiting from mobile, ensure your mobile experience is fantastic. Use other tools such as [Hotjar](#) heatmaps to see where people are scrolling and what they're clicking on which can help you refine your content and enhance the user experience.

Search engine optimisation (SEO)

Search engine optimization (SEO) is the process of improving the quality and quantity of website traffic to a website or a web page from search engines. SEO targets unpaid traffic (known as "natural" or "organic" results) rather than direct traffic or paid traffic.

Tip: Over 94% of people use Google to search for things online, over other search engines.

What Google looks for in a website is very important to enable you to rank highly for relevant keywords and topics.

Google loves:

- Sites with lots of words and text.
The more text, the more Google can recognise your site as relevant for key topics. Avoid chunks of text as images or PDFs; transcribe or copy them into your content.
- Key words.
Remember to use key words which people will be searching in your text. Use these in your page titles and H1 (main heading) and H2 (subheading) content. Name your blogs things that people would search for such as "Food and wine events in New South Wales"
- Security.
Ensure your site has a valid SSL Security certificate. Some closed-source CMS include these automatically.
- Blogging
News, articles, blog or whatever you call it, Google loves new fresh content, it punishes websites which remain stagnant for too long.
- Avoid big files.
Whilst big photo and video banners and full screen imagery are all the rage, they can make your site slow, which Google hates. Make sure your images are resized at the correct resolution for the internet. Use a website speed test to check this.
- Backlinks.
External links are links from other websites. Google relies *heavily* on external links to determine how good a website is. You can talk about yourself and your own skills all day long, but no one will believe you. But as soon as other people begin bragging about you, others take notice. The more links you can get from websites with high domain authority, the better.
- Alt-tags for images
These tell Google what is in your images.
- Submit a sitemap to Google for indexing via [Google Search Console](#).
- Connect all of your social media to your website.
- Use free tools such as www.seoptimizer.com for more tips

Website & SEO checklist

✓ Website and SEO	
	Contact form is available and working
	Phone numbers are clickable
	Website is mobile friendly
	The copy of the website reads well and uses headings where appropriate
	Calls to action are highlighted and clear for the user
	Images are of good resolution
	Website considers accessibility through colours and fonts, and image alt tags
	A map of the event location is included
	Information that encourages people to stay longer in the region is included
	A newsletter subscription is present
	Event reviews and testimonials are present
	Industry memberships and awards are present
	Links to social media are present
	Google Analytics is connected
	Google Search Console is connected. Submit website and its sitemap to Google for crawling.
	Website has an SSL certificate
	Meta title and description comply with Google's recommendations
	Keywords have been used in page titles, headings and body copy
	Internal links are used throughout the website
	The website loads in under 3 seconds