

Building Your Own Author Website and Blog

Most authors need a website, but how do you get one without the available cash or the necessary skills? A problem yes, but one you can solve. I'm going to share how I built my own website, step-by-step, so you can do the same.

First, I suggest you do some research. Look around at author websites and ask yourself: How many have an engaging message and a clear call to action? Do they make you want to linger? Are they delivering the information that's needed when it's needed it? Do they show respect for the reader's time? How many are attractive to the eye?

I'll wager that unless something's changed

the answer is 'very few'. On the positive side that presents a FAB opportunity for YOU to get it right, starting with asking yourself some key questions



Do I really need a website? Yes, I really think you do. Here's why - if you do everything right you'll build a subscriber list that belongs to YOU. That's readers on your pages, publishers and agents showing interest, money in the bank. A subscriber list is pure gold.

What's the purpose of my website? Before doing anything you need to sit down and identify *what you want your site to achieve and exactly what you want your visitors to do when they arrive*. This planning phase is vital. Here's what I decided:

'I want to sell more books by gaining the attention of visitors quickly (under 3 seconds) hold it long enough to either get them to subscribe, read an excerpt, read a review, or buy the book, hopefully all four! I want visitors to feel good, to have fun, to be intrigued and surprised, to laugh and cry, and to have so much fun that they spread the word as far and wide as possible. I want them to come back again and again and I would love it if they wrote a review.'

I invite you to take a look at my site <http://hazelkey.com> and then if you agree that I've succeeded in achieving at least some of my aims, I invite you to read on.

Where do I start? If you haven't registered your author name as a domain do it, now. And think carefully about that domain name. Keep it simple. Think about what YOU might type in when searching for an author's site. For example, if you include hyphens in the name (hazel-key.com) no-one's gonna know about those hyphens, consequently they won't find you. And consider this – if you're an emerging author you could register domains that make it obvious what you're about (hazelkeyauthor.com, or hazelkeybooks.com).

How do I choose a web host? Good question. I'll make it easy and recommend one - GoDaddy (I promise I've no vested interest). Interestingly I came across a lot of bagging for this company, but only AFTER I'd signed up. Weird, cos my experience had been good. My theory is they've had to clean up their act. Everything about the company has been pretty easy thus far: their prices, their

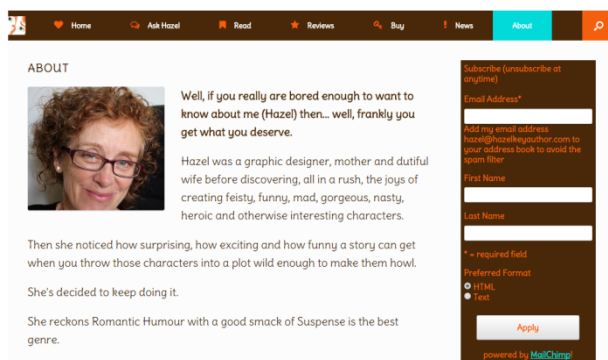
support and importantly their hosting speed. Nothing stays the same of course, businesses have ups and down, but currently I reckon GoDaddy are flying high.

What's next? Once you have a domain name and you've decided on your host you need to get the domain pointing to your site. That's a case of either asking the host to do it, or if you're feeling brave, doing it yourself. It's not that difficult. And while you're about it you'll need WordPress installed on your host - also simple enough – most web hosts have all the information you need available. They may even do it for you.

What's WordPress? It's the basic program within which you will build, customise and maintain your site. And I'll tell you now that in my view there ain't no other CMS (as it's known) worth considering. Why? Because WordPress is the easiest to use, it offers a vast range of themes (design templates) and has every bit of add-on software (widgets and plugins) you'll need.

Next, before you choose a theme and start working on your site you need to ask yourself the following question.

What should the site look like? If you already have books published or book covers designed, then it's likely you've developed a style. That style should be reflected in your site as part of your strategy to have an easily identifiable, unique identity. That identity should be based around who your



audience is, what you write, who you are personally, and therefore the image you need to project.

You could of course commission a graphic designer, but then you'll need a budget for that. Alternatively you can research the sites of other authors who write in your genre, and of course Amazon and the other online stores, as well as bricks-and-mortar bookstores. The websites of book cover designers are useful

too. Look at the colours used, the fonts too, the layout. You'll soon realise that all genres have a particular style that's well established. Chic-lit for example uses feminine pastel colours and a flat illustration style. My advice? Adopt the essential rules of your genre then put your own personal stamp on it.

One way of doing that is to choose up to three fonts that you'll use for everything. There's a great plugin called Easy Google Fonts, which lets you customise the appearance of your fonts. I'll be discussing plugins in more detail in Part 2 of this article. For now just go to Google and type in *fonts*. The choice of free web fonts is vast, and it can take time to decide which ones suit your needs. Make a list of all those you like for later when you work on the design.

Well, that's probably enough for you to be getting on with. The other half of this article, which covers menus, plugins, widgets, fonts, SEO and the most important part – the content, comes next month, by which time you might have worked through everything mentioned here.

Good luck, and don't be afraid to email me questions, I'll do my best to help, at hazel@hazelkey.com