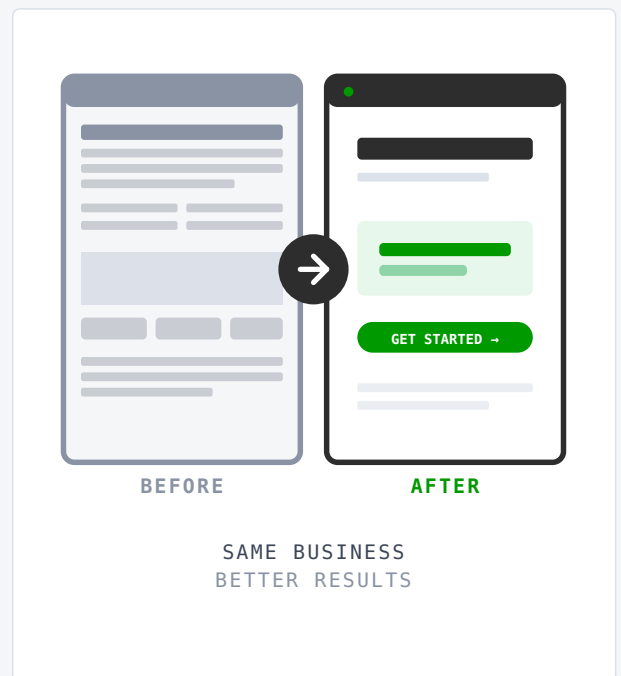


PLAN IT RIGHT, LAUNCH WITH CONFIDENCE

The Website Redesign Guide for Business Owners.

A 5-phase guide to planning, budgeting, and launching a website redesign — without losing traffic, blowing the budget, or missing the deadline.



5

PROJECT PHASES

40+

CHECKPOINTS

1

VENDOR
SCORECARD

BEFORE YOU BRIEF ANYONE

Most redesigns fail before design even starts

A website redesign rarely fails because the new design looks bad. It fails because goals weren't clear, the budget didn't match the scope, content was an afterthought, or nobody planned for what happens after launch. The visual work is usually the easy part.

This guide walks through all five phases of a redesign project in order, plus two tools most redesign guides skip: a realistic budget breakdown and a proper way to evaluate agencies or freelancers before you hire one.

How to use this guide: Read this before you brief a designer, agency, or freelancer — not after. Phase 1 alone can save you from the most expensive mistakes later in the project.

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01 Discovery & Planning

Get this right before anyone opens a design tool — it's the cheapest phase to fix and the most expensive to skip.

- ☐ **Clear, written goals exist for what the new site needs to achieve** **CRITICAL**
"Make it look modern" isn't a goal — "increase quote requests" is something a design can actually be measured against.
- ☐ **Target audience and their needs are documented, not assumed**
A redesign built on internal opinions instead of real customer needs is a common, expensive mistake.
- ☐ **Analytics are reviewed to see what's currently working**
High-traffic or high-converting pages deserve deliberate handling, not an accidental redesign casualty.
- ☐ **A realistic timeline is agreed on, with buffer for feedback rounds**
Feedback and revisions always take longer than expected — plan for it instead of being surprised by it.
- ☐ **A realistic budget is set before design work begins, not after**
Scope should follow budget, not the other way around — see the breakdown on page 5.
- ☐ **A full content and page inventory of the current site exists**
You can't decide what to keep, cut, or rebuild without first knowing everything you actually have.
- ☐ **A single decision-maker is identified for the project**
Design-by-committee is one of the most reliable ways to stall a project for months.
- ☐ **Competitor sites are reviewed for what to do differently**
Useful for context and ideas — just don't let it turn into copying what everyone else is already doing.

Why it matters: Every later phase inherits the clarity — or confusion — set here. A vague brief doesn't get fixed by a talented designer; it gets expensive to fix once real work has already started.

02 Design & User Experience

Where the site starts to actually take shape — and where scope tends to quietly expand.

- ☐ **Wireframes are approved before visual design begins** **CRITICAL**
Structural changes are cheap at the wireframe stage and expensive once full visuals are built.
- ☐ **Brand guidelines are followed consistently across every page**
Colors, fonts, and tone should feel like one coherent brand, not a collection of separate decisions.
- ☐ **Feedback rounds have a clear limit, not unlimited revisions**
Two to three structured rounds keep the project moving — open-ended feedback rarely converges.
- ☐ **Every key page has one clear primary conversion goal designed around it**
A page trying to do everything at once usually ends up doing nothing particularly well.
- ☐ **Mobile experience is designed first, not adapted afterward**
Most traffic is mobile for most businesses — designing desktop-first and shrinking it rarely works well.
- ☐ **Navigation is tested with real users or employees, not just the design team**
Internal familiarity with the site hides navigation problems a fresh visitor would hit immediately.
- ☐ **Basic accessibility is considered in design decisions, not left for later**
Color contrast and readable text sizes are far easier to build in than retrofit after the fact.

Why it matters: Design decisions made here are the ones customers actually experience. A beautiful design that's hard to navigate or slow to load on mobile undermines the entire investment.

WHERE THE MONEY ACTUALLY NEEDS TO GO

Your redesign budget breakdown

A realistic allocation for a typical small business redesign. If a quote skips content or contingency entirely, that's worth asking about before you sign anything.

**Design (25%)**

Wireframes, visual design, and revision rounds through Phase 2.

Development (35%)

Usually the largest line item — CMS setup, integrations, and testing through Phase 4.

Content & Copywriting (15%)

Often underestimated — see why it deserves its own budget line on the next page.

SEO & Migration (15%)

Redirect mapping, technical SEO carryover, and tracking setup — see our migration checklist for the full breakdown.

Contingency (10%)

For the scope changes and surprises that show up in nearly every redesign project.

Reality check: A quote with zero contingency isn't more accurate — it just means the surprises will come out of your pocket later instead of being planned for now.

03 Content & Copywriting

The most commonly underestimated phase — and the one that most often delays launch.

- ☐ **Content is written before or alongside design, not squeezed in after** **CRITICAL**
Designing around placeholder text and writing real copy afterward almost always causes rework.
- ☐ **Existing high-performing content and pages are identified to preserve**
A page quietly earning traffic or leads shouldn't be lost just because it wasn't part of the new sitemap.
- ☐ **New copy is written for humans first, with SEO informing it**
Keyword-stuffed copy reads poorly and converts worse — SEO should shape the copy, not replace it.
- ☐ **Every page has a clear call to action appropriate to its purpose**
A blog post and a pricing page shouldn't share the same generic "Contact Us" button.
- ☐ **Images and media are sourced or created with usage rights confirmed**
Unlicensed stock imagery is a real legal and financial risk that's easy to avoid upfront.
- ☐ **A content style guide exists so future updates stay consistent**
Tone, formatting, and terminology should stay coherent long after the redesign project itself ends.

Why it matters: Content is usually the single biggest cause of launch delays — not because it's harder than design, but because it's the phase most often left until there's no time left to do it properly.

04 Development & Technical Setup

Turning the approved design into a working, reliable site.

- ☐ **The CMS is chosen based on the team's actual ability to maintain it** CRITICAL
The trendiest platform is the wrong choice if nobody on the team can realistically update it later.
- ☐ **A staging environment exists separate from the live site**
Testing changes safely before they go live protects the business from launch-day surprises.
- ☐ **Site speed and Core Web Vitals are tested on staging, not assumed**
A beautiful design that loads slowly undermines both user experience and search rankings.
- ☐ **Hosting is scoped for the site's real traffic and growth needs**
Under-provisioned hosting is a common, avoidable cause of slow load times right after launch.
- ☐ **Forms, integrations, and third-party tools are tested thoroughly**
A broken contact form or CRM integration can go unnoticed for weeks if nobody checks.
- ☐ **Analytics and conversion tracking are installed and verified before launch**
Confirm tracking works before going live — not after a week of unmeasured traffic has already passed.

Why it matters: This is where design decisions either hold up under real-world use or quietly break. A site that looks right in a design file but loads slowly or breaks on real devices hasn't actually delivered on the redesign yet.

COMPARE CANDIDATES ON PAPER, NOT ON GUT FEELING

Vendor evaluation scorecard

Score up to three agencies or freelancers against the same criteria, 1–5 each. It turns "they seemed nice" into an actual comparison.

CRITERIA	CANDIDATE A	CANDIDATE B	CANDIDATE C
Portfolio quality & relevant experience	___ / 5	___ / 5	___ / 5
Communication responsiveness so far	___ / 5	___ / 5	___ / 5
Timeline realism	___ / 5	___ / 5	___ / 5
Post-launch support & maintenance offered	___ / 5	___ / 5	___ / 5
Price transparency (itemized, not one lump sum)	___ / 5	___ / 5	___ / 5
References checked and confirmed positive	___ / 5	___ / 5	___ / 5
Understanding of your specific business	___ / 5	___ / 5	___ / 5
TOTAL	___ / 35	___ / 35	___ / 35

One question worth always asking: "What happens if we need a change six months after launch?" The answer tells you more about a vendor than almost anything in their portfolio.

05 Launch & Post-Launch

The site isn't finished the day it goes live — this phase is where most of the risk actually sits.

- ☐ **A full redirect map is tested before the old site goes offline** **CRITICAL**
Every old URL needs a deliberate, tested destination — see our migration checklist for the full process.
- ☐ **A rollback plan exists in case something breaks on launch day**
A working backup turns a launch-day problem into a manageable delay instead of a crisis.
- ☐ **The team is trained on how to use and update the new site**
A beautiful CMS nobody knows how to use quietly reverts to "call the developer for everything."
- ☐ **Search Console and analytics are monitored closely for the first two weeks**
Catching an indexing or tracking issue early is far cheaper than discovering it a month later.
- ☐ **A post-launch review is scheduled at 30 and 90 days**
Give the site time to stabilize, then formally check results against the original goals from Phase 1.
- ☐ **Ongoing maintenance and updates are budgeted for**
A website is a maintained asset, not a one-time purchase — plan and budget for that reality.

Why it matters: A redesign that launches successfully but is never revisited slowly drifts out of date. The businesses that get the most value treat launch as the start of an ongoing relationship with the site, not the finish line.

BEFORE YOU GO

7 mistakes that derail a redesign

These aren't single checklist items, but we see them undo more redesign projects than almost anything else.

01

Starting design before goals and budget are agreed on

Design decisions made without clear direction get revisited constantly. Fix: finish Phase 1 fully before opening a design tool.

02

Skipping user testing and shipping on internal opinions only

The team's familiarity with the business hides problems a real visitor would hit immediately. Fix: test navigation with genuine outsiders.

03

Losing high-performing content or URLs in the process

A redesign can quietly erase years of earned traffic and rankings. Fix: inventory and redirect every URL deliberately.

04

Choosing a CMS the team can't actually maintain

A platform nobody can update becomes a recurring developer expense. Fix: choose for maintainability, not just capability.

05

Allowing unlimited revision rounds

Open-ended feedback rarely converges and quietly extends the timeline for months. Fix: agree on a fixed number of structured rounds upfront.

06

No redirect plan, losing years of SEO value overnight

One of the most damaging and most avoidable mistakes in any redesign. Fix: never launch without a tested redirect map.

07

Treating launch as the finish line instead of the starting line

A site that's never revisited after launch slowly drifts out of date. Fix: schedule the 30 and 90-day reviews before you even launch.

+1

No one owns the site after the agency or developer leaves

Without a clear owner, small issues pile up unaddressed. Fix: name one person accountable for the site, starting on launch day.



TURN THIS GUIDE INTO A SMOOTH REDESIGN

Know the plan. Now let's build it right.

Book a free 20-minute redesign planning call. We'll review your goals, budget, and timeline, and tell you honestly what a realistic scope looks like.

BOOK YOUR FREE PLANNING CALL →

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