

Review of Web Creation Tools for Small Businesses

LIBERTEKS.COM

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CHAPTER I: Introduction

Why do small businesses need to use self service websites?



It's obvious that small businesses need websites. In the past, the most common path to establishing websites was to have a professional make it for you. It used to be that websites were primarily used as a way to showcase your brochure of products. Today, the market has matured and websites now need search engine optimization, search engine marketing and social media. Small businesses not only need the web design professional but the marketing professional as well.

This brings some serious problems for the small business. This process can become very expensive. At Liberteks.com, we believe that there might be an opportunity for the small business owners to use a new wave of self service websites as a tool to do simple pages oneself. These products are

not necessarily aimed towards small businesses but more towards the DIYers, hobbyists, and individuals. Most DIY products are designed to give you the tools but not necessarily to create content that one needs. However, these web creation tools can be used as a framework to add value for the small business owner.

This is valuable for a variety of reasons. Under the assumption that the small business owner were to go through a web design professional, not only is it expensive but they would have to provide the content. By using these tools, there's a way to engage our thoughts and realize them with the designer. If the final outcome were towards a professional web design firm, these tools can also be used as a way to express quotations from the business.

These tools also allow the small businesses owner to create feeder sites: one page websites that are used to create more traffic flow into your main website. Typically, web design companies don't have the paste up tools to create these web pages. These projects tend to be too small for the company as well. You can use these tools to create dozens of these one page websites in order to create more traffic for your main site.

We can use these tools to create a "bucket" for the professional web design company to get content from these sites. With this paper, we will do an analysis within certain web tool candidates and recommend a tool that would be beneficial for your company.

~Larry Zimbler
President of Liberteks.com

CHAPTER II: Candidates for the White Paper

Why are these chosen as the candidates?

Liberteks.com chose these particular candidates since they are some of the most popular website creation tools in the market today. However, what make these candidates unique are the strong features that they offer in their free packages. Most businesses will prosper using these programs without having the need to upgrade at all. Nonetheless, these programs are powerful enough to let users who have no HTML background to create slick and professional websites without a drop of a dime. Of course, small businesses will benefit from upgrading to the professional packages as well. Last but not least, all these programs have unique and diverse features from one another. While our purpose is to choose the most ideal program from these candidates, they're all unique enough that one can choose the program that can benefit the company the most.

SnapPages: Drag. Drop. Done. Website Creation For The Rest of Us.



SnapPages is an online website creation tool that boasts drag and drop simplicity. With the free package, you can customize your website to include a blog, photos, and calendars with 1

GB of space. It has a beautiful interface and there are slick layout features for your customizable website. However, the interface requires the use of separate pages for changing themes and content. This can be confusing because you can't directly see your content when you are changing the theme of your website.

Weebly: Create a free website. Fast. Free. Easy. Now.



Although it doesn't boast the same slick interface as the other websites, Weebly is straight-forward and easy to use. It offers several templates to choose from and features an HTML and CSS editor in the free version. Compared to the other website creation tools, Weebly is the cheapest web-

site to maintain and host with only \$3.99 a month. However, it only allows 100 MB of storage for the "Pro" upgrade. This feature is mostly featured in the paid versions of the other websites.

Basekit: ...a smart and fast way to create websites from a Photoshop template or design templates without coding.



As one of the more unique website creation tools, Basekit allows you to use your own Photoshop file in order to create a website. It lets you import your .psd file and recreate it as a template that can span across multiple pages. Although Basekit is a powerful tool, it's rather limiting in the free version and you have to upgrade in order to reap the full benefits.

Yola: Watch your business grow. Create a free website now.



A website creation tool that's similar to both SnapPages and Weely, Yola uses a drag and drop system with free widgets from Google Search to an Mp3 Player. While it boasts several free widgets, it forces its brand name onto your website, at times becoming a distraction. The user must upgrade in order to remove these ads.

Wix: Create your FREE flash website. Drag & Drop. No programming. Search engine friendly.



Possessing the unique feature of letting you create free flash websites with a drag and drop method, Wix offers plenty of 100% editable. Like Yola, there are advertisements on your website which can be removed if the user upgrades. Although Wix lets you use beautiful flash animations, it does require higher system requirements and saving/publishing might take a long time.

CHAPTER III: The Categories for Analysis

Administration

While users are mostly aware of the website's content in the front end design, all websites need to have the ability to maintain and administrate the backend. Managing websites can be difficult and in order to maintain the website, these candidates must also offer strong security and hosting. Also, users must be able to work within multiple accounts and pages. Most of the candidates take care of the hosting for you.

Ease of Use

Website management and design can be tricky so these programs are rated on how efficient and easy to learn the tool can be to the user. Computer beginners should be able to create a webpage from scratch and from a template with ease.

SEO Friendly

SEO (which stands for Search Engine Optimization) is the ability for the website to be found by search engines. These candidates must have strong optimization and complimentary features such as Google Analytics and customizable SEO Settings.

Featuresh

Website creation tools should offer an array of options for the user. Features can include an array of widgets, multimedia (photos, video, audio, etc), ability to blog and ecommerce capabilities. Also, the editing capabilities should be flexible in order to create a website that's exactly to your liking.

Help/Support

In order to learn these tools, these programs need to offer a comprehensive how-to guide as well as a support system. For first time users, they need to have tutorials in order to create the website as well as customer service in case there needs to be more specific help.

Value for Free/Value for Upgrade

Although these are two different categories, we will discuss it altogether. These two categories focus on the ability of the program in relation to the price being charged. For value for free, we will discuss how powerful each program is within the free version. For some candidates, they're capabilities are strong enough to where you won't necessarily need to upgrade at all. However, some candidates may be limited in the free version and it may be more valuable to make the upgrade to the full version.

CHAPTER III: The Categories for Analysis

SNAPPAGES

Administration: HIGH

Once you upgrade to the Pro account, you can create unlimited custom pages. However, if you are to upgrade to the Developer account (\$30 per month), you gain access for Full CSS control as well as Project Management and an Invoice Creator. You're also given access to multiple accounts in the Developer version. It's easy to create themes for each page and although, it takes a little time to get used to editing content and changing theme, managing each page is pretty efficient.

Ease of Use: MED

In the surface, the SnapPages interface is slick and intuitive and it's quite easy to drag and drop certain elements into the stage. However, it can be confusing due to a separate page for the themes you choose for your website. While you can edit the content on the screen, you have to revert to a different page in order to choose certain design themes. Also, even if you choose a certain design theme, you can't see the theme while you're actually editing the content.

SEO Friendly: HIGH

While SnapPages do offer search engine optimization, users don't have access to customization until they upgrade to Pro which is \$8 per month. Along with the upgrade, SnapPages offers Google Analytics which tracks visitors in your website.

Features: MED

SnapPages offers the basic multimedia features such as photos, video and audio starting at the free version. It's also possible to add blogs and calendars into your website and it's easy to drag and drop these into the stage. However, it doesn't have as many widgets and themes compared to other programs.

Help/Support: MED

SnapPages do offer customer service in their website but they don't quite feature it compared to other sites. It's possible to add a comment to their site but there are no available phone numbers for immediate service.

Value of Free: LO

SnapPages definitely has some strong features in the free version as it boasts video players, audio players and 1 GB of storage. However, in order to tinker with the HTML and CSS,

you must resort to upgrading. Also, the SEO settings are disabled with the free version so upgrading is necessary.

Value of Upgrade: MED

With SnapPages, there are two levels of upgrades. There's the Pro account which is \$8 per month while the Developer account is \$30 per month. The price jump is definitely steep and for the purpose of creating a quote that would eventually go to a professional web design firm, the Developer account is not quite worth it.

WEEBLY

Administration: HIGH

With the pro account, you have the ability to create up to ten websites in your account. Managing these sites is pretty easy and in the free version, you have the ability to manipulate the HTML and CSS right away.

Ease of Use: HIGH

As long as the user knows how to drag and click on the computer, they won't have any problems with Weebly. Weebly's fairly straightforward with their layout but it doesn't quite have the nice and slick aesthetic interface than the other programs.

SEO Friendly: HIGH

Right off the bat from the free version, Weebly offers search engine optimization settings.

Features: MED

At first glance, the interface isn't as slick as the other programs. There are limited options for the layout and there are not as many graphics to choose from compared to other programs. However, it's a pretty straightforward system and there's plenty of multimedia for your website. Having the ability to tweak HTML and CSS in the free version is a bonus as well.

Help/Support: HIGH

Weebly contains an extensive FAQ page as well as strong customer service.

Value of Free: HIGH

Although Weebly's a cheaper, more basic website, there are plenty of features that make it stand out in the free version. Being able to tweak the HTML and customize the SEO settings make Weebly a strong candidate.

Value of Upgrade: LO

Upgrading into the Pro version is cheaper in Weebly compared to other websites. However, there aren't a lot of new features other than the audio and video player. Weebly also offers a custom domain name for \$39.95 but you can buy a domain name in a different website for cheaper.

BASEKIT

Administration: MED

Basekit's ability to convert psd files into websites gives plenty of options for users to customize their websites. However, users are limited to the amount of websites they can manage to its high price. For one website, it's \$8 per month and for 3 websites, it raises to \$16 per month.

Ease of Use: MED

Due to the Photoshop inclusion feature, Basekit is more technically demanding compared to other programs. Fortunately, importing psd files is easy and Basekit has plenty of tutorials if one has problems.

SEO Friendly: HIGH

Similar to Weebly in its free version, Basekit offers customizable SEO Settings along with Google Analytics.

Features: HIGH

Basekit's unique capability to upload psd files as templates for websites makes it one of the strongest website creation tools from the candidates. There are also ready-made templates if one chooses to ignore the Photoshop feature. There are not as many widgets compared to other sites but the Photoshop feature makes up for it.

Help/Support: HIGH

Although the ease of use is more difficult for Basekit, it makes up for its strong customer service and tutorials.

Value of Free: LO

Unfortunately for Basekit, its free version is only a demo and the user is very limited with their website. While you can import Photoshop files, you are only allowed one website with a maximum of three pages.

Value of Upgrade: MED

There are plenty of upgrade options for Basekit but unfortunately, the pricing gets rather steep. For one website, its 8 dollars per month and its most popular deal comes with three websites for 16 dollars per month. Other than the amount of websites the users can have, there aren't a lot of new features exclusive in the upgrade. Basekit is mostly targeted for designers but business owners who have Photoshop knowledge will find it just as useful.

YOLA

Administration: MED

Managing multiple websites is quite simple with Yola. The Yola Sitebuilder's layout is easy to navigate and managing each site is simple but the content editing can be a little clunky. However, Yola lets you manage up to 5 sites in the free version and a whopping 25 websites for the upgraded version.

Ease of Use: HIGH

Yola has a very simple interface that's straightforward and easy to use.

SEO Friendly: HIGH

Since Yola targets businesses, it offers SEO settings as well as Yahoo and Facebook advertising credit if the user upgrades to the Silver account.

Features: MED

While Yola offers several free widgets and backgrounds for your websites, Yola's backgrounds are somewhat bland and boring. Yola does offer slicker backgrounds but they have a price tag on them.

Help/Support: HIGH

Yola offers several tutorials for their program as well as a 24/7 customer service line.

Value of Free: MED

The free version of Yola is rather limited with its backgrounds but it boasts several widgets for the user to play with. Yola's primary focus on businesses is apparent here as well because of their amount of Ecommerce options available in the free version.

Value of Upgrade: HIGH

With only \$49.95/year, Yola offers a custom domain name, Premium Style backgrounds, Stock Photography, Yahoo Marketing credit and more. Yola's cheap package makes it an attractive choice.

Administration: MED

Wix offers professional hosting and unlimited pages for the premium account. Although Wix lets you manage your websites efficiently, it does suffer from slow loading times which can be a problem with older computers.

Ease of Use: HIGH

Wix's interface has a clean professional feeling to it which lets the user navigate through the menu with ease. It's designed very efficiently which lets the user control virtually any visual aspect on the website. It's very straightforward and easy to use.

SEO Friendly: LO

The problem with Flash websites is that search engines have a difficult time searching for them. Wix claims that they are SEO Friendly but there are reported cases where Wix users have a hard time getting high ratings in search engines.

Features: HIGH

Wix has a powerful editor that can easily customize anything in the website. There are several multimedia options, graphics and animations that can be utilized. Wix definitely shines by creating websites that are visually striking and beautiful.

Help/Support: MED

Wix has an excellent support page in their website as well as an easy to use tutorial for any beginner. However, from other customer reviews, they do suffer from poor customer service.

Value of Free: HIGH

With Wix's capabilities, you can create a beautiful, professional looking website for free. While it may not have the SEO settings you are looking for, Wix provides excellent features that makes it a definitely worthwhile for the first trial run.

Value of Upgrade: LO

With the combo pack for \$9.90 per month, Wix offers to take out any advertising in your website. Although the upgrades look promising, the price is pretty steep and along with the poor customer service, shelling out the money may not seem worth it.

CHAPTER IV: Ratings and Editor's Pick

	SnapPages	Weebly	Basekit	Yola	Wix
Administration	HIGH	HIGH	MED	MED	MED
Ease of Use	MED	HIGH	MED	HIGH	HIGH
SEO Friendly	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	LO
Features	MED	MED	HIGH	MED	HIGH
Help/Support	MED	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	MED
Value of Free	LO	HIGH	LO	MED	HIGH
Value of Upgrade	MED	LO	MED	HIGH	LO
Results	15	18	16	18	15

As I mentioned earlier in the white paper, all of these candidates are unique in their own way and would benefit anyone interested in creating a template for their website or making their own 3-5 page feeder site. Rating these sites was particularly difficult however. Although these were rated according to a certain criteria, some aspects can be weighed more than others. Some may sacrifice the ease of use to the website in favor of its vast aesthetic choices. Others might not be worried about maintaining multiple sites and are more interested in creating a site for free. In the end, it ultimately comes down to preferences. Regardless of these variables, each of the candidates is rated for each category and is added up in the end for a final score.

Our lowest scoring candidates in this analysis happen to be between SnapPages and Wix. This isn't to say that they're terrible programs but they're in the bottom for different reasons. Although SnapPages has a slick interface and good pricing, it was their theme pages that landed it on the bottom. Editing the content and working with the themes can get tricky and while the user can learn to use it in time, the other candidates are simply easier to use.

Wix in the other hand is definitely much easier to use than SnapPages. Wix also has the most aesthetically pleasing out of all the candidates along with being the easiest to use. Wix, however, fails on the accounts of having poor customer service and its integration of Flash. Even though I don't have personal experience with the lack of customer service, there are complaints about customer service all over the internet about Wix. Its integration of Flash is also unfortunate because search engine sites still have difficulties finding flash websites. This could very well be changed in the future but for now, this comes with a huge disadvantage.

So in the final three in the analysis are Basekit and tied for first place are Weebly and Yola. Once again, these sites on the top are here for different reasons. First of all, Basekit is the most powerful site within the three of them. Its feature with integrating Photoshop files

is incredible and extremely useful with people who know the program. Without knowing Photoshop though, Basekit is just as capable of the rest of the programs. With that said, Basekit's pricing gets rather steep such as its three website deal for \$16 a month. This would only be worth it if one was already a professional with Photoshop.

So with 18 points each, Weebly and Yola are tied at the top. These two candidates may not be as flashy or intuitive as the others but they make it up with practicality and ease of use. They're both straightforward, easy to use and offer plenty of intuitive gadgets that can flesh out your website. They both have excellent customer service and strong search engine customization. Most importantly, both of these candidates offer these features for free.

In the end however, the candidate that comes to the top would be Yola. Weebly's features are similar to Yola but what makes Yola different is its focus on small businesses. Although Weebly's free features are better and its backgrounds are better overall, Yola's upgrade offers several e-commerce forms, Yahoo Advertising options and a customizable logo builder with HP Logoworks Logomaker. Along with the upgrade, Yola also offers professional design help where you can work directly with a designer.

Yola's tagline is to "Watch your business grow. Create a free website today." Yola doesn't disappoint as its features definitely puts it over the top with most contenders. Their attention to detail and attention to its e-commerce and design help options make it an attractive choice for business owners eager to start a new website. Its only downside would be its poor background choices but in the long run, if your website were to be created by a professional designer anyway, this issue becomes a minor setback.

CHAPTER V: Conclusion

While these candidates certainly don't replace the quality of a well designed website of a professional, it serves as an efficient way to communicate between the designer and the client. Although these simple drag and drop systems are useful for making these small websites, they don't match up to the sophistication of Content Management Systems in the web such as Joomla, Drupal, Wordpress and LightCMS. These programs are suited for larger websites where a larger amount of people have the ability to edit these websites in the same time. These CMS programs also yield a greater sense of flexibility in terms of a closer vision on the perfect website. However, setting up these programs can be complicated and learning to maintain these websites presents a higher learning curve.

These programs do serve as an excellent alternative to these candidates we have presented in this white paper. However, for the sense of freedom and simplicity they do offer, we believe that the drag and drop system are more accessible to the small business owner. These can literally be set up within one hour and they present a high quick turn around for someone who wants to either drive business to their main site or to set up a template. Perhaps in the future, these stronger CMS programs will utilize this drag and drop feature but until then, these programs are here to stay.