THE PRINCE'S COUNTRYSIDE FUND

Germinate *enterprise*

(12) Building a website

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At last, the rural business run out of the back of your barn can compete with M&S or Mercedes. You can have a shop front in the planet's busiest high street: the World Wide Web.

You can use your web presence to display your wares; have a conversation with your customers; demonstrate and share your knowledge; sell them a product, service or appointment; and take down the contact details of prospects. Just figure out which of these you are trying to do before you start.

Options for a web presence

You don't necessarily need you own website. You could instead use www.facebook.com, www.instagram.com, or www.pinterest.com to connect with customers. Or go www.etsy.com/uk to sell craft supplies or hand-made goods. List your holiday let with www.airbnb.co.uk or use https://www.eventbrite.co.uk to sell your event or training. Photographers could consider a Flickr Pro account: www.flickr.com/account/upgrade/pro for £50 a year. If you want a web shop that takes payments, try www.shopify.co.uk or www.ekm.com for £30 a month.

If you want your own site, have your own memorable, easy to spell, unambiguous web domain. Register your domain yourself so that you own and control it. Cost for ".com" and ".org" domains is £12 a year, while ".co.uk" is £7.

A Content Management System will provide you with a framework into which you can quickly add your content without having to learn web programming. By choosing a different "theme" you can transform the look of your website in minutes not days. WordPress is the most popular. It offers lots of good free themes and "Plugins" which add extra features. Web hosting companies usually offer a quick way to install it.

User and search friendly

More than half of all searches are now done from a mobile device. Choose a "responsive" theme to allow your website to be readable on mobiles and tablets. Visit https://testmysite.thinkwithgoogle.com/ to check how mobile-friendly your website is.

Use https://gtmetrix.com/ to see how fast your website loads and for tips to improve it. On e-commerce sites, 40% of visitors abandon a website that takes more than 3 seconds to load. Clearly the days of dial-up Internet are long forgotten.

When it comes to writing the web site, avoid block capitals for large amounts of text as this is hard to read. And keep the contents fresh: if you have a news section, add an article at least every month. Note legal requirement, e.g. companies must give their registration number and registered office. See http://www.ukwda.org/blog/is-your-website-legal .

Finally, keep page titles to 65 characters or fewer (including spaces) and keep summaries to 140 characters or fewer. Otherwise Google's search results will stop in mid-sentence. Google "Writing for Gov.uk" and you will see what I mean. Ooops.

If it's all a bit too technical, just call in a favour from the younger generation. They'll sort you out.