

e-Commerce Websites for
Small Businesses:
The Promise and the Challenges

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Access the slides for this presentation here:
<http://YourPresenceOnTheWeb.com/wp217>

Agenda

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- Lots of Ways to Start Selling Over the Web
- Our Focus Today
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- A New Era of Small Business e-Stores
- An Example Store Architecture
- Tool of Choice for Developing Small Business Websites
- Other Important Choices to Make
- Yes, There Are Challenges
- Closing Remarks
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- Wrap-up



Introductions

- Who am I?
 - Jonathan May, Founder and President, YourPresenceOnTheWeb.com
 - 30+ years of designing, developing and managing information technology solutions to organizations of all sizes and types
- What does YourPresenceOnTheWeb.com do?
 - Provide e-Marketing consulting services to small businesses
 - Specialty in designing and developing websites with e-Commerce storefronts
 - Also deliver training courses in website development
 - Website Development for Non-Techies Course
 - Creating Online Stores Workshop



Lots of Choices to Start Selling Over the Web



SHOPPING



Our Focus Today

- A business website with an integrated online storefront
 - Why it's now easier and cheaper than you probably think
 - Some of the challenges you need to be prepared to tackle
- A well-designed, content-rich, visually appealing and well-promoted website-cum-storefront can do more to build your brand identity and customer loyalty – especially among *local* consumers – far better than any of the the alternative channels



Start with the End in Mind

An Example Small Business Website w/Storefront



- Scandic Footwear @ scandicfootwear.com
 - A start-up business based in Bedford, NH
 - Launched in summer 2012
 - Manufactures and sells clogs hand-made in NH
- A key requirement for the website: super fast time to market
 - Work on an initial prototype started in mid-August 2012
 - Prototype with limited products demo-ed in two weeks
 - Production site was up and running by mid-September
 - Company has continued to add more products and enhance the look of the site since then



A New Era of Small Business e-Stores

Then (Complex and Expensive)

VS.

Now (Greatly Simplified and Much Cheaper)

	Back in the Day	2013
Development effort	From-the-ground-up software development with lots of custom coding	Configuration of standardized off-the-shelf tools
Who can build it	A cadre of IT specialists	A non-programmer with good computer and Internet skills
Who can maintain and support it	A cadre of IT specialists	A non-programmer with good computer and Internet skills
Cost	\$\$\$\$ to \$\$\$\$\$	\$ to \$\$

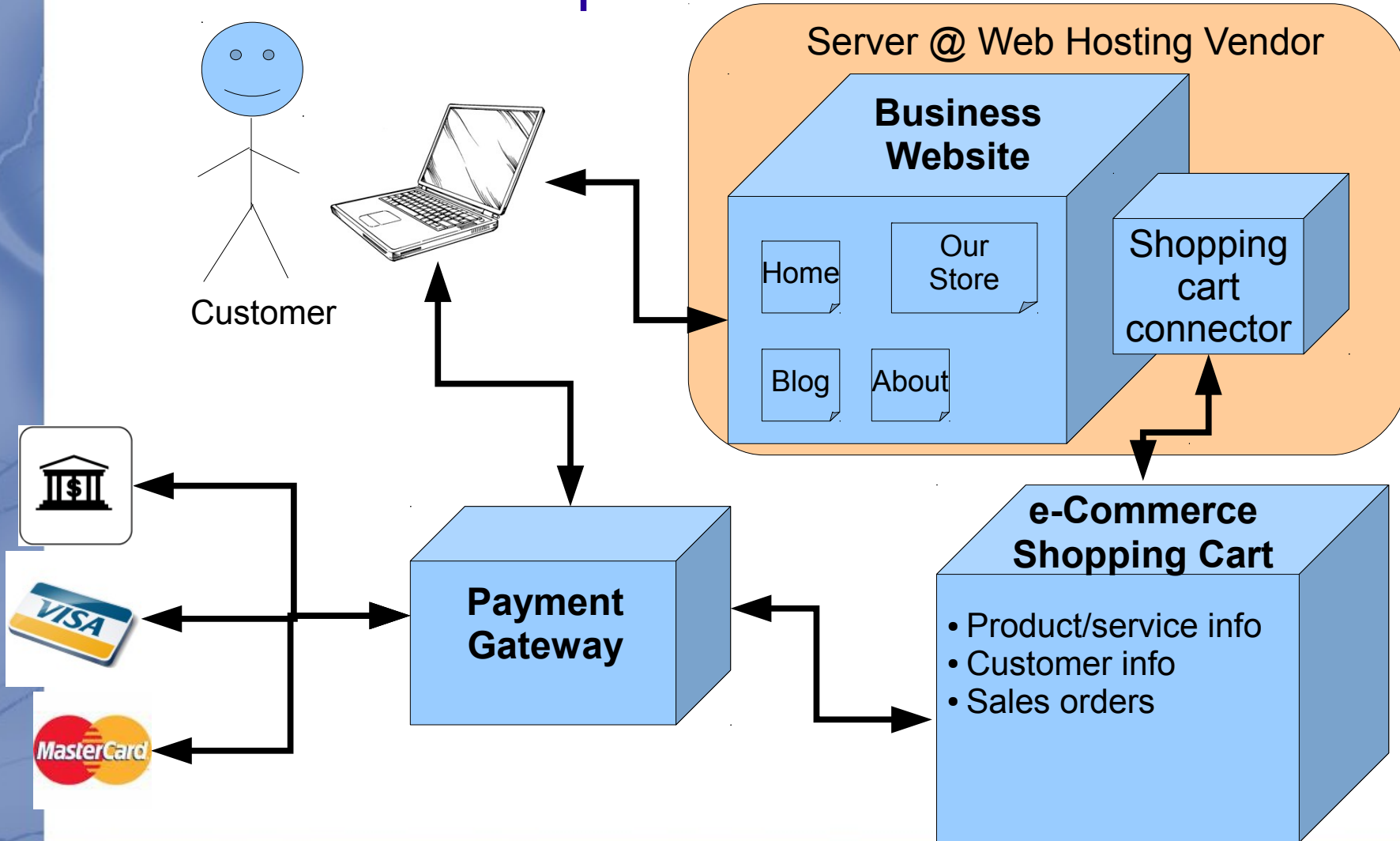


A New Era of Small Business e-Stores

Why is this now possible?

- The emergence of very powerful, flexible, inexpensive and user friendly tools
 - **Content Management Systems** for building websites
 - **e-Commerce Shopping Carts** for managing the product, customer and order information
 - **Payment Gateways** for processing credit card transactions quickly, reliably and inexpensively
 - **Web Hosting Services** to enable the website to be viewed and used reliably from visitors around the globe

An Example Store Architecture



The Tool of Choice for Developing Small Business Websites: **WordPress!**

- Open source software (hence, *free*)
- The **most** user friendly Content Management System
- Flexible and extensible via 1,000's of themes and plugins
- Complies with modern web standards
- Search engine friendly
- Extensive global support community
- Suitable for low- to moderate-traffic sites
- The **most** popular Content Management System on the planet – whose growth is *accelerating*



See: <http://herenextyear.com/35-reasons-why-wordpress-website-is-better-than-traditional-web-site-for-your-business.php>

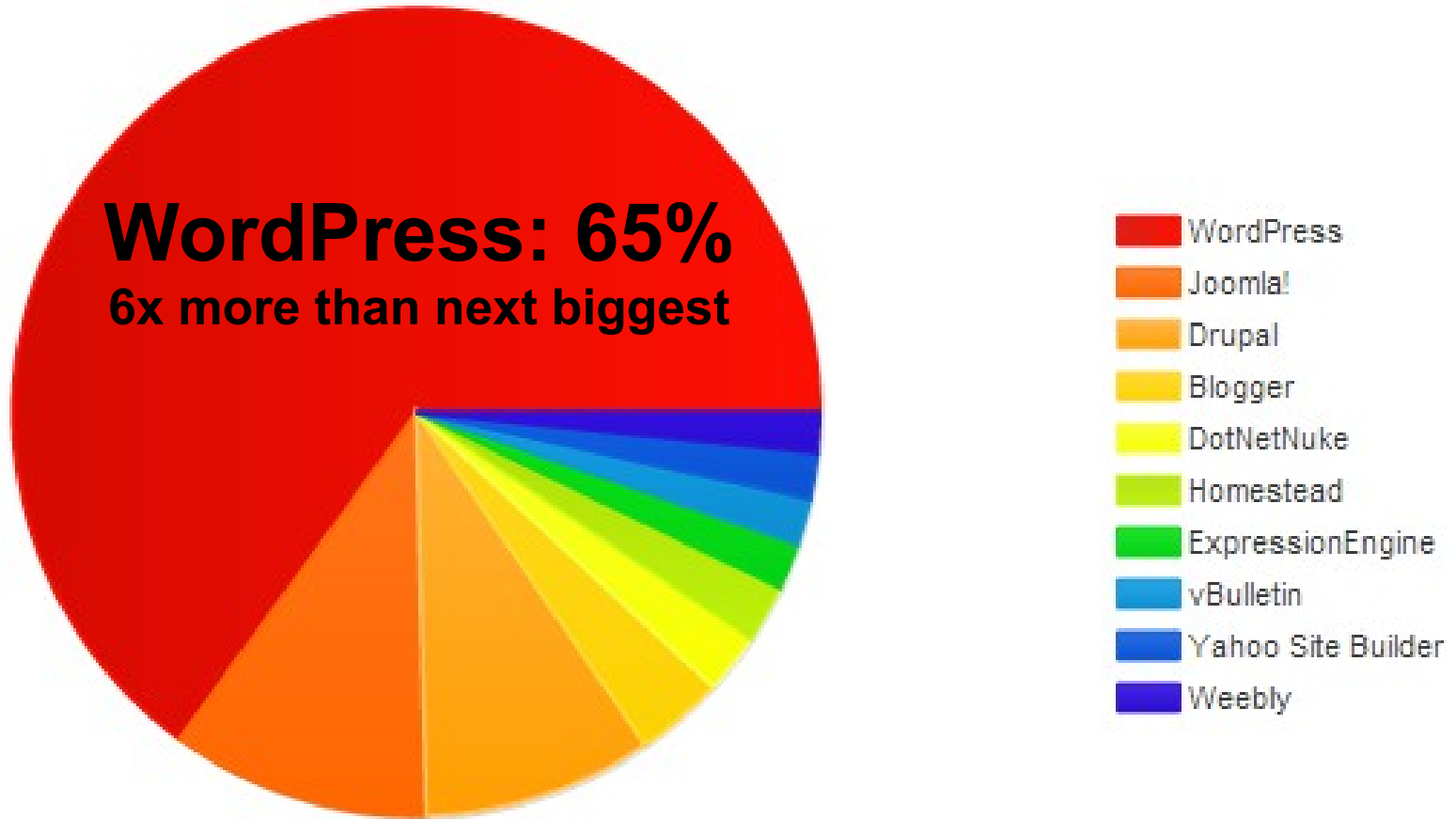


The World of WordPress




All Sizes and Types of Sites



CMS Market Share – Top 1 million sites



Other Important Choices to Make (not so clear-cut)

Component	Examples	Key Considerations
<p>Payment Gateway</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Paypal</i>* • Google Wallet • <i>Authorize.net</i>* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forms of payment to accept • Accept/store credit card info on your own site or on payment gateway • Sales geography (local vs. national vs. international) • Setup/transaction fees charged
<p>e-Commerce Shopping Cart</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • eShop • Ecwid • <i>Woocommerce</i>* • Shopp • Shopify 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ease of integration with main website • Number of products you are selling • Content required <i>besides</i> the store itself • Setup/transaction fees charged
<p>Web Hosting Vendor</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>HostGator</i>* (my fave) • BlueHost • DreamHost • Go Daddy (<u>not</u> my fave) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated vs. shared server • Cost (deals offered all the time!) <div data-bbox="1379 1114 1843 1241" style="border: 1px solid black; background-color: #00FFFF; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> <p><i>* Components used by example site</i></p> </div>

Yes, There Are Challenges...

Get and Stay Focused

- Know that selling online is different from selling through a brick-and-mortar store
 - Your competition is **global** and **intense**
 - Customers expect **service, delivery and support** in Internet time – which ***right now***
 - **Technology is evolving** very quickly – you'll need to keep up
- Know what you are selling and who you're selling to
 - The more **unique** and the **higher the quality products**, the better
 - Unless you're Walmart, **niche markets** are where it's at
- **Carefully research** your options, e.g, tools, service providers, costs



Yes, There Are Challenges...

Search Engine Rankings

- High rankings in Page Search Results do matter. This can be an intensive, expensive endeavor.
- A few, basic tips to follow:
 - As Bill Gates said back in 1996, “*Content is king!*” It's still true. Include lots of authoritative, keyword-rich content.
 - Use keyword-laced Page and Post Titles, Page Descriptions and Headings
 - Use well-formed URL's (Permalinks) for Pages/Posts
 - Ensure images are fully annotated
 - Include videos, e.g, to demonstrate products, customer testimonials
 - <http://www.business2community.com/marketing/3-reasons-why-video-marketing-tools-are-important-0379887>
 - Maintain an updated Sitemap
 - Ensure your site loads quickly (right hosting vendor, right WordPress theme, etc.)
- More tips: <http://repcapitalmedia.com/protected-20-ways-to-get-more-website-traffic-this-year-ethically/>



Yes, There Are Challenges...

Mobile Device Usage

- Make sure your site is **mobile device friendly**
 - No longer an option! There are now more mobile devices accessing the Internet than there are PC's.
 - Mobile device users will shun your site if it:
 - Loads slowly
 - Is difficult to navigate
 - Is difficult to find the most important information
 - The right software can help
 - More and more WordPress themes are now “responsive”
 - Mobile plugins can help for themes that are not natively responsive
 - See: <http://www.sitepoint.com/wordpress-mobile-plugins/>



Yes, There Are Challenges...

Brand Loyalty Will Spell Success

- Focus on building a **sense of community** around your website and storefront
 - **Encourage user engagement** besides just buying stuff from you
 - Allow people to submit comments, take polls, rate items, “like” things on Facebook, etc.
 - **Place your website at the hub** of your social media efforts
 - <http://www.socialmediaexaminer.com/9-ways-to-transform-your-website-into-a-social-media-hub/>
 - **Publish a newsletter**
 - **Reward repeat customers** (e.g., special promotions)
 - **Include a blog on your site** (see below)



Yes, There Are Challenges...

Blogging is Good for Business

- Many reasons to consider including a blog on your site
 - Humanizing the company
 - Enhancing visibility (with respect to humans and search engines)
 - Building credibility and trust
 - Establishing industry expertise
 - Promoting products and policies
 - Addressing important issues
 - Generating leads ... and business
 - Defending the company against its critics
- For more info, see:
 - http://humanresources.about.com/od/businessblogs/a/business_blogs.htm
 - <http://www.forbes.com/sites/kenmakovsky/2012/05/14/why-should-companies-blog/>



Yes, There Are Challenges...

Site Security

- **You can't take security for granted** – on *any* website, e-Commerce or otherwise
 - WordPress, like any web development tool, has it's security vulnerabilities
 - Take backups regularly, and store them off site
 - Keep all software up-to-date, following “safe update practices”
 - Close the most obvious loopholes, e.g., with security plugins
 - For more tips see:
 - <http://theultralinx.com/2012/10/basic-wordpress-security-tips.html>
 - <http://www.tipsandtricks-hq.com/essential-wordpress-security-tips-is-your-blog-protected-987>



Yes, There Are Challenges...

Monitor, Measure and Modify

- Building the storefront is **not a once-and-done endeavor**
- You need to **set goals, measure results and change course as needed**
- Regularly check for and analyze
 - Performance
 - Security
 - Traffic patterns
- Lots of tools available to help, e.g., Google Analytics
 - For more ideas, see: http://www.webdesignerdepot.com/2012/03/10-tools-to-analyze-your-website/?utm_source=twitterfeed&utm_medium=twitter&utm_source=February+2013+Newsletter+Release&utm_campaign=February+2013+Newsletter&utm_medium=email



In Closing...

- Yes, you **can** do this! But...
 - Consider getting some **training** before you dive in
 - There are lots of resources out there – books, online videos, classes, etc.
 - See my website – <http://YourPresenceOnTheWeb.com> – for live, in-classroom training opportunities
 - *Website Development for Non-Techies: A First Course in WordPress*
 - *Advanced Topics in WordPress*
 - *Creating Online Stores with WordPress*
 - To get a site up and running as quickly as possible, you may want to **enlist some outside expertise** when planning or developing your site
 - But once it goes live, **aim to maintain it yourself**



A Few Other Resources

- A video overview of selling online
 - <http://nhsbdc.org/course/sites-sell-building-your-e-commerce-business>
- An e-Commerce “checklist”
 - <http://www.boomtownig.com/ecommerce-web-development-service/ecommerce-checklist/>



**Thank You for Listening,
and Good Luck!**

Feel free to contact me if you have further questions!

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Questions???

