

HOW TO CREATE YOUR OWN DESIGN PORTFOLIO WEBSITE,

GET MORE CLIENT WORK
AND LIVE HAPPILY EVER AFTER

(WITHOUT KNOWING ALL THAT NERDY HTML STUFF)

WELCOME

Are you a new designer looking to establish a presence online with a design portfolio website, but you're not much of a geeky coding whizz to build one yourself? This guide has been made specifically for you! We're going to take a look at how to set up your own website right from step one, then I'll offer some tips on how to promote yourself, land exciting client projects and most importantly how to have fun making a living from doing something you love - Designing cool stuff.

There's plenty of tutorials out there describing the process of building a website from scratch, but in order to follow them you first need to take the time to learn the basics of the HTML and CSS coding languages. You might be a designer who isn't comfortable with all that nerdy stuff, or you might simply be a designer or illustrator who offers services other than web design, so coding isn't necessarily something you need to know.

You don't need to be a coding guru to set up your own great looking website online, in this guide we'll go through the steps of quickly installing a ready made theme on your own server, leaving you with the simple task of adding your content and promoting it. Purchasing a domain, setting up web space and installing a theme on a content management solution might all sound a little complicated, but don't worry - I'm going to take you through it step by step. Hopefully you'll learn a few interesting things along the way, but if you have any problems feel free to fire me over an email for advice.

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Let's take a look at what we'll be talking about in this guide. In each section I'll offer my personal advice and recommendations. This might be towards companies I've used myself, or it might be techniques I've put into practice since getting my start in the design industry.

1) Purchase your domain name.

2) Purchase some web space.

3) Install the WordPress application on your web space.

4) Purchase a ready-made portfolio theme.

5) Add your own content to your website.

6) Promote your website.

7) Land exciting projects and live happily ever after!

ABOUT ME

Chances are you have picked up this guide from my design blog, but if not here's a little insight into who I am and what I do. I'm Chris Spooner, I'm a designer slash blogger who runs two fairly popular design blogs, [Blog.SpoonGraphics](#) and [Line25](#). In early 2007 I set up a blog on the sub-domain of my portfolio website just as an excuse to play around with the WordPress application. I began posting guides and tutorials describing the process I used to create some of my designs. Soon these posts began gaining exposure and driving traffic to my blog and it slowly grew and grew over the years. First I gained 500 subscribers; then 1000 subscribers; then 10,000 subscribers; then 20,000 subscribers; 30,000 subscribers; 40,000 subscribers; and today that figure is around the 50,000 subscriber mark with an average visitor rate of around 20,000 people per day. This is something I never expected would happen.

As these figures grew I also noticed a number of opportunities arising from my blogging activities. I started to receive a number of design project emails from potential clients who had come across my articles and tutorials, liked what they saw and wanted me to work on their projects. I also discovered I could earn money from advertisers who wanted to put their



product or service in front of my audience as image banners. It didn't take long for the revenue I was earning from advertisers to cover my basic outgoings, and for the number of potential projects I was receiving to make me realise I could easily go into self employment - So that's what I did. I left my position as a Graphic/Web Designer at a local studio and opened my doors as a 'Freelancer'. In my first month of self employment I easily earned more than my wages from my previous job, thanks to the exposure my blog had given me as a designer.

I've been writing tutorials and sharing my design knowledge ever since, which has helped lots of new designers get to grips with the design software and make it in the design industry themselves. I always love hearing from people who have benefitted from my tutorials, it's what gives me the motivation to simply keep doing it. I remember learning lots from online tutorials while I was studying (and I still learn from them today), so it gives me satisfaction to give back in order to help out the newcomers.

One email I tend to receive more than others is from people asking for advice on how to set up their own portfolio website, get themselves noticed and land client work. The whole topic is something that's a little too big to cover in a blog post so I decided to write this eBook/guide to cover all the steps in depth.

STEP ONE: PURCHASE A DOMAIN

So enough blabber, let's get on with the job at hand - Setting up your website. Step one is to purchase a domain name. A domain is basically the address of your website on the Internet, it's the thing you type into your browser followed by .com, .co.uk, etc. You'll want to take a few minutes to decide on the domain you want to use to present yourself. Your name or your company name are good choices. Once you have decided on your domain, head over to [Go Daddy](#) and see if it's available. Go ahead and make the purchase. [Click here](#) to get 10% off your domain order.

Some people like to buy every possible version of their domain under the sun to protect their brand. I personally think you should just stick to the .com suffix, more so than your country's own suffix (.co.uk etc). This is one mistake I made and ended up having to buy the .com version of my domain for \$300 when it became available. If you have the .com to begin with, the others don't really matter.



STEP TWO: PURCHASE SOME WEB SPACE

You have your address, now you need a plot of land to build your website. This is where a web hosting comes in. Web hosting companies have farms of servers that host websites. There are plenty of hosts to choose from, but my recommendation goes with [HostGator](#) for anyone looking to set up a small personal website. I've been a [HostGator](#) user for a number of years and I still use them to host my personal blog, my fiancée's company website and a bunch of client websites. There's a range of plans to choose from, but I'd recommend the [Baby package](#) - It includes everything you need. Use the coupon code [spoonhostgator](#) to receive 25% off your order!

Once you have your domain and your web space you'll need to connect them. Log in to your [Go Daddy](#) control panel and find the options for your domain. Look for the Nameserver settings and change the two fields to the nameservers supplied in your HostGator welcome email. They will look something like ns1.hostgator.com and ns2.hostgator.com.

Once done, it might take a short while for the domain to 'propagate' so test it out the next day by typing in your domain in a browser.

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STEP THREE: INSTALL WORDPRESS

[WordPress](#) is a fantastic free application that allows you to easily create a powerful website that's clean, easy to use and search engine friendly. [WordPress](#) is a blogging application at heart, but it can easily be used for most types of websites, especially when extended with a range of plugins.

Installing the WordPress app isn't as complicated as you might expect. It's famous for its '5-minute install', but it's even easier if you purchased your web space with [HostGator](#). Log in to your website's control panel (yourdomain.com/cpanel) using the login credentials supplied in your welcome email.

Look for a button named Fantastico then click the WordPress option on the left. Fill in the details of your website, including your preferred admin login details and you're done - Wasn't too hard was it?

Now you have WordPress installed, it's time to make a few tweaks and changes to optimise it for search engines. Log in at yourdomain.com/wp-admin then head into the Permalink section of the Settings tab and enter **/%postname%/** in the Custom field. Then you'll want to install a cocktail of handy plugins via the Plugins section of the admin menu. Check out my post on [Line25](#) for a list of [Post-Install Plugins to Enhance and Protect WordPress](#).

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STEP FOUR: INSTALL A PORTFOLIO THEME

The default appearance of WordPress isn't very unique, nor is it tailored to being used as a designer's portfolio. Designing a custom WordPress theme is a job for the pros, but if you want to take a look at the steps I have a [good selection](#) of [tutorials](#) on [Blog.SpoonGraphics](#) and [Line25](#).

Chances are you're following this guide as someone who doesn't fancy getting stuck head first into HTML/CSS/PHP coding, so the easiest option is to purchase a ready made theme that has been built with a specific purpose in mind, has been tested and has been crafted with good quality code.

My recommendations go with [Themify](#), [Obox Themes](#) or [ThemeForest](#) when it comes to purchasing any WordPress theme. Both sites feature well designed themes constructed with good quality code and have a good support network should you have trouble with any of the features.

There's plenty of awesome designs to choose from, but [BlogFolio](#), [Carousel](#) and [Striking](#) stand out to me. Once you've made your purchase, the theme can be uploaded and installed directly within WordPress under the Appearance section.



STEP FIVE: ADD YOUR OWN CONTENT

This is where the real fun begins. Take the time to populate your WordPress blog with your own content through your WordPress admin dashboard (www.yourdomain.com/wp-admin). There's two types of content on WordPress blogs, Pages and Posts. A page, as the name suggests, is a static page of the website that isn't time specific. You might want to create pages such as 'About' and 'Contact'. Posts on the other hand are what makes WordPress the blogging platform it is famous for. Posts are similar to pages, but they're date specific. Each post is found in a Category, and moves further down the archives whenever a new post is published. You'll probably want to add your portfolio pieces as posts in a category named 'Portfolio', as they'll then appear in date order with your latest work being the most prominent.

Check the instructions for your particular portfolio theme to see how each portfolio item is designed to be inserted.

Overall, remember to keep your content personal, friendly and fun. The days of boring corporate copy are over, nowadays people like to get to know the people they're hiring so type out your page copy in a casual and conversational way. Also remember to add images to your website, including an image of yourself. WordPress has a built in image uploader so you don't even need to figure out how to use complicated FTP software.

When it comes to your Contact page, you have a number of choices of WordPress plugins that can quickly and easily insert a form into your page. If none of them float your boat, why not try the awesome [Wufoo](#) service? [Wufoo](#) is the service I've ended up using for every single one of my own websites. The great thing about their hosted service is you don't have to worry about your email script working properly, which is always good to avoid losing potential emails from clients. Furthermore, the [Wufoo](#) service does a great job of preventing contact form spam.

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STEP SIX: PROMOTE YOUR WEBSITE

Now your portfolio is live, how do you go about getting it seen by the right people? We have already optimised WordPress for search engines, so in time your website will appear in the results. The best piece of advice I can offer is to make the most of WordPress and start blogging. Share your design knowledge with others, give updates about the new things you've learnt, spread the word about links to cool resources and create guides or tutorials on how to create certain effects. If you read my little intro earlier in this guide you'll know how much blogging has helped me out in my career so far. Providing something that people will find useful is the best way to get your name out there as people will naturally share links to your website with their friends.

You might think that giving away your design knowledge for free devalues your work, but in actual fact it's quite the opposite.

The large majority of my client work comes from my blog, with an extremely low number of enquiries actually coming from my portfolio website. Often people will stumble across your tutorials, like what they see and get in touch to hire you for their project.

These potential clients would probably never come across your portfolio work otherwise.

One example I always give is the work I produced for the band Fall Out Boy. A year or two ago I wrote a tutorial on how to

design a skateboard deck - Just to have some fun creating a design on a medium I had no prior experience with. Skateboard deck design wasn't something I'd ever been asked to do before, nor was it something I was likely to land as a client project, so I took the time to play around just to fulfil my creative passion. I wrote the tutorial describing the process of creating the design I had come up with and it proved quite popular. Coincidentally a person from a merchandising company spotted the tutorial and got in touch to ask if I'd be interested in designing a t-shirt, skateboard deck and hoody design as merchandise for the band Fall Out Boy in time for their upcoming album launch - Quite an interesting project to say the least! The point of the story is that it's my tutorial that landed this opportunity in the first place. Simply having fun designing stuff just to please yourself is what will increase your exposure and land you potential work.

You can also increase your exposure by being an active user of [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#). Simply networking and making friends online will help get your name out there and associate you with the subject. Chat with like-minded designers and don't be afraid to talk to the 'big names' of the industry. I've landed some of my best design projects through Twitter, which has enabled me to work with friends on some really interesting designs.

STEP SEVEN: LIVE HAPPILY EVER AFTER!

Keep up your design work, constantly update your website with new posts & portfolio pieces and share everything you know to help others and in time you'll see the rewards. It can take a fair while but don't give up!

Overall I hope this guide gives you a head start in making a name for yourself in the design industry, or at least gives you some inspiration to venture out in order to earn a living from doing something you love. If you had any problems along the way feel free to drop me an email via my website, I'm always happy to help out.

Thanks for taking the time to read this far, I hope you enjoyed it.

Catch you all later.

CHRIS