



How to create an author website that reflects your brand AND includes all the 'must-haves'



Hello

I'm Michelle, lovely to meet you!

I'm not only a website designer but a writer too, so I know that setting up your author website can be a little daunting. Even when you've finally taken the plunge, knowing whether you've ticked all the boxes on creating a good-looking but fully functional website can be equally tricky.

In this guide, you'll find tips on how to get started, how to create your brand, what to include on your home page and navigation, and a few handy resources to help you make decisions on colour, images, domain names and more.

Whether you want to create a fresh new look for your site, generate subscribers, present a professional image, sell books or provide an interesting and beautiful place for readers and other writers to linger awhile, this guide will help you on your way.

And of course, if you'd like a brand new website, or help revamping your existing site, I'd love to work with you.

Check out my portfolio and how the process works [here](#).

You can [contact me here](#) or, if you're really raring to go, you can fill in the [Briefing Form](#) and I'll send you an obligation-free quote.

Michelle

Getting Started

1. Secure your domain name

This is definitely the first cab off the rank. Run don't walk to secure your own name as a domain before someone with the same name takes it.

Now that's pretty easy if your name is something unusual like Ophelia Quintrell (or even Michelle Barraclough!) because it's unlikely someone has registered that domain. But if your name is already taken, consider adding 'author' or 'writer' to the end. eg. janebrownwriter.com

If you decide to use [Squarespace](#) as your website design platform (and I strongly recommend you do - I love it!) you'll get a free .com domain name so skip ahead to the next section on website platforms.

Otherwise, I recommend registering your domain name with GoDaddy. After many years of linking my own and clients' domains to their websites, GoDaddy is the easiest to deal with. Their interface is super user-friendly and their support chat staff are fantastic if there are any complications. I would strongly avoid going with a registrar based on price. The last thing you want, after all your hard work on the website, is being unable to go live because you can't link your domain to your website.

2. Select a website platform

If you're planning to DIY your own website, there are a number of platforms to choose from. I love [Squarespace](#) but honestly, it's horses for courses!

After many years using other platforms, I've found Squarespace to have the most gorgeous modern templates with a solid and highly functional back-end. Unlike Wordpress, you don't need to add security plug-ins or do regular back-end maintenance or backups. It's all done for you by Squarespace and is securely hosted by them. They also have excellent support and training videos for the nervous DIYer.

Their basic plan starts at \$192 per year which includes that free .com domain name I mentioned earlier.

When choosing your platform, take your time, do your research, perhaps even ask a friend if you can have a peek behind the curtain at their website platform. I'd be more than happy to take you on a 10 minute zoom tour of the back-end of Squarespace so don't hesitate to get in touch.



3. Briefing a web designer

A good web designer should provide you with a briefing form with a list of questions in order to discover the kind of website you want and the scope of the project. This should include things like how many pages you need and what type (blog, online store, podcast hosting, etc.) You'll be able to work out which pages you'll need as you go through this guide. It's also a good idea to provide the designer with a list of 3 other websites you like the look of and why, so they can get a feel for the style of website you're after.

This would usually be followed up with a phone call or meeting to clarify your needs, then a fully costed proposal with no hidden surprises like additional hosting fees or charges to make changes.

Ideally, you want to be able to get into the back-end of your own website and make simple changes by yourself, such as adding or changing text or images. If they ask you to pay a retainer or ongoing maintenance fee, make sure you clarify exactly what you're getting. Nothing irks me more, as a former client of other designers, than discovering that the upfront quote to build the website doesn't include a raft of other hidden and ongoing charges.

Make sure you check the testimonials and websites of the designer's clients. I mean actually click through to the client's websites and have a good ol' sticky beak.

Finally, check what kind of customer service they offer after the website goes live, preferably live training, training videos and a period of after-care service to help with any additional tweaks and support so you don't feel like a new parent being kicked out of the hospital with a newborn and no idea what to do!

Branding

1. Discovering your brand

As an author, your 'brand' is a blend of your personality, your voice, the genre you write in and an acknowledgement of your readers or audience.

Who is your ideal reader and what do they want? When they visit your website, it should show and tell your reader exactly what they're going to get. Are you funny? An expert in something? Whimsical? Do you write crime or romance?

Have a really good think about all these elements and make a mind map of it. Add pictures, fonts, your favourite colours, your favourite books. Doodle, scribble, ramble, go down Pinterest rabbit holes! It's just for you. Who are you and what do you want to convey to your website visitors? In the words from that classic Aussie film *The Castle*, what's the vibe of the thing?

The next step is to translate that into your website design - images, fonts, colours and tone. Your whole website should reflect your brand.

Take a look at these author websites as great examples of branding:

[Pamela Cook](#) (warm, feel-good, contemporary fiction)

[Mark Smith](#) (environment-themed, dystopian YA)

[Ashley Kalagian Blunt](#) (dark, crime, suspenseful)

[Tamsin Janu](#) (middle-grade fiction, fun, bright, not too childish as must also appeal to parents and teachers)

Your brand, or how you want people to perceive you, can also be helped by including testimonials and reviews. "Other people see me like this so you should too"

You can also consider the aesthetic side of branding based on your latest book release. And don't forget to apply your brand aesthetic across all your platforms - website, socials, email footer, bookmarks. Consistency is key!

Setting the right tone for your website is an important part of your brand aesthetic. When you're trawling around for your mood board, add a term like 'light' or 'dark' or 'colourful' or 'hot pink' to your search. Here are some examples of tone:

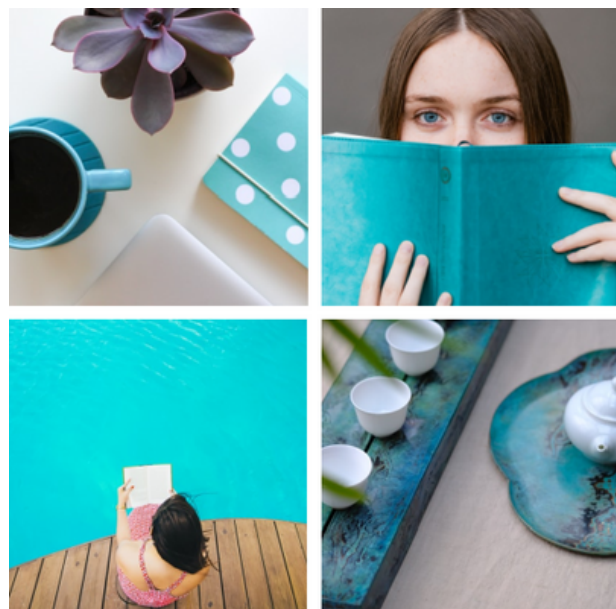
Light



Dark



Blue



2. Translating your brand onto your website

Colour

Here's a terrific resource to help you choose a colour palette for your website - [Coolors](#) and [MillionShade](#).

Do the little tutorial at the beginning to get the most out of it. You can even upload a picture of your favourite photos and it will generate a palette based on the photos. Save the colour codes from Coolors as you'll need them for your website.

For your website, create a palette that includes:

- 1 light colour
- 1 dark colour
- 1 accent colour
- Shade of black (for text)
- White

Logo

If you don't have a logo yet, have a look at Etsy. I have found several fabulous logos over the years on Etsy, really reasonably priced (I'm talking \$20-\$30) by designers who also offer complete brand kits. It's the best kept secret on the interwebs!

Here's what to do:

1. Go to <https://www.etsy.com/>
2. In the search bar, type 'premade logo', and add another term that is meaningful to your brand. eg. 'premade logo whimsical' or 'premade logo turquoise' or 'premade logo luxe'
3. Find a design you like and provide the designer with your name. Usually the designer offers the option to change the colours too.

Images

Gone are the bad old days of clip art and scanning our own dubious photos. These days we are spoiled for choice when it comes to images for our website. Squarespace has a built-in affiliation with [Unsplash](#) but anyone can source free images on [Unsplash](#). Other fabulous sites for good quality free images are [Pexels](#) and [Pixabay](#).

Structure / Navigation

We are a nation of scrollers these days! So while it's important to have a good navigation system/menu, it's also important to have all the important parts of your website on your home page.

Rather than talk about it, I'm going to send you to an author website where the home page ticks all the boxes.

Check out <https://www.suzanneleal.com> and have a scroll down the home page. You'll see it's broken up into sections, each of which is basically a summary of another page on the website. So in the section that contains images of her books on the home page, you can click through to the full books page for more detail. For the About Suzanne section on her home page, you can click through to her full bio page.

A typical navigation structure for an author website might include any or all of the following:

- Home Page
- About – Bio – make sure you include a short and long version and decent headshots (no excuse for bad photos these days – either get professional photos done or beg, borrow or steal a smartphone with portrait mode and get clicking, then filter to your heart's content!)
- Books – include blurb, reviews, an extract, book club notes and where to buy. If you don't have a book out yet, you could talk about your work in progress – a blurb (or synopsis if you're feeling brave) and a bit about your ongoing path to publication, or any competitions you've placed in.
- Reviews
- Blog
- Events
- Newsletter sign-up (make sure this is on your home page too!)
- Contact – direct or agent
- Social media feed



Use Best Design Practices

Here are a few design techniques that will help your home page look more professional.

- Use lots of 'white/negative space' to give visitors' eyes a rest between sections.
- Use short sentences and paragraphs.
- Don't use too many fonts - one or two will do. Also steer clear of using a confusing mix of italics, bold and font sizes.
- Don't use reverse type (white type on dark background) for anything other than buttons, headings or short pieces of text.
- Proofread everything. Twice! Spelling mistakes and poor grammar damage your credibility and undermine your professionalism.
- Use pop-ups wisely. Have one come up during the visit or just before exit and make sure they can close it easily if they're not interested.
- Keep navigation language clear (eg. About, Services, Blog, Contact) rather than using fancy phrases.
- Use high-quality images and keep them consistent (eg. use images with similar colour tones and don't mix coloured images with black and white)

Mobile Responsiveness

It's really important that visitors can view and interact with your website across all devices - phones, tablets, laptops and desktops. In fact, over half of all visitors to your website will view it on a mobile device so it needs to be optimised for mobile viewing. Google doesn't like it if your website isn't mobile responsive either, and we don't want to upset Google!

Squarespace creates an automatic mobile design but if you're using a different platform, check with your web designer to make sure your website ticks the mobile box.

Well that's it from me! I hope you found this checklist useful and can action a few of these tips on your own website.

So where to from here?

If you would like to dive into each of these elements in more detail, I've created an online, self-paced course with the Australian Writers Centre that you can [sign up for here](#).

By the end of the course, you'll have a detailed website brief that you can either hand to a designer, or use to build your own website. Throughout the course you'll nail your brand, select your domain name, choose the right platform, plan every page, learn about SEO and so much more.

Want me to design your site for you?

I'd love to learn more about you and help you create a fresh, modern and functional new website.

For an obligation-free quote, visit my [website](#) (where you'll see all the things on this checklist in action!) and fill in the [briefing form](#).

Or connect with me on socials.



ABOUT FRESH WEB DESIGN



MICHELLE BARRACLOUGH
WEB DESIGNER

Michelle Barraclough is a writer and strategic marketing professional with 30 years experience in a diverse range of industries.

As a professional website designer Michelle loves to help clients take their businesses online with fresh, modern websites designed in Squarespace. An accredited Squarespace Expert and Circle Member, Michelle has access to tools, perks and discounts which she passes on to her clients.

When not working with website clients or writing her own novels, Michelle conducts deep-dive interviews with authors about writing craft and process on her monthly podcast [Writers Book Club](#).

Michelle presents several courses for the Australian Writers Centre, including [Your Author Website](#) and [Plain English Business Writing](#). She is also an experienced facilitator at literary festivals and book launch events.

Get in touch with Michelle anytime. No question too big or too small :)

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