No Website? No Excuses!

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In today's ever changing digital world the options for building a professional looking website are expanding every day. Gone are the days of needing to learn HTML and CSS, worrying about if your plugin is going to crash your homepage, and figuring out servers and hosting. Sure, you can take on all of those things – it would be like building and maintaining your own home – or if you choose one of the new online website builders, it would be like leasing a shiny new luxury condo.

Names like Wix, Weebly, and Squarespace allow users to choose a professionally designed template, add in some text and photos, choose from a number of different tiered pricing plans, and in a few short hours publish a stellar website. These website builders are managed entirely online, so there is no need to purchase software, they are designed to be user friendly with options for live chats, or assistance on the phone, and if you don't mind a few ads and a long URL you can even choose a free hosting option.

Each of the above mentioned sites have pros and cons, and choosing which one is right for your organization should be easy after a bit of research on their functionality. For instance, if you want something that is super easy to use, Wix or Weebly are well known for that. If you are looking for very stylish designs, Wix and Squarespace are great choices.

When choosing, take into consideration: pricing, user experience, design features, technical features, marketing features, and user support.

Wix has a great collection of professional caliber design templates, an innovative drag and drop builder, and support available on every page. On the flip side, it's difficult to change templates without re-inserting your content, and there are visible advertisements on the free versions. Wix also has an app market to add on functions like e-commerce, online bookings, and event calendars and a full range of tools to set up and boost search engine rankings.

Weebly is another user friendly, drag and drop builder. Their templates are expanding and offering more options, and if you decide to change templates after finishing the customization, it is easy to switch. They also offer pre-designed page layouts – so you aren't staring at a blank page wondering where to start. Weebly limits the customization of the templates (which is why it's easy to change them up) and has been historically slower in introducing new features. It also offers extra apps to add, a section of SEO tools and excellent online and phone assistance.

Squarespace offers designer-quality templates, along with unique cover pages which can be used as a standalone site or combined with a template, and gives you extensive options to customize the design. On the flip side, this could be overwhelming to someone that wants a simple site design. A recent update to the platform provided major changes to make the design interface more user friendly, and users are able to see the changes as they are edited. As with the other builders, Squarespace offers online live chats and a video library of tutorials to assist the user, and options for search engine optimization.

This review only scratches the surface on website builders and their functionality; there are dozens more platforms available with varying levels of options. Do your research, and decide which options are important to you and the organization, don't let the price be the only deciding factor. Good luck – because the decisions have only just begun… ∎

On the Web

American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works

www.conservation-us.org

The AIC's website provides a variety of resources regarding materials conservation and emergency response. Check out the National Heritage Responders program, which maintains a 24-hour help line and responds to the needs of cultural institutions during emergencies and disasters through coordinated efforts with first responders, state agencies, vendors and the public. The website can also help you find a conservator, and provides resources for emergency planning and preparation.