



MTJ Digital

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The 2026 South African Website Buying Checklist

Compare website quotes properly. Calculate the real first-year cost. Know what you own.

A practical worksheet for South African SMEs

Business / organisation:

Person completing checklist:

Date: -----

Website / domain (if applicable):

How to use this guide

Complete the sections before requesting quotes where possible. Then use the comparison pages to record what each agency actually includes. Do not compare headline prices alone: compare scope, recurring costs, ownership, performance, SEO, support and exit terms.

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1. Start With the Business Goal

A website should support a business outcome. Decide what the primary visitor action is before discussing pages, animations or integrations.

Project snapshot

Business name:

Industry:

Target market:

Primary service area / locations:

Current website (if any):

Target launch date:

Working budget:

Primary objective

- ☐ Generate enquiries
- ☐ Generate phone calls
- ☐ Generate WhatsApp enquiries
- ☐ Book appointments
- ☐ Sell products
- ☐ Build credibility
- ☐ Generate leads from Google
- ☐ Provide information / support
- ☐ Other

Primary conversion action:



Priority

Item	Must have	Nice to have	Phase 2 / later
Website pages	☐	☐	☐
Lead generation	☐	☐	☐
SEO	☐	☐	☐
Booking	☐	☐	☐
E-commerce	☐	☐	☐
Integrations	☐	☐	☐
Content / copywriting	☐	☐	☐

2. Pages, Content & Functionality

Page count alone does not determine website cost. A five-page brochure site and a five-page lead-generation system can be very different projects.

Pages required

Page / content	Needed?	Client supplies?	Agency supplies?	Included in quote?
Home	☐	☐	☐	☐
About	☐	☐	☐	☐
Services overview	☐	☐	☐	☐
Individual service pages	☐	☐	☐	☐
Contact	☐	☐	☐	☐
FAQ	☐	☐	☐	☐
Blog / resources	☐	☐	☐	☐
Location pages	☐	☐	☐	☐
Privacy / legal pages	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other	☐	☐	☐	☐



Functionality required

- ☐ Contact forms
- ☐ Click-to-call
- ☐ WhatsApp
- ☐ Quote request
- ☐ Booking / calendar
- ☐ Email notifications
- ☐ CRM integration
- ☐ Automated email
- ☐ Lead-source tracking
- ☐ Online payments
- ☐ E-commerce
- ☐ Membership / login
- ☐ Customer portal
- ☐ Quote calculator
- ☐ Product catalogue
- ☐ Search / filtering
- ☐ File uploads
- ☐ Multilingual content
- ☐ Accounting / ERP integration
- ☐ Inventory integration
- ☐ Other

Important functionality not listed:

Ask for line-item pricing

If a feature is important enough to influence your buying decision, ask the agency to state whether it is included, excluded, or priced separately. Avoid vague phrases such as “advanced functionality included” without a scope.



3. Quote Comparison Worksheet

Complete this table for each agency. Ask every agency to quote against the same requirements.

Cost item	Agency A	Agency B	Agency C	Agency D
Website build	R	R	R	R
Design / UX	R	R	R	R
Copywriting	R	R	R	R
Photography / images	R	R	R	R
SEO setup	R	R	R	R
Integrations	R	R	R	R
Migration	R	R	R	R
Hosting — first year	R	R	R	R
Domain — first year	R	R	R	R
Maintenance — first year	R	R	R	R
Other recurring services	R	R	R	R
Other once-off costs	R	R	R	R
TOTAL FIRST-YEAR COST	R	R	R	R
Monthly cost after launch	R	R	R	R

What is actually included?

Check	Agency A	Agency B	Agency C	Agency D
Written scope supplied	☐	☐	☐	☐
Revision limit defined	☐	☐	☐	☐
Launch date / timeline stated	☐	☐	☐	☐



Recurring costs stated	☐	☐	☐	☐
Ownership terms stated	☐	☐	☐	☐
Support terms stated	☐	☐	☐	☐
Exit / migration terms stated	☐	☐	☐	☐

4. Calculate the Real First-Year Cost

The launch price is only one part of the cost. Use this worksheet to calculate what the website is likely to cost during its first 12 months.

Once-off costs

Website design / development:

Copywriting:

Photography / video:

Branding / logo work:

SEO setup:

Migration:

Integrations:

E-commerce setup:

Other: -----



Once-off subtotal:

Recurring costs

Service	Monthly	Annual / renewal	Notes
Hosting	R	R	
Domain	R	R	
Email	R	R	
Maintenance	R	R	
Security / backups	R	R	
SEO / content	R	R	
Analytics	R	R	
Other	R	R	

Monthly recurring subtotal:

12-month recurring subtotal:

ESTIMATED FIRST-YEAR TOTAL:

Compare like with like

A low build price can become expensive if hosting, maintenance, content, SEO or mandatory monthly fees are excluded. A higher quote can also be better value if it includes work you would otherwise have to purchase separately.

5. Ownership, Accounts & Exit

Before signing, make sure you know who controls the assets that matter to your business.

Domain

- ☐ Domain is registered in my business / chosen owner's name
- ☐ I know which registrar holds the domain
- ☐ I have registrar access or a clear contractual right to access
- ☐ I can transfer the domain if I change provider



- ☐ Renewal price and date are clear

Website & content

- ☐ Ownership of website code / platform is clear
- ☐ I can obtain a full website backup
- ☐ I can migrate the website if necessary
- ☐ I retain ownership / licence rights to my business content
- ☐ I know what happens to the site if the agreement ends
- ☐ Stock image / font / plugin licences are identified where relevant

Business accounts

- ☐ Google Business Profile
- ☐ Google Search Console
- ☐ Analytics platform
- ☐ Domain registrar
- ☐ Hosting
- ☐ Business email
- ☐ Payment gateway
- ☐ Social media accounts
- ☐ Other

Exit questions to ask

- ☐ What happens if I cancel?
- ☐ Do I receive a website backup?
- ☐ Can another developer take over?
- ☐ Are there migration fees?
- ☐ Who owns the domain?
- ☐ What happens to hosting?
- ☐ What happens to analytics and tracking data?
- ☐ How long will you retain my data after termination?



6. Hosting, Security & Performance

Hosting & resilience

- ☐ Hosting provider identified
- ☐ Hosting cost after promotional period is clear
- ☐ SSL / HTTPS included
- ☐ Automated backups included
- ☐ Backup frequency stated
- ☐ Backup retention stated
- ☐ Website can be restored from backup
- ☐ Uptime / monitoring arrangements explained
- ☐ Security updates / patching explained
- ☐ Website can be migrated to another host

Performance questions

- ☐ Website is tested on mobile
- ☐ PageSpeed Insights / Lighthouse testing is performed
- ☐ Images are optimised
- ☐ Third-party scripts are controlled
- ☐ Caching / delivery strategy is considered
- ☐ Core Web Vitals are considered
- ☐ Performance expectations are documented

Core Web Vital	Good target	Your result
LCP — loading	≤ 2.5 seconds	
INP — responsiveness	≤ 200 ms	
CLS — visual stability	≤ 0.1	

Important

Core Web Vitals are field-based user-experience metrics. Google's current guidance uses the 75th percentile and separates mobile and desktop data. A single Lighthouse score is useful for testing but is not the same thing as real-user field data.



7. SEO & Local Search

SEO should be defined as work, not simply listed as “included”. Meeting Google's technical requirements does not guarantee crawling, indexing or rankings.

On-page & technical SEO

- ☐ Unique page titles
- ☐ Meta descriptions
- ☐ Logical headings
- ☐ Clean, descriptive URLs
- ☐ Internal links
- ☐ Image alt text
- ☐ Canonical URLs where needed
- ☐ XML sitemap
- ☐ Robots.txt
- ☐ HTTPS
- ☐ Mobile usability
- ☐ 404 page
- ☐ Redirects / migration redirects where needed
- ☐ Search Console setup
- ☐ Indexing checked
- ☐ Structured data where appropriate

Local SEO

- ☐ Google Business Profile connected / reviewed
- ☐ Business name, address and phone consistency
- ☐ Service-area information
- ☐ Relevant service pages
- ☐ Genuine location pages where useful
- ☐ Local business structured data where appropriate
- ☐ Review acquisition strategy
- ☐ Local citations / directories considered



SEO deliverables to request

Deliverable	Included?	Details / limits
Keyword research	☐	
Page mapping	☐	
On-page optimisation	☐	
Technical SEO	☐	
Local SEO	☐	
Content / blog	☐	
Reporting	☐	
Avoid guarantees Be cautious of guaranteed Google rankings. Search visibility depends on many factors, and Google explicitly states that meeting its technical requirements and best practices does not guarantee crawling, indexing or serving in Search.		

8. Conversion, Analytics & Lead Handling

Conversion essentials

- ☐ Each key page has a clear next action
- ☐ Calls are easy to make from mobile
- ☐ WhatsApp is easy to use where relevant
- ☐ Forms are short and purposeful
- ☐ Trust signals are visible
- ☐ Testimonials / reviews are genuine
- ☐ Service benefits are clear
- ☐ Contact details are easy to find

Lead handling

- ☐ Form submissions go to the correct recipient
- ☐ Spam protection is included
- ☐ Automatic confirmation is configured where useful
- ☐ Leads are stored securely where applicable
- ☐ Lead source can be tracked
- ☐ CRM integration works



- ☐ Booking confirmations work
- ☐ Failed submissions can be identified

Analytics & measurement

- ☐ Analytics installed
- ☐ Search Console connected
- ☐ Form submissions tracked
- ☐ Phone clicks tracked
- ☐ WhatsApp clicks tracked
- ☐ Booking conversions tracked
- ☐ E-commerce conversions tracked where relevant
- ☐ Accounts are owned / controlled by the business

Primary conversion to measure:

Secondary conversions:

Who receives leads?

Where are leads stored?

9. POPIA & Website Privacy Check

This section is a practical website-planning checklist, not legal advice or a POPIA compliance certification. The actual obligations depend on what your business collects, why it collects it, how it uses it, and which third parties process it.

- ☐ Privacy notice is available
- ☐ Privacy notice reflects the website's actual data collection
- ☐ Forms request only information that is reasonably necessary
- ☐ Purpose of collection is explained where appropriate
- ☐ Marketing consent is handled appropriately
- ☐ Unsubscribe process exists for applicable marketing
- ☐ Third-party processors / services are identified and considered



- ☐ Form submissions are protected
- ☐ Access to personal information is restricted
- ☐ Retention / deletion practices are considered
- ☐ Analytics / cookies / tracking technologies have been reviewed
- ☐ Cross-border processing / data transfers have been considered where relevant
- ☐ Security measures are documented or understood
- ☐ A process exists for handling security compromises / data breaches
- ☐ Information Officer responsibilities are understood where applicable

Why this matters

The Information Regulator states that POPIA requires responsible parties to take appropriate, reasonable technical and organisational measures to protect personal information and to identify and manage foreseeable risks. Website forms, analytics, bookings and other integrations can therefore create privacy and security considerations.

Ask your agency / provider

- ☐ Which personal information will the website collect?
- ☐ Where will form data be stored?
- ☐ Which third-party services receive it?
- ☐ Who has access to it?
- ☐ What happens when I stop using the service?
- ☐ Are backups containing personal information secured?

10. E-commerce & Online Payments

Complete this section only if the website sells products or takes online payments.

- ☐ Product catalogue
- ☐ Product descriptions
- ☐ Pricing / VAT treatment
- ☐ Shopping cart
- ☐ Checkout
- ☐ Payment gateway
- ☐ Order confirmation



- ☐ Customer notifications
- ☐ Delivery / collection options
- ☐ Shipping rules
- ☐ Stock management
- ☐ Returns / refunds information
- ☐ Terms and conditions
- ☐ Privacy information
- ☐ Customer accounts
- ☐ Transaction records
- ☐ Fraud / payment security measures
- ☐ Mobile checkout tested

Payment & commercial questions

- ☐ Who owns the payment gateway account?
- ☐ Who pays gateway fees?
- ☐ Are gateway fees included in the website quote?
- ☐ Who handles failed payments?
- ☐ Who handles refunds?
- ☐ Are transaction emails configured?
- ☐ What happens if the website is migrated?

South African context

For online transactions, review the requirements that apply to your business under the Electronic Communications and Transactions Act 25 of 2002 and any other applicable consumer, tax, privacy or industry requirements. Do not treat this checklist as legal advice.



11. Accessibility, Content & Assets

Practical accessibility check

- ☐ Text has sufficient contrast
- ☐ Keyboard navigation is usable
- ☐ Focus states are visible
- ☐ Images have appropriate alternative text
- ☐ Forms have clear labels
- ☐ Links and buttons have meaningful names
- ☐ Content does not rely only on colour
- ☐ Text can be resized without breaking the layout
- ☐ Videos have captions where appropriate
- ☐ Mobile touch targets are usable

Content responsibility

Content item	Client	Agency	Shared	Not required
Logo / branding	☐	☐	☐	☐
Website copy	☐	☐	☐	☐
Service descriptions	☐	☐	☐	☐
Photography	☐	☐	☐	☐
Stock images	☐	☐	☐	☐
Testimonials	☐	☐	☐	☐
Case studies	☐	☐	☐	☐
FAQs	☐	☐	☐	☐
Legal content	☐	☐	☐	☐

Assets & licensing

- ☐ Stock image licences are appropriate
- ☐ Fonts are properly licensed where required
- ☐ Plugins / themes are properly licensed where required
- ☐ Business owns / controls its logo files
- ☐ Photography ownership / usage rights are clear
- ☐ Video / music rights are clear



Accessibility note

WCAG 2.2 is the current W3C Recommendation for web accessibility. This checklist covers practical basics but does not certify WCAG conformance. Businesses with specific legal, contractual or accessibility requirements should obtain an appropriate professional assessment.

12. Maintenance, Support & Contract

What does “maintenance” actually include?

Service	Included?	Frequency / limit	Response time
Software updates	☐		
Security updates	☐		
Backups	☐		
Bug fixes	☐		
Content changes	☐		
New pages	☐		
Image changes	☐		
Form troubleshooting	☐		
Hosting support	☐		
SEO updates	☐		

Contract checklist

- ☐ Written scope of work
- ☐ Payment schedule
- ☐ Project timeline
- ☐ Revision policy
- ☐ Acceptance / approval process
- ☐ Cancellation terms
- ☐ Refund terms
- ☐ Ownership terms
- ☐ Hosting terms
- ☐ Renewal pricing



- ☐ Maintenance terms
- ☐ Support hours
- ☐ Response times
- ☐ Termination procedure
- ☐ Migration / exit terms

Ask before signing

What exactly happens after launch?

What will I pay next year?

What is excluded?

What happens if I want to add a new page?

What happens if the agency stops trading?

What happens if I want to move to another provider?

13. Red Flags

One red flag does not automatically mean an agency is unsuitable. Several together should trigger questions before you sign.

- ☐ The quote only says “website” with no meaningful scope.
- ☐ Recurring costs are not disclosed.
- ☐ SEO is included but no SEO deliverables are defined.
- ☐ Maintenance is included but there is no definition of what maintenance means.
- ☐ The agency owns your domain without a clear reason or transfer arrangement.
- ☐ You cannot access important business accounts.
- ☐ The agency will not explain where the website is hosted.



- ☐ There is no backup / recovery explanation.
- ☐ You are promised guaranteed Google rankings.
- ☐ An unusually low price is tied to a long mandatory contract.
- ☐ You are not told what happens to the website if you cancel.
- ☐ Migration / exit fees are hidden or unclear.
- ☐ Third-party subscriptions are registered in the agency's name with no transfer plan.
- ☐ Important features are described as “subject to scope” but the scope is never supplied.

14. Score the Quotes

Score each agency from 1 (poor / unclear) to 10 (excellent / clearly documented). Use evidence from the quote and your discussions, not sales impressions.

Category	Agency A	Agency B	Agency C	Agency D
Scope clarity /10				
Price transparency /10				
Functionality fit /10				
SEO /10				
Performance /10				
Mobile UX /10				
Security /10				
Ownership /10				
Support /10				
Contract / exit /10				
TOTAL /100				



My weighting

If some categories matter more to your business, record your own weighting before deciding.

Category	Weight %	Reason
Scope / value		
Lead generation		
SEO / local visibility		
Performance / UX		
Ownership / control		
Support / maintenance		
Other		
TOTAL	100%	

15. Final Decision

Use this page after you have reviewed the quotes and clarified the unanswered questions.

Preferred agency:

Once-off investment:

Monthly ongoing cost:

Estimated first-year cost:

Contract term:

Expected launch date:



Three reasons this quote is the best fit

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Three costs / exclusions I still need to budget for

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Before I sign, I have confirmed:

- ☐ Scope of work
- ☐ Pages and functionality
- ☐ Content responsibilities
- ☐ First-year cost
- ☐ Recurring costs
- ☐ Domain ownership
- ☐ Website ownership / migration
- ☐ Hosting
- ☐ Backups and security
- ☐ SEO deliverables
- ☐ Analytics / conversion tracking
- ☐ Privacy / POPIA considerations
- ☐ Support and maintenance
- ☐ Cancellation / exit terms

Final check

The lowest quote is not automatically the cheapest website.

The best-value quote is the one that gives you a clear scope, predictable costs, appropriate functionality, sensible technical foundations, control of your business



assets, and terms you understand. If two quotes are materially different in price, find out exactly what is different before deciding.

Reference Notes & Sources

This checklist was prepared as a practical purchasing guide using current public guidance available in August 2026. The sources below are provided so readers can verify the technical and regulatory concepts used in the checklist.

Google Search Essentials

Google Search Central — technical requirements, spam policies and key best practices for appearing in Google Search.

<https://developers.google.com/search/docs/essentials>

Core Web Vitals

web.dev — current Core Web Vitals: LCP, INP and CLS, including the good thresholds and 75th-percentile field measurement.

<https://web.dev/articles/vitals>

WCAG 2.2

W3C — Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.2, current Recommendation.

<https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG22/>

Information Regulator South Africa

POPIA guidance and eServices material covering lawful processing, security safeguards and compliance resources.

<https://infoeregulator.org.za/>

Information Regulator eServices

Official portal for POPIA/PAIA services, including assessments and security-compromise reporting.

<https://eservices.infoeregulator.org.za/>

Electronic Communications and Transactions Act

South African legislation relevant to electronic transactions and online commerce. Businesses should verify the provisions applicable to their specific activities.

<https://www.gov.za/documents/electronic-communications-and-transactions-act>



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