



# *the* VENUE BUSINESS BOOT CAMP

Expert-led strategies to elevate your venue business

FROM THE CEO OF HERE COMES THE GUIDE

VBBC BASICS MODULE 7

## The 10-Step Website Audit Checklist

**Your website is your top digital marketing asset.** It's oftentimes the first place people will go when they hear about your venue from someone else, or what they'll land on organically from an online search.

**And there your website is:** working for you 'round the clock like a super-skilled 24/7 venue salesperson.

It's there to show off your event spaces, answer basic questions, give pricing and package information, and offer the immediate gratification that venue-hunting couples are looking for.

**But how do you optimize your website** to ensure it's working for you, and not against you? Follow our 10-step website audit checklist to ensure you have these key elements to an effective, high-converting wedding venue website!

## MOBILE OPTIMIZATION

**Over half of all website users are checking out your website from their pocket-sized phones.** And Google has rolled out mobile-first indexing, which means it's prioritizing the mobile version of your website when ranking. So nowadays it's not enough to simply have a website—it **MUST** be mobile responsive!

Put on your "just engaged" hat and explore your website on one or more mobile devices. Make sure you can check all these boxes:

- **Easily Clickable.** Call-to-action buttons and navigation links should be within reach, and big enough to easily click with your thumb.
- **Space-saving Navigation.** Use a dropdown hamburger icon  $\equiv$  instead of a navigation bar on mobile to save space. Or a navigation bar that slides to the side.
- **Clear Images.** Photos should be clearly visible so you don't force users to turn their devices sideways or pinch-to-zoom.
- **Streamlined Contact Forms.** This may mean reducing the number of form fields, or using radio buttons or dropdown options to save space and keep typing to a minimum.
- **Mobile Functionality.** Link phone numbers for click-to-call functionality, and format addresses to pop up in the user's Maps application.
- **Easily Readable.** Font size on mobile should be no smaller than 16px—and that's the absolute minimum!

Want further insight? Type your URL into [Google's Mobile-Friendly Testing Tool](#).

## STRATEGIC NAVIGATION

Your “navigation bar” or “menu” refers to the links listed in the masthead at the very top of your website. It may include key pages on your site, like: Home | About | Gallery | Packages | Contact | etc. as well as social media icons.

- **Less is More.** Your navigation should be no-nonsense: short, simple, and to the point. Don't make users guess where a menu option will take them.
- **Sticky Nav Bar.** This bar should ideally be "sticky" so that as a user scrolls down your site, the nav bar stays at the top as they scroll.
- **Mobile Considerations.** On your mobile site, use a dropdown hamburger icon ☰ instead of a navigation bar to save space.
- **Call to Action.** Consider putting a call-to-action button on the top right to encourage users to contact you or schedule a tour.

### **\*DON'T FORGET YOUR FOOTER!**

It's prime real estate because it exists on every single page of your website. And if a couple is interested enough to scroll *alllll* the way down to the bottom of your pages, that's a big deal. Here's what to include:

- **Secondary Navigation.** Your footer may act as a more robust secondary navigation by including more items than the main navigation, including an email opt-in prompt or link to a sister venue. **It should also include your full address and all contact information!**
- **Back to Top.** Put a “Back to Top” button here to make it easier on mobile users to bump back up to the beginning of the page.
- **Protect Your Content.** It's also important to put a © copyright for your company at the very bottom of your footer with the current year, along with All Rights Reserved so that you protect the contents of your website.

## OPTIMIZED IMAGES

**The images you use have the potential to make or break your website.** Use only high-quality, professional photos of recent real weddings at your venue. Don't use stock images. Set up styled shoots if your image inventory is lacking.

***Once your images are gorgeous, make sure they're also optimized!***

- **File Names.** Give them short, descriptive file names (e.g. BarnWeddingCeremony.jpg)
- **Alt Text.** Give them short, descriptive image ALT text (e.g. Outdoor Wedding Ceremony with Mountain Views at Hopscotch Estate, Venueville CA)
  - This stands for "alternative text", and is typed into the backend of your website. This helps the vision-impaired who use screen readers to surf the web, but it *also* helps Google understand what the image is about, which may lead to better Google Image ranking.
  - Alt text should consist of no more than 125 characters.
- **Compress File Size.** Don't upload humongous images because they'll slow your website down—hurting both your user experience *and* your Google rankings.
  - Your website images should be no larger than 1500–2500px on the largest side.
  - Compress the file size of your images in a program like Photoshop, or use a website like [TinyJPG](#) or [JPEGmini](#).

**Once your images are a smaller file size, your site speed should go from sluggish to snappy—a key ranking factor!** Test your site speed through [Google PageSpeed Insights](#) or [Pingdom](#), and remember that your website should take no longer than 3 seconds to load.



## ANSWER THE 3 WS

The #1 priority for your website is to make it crystal clear exactly **who** you are, **what** you do, and **where** you're located. And fast! In website design, we use the term "above the fold" to describe the first snapshot of website content that fills a device's screen upon landing on your site.

### HERE'S WHAT NEEDS TO BE VISIBLE ABOVE THE FOLD:

- **Who You Are.** Your venue name as well as one or more gorgeous photos of your venue and its superpower features.
- **What You Do.** This is technically your headline, but we like to call it your [Brand Superpower Statement](#) – concisely shouting out your unique value proposition.
- **Where You're Located.** As a brick-and-mortar wedding venue, your geographical location must be clearly stated and highly visible across your website. Street address, city, state, zip. Yes, the whole thing—even if you think people know. (You need to make sure Google knows, too!)

## STRONG CALL TO ACTION

When we say "call to action" (or CTA), we're talking about the main thing you want your website users to do. Yes, you ultimately want them to book their wedding at your venue...but how do you convert a couple from website "looker" to venue "booker"?

Whether it's "Schedule a Site Tour!" or "Request a Proposal" or "Download our Wedding Brochure", you'll want to decide on a main call to action for your website and put that main CTA in several strategic placements.

### CALL-TO-ACTION CONSIDERATIONS:

- **Navigation Bar.** A CTA button on the top-right corner of your website.
- **Above the Fold.** Place your call to action right above the fold. It can overlay your gorgeous hero image or go underneath your Brand Superpower Statement.
- **Rinse and Repeat.** Your main CTA should be repeated throughout the pages of your website, where it makes sense.
- **No Dead Ends.** Think of your website like a road map with signs leading users to the next destination. Don't let a page end with no clear path to the next step. Using CTA directives on every page will lead to a better user experience—and more conversions!

It's also important to style your CTA buttons with a consistent look, so you can train your website visitor's eyes to find them. For example, make all the buttons on your website teal rectangles. That way, on every page, your user will know what they're "supposed" to click.



## TRUST FACTOR ITEMS

**Trust is the first step to making the sale**, so include as many of the following trust-building assets on your website as you can!

***This may include:***

- **Meet The Team and/or History.** If you have a superstar staff or fabulous on-site wedding coordinator, introduce them on your website. Include professional photos of their bright, smiling faces to instantly spark a connection with couples. Or if you have a venue with a rich history, tell the story! Time-honored tales can really resonate with couples and add to their interest in your event space.
- **Social Media.** Only link to your active social media accounts. Linking to your Twitter account that you haven't touched since 2012 will only cause confusion.
- **Testimonials.** Sprinkle short + catchy testimonial snippets strategically throughout your entire website.
- **Press.** Media mentions including website and/or blog features and print publications.
- **Badges.** Proudly display any badges or awards. Also note any relevant memberships (e.g. Certified Green Business).
- **Philanthropy.** Shout out the charitable things your venue does, like donating a portion of event proceeds or donating food to local shelters, or make it known that you're a nonprofit venue.



## EFFECTIVE WEB COPY

**At the end of the day, people want to deal with real people.** So make sure you're coming across as a relatable human! Your web copy is often a couple's first impression of you, so don't be afraid to let your personality shine through.

*Here's how to connect with couples through the words on your website:*

- **Be Conversational.** Avoid marketing speak or industry jargon and write your web copy from the heart. Inject some personality into your text to keep the information from being too dry or technical.
- **Be Crystal Clear.** Keep text simple and concise. Try to get your point across in as little words as possible! You'll also want to triple check your spelling and grammar. Ask some trusted colleagues to proofread.
- **Format.** Format any big blocks of text with **bolding** and • bullet points so that it's easily skimmed. Break up text with images to keep the user's interest.
- **Make It About THEM.** Craft your brand story and web copy around the couple and how you can help bring their distinct vision to life.



## CONTACT FORM

**You want your website to be a lead capture machine!** And while you don't necessarily *need* a contact form if your phone number and email are readily available on your site, having one will make it easier on couples, help with conversions, and help you track where your leads are coming from.

### **FOLLOW THESE TIPS TO OPTIMIZE YOUR CONTACT FORM:**

- **Keep It Concise.** Contact forms must be clear and easy to fill out to be effective. Only ask for the information you absolutely need. The longer the form, the fewer the number of people that will fill it out. Make the "barrier" to contact you as low as possible by keeping the form brief and easy to answer.
- **Make it Mobile-Friendly.** Do what you can to make the mobile experience seamless. This may include larger fields or the use of radio buttons or dropdown options to save space and keep typing to a minimum.
- **Set Up an Automated Reply.** You should personally respond to every lead within 1 business day. But we all want immediate gratification—which is why you need an automated email to be sent to the user *right after* they hit the submit button. You'll also want a nice "Thank you!" message to pop up once they hit submit, so they'll know their form went through.



## TRACKING

Sure, you should include a "How Did You Hear About Us?" or "What Wedding Websites Have You Been Using?" field on your contact form, but don't let that be your be-all and end-all of lead tracking!

**We highly recommend using some form of analytics.** We use [Google Analytics](#) at Here Comes The Guide, which is a super robust and completely free way to track where your website's visitors are coming from and how they use your website.

### WEBSITE ANALYTICS

Web analytics will help you see which websites drive traffic to your website, but can also give you other useful information, like:

- **Which page on your website gets the most traffic?**
- **Which page do most people land on?**
- **What geographic regions do your users come from?**



## SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION

### READY TO TACKLE SOME ENTRY-LEVEL SEO?

We've put together a PDF of SEO tips for beginners in this module so you can improve your website's ranking—even if you're a total novice!