

# Digital sustainability

# The SmartAlpaca approach to digital sustainability

Digital work isn't always as clean as it looks. Websites, servers, emails, and meetings all come with a footprint, even if we don't always see it.

At SmartAlpaca Marketing, we try to be mindful of the impact our work has – on the planet, on our time, and on the people we work with. Here's how we approach sustainability in the way we run our business and work with clients.

## Building digital foundations that last

We don't like waste – and that includes digital waste. That's why we focus on building marketing assets that are made to last: messaging frameworks that grow with your company, websites that stay fresh and user-friendly (even years down the line), and content strategies that support long-term goals.

We also build for performance, not just for show. Lightweight sites are faster to load, and that makes them easier on the planet: fewer megabytes means fewer emissions from data transfer and processing. One single website may not make a huge difference, but it adds up.

Short version: we build things to last, not things you'll have to redo next year.

## Rethinking the digital footprint

Behind every website, every photo, and every video, there's an energy cost. Hosting, processing, and transferring data all require electricity; and depending on where that electricity comes from, it can carry a hefty carbon footprint. Digital isn't necessarily green, but it has become an important part of our daily life.

That's why we take digital sustainability seriously.

We host most WordPress websites with [Cloudbabove](#), a UK-based provider powered by 100% renewable energy. They're not just green on paper; they regularly review and report on their environmental impact, and we like how they pair sustainability with top-notch

customer service. When Cloudabove isn't the best fit for a client, we always try to recommend other green and sustainable providers.

We also pay close attention to other tools we use and recommend. Many developers launch software and plugins without long-term support or follow-through, and even abandon and replace those before their time. That's why we'll usually recommend premium tools that are well-supported by trusted developers.

The way we store and manage assets matters too.

- We make sure files are only saved once, not duplicates scattered in multiple folders.
- We prefer smaller files and images to oversized ones when they'll do the job.
- We also design our websites to reuse assets efficiently, rather than uploading the same image or document multiple times.

One final note about using sustainable digital tools and software; in the tech world, greenwashing is everywhere. Sustainability badges, promises of carbon neutrality, vague commitments to "doing better"; we pay close attention and look behind the words and the PR strategy.

## Choosing a lifestyle that supports conscious work

Remote work doesn't automatically make a company more sustainable, but it can open the door to better choices. Working remotely means fewer emissions, no daily commutes, and no office buildings to heat, cool, or maintain. That alone makes a difference – but for us, it's also part of a larger commitment to living with less and working with intention.

Each of us has built a life around what matters to us. Sandrine lives off-grid on a small olive farm, Mellissa lives in a rural village in one of Spain's least populated regions, Sarah lives on a farm in Ireland, and Flavia slow-travels the world as a digital nomad – her entire office fits into a backpack.

Living this way lets us be more conscious about what we consume, how we spend our time, and the kind of work we take on. It also gives us the flexibility to set fair prices based on the quality of our work, not the cost of keeping up with city life. Less overhead means less pressure, and more space to do good work.

## Designing workflows that respect everyone's time

Over the years, we've developed a workflow that's smooth and efficient, because we don't believe in dragging things out or making clients jump through hoops. We limit in-person meetings to crucial touchpoints (like a discovery visit or a messaging workshop), and everything else runs online.

- We run our meetings through a website that allows us to keep recordings, transcripts, and notes - all in one place; no additional software required
- We use Slack (mostly internally, sometimes with client teams too) to cut down on long email threads.
- We structure our projects so clients can give feedback quickly and easily, and stay up to speed without having to manage yet another thing.

What surprises most people is how little time they end up spending on the project. We create a clear checklist of what we need from them ahead of time, so there's no need for a lot of back-and-forth and additional requests. On video calls, we know what we're looking for and ask strategic questions. And last but not least, we do our homework; including looking at what you've got already, and additional research as needed.

This allows us to pull things together in a way that feels natural and easy, even when it's a complicated project.

## Working with clients who care

We love working with wildlife and nature conservation organisations, but not all of our clients fall into that category. With any prospect, we look for an alignment in values; if we don't feel the prospect's company makes a positive impact on people or the planet, we reserve the right to say no - and refer them to someone we know works specifically with their industry.

## Our vision: shrinking the digital footprint

Digital will never be fully green; every click comes with a cost, even if we can't see it. However, digital communication is a part of our daily life, and it's not going away.

That's why we try to contribute to the digital marketing industry in a way that may not erase its footprint, but we aim to shrink it where we can. We do this by making intentional choices and by helping our clients make better informed decisions as well.

**AI**

# How We Use AI at SmartAlpaca (2025 update)

At SmartAlpaca Marketing, we believe in being completely open about our processes and tools, so we want to share exactly how we incorporate AI into our work while staying true to our values of quality, authenticity, and client confidentiality.

## Opportunities and challenges with AI tools

These days, AI is everywhere. From Siri and Alexa to your email client trying to finish your sentences, it's hard to find a digital platform that doesn't use some form of artificial intelligence. But not all AI tools are equally useful or functional, as [illustrated by these hilarious famous AI disasters](#).

When it comes to using AI in marketing, we've watched the market get flooded with tools promising instant results and magical solutions. Many of these tools churn out generic, inaccurate, or poorly crafted content that simply doesn't meet our standards.

That doesn't mean we don't use AI at all: using the right tools in combination with our expertise (both in writing the right prompts, and recognising good output) has allowed us to deliver better results, faster. This is how we do it.

We use AI as one of the many tools in our toolkit; it's a smart assistant that helps us work better and faster, but doesn't replace human creativity and expert judgment.

## What we use AI for

The primary ways we incorporate AI include:

- Generating initial ideas and exploring creative directions
- Creating first drafts that we can refine and/or flesh out
- Expanding strategic documents with relevant examples
- Generating tentative research and gathering insights

After trying out numerous tools, we mainly use the following AI platforms:

[HotGoss](#) is a secure, platform we use for quick insights and research. HotGoss is built by ethical marketers, for ethical marketers.

[Claude \(Anthropic\)](#) is our go-to tool for initial content creation and creative exploration

We occasionally use [ChatGPT](#) for strategic brainstorming, help with coding, and other conversations.

We continuously try and test new tools for different purposes, as other tools keep getting better. If you're a client and wondering what tools we use to support our work on your account, don't hesitate to ask!

## Quality Assurance

We never simply copy and paste AI-generated content into final deliverables.

Instead, every piece goes through rigorous fact-checking to ensure accuracy. Our team then edits and refines the content, adding expert insights and personalised stories when relevant.

Throughout this process, we carefully align everything with each client's brand voice and objectives. While we might occasionally share AI outputs with a client during our collaborative process, our final deliverables reflect the full value of our expertise and attention to detail.

## Data security and client confidentiality

We don't mess around when it comes to confidential information. We have strict protocols about what information goes into AI systems and what doesn't. Sensitive data only goes into enterprise-level tools with proven security track records – and if a tool doesn't meet security standards, we simply don't use it for that kind of information. We regularly review and update these practices to ensure we're always protecting your data with the latest security measures.

## The results: better work, greater value

Integrating AI into our workflow has transformed how we work, and we're seeing amazing results.



Because AI helps us work through initial drafts and research faster, we can spend more time on the aspects of our work that require human expertise – like strategic thinking and creative problem-solving. We can explore more creative possibilities for each project without getting bogged down in time-consuming drafts. Even better, it allows us to maintain competitive pricing despite rising industry costs, because we're working smarter, not just harder.

AI allows us to deliver higher quality work than ever before, while keeping our services accessible to the organisations that need them.

## Examples of how we use AI

Here's how we've successfully incorporated AI into recent projects:

### Brand voice guidance

For Sunny Simple Living, we used AI to analyse years of existing blog posts and create a [comprehensive brand voice guide](#). New content created using this guide – combined with our expertise and thorough review process – is spot-on: this allows us to batch-create more content and schedule it ahead of time.

### Marketing roadmap

To wrap up our work on a fundraising consultancy's website, they needed a clear [roadmap for their future marketing efforts](#). We gave our AI tool a timeline to follow, and it fleshed out our recommendations into a clear document with instructions for every step.

While we would have needed to charge a premium price for this type of service in the past, AI allowed us to add this practical and actionable advice to our offboarding package at no extra cost to the client.

### Content writing

Our work with [manta ray conservation articles](#) demonstrates our balanced and process-driven approach.

- The client shares their expert insights our article ideas via voice message or email

- We use AI to create an initial draft
- Our team conducts extensive fact-checking and fleshes out the article...
- Before returning it for client approval.

This workflow ensures scientific accuracy while incorporating the client's personal expertise and insights. Again, it allows us to batch-create quality content that keeps driving content to the website - and we can use the extra time to support the client in other ways.

## Database development

For a [chicken breed library project](#), we leveraged AI to generate an initial CSV including data about selected breeds. After uploading this CSV to the database, we can now manually review each record, add images, and publish each chicken breed record after extensive verification.

Having AI create a CSV that includes all the necessary information about the chicken breeds we selected saved us days, if not weeks of preliminary research. It is much easier to look up and fact-check existing information, than it is to find the right information in the first place.

## Our AI philosophy: enhancement, not replacement

While some agencies proudly advertise "100% human-written content," we believe in using tools that help us serve our clients better. Our approach allows us to scale our work efficiently without compromising on quality and keep our services accessible through competitive pricing.

At its core, we believe good marketing is about connecting people with people. AI is simply one of many tools we use to create those connections for ourselves and for our clients. As AI technology continues to evolve, we will continue to thoughtfully integrate tools that enhance our work while maintaining the human touch that makes working with us special.

We love talking about our tools and workflows. If you have questions about any of the above, don't hesitate to reach out!

**SEO**

# "Common Sense" SEO: a Practical Approach

When clients explore the possibility of SEO (Search Engine Optimisation) for their website, they often imagine a complex world of keyword research, technical optimisation, and ongoing investments. While that approach works well for a lot of brands, it's a total waste of money for others.

At its core, SEO is nothing more than helping search engines understand what your website is about and whether or not they should recommend it to searchers. Think of them as librarians trying to match readers with the right books. Your job is to make the search engine's work easier by properly labeling and organising your content, and making sure visitors get exactly what they're looking for.

## Why traditional SEO might not be your best investment

Fact: as a conservation organization, you're probably not competing for highly commercial keywords that guarantee loads of traffic - those battles are fought by companies with massive marketing budgets and dedicated SEO teams.

Keyword research is expensive: it takes an expert anywhere between a day and several weeks to find all relevant keywords and turn their research into recommendations or an SEO strategy. They might go down several rabbit holes to exhaust all possibilities and find those hidden gems - search terms and phrases that directly relate to what you do, get a decent amount of traffic, and aren't being used much by other websites yet.

SEO also isn't an overnight magic trick: once you've found those relevant keywords, you'll need to consistently apply them to your website - and it usually takes 4-6 months for search engines to take notice and your SEO strategy to start paying off.

This all requires a considerable investment (if you want it done right)... which may not always get you a great return on investment.

That's why we often go with a "common sense" approach to keyword research and SEO:

- Optimising your website for search engines – making sure your foundations are set up right
- Finding some “common sense keywords” so people who do search for your organisation can find it easily
- Posting fresh content regularly and updating old content as needed, signaling to search engines your website is being kept up-to-date and reflects the newest information.

Not sure if investing in SEO is the right step for you? [Schedule a no-pressure discovery call](#) to find out and/or to get a quick SEO audit for your website.

## Common Sense SEO: Minimum Viable Actions

Here's what every small to mid-sized conservation organisation should do, regardless of budget:

### 1. Technical Basics

Search engines prioritize websites that provide a good user experience. That starts with technical fundamentals:

- Ensure your website loads reasonably quickly – slow sites frustrate visitors and rank lower in search results
- Make sure it works well on mobile devices – most people will view your site on phones or tablets
- Create a clear site structure with logical navigation – this helps both visitors and search engines understand your content
- Set up HTTPS security to protect your visitors and improve search ranking

Getting these basics right signals to search engines that your website is trustworthy and user-friendly. Plus, a well-functioning website makes it easier for supporters to engage with your mission instead of getting lost (and ultimately giving up) trying to find the information they're looking for.

## 2. Website structure

Creating a clear site structure with logical navigation isn't just necessary for your visitors to find their way around – it also helps search engines understand your content. Ideally, your website would need

- A homepage that tells people all about your mission and directs them to sub-pages if you have those
- An about page describing your mission and work, and listing key team member and their roles
- A contact page with clear contact information, including locations
- Individual pages for major projects
- At least one “blog” of some sort – these could be resources, articles, stories, podcast episodes, press releases – anything you could post regularly to add fresh content to your website.
- (And, of course, a privacy policy and cookie banner – while not as essential for SEO, we would be amiss not to mention these here!)

This core content helps establish your organization's credibility and makes it easier for interested parties to reach out. It also provides natural opportunities to include relevant keywords without it feeling forced.

## 3. On-page optimisation

These elements help search engines understand what each page or post is about:

- Clear page titles that say exactly what the page is about
- A descriptive excerpt (meta description) for each page or post, including (common sense) keywords if relevant
- Headers (H1, H2, etc.) to organize content logically and make it scannable
- Include common sense keywords (see below) in key places
- Name your images with descriptive file names and alt text (helps with both accessibility and image search)

Good organisation makes your information more findable and useful.

# A common sense approach to keyword research

## Stay close to home

While you might not outrank National Geographic for "wildlife conservation," you can absolutely own searches related to:

- Your organisation's name and variations
- Project names and locations
- Key staff members' names and titles
- Unique terms or methodologies you've developed
- Local initiatives you're running

## Start with your audience

Put yourself in the shoes of someone who would visit your website. When would someone search for content that should lead them to your website? Some examples:

- A student researching a specific conservation project
- A potential donor looking up your organisation's name or searching for organisations in your field
- A local resident checking your latest community initiatives or local projects
- Journalists researching stories related to your work or fact-checking details about your organisation
- People looking for volunteering opportunities

The answers to these questions are your real keywords – and they're probably quite different from what an SEO tool would suggest.

## Use the words they would use

A lot of us (humans) suffer from the "curse of knowledge": we don't know how much we actually know. And especially if you're an expert at something, using the correct terms for everything or language you'd use internally, might not always resonate with your readers – let alone be the words they're searching for.

For instance, the correct name for a female alpaca is “hembra”; however, people looking to find out more about alpacas might not know this yet. So while an article on the topic will reflect you know the correct nomenclature, you also need to include more basic language to get traffic from organic search.

## Answer real questions

Create content that addresses what people actually ask about your work in real life. This approach, also featured in the best-selling book [They Ask, You Answer](#), focuses on authentic communication rather than keyword optimisation.

Think about:

- Questions you frequently get at community meetings
- Emails you receive from supporters
- Topics that come up in conversations with stakeholders or visitors
- Common misconceptions about your work
- Questions that arise during volunteer orientations

Turning these conversations into website content helps to share useful information that naturally includes the language your audience uses.

## Ongoing SEO and content creation

Fresh content shows that your organization is active and engaged. That doesn't mean you need to post often; twice a week is good if you're aiming for big organic traffic with high-volume keywords, but overkill if that's not the case. Every other week or even once a month is plenty if the main objective is to show search engines (and visitors) your website's not dead or abandoned.

Post regularly: better to schedule a post to publish once a month, than to post every week for 3 weeks – and then nothing for 3 months.

Examples of content you could post:

- Share new campaigns and initiatives
- Create a post every time you get mentioned in the press or someone in your organisation does a podcast interview



- Ask a volunteer to update your audience on an ongoing project or share their experience working with your organisation
- Answer questions from your followers (see previous section)

Regular updates give search engines a reason to keep coming back to your site, and more importantly, they keep your supporters informed about your work.

You may also want to update information as needed:

- Keep track of posts that will need an update later (e.g. if an article mentions congress will be voting on new regulations soon, post an update after the vote)
- Remove posts that are no longer relevant; when you do this, make sure you place a redirect instead so people don't just end up on a 404 error page
- Occasionally review older posts for broken links or outdated information

## When to invest more in SEO

There are specific situations when it makes sense to expand your SEO efforts. For example:

- If you're launching a campaign or running an initiative that could attract significant search traffic
- When you're competing for grants or funding where online visibility matters
- If you have a webshop (ecommerce)
- If people are searching for information about your topic or location, even if they don't know your specific organisation

However, only consider expanding your SEO efforts when you have the resources to sustain a longer-term strategy. SEO isn't a one-time effort – it requires ongoing attention and regular updates to stay effective.

Here at SmartAlpaca Marketing, we build websites and write content that can either be based on extensive keyword research, "common sense", or somewhere in between. We'll determine which option is right for you when we know more about your organisation's goals and needs!

# Storybrand

# Story-based marketing for conservation organisations with StoryBrand

Every day, vital conservation work goes unnoticed because it isn't communicated in a way that resonates with potential supporters. It's not because the work isn't important; it's because the story isn't clear.

The StoryBrand framework, based on Donald Miller's book [Building a StoryBrand](#), enables brands to clarify their brand's story. In its most basic form, it's about making your messaging more customer-centric (instead of company-centric) – and through the years, StoryBrand certified professionals have been successfully applying it for charities and non-profit organisations... with a twist.

## The communication challenge in conservation

Conservation organisations often face a unique communication paradox: the work is complex, involving intricate ecosystems, long-term research, and complicated solutions. But to secure funding and support, this complexity needs to be translated into communication that inspires action from diverse audiences, from local communities to potential donors.

Many conservation professionals worry that simplifying their message might compromise its integrity. There's an underlying belief that marketing techniques conflict with conservation values, or that resources spent on communication mean less funding for actual fieldwork.

In reality, unclear communication costs conservation organisations more than just missed opportunities. It results in valuable fieldwork staying invisible, important projects remaining underfunded, and ultimately, less impact for the causes we care about.

## StoryBrand: 7 key elements for your marketing

This is where the StoryBrand framework comes in. At its core, StoryBrand is about clarity – something the conservation world desperately needs. StoryBrand is not about

oversimplifying your work or resorting to clickbait; instead, it's about organising your message in a way that naturally engages your audience while maintaining your credibility.

The StoryBrand framework is all about making your audience the protagonist of your brand's story. Applying the framework hinges on identifying the seven core elements of your marketing; you then use these elements to create clear and consistent communications in all the areas of your work.

These are the 7 key elements in a standard "BrandScript":

- A character (your audience)
- Has a problem (what they're struggling with, that you can help them solve)
- They meet a guide (that's you, the company or organisation that can help them solve that)
- Who gives them a plan (your unique approach)
- And calls them to action
- To help them achieve success...
- And avoid failure.

Identifying these 7 key elements allows companies to create a foundational "BrandScript" that's centred around the audience, their challenges, and their needs.

For most charities and non-profits, the main challenge lies in identifying the audience: from funding providers and large stakeholders to donors, local communities, and other followers – the key is to identify who the different audience segments are – and what each group want most (from you).

Most donors and community members might want to make a meaningful impact on wildlife protection, or to ensure their local marine ecosystem survives for future generations. For bigger donors and companies, they could be looking for a way to lower their carbon footprint or improve their green equity.

Once you've identified who your audience segments are, most organisations choose to create one script for each separate segment, allowing them to speak directly to that group's challenges in each campaign or communication.

However, besides these separate scripts, you'll also need a way to pull these all together into clear messaging for your website and broader campaigns.

## Tweaking StoryBrand for conservation organisations

When working with conservation charities and non-profit organisations, the StoryBrand framework takes a unique turn. Instead of positioning your audience as the hero, we'll often focus on the cause itself.

### 1. Character (the cause)

Your character is “the world as it should be” – a thriving ecosystem, protected species, or restored habitats. For example, if you're working on coral reef conservation, your character's “aspirational identity” might be a vibrant, resilient reef ecosystem that supports abundant marine life and coastal communities.

### 2. Problem (current challenges)

This is where we address the gap between the ideal and current reality. What's preventing your cause from reaching its full potential? What are the current threats, challenges, problems holding things back?

Explore the topic in-depth – for each problem you come across, ask yourself “why is this a problem?”

As part of this exercise, delve into what makes it an issue for each of your audience segments. “Why should they care about this?”

### 3. Guide (your organisation)

Once we've established the challenges we're facing, it's time for your organisation to step in as the guide. You have the expertise and dedication to bridge this gap. Show your authority in the matter by mentioning your experience and measurable impacts.

## 4. Plan (your unique approach)

As the “guide” who’s going to bring about real change, you’ll need to tell people how you plan to do this.

What’s the unique approach your organisation is taking to save the polar bear or protect coral reefs? This is where you may want to mention your main programs or activities.

Break down your conservation strategy into clear, digestible steps.

## 5. Call to action

It doesn’t stop at telling people how your organisation can make a difference; if you want to get more people on board, you’ll need a clear call to action.

Be specific about how people can contribute. Instead of a vague “Support Us” button, try “Adopt a Coral Reef” or “Join Our Citizen Science Program.”

In some cases, you may need several CTAs to address multiple audience segments or campaigns; pick one to be your primary call to action (for your primary audience segment).

If you’re not sure how to do this for your organisation, talk to a StoryBrand certified guide. You can [book a call through this link](#).

# Practical application for conservation organisations

When implementing StoryBrand in your conservation work, this is the workflow we’d follow:

- Get clear on the main elements above before you start. Go through the exercise and create your foundational “BrandScript” first (or even, one script for every audience segment as well as one focusing on the cause), this helps save time on the next steps.
- Then, write or tweak your website’s homepage. This is often where the framework can make the most immediate impact.
- For fundraising campaigns, use the framework to create a narrative arc that takes potential donors from concern to action.

On every other page, in every campaign, every post, every email, follow these 3 steps:

- Be clear on who your audience is. You don't have to say it or call them out – but before you start writing or recording something, be clear on who you're creating it for.
- Start with the problem. If your audience is not clear on what the problem is, they may not understand why you need their help. Why do we need better rules for manta ray tourism? Why should we donate to something that's got nothing to do with me?
- One topic, one call to action. If you need more people to get on board with a program or campaign, don't confuse them by mixing different stories onto one page or post. E.g. an email meant to find volunteers to protect a near-extinct local tree species should not contain the announcement for an unrelated fundraiser event. Sticking to a single narrative makes your call to action much stronger and more effective.

## Moving forward

Your conservation work is too important to go unnoticed. By implementing the StoryBrand framework, you can create clear, compelling messages that drive action without compromising your scientific integrity.

Ready to transform how you communicate your conservation message? Let's start with a conversation. Book a free 30-minute call to explore how applying StoryBrand to your communications can help your conservation work reach more people and make a bigger impact.

**WP vs SS**



Is WordPress the right platform for your website?

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We've all heard conflicting opinions about WordPress websites. Some swear by their flexibility, while others warn about their complexity.

As we build websites for mission-driven companies and organizations, we've seen different sides of this story:

- People coming to us with a broken WP website – because someone built it, but they were unable to update and maintain it
- People who think they need WordPress because “it's the best”, not realising it may not be the best option for their needs
- People who try to DIY a WordPress website, or hire a sub-par designer/developer (getting sub-par results)
- People who don't want WordPress because of stories like the above, not realising they're making things needlessly complicated

If you're wondering whether WordPress is the platform your website should get built on, this article is for you.

Note: there are two types of WordPress: this article is about the “full” WP experience by wordpress.org, which allows you to self-host and fully customise a website. [Learn more about the difference here.](#)

We've listed the pros and cons of WordPress websites below:

Pro: Unmatched functionality customisation

WordPress's greatest strength lies in its functionality options: there's a reason why major brands often use WordPress.

The platform can be extended to include:

- Complex booking systems
- Membership areas or Learning Management Systems, like the kindyRock membership site we built
- Advanced E-commerce functionality
- Custom databases, like the plant library we built for My Garden Life or the manta ray database on mantarayadvocates.com
- Interactive features
- Integration with virtually any third-party tool

And many, many more.

Pro: Next-level design opportunities

While WordPress is not the only platform professional designers love, it probably is the most powerful one – where design meets functionality and user-friendliness.

The design freedom makes it very popular (and a great choice) for brands who want a unique and out-of-the-box experience for their visitors.

Pro: Content management made simple

Once properly set up, WordPress offers extensive content management capabilities. Few other platforms make it this easy to manage large amounts of content (e.g. blog, database, author profiles, resources, media,...)

- Creating and organising hundreds of pages, posts, and custom content types becomes manageable – and categories and tags are just as easy to manage and customise/optimize.
- It's a great platform to build user-friendly databases – like [this manta ray database](#) or [this plant library](#)

- Making basic changes is straightforward – e.g. adding new blog posts, updating text, swapping images, etc.
- Thanks to the multiple user roles, you can give different team members various levels of access – e.g. writers can draft posts while administrators maintain full control.

Con: The learning curve

The challenge, however, lies in creating the website. While WordPress markets itself as easy to use, building a good-looking and completely functional WP website is anything but simple.

Sure, you can grab a template from the extensive template library – but that gets you exactly that, a template that hundreds of others have already used on their website... and customising that template to meet your needs is more involved than when using a more WYSIWYG platform like Squarespace or Kajabi.

A proper WordPress setup is technically complex and involves:

- Understanding hosting requirements
- Managing security measures
- Configuring caching
- Setting up backups
- Choosing and testing compatible plugins
- Optimising for speed and SEO

On top of this, creating a WordPress website requires substantial design skills – unless you want to customise a template (which doesn't always make for professional-looking results). You'll need to understand UX principles, have extensive knowledge of responsive design, and be familiar with current web standards. You'll need to manually optimise and test the website for accessibility, speed, compatibility with modern browsers, and of course optimise it for different types of devices.

Plugins are also often a cause of concern for new WordPress developers: with thousands of plugins to choose from, it's easy to get carried away and either add too many plugins to your website (potentially slowing down the site, or causing conflicts down the line) – or

choose plugins that aren't as good as they seem. Using premium plugins (whether paid or free) is the only way to ensure they will stay supported down the line.

In our experience, DIY attempts by business owners typically result in months of frustration, resulting in a subpar website. We've seen many solopreneurs or small organisations not launch their website after months or longer – they'd often come to us after having tried it themselves for a substantial period of time.

Similarly, we've seen bigger companies asking their IT department to (semi-)custom-code a WordPress site, turning these into a lengthy development process – and long-term updating/maintenance headaches.

Con: Ongoing maintenance requirements

This is perhaps the most important consideration: WordPress websites need regular attention.

WordPress core, themes, and plugins need regular updates to maintain security, ensure compatibility, fix bugs, and add new features.

And without proper and regular maintenance, plugin conflicts can break the functionality of the website and your website may become vulnerable to security issues. (I say “may”, but the amount of people who come to us with a broken and non-functional or hacked website is staggering.)

When is WordPress the right choice?

WordPress might be right for you if:

- You are looking for next-level design and functionality, creating a unique website your visitors don't want to leave
- You have a lot of content on your website already (e.g. a blog or database), or you plan to regularly publish content
- You require specific functionality or integrations – now, or in the future
- You have a budget for professional development and maintenance
- You're willing to invest in ongoing website care

Consider other options If:

- You're just starting out and expect major changes soon
- You need a simple, low-maintenance website
- You have a limited budget
- You don't have time or resources for regular updates
- You need a basic online presence without complex features

In these last cases, platforms like Squarespace often make more sense as they have lower maintenance requirements and allow you to easily make changes to your website yourself.

If you end up choosing WordPress...

WordPress can be an excellent choice for businesses that need flexibility and customisation—but it's not for everyone. Success with WordPress depends on proper implementation and ongoing maintenance by experienced professionals.

If you choose to build your website on WordPress, make sure to

- Have a clear plan for your website before you start – this can save you time and money
- Work with experienced professionals who know the platform inside and out
- Factor in ongoing maintenance costs (and consider a maintenance plan/service to avoid downtime)

At SmartAlpaca Marketing, we can help you clarify your message, strategise your marketing, and build a website that can stand the test of time – on a platform that fits your needs and preferences.

Need help deciding if WordPress is right for your business? Scheduling a free consultation to evaluate your specific needs and recommend the best solution – whether that's WordPress or an alternative platform.

# 10 things to optimise

# 10 things each website should be optimised for in 2025

Once upon a time, all you needed to build a website was basic HTML knowledge and a decent eye for design.

Today's websites need to work for search engines, AI systems, screen readers, mobile phones, tablets, and dozens of different browsers. They need to load fast, stay secure, and ideally not destroy the planet in the process.

Many of these optimisations are invisible until something goes wrong. Your website might look great to you but be completely unusable for someone with a disability, penalised by Google for slow loading times, or ignored by AI tools because the structure is unclear.

Whether you're building a new website or wondering if your current one measures up, here are the ten things every modern website needs to get right.

## 1. Performance and speed

If your website takes too long to load, visitors will leave before all the content appears. Even worse, when Google notices your slow loading times, it can drop your search rankings accordingly.

Page speed isn't just about user experience anymore – it directly affects your search engine visibility, conversion rates, and even your carbon footprint. A slow website uses more energy to load and frustrates visitors before they can learn about your important work.

To improve performance and speed, focus on:

- **Image and file compression** – making images smaller and using formats like WebP that load faster than heavy PNGs
- **Caching systems** – storing copies of your website content so it loads faster for repeat visitors
- **Clean, efficient code** – removing unnecessary features and plugins that slow things down
- **Content delivery networks (CDN)** – serving your website files from servers closer to where your visitors are located

- **Core Web Vitals monitoring** – tracking specific measurements for how fast your site loads and responds

*At SmartAlpaca, we build websites with performance in mind from the start. We keep the codebase lean and avoid cluttering pages with bloated features that slow things down. We also set up monitoring tools so we can catch performance issues before they affect your visitors or search rankings.*

## 2. Search engine optimisation

Search engines decide which websites to show based on how well they understand your content and how trustworthy your site appears. Without proper SEO, even the most important conservation work can stay hidden from people who are actively searching for ways to help.

When optimising your website for search engines, you might consider:

- **Keyword research and implementation** – finding the terms people actually use when searching for your work, and including them naturally in your content
- **Technical SEO foundations** – making sure search engines can crawl and index your site properly with clean URLs, sitemaps, and proper redirects
- **Content structure and hierarchy** – organising your pages with clear headings that help both readers and search engines understand your content
- **Meta descriptions and title tags** – writing compelling summaries that appear in search results and encourage people to click through
- **Local SEO setup** – making sure people in your area can find you when searching for local conservation efforts or volunteer opportunities

*We approach SEO strategically, determining whether extensive keyword research and competition analysis will benefit your organisation – or if a simpler approach focusing on foundational optimisation makes more sense for your goals and audience.*

## 3. Large language models and AI systems

AI tools like ChatGPT, Claude, and Google's AI responses are becoming the go-to way for people to research organisations and get answers to their questions.



If your website isn't structured in a way these systems can understand, you're missing out on an increasing number of referrals and mentions.

AI systems work differently than search engines – they need clear, well-structured content to understand and accurately represent your work. When information isn't clear, AI tools may give users incorrect details – or miss your organisation entirely when someone asks about conservation groups in your area.

Here's what helps your content show up accurately:

- **Clear content structure** – use proper headings, logical page organisation, and descriptive section breaks that show how information is related
- **Factual accuracy and citations** – make sure all information is correct and link to sources when possible, as AI systems prioritise reliable information
- **Key information in obvious places** – include your mission, location, contact info, and major projects in clear, easy-to-find spots
- **Marking up your content** – adding metadata that tells AI what kind of organisation you are and what you do
- **Regular updates** – keeping your content up-to-date helps AI systems provide the most relevant information about your work

We structure websites so AI tools can pick up the right facts and context, and help the public find accurate, up-to-date information about the topics you care about.

## 4. Accessibility and screen readers

Around 15% of the world's population lives with some form of disability, but many websites are completely unusable for people who rely on screen readers, keyboard navigation, or other assistive technologies.

In many places, accessible websites are also a legal requirement, and a lack of accessibility can block funding or lead to complaints (and lawsuits, if you're in the US).

To make your website more accessible:

- **Alt text** for images – describe images so screen readers can read them out loud
- **Proper structure** – use H1, H2, and H3 heading tags in order so screen readers can navigate the content

- **Keyboard navigation** – make sure all interactive elements can be accessed without a mouse
- **Colour contrast** – check that your text is easy to read for people with visual impairments or colour blindness
- **Form labels and error messages** – clearly explain what's required and what went wrong if a form submission fails
- **Video captions and transcripts** – provide alternatives for visitors who can't hear or prefer to read

We build accessibility into every site from the start and test using real tools to make sure your content is available to everyone who needs it.

## 5. Responsive design for all devices

Your website visitors aren't just using desktop computers anymore. They're browsing on phones during their commute, tablets while lounging at home, and everything in between – from tiny smartphone screens to massive desktop monitors.

A website that looks perfect on your laptop might be completely unusable on a phone, with tiny text, overlapping buttons, or forms that can't be filled out properly. This makes it hard for people donate, sign up, or share your content.

We make sure your website is fully responsive by:

- Designing **layouts that adapt** to different screen sizes and orientations, and prioritise key content on smaller screens
- Creating **touch-friendly elements** like buttons, forms, and menus that work well on mobile
- **Prioritising key content** so it's easy to access on smaller screens
- Optimising for **mobile loading speed** and usability
- **Testing** on a wide range of real devices and browsers

We test every website on multiple screen sizes before launch, so that people get the best experience, whether they're on a phone or a computer.

## 6. Modern browser compatibility

When your site launches, it should work smoothly across all major modern browsers — including Chrome, Firefox, Safari, Edge, and Brave.

Some newer features might look or work slightly differently on different systems, and that's okay. What matters is your site doesn't rely on experimental features that break when you open it in the wrong browser.

To ensure browser compatibility, we test your site in the most-used modern browsers — and when we handle ongoing maintenance on WordPress, we also keep an eye on browser changes and make sure your website stays fully compatible.

## 7. Security and privacy

Website security isn't just about protecting your own data; it's about safeguarding your visitors' information and maintaining their trust. A hacked website can damage your reputation and compromise supporter data. A secure prevents data leaks, defacement, spam attacks, and other problems that could damage your credibility.

Data privacy is just as important, and regulations like GDPR give us clear ground rules for protecting our visitor's user data. Even simple contact forms collect personal information that needs proper processing.

Here's how we build security into every project:

- **Https encryption** – protecting data sent between your website and your visitors
- **Software updates** – keeping your platform and plugins patched and secure
- **Secure logins** – using strong passwords and two-factor authentication for staff and users
- **Data protection compliance** – properly handling, storing, and protecting any personal information you collect

We use **premium plugins** to secure your website. And if you're on a maintenance plan, we keep your software up-to-date and take regular backups, so your website can be restored if something goes wrong.

## 8. Sustainability and carbon footprint

Every website uses energy — to store its files on a server, deliver its content worldwide, and load on someone's device. Digital sustainability matters to our clients, and it matters to us.

To reduce your website's environmental impact, we:

- Choose **green hosting** providers, who use servers powered by renewable energy
- Keep **file sizes** as small as possible without compromising on quality, to reduce the amount of data that needs to be transferred for each page visit
- Use clean, **efficient code** and avoid unnecessary scripts or clutter code
- Using **lazy loading** (only loading images and features when they're actually needed) and smart asset management (avoiding duplicates and repetition)
- Conduct regular **content audits** to remove outdated files and unused features

We've shared more about our approach to digital sustainability in [this article](#).

## 9. User experience (UX) design

A beautiful website is worthless if visitors can't figure out how to use it. User experience (UX) design focuses on making websites intuitive, helpful, and easy to navigate — regardless of whether someone comes in with a clear goal in mind, or is simply browsing.

A good user experience means visitors can find what they're looking for without having to think too hard. It means your website draws them into a journey, they follow the path laid out for them, and everything (words, imagery, and layout) works together to get your visitors where you need them to go. When done well, UX design makes your site feel intuitive and trustworthy. If not, people will leave without taking action.

Good UX design addresses:

- **Clear navigation** — making it easy to find things on a website
- **Logical information architecture** — organising content in ways that make sense to your visitors
- **Intuitive user flows** — structuring pages to match how visitors think
- Focus on **readability** — Using readable fonts, sizes, and strategic use of white space to make pages easy to scan

- **Consistent design** – using similar layouts and patterns throughout the site

We approach every website project by first understanding your audience and their needs, then designing experiences that make it easy for them to engage. We also apply [StoryBrand](#) principles to help guide your visitors through a clear narrative that builds trust and encourages action.

## 10. Future-proofing and scalability

Your website shouldn't need a rebuild every time something changes. But it also shouldn't be so rigid that you can't grow.

Too often, we encounter websites built without scalability in mind: they break when you try to add new features, need new elements hosted on third-party platforms, can't handle traffic spikes during campaigns, or become impossible to maintain as your scope expands. For growing organisations or those with large amounts of content (blogs, resources, directories), we typically use WordPress (with the Divi builder); when the foundations are solid, this platform can handle growth in content, features, and traffic.

Other organisations need the exact opposite – they need a platform we can “set and forget” so they can focus on their mission, not a website that might break if they don't get to update it for a few months. That's where Squarespace is the perfect choice, as it doesn't require upkeep (Squarespace handles everything from security to performance updates).

Learn more about when we recommend WordPress vs Squarespace [in this article](#).

Aside from the above, here's how we approach future-proofing:

- **Flexible content management** – making it easy for you and your team to edit pages, posts, and other elements
- **SOPs and training** – so you don't need outside help for every little change
- **Evergreen copy** – so you don't need to review your whole website every time something changes
- **Timeless visual design**, so your site doesn't look out to date a year from now

## These aren't details, so don't skip them

Every one of the areas above is essential when you're building or rebuilding a website. Skipping them might save time or money in the short run — but it usually leads to higher long-term costs, or the need for a rebuild far sooner than expected.

If you're looking for a team that knows how to get it right from day one, [schedule a call](#) to talk through your project.

If you're handling it internally, we offer free website consultations for nature and conservation organisations — [read more here](#) and see if it's a fit.