# Website Basics

By Joe Preston, Openherd.com

I know you're all passionate about alpaca farming but would you realistically entertain a farm visit at 11 o'clock on a Sunday night? The truth is that you easily could—and should—business is business, right? So am I pushing night tours as a new twist on alpaca farm marketing?

No, of course not. I'm talking about your farm's website. Potential customers can be getting familiar with what your farm is all about, looking at your animals or store, and getting excited about visiting you from the comfort of their home a hundred miles away, and all while you sleep! Isn't that a marvel? Yet, from our experience at Openherd with talking to hundreds of farms, you're more likely saying to yourself, "it would be a marvel if I ever get my website figured out!"

The reasons many farms don't have a functioning website are either because they don't really know what a farm website is, or they've had difficulty with a previous attempt and gave up at some point in the process. So I'd like to start back at the basics with clearing up what a website is (and is not), then explain the main things you need to have a functioning website, and finally look at different website solutions.

What Is a Website?

I know this is a very basic question but from our experience people have different ideas of what a website is. Many people, for instance, think their Openherd profile is their website. Take a look at the diagram below:


www.openherd.com   www.yourfarm.com
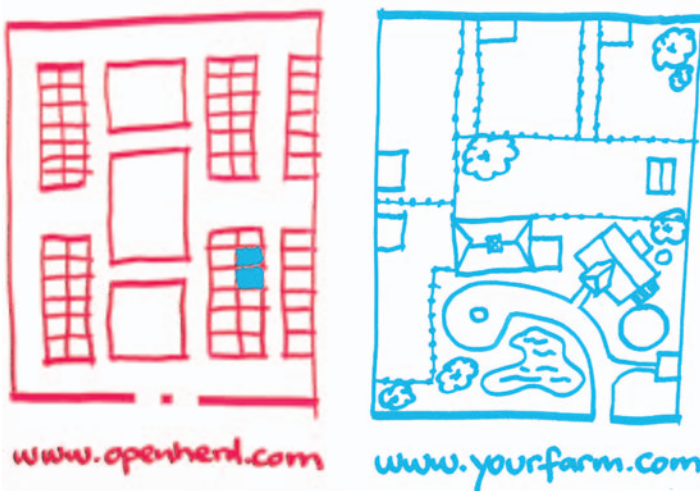
Openherd.com is like an alpaca show—many farms are represented under one roof and you rent stalls for your animals and set up your marketing table. It's a great place for exposure, networking, and participating in group activities, but it's not fully your farm—it's someone else's venue.

On the other hand, www.yourfarm.com (or whatever your website address would be), is like your real farm: The address goes to a place that is exclusively yours, bears your identity, colors, and feel and you are not competing against other farms for attention. If someone called you up and wanted to visit your farm, would you tell them to meet you at the alpaca show or come to your farm? Which would leave them with a better impression of your farm?

So a farm website is not just some informational pages on someone else's website but is your own exclusive website with it's own unique website address. Marketing is first and foremost about engaging people emotionally. People buy what they want, not what they need (55 million people don't need an iPad, but they bought one anyway). So when you have your own website, visitors will be fully immersed in your farm experience, raising their emotional involvement, and making them far more likely to go the next step and get in touch with you.

So now that we have a better idea of what a website is, let's look at the four main things you need in order to have a functioning website:
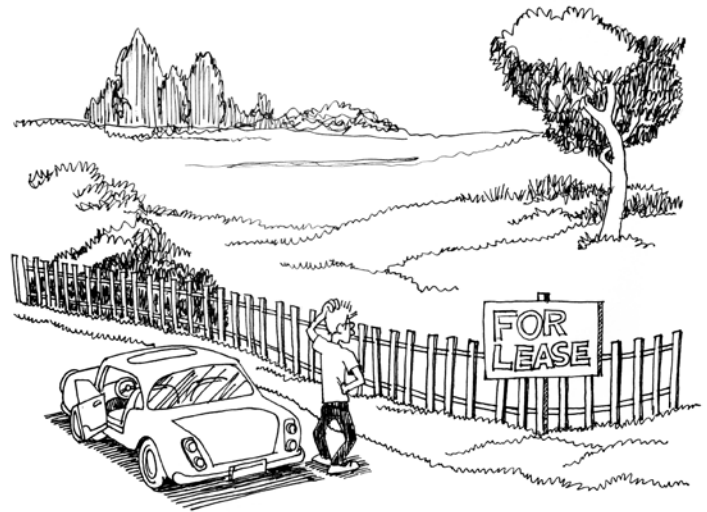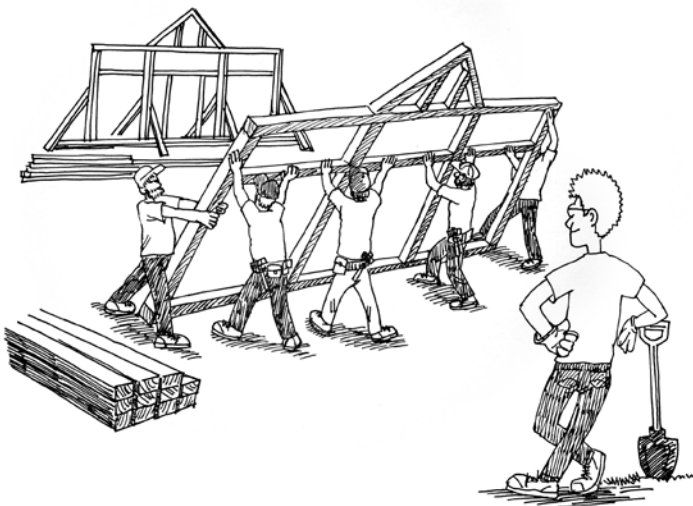

1. Website Space

Imagine that you live in a townhouse and want to start a farm. The first thing you'd do is find some land because your current place isn't set up to be a farm. The same thing goes for a website—you'll need to rent some hard drive space from a company that specializes in website hosting because your home computer isn't set up to be a web server. This is where your website files will be kept and served to someone when they visit your website. So this is your "property" for your new website.
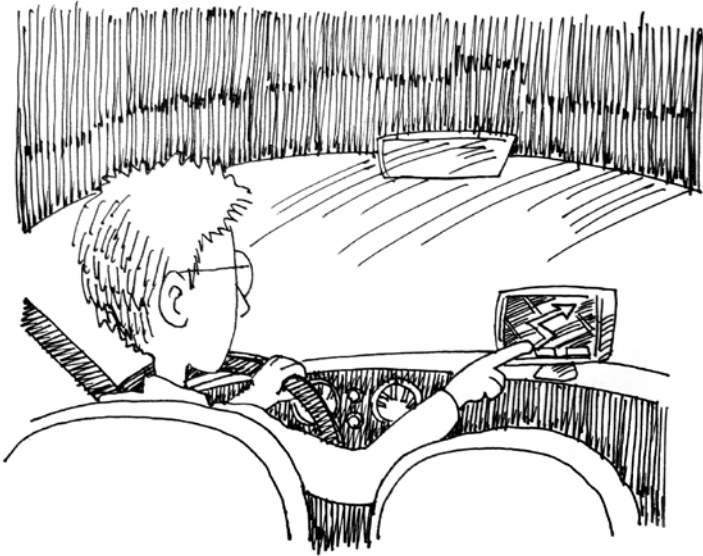
2. Website Address

Now that you have some land, you decide on a unique name for your farm. Your postal address is the information needed to locate your farm but once someone has programmed this into their GPS or has the way memorized, they won't need to refer to your postal address any longer—the GPS or memory will take them to Your Farm. The same thing goes for a unique website address, known as a "domain name." When you sign up for website hosting they will give you a temporary website address but it's not usually very personal or easy to remember. So you'll find a unique domain name that includes your farm name (i.e. www.yourfarm.com), and register that name with a domain registrar company. Most website hosting companies offer domain registration. Just like programming an address into your GPS, once your domain account has the correct technical information for where to find your website files, your visitors will be able to get to your website by just knowing your domain name, www.yourfarm.com. So this is your "name" for your website.

3. Website Design/Construction

Now that you have your land and a unique name for your farm, you'll need to plan your farm, construct some buildings, and put your alpacas there. The same goes for a website—your website hosting is just empty space until you put something there. Since most people don't have the skills to design and build their own website, they'll either hire a company to build one for them or they'll use "do-it-yourself" software. The former is expensive and the latter can be frustrating and time-consuming. So it's understandable that many people have attempted a website but gotten stuck at this point. This step completes your "farm" online and you're ready for business!

4. Website Updates

Now that you have your land, a unique name for your farm, and your property developed into a fully functioning farm, you're going to need to keep it running and in good shape. When visitors come, it'll need to be attractive, well maintained, and have new alpacas and products to look at. The same goes for a website. The first three points are "pre-business" steps. The only step your potential customers will care about is this fourth one—what your website looks like when *they* visit it. Imagine what a turnoff it would be if a potential customer pulled up at your farm, the grass was long, a pile of construction materials out front, and the "Summer Sale" sign in your farm store even though it's November! A website that looks outdated, has old information, or hasn't changed since the last visit is a big turnoff.

Part of the emotional appeal in marketing I mentioned earlier is not just your product but also your personality. People do business with people they like. So if your website has gone to seed, people won't like the idea of doing business with someone who lets that happen.

Getting Going

If you're ready to get your own website going, you're probably wondering, "where do I get started?" The following website options are the most common ones and I have listed some pros and cons for each:

High End Custom Website

This approach will give you most of what you want—a completely custom designed website coded from the ground up and tweaked for search engines. However, it's the most costly way to go (often many thousands), and can take a long time to go through all the stages of design, review, and production. This type of website often comes with a decent self-editing system but don't forget that time is usually a more precious resource than money because everyone only has 24 hours in a day and you can't make time back like you can money. So even though you'll have a "Cadillac" website, you'll need to make sure you have budgeted the time or personnel to make all the updates yourself on top of what you have to update on other websites.

Low-Budget "Custom" Website

Many people are drawn to these attractively-priced "custom" websites but expect to get what you pay for. While this option may seem good enough, you'll likely be paying a web person with a slow turn-around time for all your updates. So even though this saves you money up front, you can end up paying a lot of money over time for all of your updates—equivalent to a nicer website that comes with a self-editing system to do your own updates when you want.

Do-It-Yourself Website

If you have the website design and coding skills then this can save you some money and you can make things the way you want them. However it can be a sink on time and you may never get it finished with all your other responsibilities on the farm. If you do, you'll not only be responsible for updating your content but also your site's code as new web technologies and standards come out. Also, if your web building software becomes obsolete, you may have to buy and learn a new program. You probably didn't leave your previous career to build a website, so unless you want to do this as a part-time job, I would avoid this even if you have the skills because it'll cost you more time than it's worth.

Content Management System (CMS) Website

Many farms go with these shared online editing and design template systems because they're all-inclusive and very affordable. Because the website code, templates, and editing system are centrally administered, costs can be kept low and the quality generally high. Plans typically include website hosting, domain registration, email accounts, shopping carts, blogging, etc., and a user-friendly system for editing your pages. You also don't have to worry about keeping your site's code current because the company does this all for you. On top of this you will get technical support if you need help. However, updating your pages—your sales lists especially—is still going to be the same investment of time as all the other options above.

Openherd "Fully Synchronized" Website

All of the previous options have their pros and cons but they all require valuable time to make updates. With marketing you have to be in as many places as possible but updating a variety of sites separately is a big time burden. So that's why Openherd pioneered the "fully synchronized" website. It is essentially the same as the CMS option except that you don't have to make those time-consuming updates. All you need to do is keep your Openherd pages and sales lists up-to-date and your farm website pulls this information from our database and automatically updates your website. So you get the benefit of great exposure and use of Openherd membership features plus your own website, all in one affordable package. Openherd can even register a domain for you.

Openherd farm website

To learn more, go to **www.openherd.com/join/** or contact us at support@openherd.com or 724-954-3044 and we'll be happy to help find the best solution for you.

Join Openherd Today!

Openherd.com is the industry's largest alpaca marketplace with over 2900 farms represented. Openherd gives you the tools to easily and effectively market online and network with other breeders. A basic profile is free with paid plans that include an online storefront, your own "fully synchronized" farm website, online auctions and more, all managed in one place!

Get started with your online marketing today by going to **www.openherd.com/join**

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