

## HOW TO CHOOSE A WEB DESIGNER



The more experience a designer has, the more skills he or she will bring to your project, to create a sophisticated, intelligent and functional web site. The designer will have more tools, tricks and knowledge to help you accomplish your business goals. So what should you ask your prospective web developer?

### Experience

- How long have they been in the business of web design?
- Can you see their design portfolio?
- How many sites have they developed?
- What areas of web design are they familiar with?
- Do they know how to hand code HTML, or do they only use an HTML editor (hand coding can allow for an extra level of precision that can be difficult to achieve with HTML editors)?
- Do they know JavaScript?
- Do they create the graphics they use?

### Top Quality Customer Service

Equally as important as experience is high quality customer service. After all, what good is having a top designer if he or she is too busy to answer your e-mails or jump in to help with an emergency?

Ask for a list of references and contact some of them. Don't be afraid to ask if the web designer is responsive to their needs and assists them in a timely manner.

### Professional and Original Graphics



The ability to create professional, original web graphics will quickly distinguish the Cousin-Jim-Bob-amateur-designer-wanna-be's from the professionals. Anyone can put words on a page and create links. But only a skilled designer will have a good sense of page layout, know how to create an effective color scheme, and be able to produce tasteful graphics that enhance your web site.

Take a look at other sites the designer has created. Do they demonstrate a considerable range of "styles" or do they use templates? Do the web sites feature original graphics?

If you want a unique online presence to successfully brand your business, you must insist on original graphics. And be sure to confirm that the developer can

create "extras" such as animation or mouse-over effects, if you're interested in including these on your site.

## Pricing



The cost of a professionally designed small business web site can run anywhere from \$500 to \$15,000. To ensure you don't blow your budget, ask for a written estimate. If your project is particularly complex, you may even have to pay for your quote. Ask the developer to break down the costs for your domain name, hosting services, graphics, web development, and marketing fees, so that you have a complete picture of all the costs involved.

Will you be required to put down a deposit on the project? Some firms may ask for half of estimated fees up front, as a deposit. What methods of payment do they accept? Will they accept credit cards or do you have to pay by cash or check?

Do they charge a flat rate, or will you be billed by the hour? Typical hourly Web development fees can range from \$30 to \$200. But beware: cheaper is not always better! Whatever the rate, make sure it's justified by the amount of experience and the skills the developer brings to your project. While a designer who charges \$30 an hour might seem like a great deal at first, they might take twice as long to complete your project.

What items will cost you extra? If there are items that are additional to the estimate you've been provided, make sure to ask for quotes for these as well. And finally, find out what the costs for site maintenance will be once the site is complete. If you'll update your site frequently, this cost is an important one to keep in mind.

## Marketing Savvy

A crème-de-la-crème web site will do you no good unless you can attract a steady stream of traffic to it. With just a few questions, you can quickly gauge the degree of marketing support a developer will provide:

- Will they help you create meta tags for your site?
- Will they register your site with the search engines?
- Which search engines do they submit to?
- Do they mass-submit, or will they submit your site individually to the important search engines?

Note: If they claim to be experts in search engine positioning, check first to see how highly listed their own web site is - it's the proof-in-the-pudding as to whether their techniques work!

## Creativity



One thing you'd better define upfront is how involved your developer will be in the creative process. Unless you're an experienced marketer, you'll probably need at least a little help as you write the copy and plan the layout of your site - will your developer help you develop this content?

Writing for the web is different than writing for print communications. Use someone who's experienced in web copy writing, and you'll ensure that the message, as well as the look of your site, is geared to sell.

Also, be aware of over-creative know-it-all designers who don't respect your input. It's your site, and you should have the opportunity to provide creative input. The key is to find a developer who will listen to your suggestions and work with you, offering ideas and advice to guide you while you plan your site.

## Communication Skills



How easy is your designer to talk to? Do you trust them? Can you understand what they explain to you, or do they use technobabble? And do they take time to listen to your needs? If you are going to have a good long term working relationship, it's crucial that you feel comfortable with one another, and can communicate clearly.

## Delivery Deadlines

Ask how long the development process will take. You might also want to ask their past clients how close the developer came to completing other projects on time. A simple web site could be developed in one or two weeks, while a larger, more intense site could take several weeks or months. If you know what to expect in advance, you'll have a benchmark by which you can evaluate your developer's performance down the track.

## Full Service Offering



Does the developer offer a full range of services? Will they help you acquire a domain name, set up web hosting, market your site, write copy, and add special features to make your site more useful for your business. If you work with a developer who can handle all these details, you'll save time, money, and frustration, as you can rely on their expertise to handle the more technical issues that may arise. And if they don't provide these

services, ask whether they can recommend a company who can. Be sure to get prices from those vendors too, so that the total cost of your site won't sneak up on you.

### **Availability**



Is the person you're considering a full time web developer, or is this just a moonlighting job for them? A full time developer will probably be able to complete your site in a shorter time frame than someone who squeezes you into his or her spare time.

What are the business's operating hours? Are they happy for you to call them with questions? Can they start your project right away? And if you need maintenance down the road, how soon after you submit changes can you expect them to appear on the live site?