



## Selecting a Web Designer or Developer

Before you choosing a designer for your website, step back and ask yourself 3 simple questions:

1. What is the objective of the website?
2. How much are you willing to spend, or how much can you afford to spend on the website?
3. How much time do you have available to spend on the website?

Let's consider each one in turn:

### 1 What is the objective of the website?

Three types of website have been identified here, decide which one suits your purpose best.

#### a) The advert site

This type of site is primarily the company description and contact details. This type of site is probably the cheapest to set up, and requires the least maintenance. Just about any designer should be able to build this type of site very quickly, particularly when using web templates. In this case fancy graphics are not the issue, instead concentrate on the content and the ease of finding the information. Content establishes what you are about, which you want the reader to find readily.

#### b) The sales support office

This site is more complex than the advert site, it should include company description, contact details, feedback form, product specifications, manuals, brochures, and frequently asked questions.

With this kind of site you should be aiming to enhance the company sales opportunities, making information for your customers and your prospective customers easier to find. Graphics and artistic presentation, but again you should concentrate on content and accessing the content. Content **must** be useful, relevant, accurate and kept up to date. This is more difficult as the volume of information increases. Accessing the information should be easy, clear, consistent and intuitive. Site navigation is a key element in the final design.

#### c) The shop

This is a more complex site which consists of company description, contact details, product catalogue and payment system This is an e-commerce venture where problems will be encountered. The problems are not the design or the payment mechanism, but with the integrating the new system to work along with any of your existing sales system and order processes. Unless you're already operating a system involving mail order/catalogue sales, this probably should not be considered as your first web project. Recovering the initial setup costs will be a challenge, and the

cost of running a site like this, both in terms of money and time, will be higher than the cost of running one of the previous types of site.

## **2 How much are you willing to spend, or how much can you afford to spend on the website?**

There are designers to suit most budgets, the larger the project the greater the cost. When commissioning a website bear in mind that the cost for creating the website is a small in comparison to the ongoing running costs. Check what the quoted costs will include;

- Is a domain name included in the cost?
- Is hosting of the website on a suitable server included?
- Will it include email accounts and can they be redirected to your existing accounts?
- What will be the costs of ongoing maintenance and enhancements?

Even for the most basic websites the running costs must cover:

- Domain name rental (check for how long)
- Web space rental
- Maintenance and content updating costs
- Cost of monitoring email accounts

There may be additional work required for existing staff for updating of content and monitoring email. Is there anyone on the existing staff to look after this role, does anyone have the confidence to get involved with techie issues like these? Consider taking on additional staff, or outsourcing.

## **3 How much time do you have available to spend on the website?**

This refers to the ongoing support of the website, not the time involved in the initial creation. The creating of a new website is the exciting tasks at the beginning, but it is the dull repetitive tasks such as proofreading, frequently checking search engines, finding other websites willing to link back to your new website, checking details are still accurate, links still work, updating news items and so on. If your website has basic mistakes in it, it could cost you potential customers and could weaken relationships with existing customers.

### **Finding a designer/developer**

Once you are satisfied that the answers to the previous questions are satisfactory it is time to start looking for a designer. Start by looking to find a designer that can produce the sort of site you want is to look for sites that look right to you. Firstly look for the type of site that appeals to you.

1. Spend some time browsing sites of companies you know, both in and outside of your speciality, to get an idea of what others are doing.
2. Search on the major search engines for your type of business and see what comes up.

3. Talk to other local businesses and see if they can recommend local designers.

After founding some sites that look interesting, identify the designer, there are 3 potential ways of doing this:

1. Some sites will have a link to their designer
2. Locate designers in sites such as [W3Sites](http://www.w3csites.com) (<http://www.w3csites.com>), or the [UK Web Designer's Association](http://www.ukwda.org/) (<http://www.ukwda.org/>)
3. Contact the owners of the site and ask (some will have built their Web site in-house, and others will not disclose their designer to a 3rd party).

Having identified a number of designers/developers the next step is to test them against some basic criteria:

- Does the designer offer the sort of service you want within your price range? Get a quotation!
- Will the subsequent running costs be within your reach?
- Will the site be produced within the desired timescale?
- Can you meet and talk to the individual responsible for designing your site? Whilst it is possible that a designer can be based anywhere in the world, if you cannot meet face-to-face during the project, it's unlikely to arrive correctly, on time and on budget.
- Are they the sort of people you can work with? All organisations work differently. The designer/developer should be able to fit in with how your team works.
- Will your designer act as a one-stop shop for all the basics?
- Will the designer/developer modify the text copy to provide on page Search Engine Optimisation?
- Will META tags and descriptive phrases will ensure your details display in response to relevant key searches be generated?
- Will hosting be provided, or identified?
- Is a domain name required, will the designer/developer assist in finding a suitable name?

Once you have decided upon a web designer/developer establish (in writing) exactly which services will be provided, when they will be provided, by whom, and how much they will cost. Some designer/developers will have already stated much of this in their quotation proposal.

## **Ongoing Support**

Consider as part of the agreement the post completion support for the website. There are a number of Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) tasks that should be completed.

- Registration with search engines
- Registration with relevant directories as possible.
- Sitemaps to be generated and updated as required.

If you're determined to build an e-shop, you need to remember that the only real likelihood of payback will come from the reduction in the cost of processing sales. If you can simplify the sales order process so visitors can place orders direct, you should be able to reduce the number of staff involved in processing orders. E-business will make a big difference, but not necessarily to you and not necessarily right now, so you need to approach with caution.

Now you've identified what you want to build, who you want to build it and how much it will cost to build and run, it's time to go ahead and do it. So what are you waiting for? Go for it!

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