

Selecting The Best Web Designer

Creating your website can be a tricky process. Choosing the best web design company for your site is extremely important. Unless you run a web-based business, you probably do not have web design experience within your company. Building your website will take time and some homework!

To create a website for your business, follow these key steps:

Establish your goals

Before you begin looking for a company to help you design and build your website, take the time to clearly define your goals. This will be extremely important to help set criteria and define expectations with the web design company that you choose.

In order to set your website goals, answer the following questions:

- 1 Why do you want a web site?
- 2 Are you selling a product or products?
- 3 Do you have a catalogue of products that changes on a regular basis?
- 4 Who are your primary and secondary target markets?
- 5 Do you have a solid corporate branding program?
- 6 What is your industry?
- 7 Who are your competitors?
- 8 Do they have web sites? If so, what do they look like?
- 9 If you're selling products, will you accept credit cards over the internet?
- 10 How soon do you want your website online?
- 11 What would happen to your business if you never created a website for your business?

Take the time to answer each of the above questions. Write the answers down on a sheet of paper. **(Or use the specially designed pdf Web Site Briefing form on the cogentdesign.ca web site.)** These are the same questions most good web design companies will ask you before they begin to create your site. If you have these questions answered up front, you will have key criteria for choosing the most appropriate web design company. For example, if you are a real estate agent, and want to publish listings on your web site, you should seek a web design company that knows about the real estate business and has created web pages for other real estate agents.

Determine your budget

How much do you want to spend on your website? Websites can cost you anywhere from \$500 to \$100,000 depending upon your requirements. Know your spending constraints before you begin negotiating with design companies.

Select a web design company

Your choice of a web design company is a very important step. Take your time to investigate all of your options. Here are some important items to consider.

A Creative and technical ability

Developing a professional website is a very creative and highly technical process. Many firms specialize in website design and do not necessarily have the necessary technical skills, and vice versa. The process of creating a website is similar to the process of building a new home. Before you ask a construction company to start building, you first seek out an architect who creates a blueprint of your house taking into account what you want (number of stories, square footage, etc.). Creating a detailed blueprint before construction begins can help you accurately estimate the final price. Without the blueprint, you may end up paying a lot of money for a house that does not fit your needs.

B Evaluate experience

Has the web design company created websites similar to yours? Do they have relevant industry experience? As with any services company, choose someone who has relevant experience. If you want to sell products through your web-site and accept credit card payments, does the web design company you are considering have experience doing just that?

C Review the portfolio

A well-established web design company will have a solid portfolio of web-sites that they have created for other clients. Ask for links to several sites the design company has created and review each one. Do you like what you see? Do the sites have a style that appeals to you? In addition to reviewing web-sites, ask for customer references. Contact these references and ask them about their experience with the web design company. Were they happy with the results? Did they get what they paid for? How much did they pay? Would they recommend this design company? How long did it take? What didn't they like about the company? How responsive was the company when they had questions?

D *Compare prices*

Pricing for creating a website can vary widely. Typically, web design companies will provide estimates in one of the following three ways:

1 Time and materials

Price is variable based on the actual number of hours spent working on your site. For example, a web design company may charge you \$75 per hour. If it takes 100 hours to create your web site, your price would end up being \$7,500.

2 Fixed Price

Some design companies will charge you a fixed fee based on a fixed set of requirements. If you outline your requirements very carefully, many web design companies will quote you a single price.

3 Component Pricing

Some design companies will charge you “by the page.” By creating a price based on the number of pages, you can control the cost by designing a specific number of pages. Buyer beware: some design companies will charge you by the page but will have “special pricing” for components such as custom graphics, animated images, and the like. All pages may not be equal!

The most important step in pricing is to make sure the prospective design company include all costs associated with the work and describes these costs in the written estimate. Never enter into a contract unless all of the costs are well understood up front. A signed estimate is a contract! Try and structure the payments so that a significant portion of the fees (20%) are not due until you approve the final website. Include the agreed-upon dates in your estimate and provisions for what will happen if these dates are not met.

There are thousands of web designers across the country. If a web design company dismisses any of your questions regarding their design process, pricing, or client references, take your business elsewhere!