

How to Choose a Web Site Designer

By Herman Drost

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iSiteBuild.com <http://www.isitebuild.com/webdesignerarticle.htm>

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It seems that everyone from the 15-year-old kid to their Grandmother
is able to design a web site these days. You could also build the
site yourself using a word processor or other web site program;
however if you choose this route, plan on spending quite a bit of
time learning, to get your site to look professional.
Creating a web site is not as simple as typing a letter.

If you want your site to look professional, it is imperative to find
a designer that will be with you from the start to the finish of your
web site and will also be there in the future should you need changes
or updates to your site. So how do you distinguish who is a good
designer or a bad one?

Here are some important steps to take before making that important
decision:

1. Credentials - does the person or business have professional qualifications in Web Design and the Internet? Are they certified in any particular area of web design? You can often check this out by going to the "about" page on their web site. If they have taken the time to gain the qualifications, then you know they are serious about their business.

2. Experience - how long has the person or business been designing web sites and working with the Internet? If it is only a short time then they may not be familiar with all the technologies available in designing a web site and may not be around to take care of your future needs.

Look at the design of their web site and other sites that they have designed by going to their portfolio page. Do the colors and text look balanced? Do all the links work, does the site load fast and is it easy to navigate the site? Do all the pages have a consistent look?

3. Testimonials - this will give you a good idea of the service and design you can expect. Look through the testimonials of satisfied customers. The testimonies should have the email address and the web site address listed (so you can contact them if need be). Beware of fake testimonials in which just the name is listed but no email or site address.

4. Vision - create a basic plan of the type of web site you want. Do a search of other sites on the Web, to get a rough idea of what type of site you are looking for, that is unique to your business, (not just a copy of someone else's). Sketch your ideas out on paper, so that when you contact your designer, you already have a good idea of

what you have in mind.

Decide what kind of web site it should be - will it be an informational web site, a web site that will continue to expand as you develop your business, or an e-commerce web site with a number of products for which you accept online payments?

5. Technology - if you want to use advanced technologies on your site, such as flash, shock wave, database integration, make sure your designer is familiar with them and how this may affect your site.

They are often expensive to implement and may not be needed for you to set up your business on the Web.

6. Contact - make sure you can contact your designer by phone or email and see how long it takes for them to get back to you. If it takes a long time, then this may be an indication of what your future contact with them will be like. Are they helpful, professional, polite and friendly? I find this always makes it easier to do business and less stress on yourself, since you will want it to be a strong and stable relationship.

7. Free Consultation - once you have a plan of what you want on your web site (or even if you don't know where to begin), contact your designer for a free consultation before you set up a contract. Most web designers will give you a free consultation if they want your business. This will help you clarify what is expected in the design process.

8. Contract - make sure you have a contract drawn up before you make any payments. It should state clearly what is included in the contract e.g. how many pages, links, graphics? Does it include

marketing and maintenance of your web site? If not, then ask what does it cost for the extras. This can include domain name registration, scanning and optimization of graphics and hosting. (see my article "how to choose a hosting company" at <http://www.isitebuild.com/webhostarticle.htm>)

9. Pricing and Payment - surf around the Web to compare prices, so you have a ballpark figure of what to expect for your site design.

You can expect to pay half of the full price up front. If they are professional, they will accept credit cards for online payments. Do the prices include submitting your site to the main search engines? (This should be done by hand if it is done properly). Don't be misled by those that say your site will be submitted to 3000 search engines by automatic submission software.

10. Testing - your designer should test your site before it is completed. Will it look good in Internet Explorer as well as Netscape browsers? What screen resolutions can it be viewed in? It should be able to be viewed in all resolutions. Without extensive testing, your site may not look good to a large number of your customers.

11. Ongoing Support - support means that you know you can contact them to get a prompt and courteous answer to any question or concern you may have. Can the designer grow with your web site? You may want to make additions or changes to your site in the future especially if your business is expanding. Does your designer have other ideas for driving traffic to your site (since this is the lifeblood of a successful web site)?

If you follow these 11 steps in choosing a web designer, you can then

be reassured of great design and support that will contribute to the ongoing success of your business.

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