

How much does a website cost?

By Steve Lillo

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As a website designer, this is often the first question that I am asked by a new client. The simple answer is that it costs whatever you are willing to spend; anywhere from free to millions of dollars. A more productive process to address the issue of cost is to answer a series of questions.

What are your needs, goals and expectations?

What are the needs and expectations of your site visitors, customers and clients?

Is your business already established with its unique brand/identity?

What is required in terms of the skills, experience and level of design?

Do you want to hire a high profile design house, a medium sized design studio, a small company or a student? What can you afford to budget for your project?

We'll take a look at these questions to see how they influence the cost of creating a website, look at two simple examples and give you some ideas for coming up with a budget for your project. In general, the cost for a website will be based on how long it takes for design and implementation plus any additional costs required for hardware or software. While there are certainly no hard and fast rules, the more experienced the design company, the higher their hourly rate. Generally, the more robust and complicated the site needs to be -- whether for handling large amounts of traffic, for technically sophisticated programming and database integration or for specialized images and text -- the higher the cost.

What are your needs, goals and expectations? What are the needs and expectations of your site visitors, customers and clients?

It's important to address what your ideas are for a website and why you want one. There may also be details or uses that you haven't considered. The needs and expectations of your target markets are also important and will also address your analysis of your competition. A good designer will support you through a process to determine what is required to achieve the results you require. PlanetLink often provides this as a consulting service with a portion of the fees applied towards the

actual design work. Projects can also be implemented over time so that the costs can be spread out. The more involved the needs of the project, the greater the cost.

Is your business already established with its unique brand/identity?

Websites on a tight budget generally don't address this issue. It's important that your website accurately represent who you are from the perspective of "look and feel." If the way your business is visually and thematically represented is structured and effective, then the process of creating the imagery for your website will ideally be an extension of what already exists. If the budget allows, for businesses without a unique identity or style, often the generation of the website is an opportunity to create print materials at the same time, thus saving costs.

What is required in terms of the skills, experience and level of design? Do you want to hire a high profile design house, a medium sized design studio, a small company or a student?

At PlanetLink we look at the process of website creation from three perspectives; artistic/creative, technical, and marketing. A good design company will have skills and expertise in those areas. In general, the more skilled and experienced the team, the higher their rates and the higher their minimum project fees. Some design firms don't take on a project for less than \$20,000. You will also find designers that will create your site on a per-page cost (okay for simple, low cost sites, but not recommended for anything beyond that). Someone who is just getting started in the business may also do your project for free just to get the experience.

What can you afford to budget for your project?

This is really an important question to ask yourself. What are your current expenditures for marketing? For sales? For support? What are your expectations/projections for revenue, or reduction of expenses from your website? What is the current annual revenue for your business? Your budget should, to a degree, be commensurate with the level at which your business is operating. If your website were for a large corporation, the budget would be higher than for a small sole proprietorship.

Let's take a look at two examples:

A small business needs a website for their business so they have a presence on the Internet. The site is simple - about 5 pages with information about the business, the services they provide, and a form that can be submitted and the information received via email. The budget isn't available for creating a graphic "look," and existing images will be used. A smaller, less experienced designer may take on a project like this for a few hundred dollars. A medium sized firm might quote \$3000 to \$4000 depending on variables. A larger firm would probably not take a project this small.

A mail order company wants to get into online sales. They currently have no website. They have a narrow mix of about 200 products with a broad target market; it's also time to update their image. Depending on a wide range of variables, a project like this could start at about \$7000 and go into six figures.

So back to our question, the cost for your website is determined to a large degree by what you can afford to spend. The complexity, size and needs play an important role as well as the level of expertise and experience of the design team. Generally, the more you spend on your website, the more website you will get for your money, an obvious statement but true none-the-less. In developing the budget for you project; remember to consider your needs and expectations, the level of design, size and complexity required for your project's success.

Additionally an important component, beyond the scope of this article, addresses the promotion and marketing of your site - the best project in the world isn't likely to be successful if no one knows about it. Be sure to include the costs associated with your marketing program.

Steve Lillo author of Websites That Work! is the President of PlanetLink, a website design and consulting firm which specializes in creating websites which get results. They also provide their Web Rx Service for increasing the effectiveness of existing websites. PlanetLink can be reached at a href="http://www.planetlink.com" or by telephone at 415-884-2022.

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