

How to choose a Website Designer

By Steve Lillo

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Selecting a Website Designer

Now that you have decided that it is time to create a website for your business there are many questions you must answer. One of the most important questions is "Who should create my website?"

I like to use the analogy of playing music; in as little as a few hours, some people can strum a few chords on the guitar and play a song. But to really play the instrument and make your instrument sing requires experience and understanding. Likewise, although there are tools which are readily available to assist in the process, effective website design requires experience and understanding of many diverse areas including: marketing, Internet graphics options and limitations, effectively creating a site from the perspective of search engines, the differences and limitations of different browsers and computer platforms as well as knowledge of the software and coding required to move beyond simple static html pages.

It is also vitally important that your designer understand you and your business and know how to most effectively communicate you and your uniqueness to your Internet audience. To answer our question, we'll look at some important pieces of information that you'll need to find out before you choose your website designer.

What do you want in a website? What are your needs and intentions for having a website? Does the prospective designer listen to and understand your needs and intentions? Have you checked other similar businesses to see what they are doing on the Internet? Can a prospective designer offer any suggestions for improving upon what others have already accomplished? The more clarity you have about your intended results for having a website, the more accurately you can communicate your needs to your designer and the more likely it is that you will achieve these results.

Is the designer experienced in website design? How long has the designer been creating websites? What is their background? How long have they been using the Internet? Three years is a long time in Internet terms. More than four or five years is a seasoned veteran. Ideally, your site designer has a variety of experience.

What are the designer's strengths and weaknesses? The range of skills required for creating any type of website is more diverse than you can imagine. If a designer tells you they have done or can do any project, I'd suggest you take that statement with a grain of salt.

Is the designer easy to work with and talk to? Is she/he able to communicate technical information so that you can understand it? The process of creating a website can often be an overwhelming process for some people. Consider hiring a designer with whom you have a good rapport and find communicating with easy.

Look at some of their previous clients sites. Do they all look the same? Do they load quickly? Are they easy to navigate through? Do you like their previous work? Do they accurately reflect their clients' business? Does the designer custom create each site or would they have you select from a list of prepackaged sites?

What is your budget and what is the typical cost for the designer's projects? As a generalization, the larger the company, the more they charge for their services (and often the more elaborate the sites they create.) Companies which create sites from a prepackaged template often cost less but don't provide you with custom solutions which may more closely meet your needs. Site designers who are getting started will often create your site for a lower fee, essentially using your project to develop their skills.

Your decision should be based on many of these important questions. Also use any other questions you find useful when hiring any other service business for a project. Comparing website designers is sometimes like comparing bananas to bicycles instead of apples to apples. Don't be afraid to ask questions. You might consider writing pros and cons for each designer on a sheet of paper to develop a more objective point of view.

The selection of your website designer is an important step in the creation of a successful website. With time and patience, you too can join the thousands of businesses with successful websites.

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 <http://www.planetlink.com> or by telephone at 415-884-2022.

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