

Choosing a Web Designer

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You've done the research, you've compared your options and assessed your level of seriousness about putting a website online. Maybe it's to sell your products, maybe it's to inform, maybe it's to entertain. Now comes the hard part of finding a web designer that's right for the project and can assure you the work will be completed on time, at a fair price, and exceed all of your expectations. So where do you start?

Step 1: Contact

You've found a few designers you would like to speak with. Great! Start with an email, or better yet, call them. If there is no phone number be wary. Any serious web artist will want to speak with you directly and will ask you a lot of questions about your company and to learn as much about you too. After you make contact keep a record of the response time and the demeanor of the person on the other end. You want to be comfortable with your choice because you will be communicating with this person for about 1-3 months, or longer, depending on the size of the project.

Step 2: Experience

Ask the designers about his/her experience, both on the web and in other areas that may be useful to your success, like advertising and print design. Who are their clients and can you contact them for references. Also, ask to see samples of their work. The designer should then direct you to their own website which will have samples for you to see. If the designer has no website of their own or no samples previous work walk away, fast! This is not a person you want to spend time working with. Also, you want to know if they coded the sites themselves or did someone else do the work. A designer who is also an expert coder is a sure bet that this person truly is devoted to their craft and a great candidate for your project.

Step 3: References

Once you have seen their work and still feel they are in the running, ask for some references. These will be clients they have worked with on the projects you have just seen on their website. Some sites, like **Webanello.com** have testimonials along with email addresses to contact each client. This is a great sign that the designer is well prepared and also well liked by a number of different people in different areas of business.

Step 4: Design Style

It is important to note that while looking through the designers' portfolio of work, not to spend too much time critiquing each design. Remember, each design was developed for that specific client and your site will look very different from the others you are seeing. Instead, pay closer attention to the more important elements like - are the sites easy to navigate? Could you find information quickly, without getting lost within the site? Did you like their choice of colors? Did you like the mood created within each website environment that the designer created? Did you want to stay a while and browse or leave the site immediately? Was each website professional looking? Be sure you can answer each of these questions before making your decision.

Step 5: Technical Skills

If your designer is coding your site be sure to find out how they will code it. A designer worth your time and money should **hand code** your site. RUN AWAY, FAST from any designer who says they use one of the "do-it-yourself" coding programs like Dreamweaver, Go-Live or FrontPage. These programs were designed for the home user who has no real interest in "getting under the hood" of a project. Also, these programs create code that is not compliant with the **World Wide Web Consortiums' (www.W3.org)** standards of good HTML.

And more importantly if you ever want another web designer to update your site some may charge a higher fee to have to work with code created by these programs.

A good coder ALWAYS hand codes their work, PERIOD! This is the most important factor in knowing for sure that your designer/coder has spent allot of time in their profession and can guarantee that your site will not only work, but will work on both the Macintosh and PC platforms and in the most popular browsers, such as Internet Explorer and Netscape.

I cannot stress this point enough. In fact, go back and view the designers' portfolio again. If possible, look at their work on both a Macintosh computer and on a PC, using both Internet Explorer and Netscape. Each operating system and browser handles code with very slight differences, but there shouldn't be any glaring differences that stand out or distract from the performance of the site.

Step 6: Cost

There is a wildly varying difference in what is the best price to pay for a website. This industry is still so new that no standards have yet been realized. In the past the same website could have cost anywhere from \$1,000 - \$60,000 and possibly more, depending on what the buyer was willing to pay. It's unbelievable and yet was a reality. Lately the prices have come down to a more reasonable and realistic level. Often, as in most design circles, a bid is placed on a job and then the client decides based on the bid and based on carefully going over all the other points in this article, who is best for the job. But remember, if your serious about your web sites success then your choice should not be based on price alone. If you find one designer charging \$1,500 and the other is charging \$3,000, find out why there is such a big price difference.

Ask each of them how they determined their price and what you are getting for your money. A lot of companies will offer incredibly low prices for a website but often there is a catch, like having to use their

Hosting Server for a year or more or they are pumping out template style sites where only the graphic change from one site to another, or they are coding the site using the dreaded programs mentioned earlier in this article. Coding and design takes time and getting to know how best to market your online image takes time too. You truly get what you pay for in this industry, but that still doesn't mean you can't afford it. Go with a designer who you think will take their time with your project and give it the unique look and feel that best suits your needs.

Step 7: Hosting

A Host is like a large Hard Drive that holds all of the files that make up your website as well as the files of many other websites. This is where your domain or web address is pointing to when you type it into a search engine. Your designer should be able to offer you hosting choices and explain the benefits of using the host they recommend. The best hosts offer 24-hour tech support, fast connections and no down time. The average price for a host starts at around \$16.95 and goes up from there, depending on the size of your site and the level of technology you need.

Step 8: Contracts

At last! You have gone over all of the steps in this article and you are very happy and excited about the designer you are going to be working with. You agreed to a price and a time frame and what will be delivered. **Now it's time to get it all in writing.** A contract is mandatory for both you and the designer.

RUN AWAY, FAST from a designer who does not have a contract for you to read and sign, or refuses to use a contract at all. When a project like a

website is getting started it is imperative that both you and the designer know, understand and agree to everything that is expected. Don't wait for surprises to occur. Read over the contract VERY CAREFULLY and ask as many questions as you can think of. This is the last time to negotiate and address any concerns so take your time!

Step 9: Maintenance

Your site is finished and up on the web. Now what? You decide you need to update the information of the site. Maybe there are price changes, items are no longer part of your inventory, a picture needs to be changed, or perhaps you need to add more pages and a whole new section. Can you do this yourself? This answer is strictly up to you. Once the designer delivers your website, as per your contract agreement, you can decide to make updates yourself, if you have the skills to do so, or you can keep your designer, or you can call on the services of someone new. The point is to think about the future of your site and how to keep it current. The best thing about a website is it is never truly finished. It can be updated and revised for years to come. A good designer will make sure that your site is easily updateable, enabling you to keep up with any new technologies, and simply keep the site fresh to attract new visitors and keep them coming back again and again.

Keep in mind that "easily updateable" means it's easy for someone knowledgeable to update the site. Often a designer will be hired on, as a Webmaster to make sure your site is always up and running 24/7. This is done remotely and normally, a weekly or monthly fee is agreed to for this service. Be sure to ask for a new contract called a Maintenance Agreement that spells out precisely all of the details of the work that will be done.

I hope this article has been informative and helpful. Good luck with your project and if you have additional questions or would like to look into choosing Webanello.com for your next project, please contact us.

Good Luck!

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