

## Web Site Checklist

In order to help prospective clients, we have developed this checklist\* to help you define what the goals are for the site, and what the scope of the project will be.

### 1. Define your goals

- What is the main purpose of your web site?
- Is it to provide information about your services or products to customers?
- Is it to sell products online?
- Do you want to retain your existing customers by providing further information about your organization?
- Are you looking to streamline some of the time-consuming processes through your web site?
- How big do you want your site to be?
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### 2. Evaluating other sites

It's important to look at other sites, so you can identify features that you may require, or problems you'll want to avoid on your site. Check for the following:

- Is the site easy to navigate and understand?
- Is the content informative?
- Can you find what you would be looking for if you were a customer?
- Is there unnecessary clutter, or too much animation?
- Do you need a specific browser or computer platform to view the site properly?
- Does it look as good on different sized monitors?
- Are the graphics professional looking?
- Are there any broken links, or missing graphics?
- Does the site load quickly?

### 3. Looking for a developer

When you are speaking to a design firm, ask whether your site will be created in-house, or subcontracted out (if part of the work is to be subcontracted, find out as much as you can about the work of that firm or individual).

Ask other organizations that have web sites that you like, who designed theirs, how much it cost, and how long it took. Make sure you check the references of the web site designer. Make sure the designer has the skills and experience to complete the job to your satisfaction. Were their customers satisfied with the work done? What kinds of sites have they worked on?

If you are looking at work that the designer has done, and you don't see any concepts you like, you should probably look elsewhere. In other words, are your design tastes compatible with those of the designer?

#### **4. You get what you pay for**

Your site may be the first impression people have of you or your organization, so don't sacrifice quality for price.

Avoid hiring a developer who charges a few hundred dollars for a web site by using 'templates or themes' from an off the shelf program. You definitely don't want your site looking like a hundred others (note: even a fairly basic web site these days can cost you up to a few thousand dollars).

Protect your investment. You wouldn't pay for an ugly advertisement, or send out a brochure with typographical errors in it, so make sure your web site is suitably professional, now and in the future.

Remember to allocate funds to update your site. There is nothing more unprofessional than a site which contains out-of-date information.

#### **5. Making a decision**

Choose someone you feel is best suited to your needs, and with whom you feel comfortable working.

Expect to sign a contract and pay a deposit. The site outline, technologies to be used, deadlines and payment schedules should be included in this contract.

#### **6. Marketing your site**

A quick list of things to do to market your site:

- Do you have a marketing plan for your site? Remember to put your web address on your letterhead, on business cards and in any advertising that you do.
- Do you have the e-mail addresses of all your clients/customers? Tell them you're online - via e-mail. Put your monthly newsletter on your web site for visitors to download (make sure it is professionally produced as well).
- Don't send unsolicited e-mail! It's one of the quickest ways to damage your organization's reputation on the Internet.

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\* This checklist is based, in part, on information provided in Web Profession Magazine (produced by the International Webmasters Association).

# 6 Things Your Web Designer Wants You to Understand

## Help Your Web Designer Help You

By Jennifer Kyrnin, About.com Guide

### Nearly Anything is Possible, Given Enough Money and Enough Time

The first thing that you should know when working with a Web designer is that the Web is an exciting place. Most Web designers got into the business because they like building beautiful and functional designs. So if you have an idea for something that sounds exciting, but perhaps too hard to do on the Web, don't be afraid to run it past your designer. Chances are, it's possible to do the design. But there are two caveats:

- Money
- Time

Unless your designer has built something like you're proposing before, it's almost certainly going to take more time and money than you expect to build it. When a Web designer says no to something, most of the time it's because they assume that you aren't going to be willing to foot the bill or have the time it would take to implement what you're asking for. If you really want it, and they say they can't do it, ask them what kind of time and money it would take to get it done. Then you can decide if you can afford it.

### Web Design is Not Instantaneous

Most Web designers want their Web pages to load quickly, but that doesn't mean that they are quick to build. In fact, the more complex a page is, the longer it will take to build. And if a page is complex and loads quickly, well, that took even longer to build.

When working with a Web designer don't assume that the job is "easy" or "fast" (or if you do assume that, don't tell the designer you think so) until they tell you that it is easy or fast. A good Web designer will work with you to meet your timelines, but you need to listen when they tell you that you haven't given them enough time. A good rule of thumb is to assume that every minor change you request will require at least 2 business days to complete. Medium size requests will take at least a week. And larger requests will take even longer. And these time estimates don't take into account any of the other jobs that your Web designer is working on for your site.

Most Web designers would like you to set a deadline that is moderately far out and then they can dial it back if they can get it done more quickly.

### Web Design is Not Print Design

Many Web designers have clients bring them an image that they want to replicate on or as the website. But the first thing you should know when working with a Web designer is that Web design is not the same as print design. There are similar rules and design practices, but they are not the same. It's not possible to create a Web page that looks exactly like a print-out in every Web browser because:

- Web browsers render pages differently. Internet Explorer is different from Firefox is different from Chrome or Safari.
- Web customers have control over things that print customers do not - like fonts, colors, and screen sizes.

So, if you bring a print-out to your designer the Web design should look similar to the print-out, but it might not look identical. It's perfectly acceptable to ask why the Web page looks differently, but remember that many of the differences can only be fixed if you have unlimited time and budget.

### **Colors Are Challenging**

Many companies have a very specific color scheme, set out by the branding department in CMYK colors so that the Marketing department can make sure the color print advertisements are correct. But computers don't use CMYK colors - that's a print scheme. It's possible to convert CMYK colors to RGB for the Web, but the colors may still not look 100% correct. This is because every monitor may be calibrated slightly differently. Every person viewing a Web page has a different monitor, operating system, Web browser, color scheme, and ambient light and all of these things can affect how the colors look.

When working with a Web designer, expect the colors you choose to be used, but don't expect to hold up a printed color swatch to your monitor and have it exactly match your Web page colors.

### **Ecommerce, Databases, and Other Web Applications Take a Lot of Time and Effort**

When you come to a Web designer and say "I want to build a website" they are usually more than happy to help you. But if the next words out of your mouth are "so that I can create a catalog of my widgets to sell online" most designers will cringe at least slightly. It's not that this is not possible, as you know, there are hundreds and thousands of widget ecommerce sites with online catalogs. The problem is that creating a custom ecommerce site can take a lot of time and programming skills. There is a lot more to it than just learning HTML and CSS and putting a page on a server.

When you're working with a Web designer to build an ecommerce site, database driven site, or other Web application, you must return to the first rule - how much money and time do you have to spend? The more money you have, the faster it will go. Or if you're willing to use a less custom solution like a Yahoo! storefront, you can get your ecommerce store up and running quickly.

### **Remember, You're Hiring a Web Designer for a Reason**

If you have decided to hire a Web designer it's because you need a professional to help you get your website up and running. Treat your Web designer with respect. Listen to their comments and suggestions. If you do all this, you'll have a great working relationship with someone who can make your website all it was meant to be, and more!