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Getting Started

What should we look for in a Website Development firm?

One of the major frustrations for clients occurs when they receive wildly varying quotes for Web design projects. One of the best ways to avoid this, and ensure the work is completed to the highest standards, is to specify accurately all aspects of the work to be completed.

The old formula of comparing apples to apples rings true. Note down the exact specifications for the project, how many pages you require, how many forms, etc. Only by doing that will you ensure that everyone is quoting the same and only then can you really see who is the best value - without compromising on quality.

Beyond this, you need to consider various other factors.

These may include:

Experience.

Expertise

Past projects completed.

Success of previous projects.

References and testimonials.

Equipment - does the designer have all the equipment necessary to complete all aspects of your project? This could include digital cameras, scanners and software.

Specialized technical skills (i.e. Search Engine Optimization, 'Flash' programming, .NET, etc.).

As an example, our Web Team consists of a researcher, copywriter, Internet Marketer, Web designer, Internet Security Expert and Graphic Artist. A site completed by us is reviewed extensively for such critical

issues as load time (how long does the site take to come up onto the screen?), browser compatibility (is the site displayed the same by different computers?), and navigational ease.

A lot of people have Web design skills now. Why shouldn't we use a graduate who has these skills?

We do find that this is one of the most common scenarios we are presented with. Our answer is that **design skills are only a very small part of Website development**. It is no good having an attractive site if it does not attract visitors.

The process we go through in designing a site is exhaustive. First, there are a series of meetings with clients to establish exactly what they want and need the site to do. Once the objectives of the site are clearly fixed, we research the target market and assess their requirements for such a site. We then establish a focus group of the target market that assists in the development of the site. This group completes a series of surveys to identify issues such as load time, copy effectiveness, navigational ease, and the quality of product presentation and overall design success.

In close consultation with our clients, we then move on to complete the look and 'feel' of the site.

The wording of the site is completed by an experienced copywriter. The copy is developed in association with the client and our expert Internet Marketer to ensure that the site will place as high as possible in Search Engines, if this is relevant, and to ensure its relevancy. Privacy commitments are then included into the site (again, research shows that privacy is the biggest concerns for Internet users).

Our Security Expert is brought in to try to 'crack' the site code, access databases, etc to ensure a high level of security is provided for the site.

The entire site is then reviewed via a complex process whereby a vast amount of technical information is gathered and assessed by our team.

Once the site passes a series of strict criteria, ranging from security issues, to navigational issues, to marketing issues, then the site is passed for hosting.

Clients are involved in the development of the site as much as possible, to ensure it meets the objectives set earlier and is a site of the highest standard.

How long would it take to build a site as detailed here?

The site can often be completed within eight weeks from the order being received. For an ecommerce site, other factors such as establishment /transfer of merchant gateway relationships could potentially impact this timeframe.

Once the site is up and running, what do I have to do to maintain it?

The site needs to be maintained on an ongoing basis. If you purchase a shopping cart for eCommerce, an administration interface will be made available for adding/editing/deleting products and their associated audio and images. Your organization will be responsible for ensuring all products are added via the admin interface prior to launch. Fresh information also needs to be put into the site to keep it up to date and interesting. You can do this yourself if your organization has the resources available in-house, or we would be delighted to be of assistance.

What are the demographics of people using the Internet?

This varies greatly depending on what research you happen to review.

Some data on Internet users:

44% have income above \$70,000

65% of users are male

Average age: 33

The business community has the fastest uptake of the Internet of any group.

What is a 'host'?

This is the term given to the company that actually puts your Website into cyberspace. Think of the Website as a newspaper advertisement a copywriter has produced for you. You then need to place that advertisement into a newspaper for it to be effective—that's the same as your Website host.

Like newspapers, there are some good hosts and some that could be a little better. The important aspects to know about your host are a) can they cope with the 'type' of site you have, b) will their system be able to cope with the number of visitors your site attracts, and c) do they provide back up service in case of problems?

Are they an ISP (Internet Service Provider)?

Sometimes, ISPs do host Websites (the majority do). Others only host sites. With this company, you will still need your ISP for email, connecting to the Internet and Web viewing.

What's ecommerce?

Ecommerce is simply the term given to purchasing products or services over the Internet.

What's a link?

A (hyper)link is a bit of text on a Web Page that, when clicked on, takes you to another Web Page or Website.

What's a search engine?

A search engine is a computer that reviews (and ranks in an order) the content of Websites. If a person enters 'golf' into a search engine, that person will be shown a list of sites to visit that contain the word golf. As an example, Yahoo! (the second most popular search engine on the Internet) has 2,066,797 Web pages to choose from when 'golf' is searched for.

Will the Internet continue to grow?

All indications are that the Internet will continue to grow. Most day-to-day activities can now be completed on the Internet. An example of this is grocery shopping from the major supermarkets. Think of when the first fax machines appeared. When only a few had them not everyone needed them—but when the majority had them then others had to have them to keep in step.

Increasing ease of use, reducing costs and technological advances will aid the continued growth.

Is it important to get people to return to the site? If yes, how do you get them to return?

It is vital to have people return to the site again and again. Research indicates that people will feel more comfortable with your company and purchase products or services only after having visited the site seven times previously.

To have people return to the site we have to **reward** them. We have built-in some strategies to the proposed site that will aid repeat visiting. Other possibilities include:

- Interesting information regularly updated such as industry related articles, tips as said, etc.
- Links page containing links that appeal to the target market - once visitors know it is available they can return to the site to access the links easily.

How do people find out about Websites?

1. 90% from links from other sites
 2. 85% from search engines
 3. 65% Word of mouth
 4. 64% from magazines and newspapers
- (Multiple response answers)*

How do we let people know of the site?

As indicated in the above figures, effective marketing of a Website is achieved utilizing a variety of techniques. These include:

Links - being linked to a site that has a lot of, and/or related, visitors can attract visitors over to your site. Examples of the reciprocal links we will try to establish are with:

- ◆ Suppliers.
- ◆ Clients.
- ◆ Sites of interest.

Search Engine submission - up to 85% of all Websites are found after a search engine request.

Structure of the site - the text and Meta tags (meta tags are special areas hidden within a site that hold key words that search engines find) should hold all words that are relevant for your site.

Off-line advertising - advertising of the site, placing the Website address on all business literature, using a 'postcard' mail out strategy, etc.