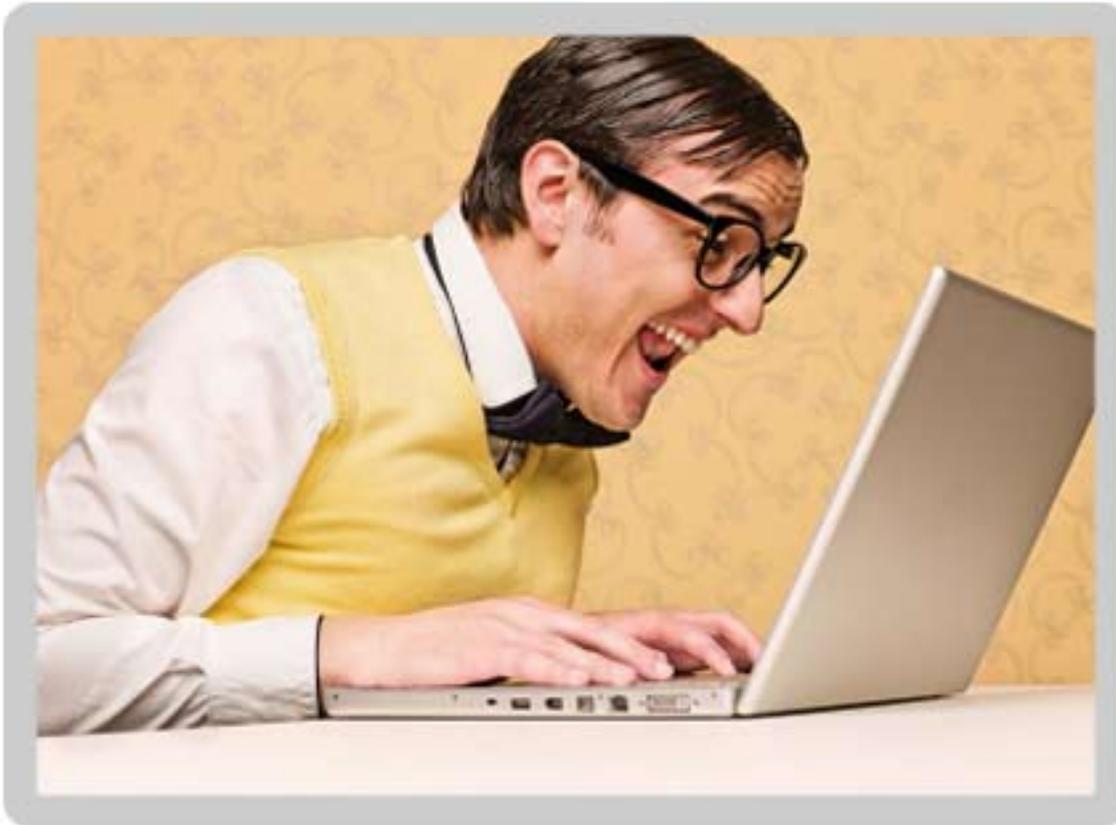


HOW TO SHOP FOR A WEB DEVELOPER



10 QUESTIONS YOU SHOULD ASK



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Part 1

HOW TO SHOP FOR A WEB DEVELOPER



INTRODUCTION

If you're shopping for local web design services, a graphic designer and/or an internet marketing company, it's very important to educate yourself as much as possible before deciding on a particular provider.

Most of our clients have come to us with horror stories about the service they received from other providers in the web development industry and although our industry seems to be notorious for bad business practices, half of the problem originates with the client's lack of due diligence and proper shopping techniques. The following 3 step process is intended to assist you in making the right choice when it comes to choosing a professional or company in the web design services or related industry.

I consult with individuals all of the time and make sure they know that you **CAN NOT** simply look at the portfolio of work that a professional or company has created and then ask what their price is to achieve a proper sense of how things are going to turn out. You would not believe how important communication, customer service and over-all dependability becomes once you are in the middle of a project.

In addition, if the local web design services individual/company you are speaking with is mainly focused on "competitive" pricing, chances are the end result is going to be lacking in general web design essentials. In our industry, the phrase "you get what you pay for" rings true. It takes time, skill and most importantly a real passion for doing things the right way which will help you to become more successful.

So how do you find the right provider for you?

- Good End Result =
- having a great experience with someone who actually cares about your business
 - receiving the design or marketing exactly like you wanted it
 - paying a fair price

Step 1: What type of professional is right for me?

Are you a brand new business with little to no money to invest?

A friend that would be willing to help you get a web design and plays around in Photoshop might be the way to go for now. You can also try your luck at getting a college student to do it for you for free or for a low cost so that they can build their portfolio. Keep in mind that the end result might not be to the highest of standards, and because they have no business systems in place, the process could be a long and confusing one.



Let's say you do have a budget (\$500-\$1,500)...

but it's not enough to afford a dedicated local web design services team. I would recommend working with an established freelancer. Though keep in mind, for example, let's say you need a Logo design. You might be able to find a reputable freelancer to design that Logo for you, and he or she may do a wonderful job. A potential problem is that your business may need other things like a website or internet marketing. It can be very time consuming to build new relationships with each individual freelancer and to make sure that your branding message is consistent across the board.



Now lets say you have a budget between \$1,500-\$10,000...

This is where small local web design service companies come in. A lot of times these places will provide more than one service and give you the opportunity to build a lasting/effective relationship. Chances are they will also have business systems in place to make sure that the experience/project goes smoothly and that the results are measurable.

There are many benefits in going this route yet it is not without its flaws.

In today's day and age, much of the work of your project is being sent overseas with some of these internet companies. Some of the problems that arise from the practice of outsourcing are things like; longer project timelines, low quality of work, and a general lack of communication and consideration when it comes to your project.

"OK, so I know which type of provider works for me...now what?"

Step 2: Find someone who actually cares about your business, and their own.

This is where things can get a bit more tough, and a lot of it is going to depend on your "feelings" as well as the "facts".



No matter which type of local web design services you have chosen for yourself, the prices and rates are going to vary, so at the end of the day you're going to need to base your decision on who the provider is, and why they are providing the services that they offer. Are they in it because of some related passion, or are they in it simply for the money? Either way is fine, and I have no personal judgement, but each scenario will produce different results.

Specifically, if you're a small business owner, you are probably very passionate about what you do and everything regarding your business is very important to you. The provider you choose should be just as passionate about their own services. By nature a provider with a passion for what they are doing will produce better quality, show genuine concern for your needs and provide you with fair rates.

Talk with them for a while, get to know them. Search for reviews or ask to speak with past clients. Check out their online portfolio of web design work. Ask them what the process will be like when you start working together (very important).

Step 3: Find someone who specializes in what you need.

Last but not least, choose your provider based off of what they do best!

Some local web design service providers focus on a specific industry, demographic, or situation. If you have followed the above guidelines, at this point even a generalist would provide a great service for you. Still, if you have the option, go with the provider that not only gives you a good vibe, but is also a professional at servicing your specific needs.

So instead of focusing on whose price is the lowest, take a little time to get to know the people who are going to be a main factor in your success, and you will never regret it.



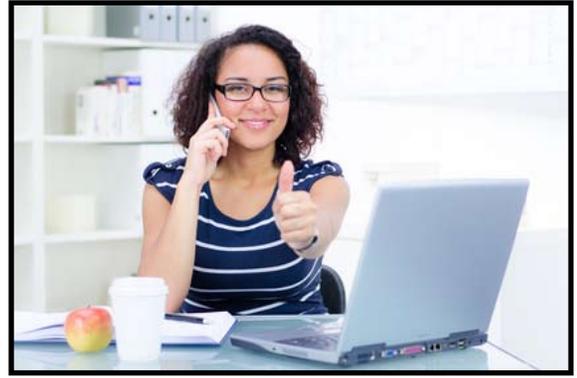


Part 2

10 QUESTIONS YOU
SHOULD ASK



In "Part 1" of this article series we talked about How to find the best Web Design Services for YOU and in this section I will be providing you with a list of questions you should ask while you are shopping!



As mentioned in Part 1 of this series, your main focus should be on who the provider really is. By doing this your experience with the provider, the success of your business, and your over-all end result will be so much better.

I think it's safe to say that when ANYBODY is shopping for something, especially local web design, that the "go-to method" (although flawed) is to take a look at the portfolio of work that a design company has and then ask them how much something costs or what their rates are. You then make a list of the best firms based on their work and the price, you pick one and then you're done right!?

Well, not really.

You see in fact, this is a recipe for disaster. This is an out-dated and completely incorrect way to shop for services in the local web design and internet marketing industry simply because there are too many things that the general public is not educated about regarding what it takes to create a website and how to compare web developers. This is definitely one of the main reasons that providers are able to get away with providing low quality work, poor results and lazy customer service. The general public is shopping for these services blindly and feeding into these poorly developed companies. ***Stop focusing only on the price and start doing your homework!***

The Biggest Mistake You Can Make

This point is extremely important so I am going to give you an example: Imagine that you are looking for local web design companies. If we are using the old method of shopping around, you would look up a list of providers, check out their work and ask them, "how much"? You would then pick one.

Based on all of our past clients and general experience in the Web Design and Internet Marketing industry, I am not exaggerating when I say that there is a good chance your experience with this company will be one of frustration, disbelief and confusion.

So at the end of the day you didn't get what you wanted, or the person working on the project "disappears". Whatever it is, you now need to spend hours of your time doing research to find someone who is going to treat your project as if it were their own. Your "time", as a small business owner, is "money". So you will have truly spent time and money at first (albeit at a cheaper price) on a provider that did not work out. Then you will have to spend more time and money in attempts to find another provider. This is an extremely common scenario.

You will spend your time and money 2 times when you could have simply paid a good fair price the first time (saving you time and money in the end) on a provider that had your best interests in mind and who could provide you with a solution that would have produced far better results for your business.

Price is important. Obviously you need to know if you can afford something, but you should not be purposefully trying to find the "cheapest price". What we do takes a lot of quality time, effort, skill and passion to pull off properly. This is your business, why would you invest as little as possible on something that is producing your lively-hood? The more you properly invest, the more positive return on investment you can expect.

If our industry is going to change for the better, our clients need to do their part. Ask the right kinds of questions and pay your provider a fair price for their hard work. After all, this is the person or persons that will be directly influencing the success of your company for years to come.

Questions to Ask Web Design Companies

Here are some questions you can use while shopping for a web design company, that should help you find the right company for **you**:

1. What is your process like?

It is important to ask this question because once you pay your first deposit, your project is in the hands of the developer. Will they communicate with you throughout the process in a transparent way? Do they set deadlines? What kind of communication can you expect (email, phone, smoke signals)? How do they make sure they deliver things on time or make sure the project doesn't go over budget? How do they make sure they know exactly what you want? What kind of "phases" of development do they have? **this isn't rocket science or large design firm stuff...every developer, whether they be a college kid, freelancer or small agency, needs to have a process**

2. When and why did you start doing web design/internet marketing? What is your (or your company's) mission or goals?

This question is extremely important. If they do not have an answer to this question, you can be sure that someone started the business based off of their "bottom line" and because of this their business ethics, practices and standards will be sub-par. If someone is doing this for a reason that stems from a passion or a goal that they have for positively effecting the world with their skills, even if they make a mistake or there is some kind of problem during the process of your project, they will take care of you and make sure that they correct the problem. Someone who does not have a mission statement might just leave you hanging.

3. Can I speak with some of your clients or see real reviews? What kind of results can I expect and what have you done for past clients?

This one is obvious. Don't settle when the "sales guy" tells you that their clients are "super happy" and starts throwing big numbers and phrases around. Find out what they are really doing for even their smallest client. Ask to speak with a current and past client.

4. What kind of help and support can I expect to receive from you guys once my project is done?

If the company or person you are considering to work with has a system and plan for how to continue helping you at no cost (or even at a cost), you can be sure that their mindset is to benefit their clients in the short term and long term. Because of this you can assume that everything else they do in their business, from the way they take payments to the type of website platform they use will all be set up with their clients success in mind.

5. Can I make updates on my own website when it is complete?

If the local web designer has the success and benefit of their clients in mind, they will use systems and client management systems on their websites that are not only extremely user-friendly but they will also provide tutorials that were made from scratch and provide training of some kind. The ones that do not are looking to simply finish your project as soon as humanly possible and then if you need updates or changes they will expect you to pay for them every time. This is a company that you want to steer clear from as their entire business model is probably structured with their pocket in mind.

6. How do you take payment? Is there a contract?

If a provider has a payment option and deposit structure set up, it can be a sign that they are looking at things from a reasonable and partnership perspective. If they are requesting full payment up-front, hang up the phone.

Specifically we know of a company that makes you sign a contract when you get a website from them and if they do any SEO work to your website, according to their contract, they OWN the SEO work that they did. This is ludicrous, simply impossible and is a tactic to keep you from ever leaving them or trying to take your website to another provider. You will also notice that their hosting prices are set up to be monthly and are higher than other providers. This is because they know you can not leave (unless you are willing to ditch all of your SEO). This company I am talking about is a major player in our industry. It is sad that these kinds of tactics are being used by the majority as apposed to the minority and this is why you must ask the questions!

7. How can I be sure that you can provide me with what I need once we get started?

A provider that is doing good business will have a way for you to make a reasonable amount of changes or will have a system in place that is setup to address these kinds of issues.

If someone says to you, "we are the professionals, don't worry about it", you might want to keep looking. There should be a clear-cut understanding that you may not be happy with the end result even if they have tried their best and there should be a solution to the problem in place.

8. How will I know that my website will work in all the current browsers in their recent versions (Internet Explorer, Firefox, Chrome, Safari)?

A good provider will have a process that they can describe to you for making sure your website is functioning properly in the current versions of all the browsers.

9. How long will it take to complete my project?

A good provider will be able to quickly and easily answer this question. They should have a system in place for knowing how long it will take on average. Using web design as an example, for a quality product it can take anywhere from 1 to 3 months. Of course this depends on the size and scale of your project.

A provider that is "turning and burning" websites will tell you a week or even less. Some providers claim that they can build a website in 24 hours...this is silly and will be lacking in necessary essentials.

Just make sure that they have a "time-line" and "milestone/deadline" system and you will be good to go.

Finally, everyone's favorite local web design question...

10. What are your rates? How do you come up with your prices?

A good provider will openly explain how they come up with their pricing structure. They will probably not bill hourly, instead they will charge per project and this part is important: If their price is within your budget and you are satisfied with all of their answers to the above questions...pay it and move forward knowing that you have chosen a good provider that is going to produce many more results and monetary benefit for you and your small business. If it is not in your budget but you like the provider then do not try to haggle with them and realize that their price is where it is for a reason. Listen to their advice and maybe start out with a smaller version of the project you are trying to create.

If they're not such a good developer they will try to weasel around the question, not know how to answer it, or say a bunch of stuff that really makes no sense.

If you are trying to purchase a local web design and the price is under \$500 dollars, for even the most basic services, you need to realize that you are probably not going to get necessary essentials and you may end up spending more money in the long run to correct that mistake.

To Sum Up

Ask the right questions, find the right provider, reap the benefits.

After years of hearing horror stories from our clients and everyone else that we have ever had a conversation with about the local web design and internet marketing industry we decided to make it a mission of ours to educate as many people as we could because if everyone understands our industry better, the sub-par developers of the world will be naturally and automatically weeded out.

Please do your research and ask the questions in this list. It may take a little more time but I guarantee you will thank me later.

Good luck!