

Your Consumer Guide to Hiring a
Web Designer



Do you ever feel like:

- Not having a remarkable website that showcases your business is holding you back?
- You're overwhelmed with where to start to create your perfect website?
- Your website doesn't really represent your business like it should?
- Trying to keep up with maintaining your website is like running on a hamster wheel that never stops?
- You are tired of paying high hourly prices for minor edits to your website you wish you could do yourself?
- You're a prisoner of your webmaster and have to wait on their schedule for changes and updates?

You want an amazing website - a website that rocks your brand and engages your customers.

If you're building a website or want to update your existing website and you decide to hire a designer to help you can quickly get overwhelmed. There are thousands of Web designers. How do you decide what makes one designer better than another designer?

It's no secret that your website is a critical component to your business, and one that should reflect your brand's style while remaining incredibly functional and user friendly. It is not just a business card, but an engaging way for your clients to experience your business's offering.

➤ Your website is your chance to offer more detail about what your business offers; showcase new products, services and accolades; and provide added value to solidify a customer's belief in choosing you. However, it **MUST** grab their attention within *2.6 seconds or less*, as studies have shown that the visitors will make their first impression of you within that short window!

Plus, as of 2012 there were over 644 million websites active worldwide. This means that if you're going to spend your hard-earned cash and effort on building or re-inventing your website, you want to make sure you're getting a stand-out, here I am, unique site, not some cookie-cutter website that's going to look like everyone else's.

In that 2.6 seconds you have to make an impression the graphics on your site must be engaging enough to give their brain time to connect with your content. A cookie-cutter site just can't give you that. You'll be more likely to lose their interest and get lost in the midst of your competitors.

So, how do you go about hiring the right website designer for you? Know your stuff!



It might seem overwhelming right now, and it's ok if you don't know what to plan for or expect - that's why you're reading this guide.

When you're done reviewing this guide to hiring a web designer/developer you'll know:

- Exactly how to prepare before you even begin looking for a designer
- What to expect during the research and hiring phase
- How to select the right company among your choices
- How to manage the entire development process like a pro

In a nutshell you'll know how to get what you want - a 'goodbye' to website confusion and overwhelm and a 'hello' to the perfect site for your business developed by an experienced professional.

There are four key steps to successfully hiring the right web designer to create your site.

- Planning your strategy and budget
- Selecting the right designer/developer
- Managing the process of your website's creation
- Post-launch follow up and maintenance

Are you ready to break it down? Let's get to it.

Phase 1:

Planning for Website Bliss

Hire Out or Do It Yourself

Do you plan to hire a pro to do both the design and build of your new website, or are you planning on hiring for just one of those pieces and executing the other yourself? The designing stage is the creation of the look and layout of how your site will appear, including colors, page layout, menu type, etc. The building stage is the part where your design is turned into a functioning site that can be viewed and used by visitors online.

If you've got skills or other resources for either the designing or building stage you can certainly save a little money by doing part of the work yourself, but you'll likely spend more time managing the transition between the two pieces. However, if you do decide to have a separate person design the look of the site, ensure they are experienced at designing for web. Someone who is experienced at print design may not have the right knowledge to also design for web creation.

The great benefit to hiring a professional to do both the design and build is the efficiency of time between design and build stage - no muddling through files transfers and updates, and no confusion in how to design for web use.

Budgeting



Before you begin shopping for the right person to bring your website vision to life, it's best to have a budget cap or range in mind. This will save you time during your initial search and in weeding out bids that aren't a good fit.

You may already have a maximum dollar amount in mind or you could be open to a broader range. Either way, consider which services from above that you need so you can plan for these items in your budget. You likely won't know the full design, building and maintenance costs at this time, but you can determine how much of your budget is left for these components after you account for the other items.

Make a spreadsheet with the following expenses for you to consider:

- **Domain name purchase:** you can purchase a domain for as little as \$12, renewable on an annual, 2-year or 3-year basis.
- **Hosting service:** most hosting companies offer monthly and annual fee options. Contact your hosting service to get a pricing. You can also ask your website developer if they offer hosting services, as they may be able to save you money for this service.
- **Branding work or a logo designed prior to your site being created:** If you already have this done, great! If not, then this will be a critical step as you'll want any existing or newly created brand to be carried through on your new site.
- **Images:** typically the purchase of images for your site is a separate expense. Plan for \$15-25 per image on average.
- **Copy:** will you write the copy for your site or hire someone to do it for you? Copywriting fees can range on average from \$75 to \$500 per page depending on who you hire. You can check with the website design company to see if they offer this service and hire through them, or you can hire a separate writer. When looking, you want to make sure you feel the person/company writing your content gets the tone and style of your brand.
- **Cost for the design and building of your website:** This cost varies significantly depending on the number of pages, social media integration, how picture heavy the site is, and the inclusion custom forms, e-commerce and other features.
- **Maintenance after launch:** do you plan on managing updates and refreshing content for your site or would you like to hire someone to handle this task for you? It may be that you pay for the initial upload of all copy and then manage new updates yourself, or you can hire someone to manage weekly content upload for blogs, shopping cart items, events, etc. Ask that website development companies about their maintenance services and fees.

Groundwork

What are your website 'must haves'?

Before you begin reaching out to website development companies to request quotes it is important to figure out the basics of what features and functionality you want for your site. This will help you save time in vetting various website developers (they will ask you for these details to create a quote for you) and provide a jumpstart on the information they'll need to start creating your website once you make your choice.

Create a document with as much of the following details as possible. You'll use the document to provide details to website development companies when asking for quotes.



- What is your timeline? When do you need/want the website completed by? Keep in mind the back and forth of email updates, time for edits, etc.
- What do you want your website to do for your business? Is it a place to process sales, generate leads, showcase work, be an online business card, blogging or something else?
- Do you want a custom built website or a stock template that you have someone simply set up for you? There are pros and cons to both outlined here:
 - Pro: Buying a stock template will save you a little money on the design side. Con: Your website will look more 'cookie-cutter' and similar to many others online. You will have less flexibility in adding unique features that you decided above that you like. It will still require a person to set it up and add images, copy, etc. or teach you how to do that.
 - Pro: Going with a custom design allows your website to be built to fit your brand perfectly. You will stand out from your competition and other websites. Your site can have any feature or functionality that you have outlined in what you want from your details above. Con: It may cost a bit more on the design side.
- What are 2-4 websites that you like? Detail what you like/dislike about the sites including, navigation, layout, style, features, specific functions, or even the way images and copy are displayed.
- What things do you like about what your competitors are doing on their websites? If this information is not already included in the item above (#3), then provide those details. This should also include things like what you like/dislike about their copy style, promotions, engagement with audience, etc.
- Make a list of how many and what type of pages you want on your site (Home, About, Products, Blog, Contact, etc.). Then list the features and functionality you want included (think about it from the visitors' perspective/needs), such as social media feature, blog, forms, search function, and e-commerce.

What are your website 'must haves'?

- Do you have a platform preference? There are several platforms to choose from. You may not be familiar with all of them, but you've likely heard of Wordpress. This is one of the most widely used platforms because it offers flexibility in available resources to support and expand your website easily. Wordpress also gives business owners the freedom to either manage maintenance and updates themselves or easily contract out for that service. Your website developer should absolutely be familiar with Wordpress and can usually teach you how to easily manage your content after your site is built.
- What details can you provide about your audience? Include demographics, personality characteristics, and pain points. Note what solutions your clients are looking for when they search for you or your type of business, and what online communities and resources they commonly use.
- Make note of whether you have a domain name and hosting service purchased or if you need your developer to set that up. At minimum you should have your domain name secured so that you know your brand name will be consistent with your domain name. The website developer may require you also have hosting service prior to beginning work if they don't offer that service through their company.
- Do you plan on maintaining your website yourself after launch or do you want to consider contracting for someone to do that for you. This can range from adding content to changes to pages and navigation.

Understanding what you'll get:

Services and Responsibilities

The next preparation step you will want to complete prior to contacting designers or developers is a way to easily compare the quotes you'll receive. You do this by asking them a set of questions regarding the process, communication and delivery of your site.

Review the list of common questions in this section and include those that you feel are relevant to your project based on your "Groundwork" details from above when submitting your requests for quotes.

- Can they meet your timeline? Next to 'can they meet your budget', timeline is the most important question to start with. It's not required that you give a budget amount up front when requesting a quote, but you will be evaluating all quotes against your budget after you receive them.
- Do they do both the design and building (development) of website?
- Do they build custom websites?
- What platform do they build on?
- Do they offer hosting set up?

Services & Responsibilities

- Are images (purchased) included with the design or are they charged separately? If included, ask how many? If not included, ask what the price per image is and confirm that you will have final approval of the image prior to purchasing.
- How many design comps do you get? Typically companies offer one or two unique design comps to choose from with two to three rounds of edits to the design
- How many rounds, or series, of edits do you get for each stage of the process? The type of edits varies based on the part of the project you're reviewing. They may allow you to request a completely new design if you didn't like either of the first two at all, but when it comes to copy editing they may specify only one round of edits prior to finalization.
- Do they offer copy writing services, or do they have a recommended resource for this service if they don't offer it?
- How do they communicate with you throughout the project – email, phone or project management software?
- Do you plan on maintaining your website yourself after launch or do you want to consider contracting for someone to do that for you. This can range from adding content to changes to pages and navigation.

Phase 2:

Selecting the Best and Sealing the Deal

You've completed your planning groundwork and now you're ready to find and hire the right person to make your website dreams come to life.

➤ Where to Look ◀

You can search websites like Craigslist or Creative Cow for independent contractors to request a quote from an individual there, but often times you will find a person that specializes in one area of the process – just the design or the building. This means that you will likely have to hire multiple individuals to handle the remaining pieces for your sites and for services like copy writing or branding.

The benefits of choosing a marketing firm is that they typically offer all the services you need from branding and design to building and maintaining your website. Plus they will have copy writing (one word or two?) and other resources in house to cover all your needs. There is also the added security of having a team working on your project so that if one person is unavailable, others are there to continue working for you. You can search for marketing firms online and also ask other business owners you know who created their websites (if you like their site).

What to Look For In a Quote Request

As you begin to receive responses and quotes back, you'll want to look for a few core items. Those that don't meet these items, or that just don't feel like they'd be a good fit, put to the side and focus on the others.

Consider the following when evaluating the various quotes:

- Did they respond to your request in a reasonable time frame and in a professional manner?
- Are they able to meet your timeline?
- Does their quote fit within your budget?
- Can they build your site in a flexible platform?
- Did they answer all of your questions and is their quote clear on what you're receiving?
- Can they do what you need – design, building, hosting, copy writing, maintenance, etc?

What to look for

Prior to requesting a quote

A good firm will have samples of work they've done for current and past clients available to view. They'll likely also have testimonials, and can even connect you with clients they've served for you to talk with before making your final hiring choice. When reviewing testimonials look for happiness in not just the outcome, but how that person enjoyed working with the company during the process of their project.

A word of wisdom, work samples will only tell you so much as you don't know how specific or open the client was in directing the agency on what they wanted. Ultimately the company works to serve the client and the client has the final say in what they want. So as long as you can see a variety in styles and type of work that is a good base point for moving forward to contact the company for a quote.

Add something here about reviewing unbiased third party reference sources like LinkedIn and Yelp where the owner can't manipulate the reviews, they are true reviews.

If you like what you see, email the company to request a quote. Provide the ground work details showing what you are looking for and your list of questions. This will help both expedite the process and ensure a more accurate quote for your project needs. To have a good comparison, requesting quotes from multiple companies is common (two to three companies is typical)

Making Your Selection

You've prepared well and done your homework. Choose the company that is the best fit for your project needs, but also choose the one you feel that you'll work well with. You shouldn't hire someone that you don't like or don't think you can get along with. You'll need to work with this person, and if you don't like them or their manner is off putting, you won't get the best website you can get. Even if their price is perfect and everything else seems great, if you don't like them, it won't work out.

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Narrowing Down Your Choice

If these items are all met it's time to narrow down your choice to your top 1-2 quotes. Carefully review the similarities and differences between them, including;

- How many design comps will you receive? (I don't want to emphasize this since creating more than one comp for us is extremely time consuming and we do a ton of work up front to really nail it on the first try with a few cosmetic edits). We don't charge Seattle agency prices where you come to expect three mockup choices. Can we replace this with something else?
- How many rounds of edits do you get for each stage?
- Are images included or charged separately, and at what cost?

Now's the time to pick up the phone and call them if you still find them comparable. Let them know you're narrowing down your choice and you like the information they've provided so far. Ask them about these three final important areas;

- Can you speak to one or two past or current clients?
- Pricing and payment. If you want to negotiate something, do so now. Find out what payment options they have if it wasn't noted already in their quote. All or 50% down is common depending on the total value of the project.
- How will they be communicating with you throughout your project? Do you have a dedicated person or account manager assigned to you and how will you receive regular progress updates and communicate feedback?

Sealing the Deal

Sweet! You've made your choice and you're ready to seal the deal. Once you let the winning company know you're choosing them, they'll send you the final agreement prior to beginning work on your project. As with any agreement, you may want to have it reviewed by a professional, however here are a few tips on basic information to look for in the agreement. Basically you want to ensure that both you and the company share the same expectations for the project and each other.

- Are the project deliverables, milestones and final delivery date correct? (whoops, we don't include these in detail...let's discuss). We usually outline these in Basecamp in our Welcome and Next Steps Discussion.
- Does it state the agreed upon number of design comps and number of revisions you understood?
- Does it outline how you'll communicate and timelines for communication?(whoops, don't do this either. Can you possibly write a brief three sentence piece on this for our agreement?)
- Are payment details and any additional potential fees clearly outlined?
- Intellectual property rights. Ensure that upon completion and payment that you own and have full rights to everything produced for your website (design, images, copy, etc.)

Phase 3

Managing Your Project

During your project process it is essential that both you and the company you've hired communicate well. You do not want to micro-manage your project. They need the creative space and you have other matters of business to attend to as well - this is why you hired them in the first place. However, you should be aware of what stage your project is at throughout the process and ensure that you provide timely feedback when you receive items for review and decisions.

If you have agreed upon communication for feedback and review to occur by email or a project management system, be sure that is both how you receive and provide feedback. Additionally, if you're not happy with any part of the process, notify them immediately. You do not want to wait until after the project is done, after you've given your approval to move forward, to express your thought. The company you hire wants to create a great product for you, so just ensure open and honest communication with them. As professionals, they will not take your feedback personally, so speak up if you don't like something or have concerns.

A Successful Outcome

Remember that the key to successfully hiring the right website designer and developer is to do your planning in advance. Know what you want to achieve with your site and what questions you need answered by the developer to make your decision. Then it's all about consistent and timely communication. Enjoy the process of creating the perfect site to showcase your unique talents and offering!

Our team at Fingerprint Marketing would love to clear away any overwhelm or uncertainty you have around creating the right website for your business. We have expertly guided hundreds of businesses through the process of creating the perfect website to showcase their business and serve their clients. If you're interested in learning more about how we can help you, schedule your Free 30 Minute Consultation Today at www.fingerprintmarketing.com 

Phase 4

What To Do When Your Website Is Complete

Once your website is complete, testing is complete, and the site is made live to the public, full access to the site should be turned over to you including all code, login information, databases and images. If you negotiated it up front for the company to provide ongoing maintenance, then you will have access to your entire site, and you will send your content or site updates to them to be executed.

If you will be handling maintenance on your own, be sure to ask for any training (there may be an extra fee for this if it wasn't already included in your agreement) that you need to feel comfortable managing your website. If you are just deciding at this point to extend your agreement to include ongoing updates for your site, be sure that the same type of details are noted in the agreement - how you'll communicate, payment, revision and approval process, etc.

If you were happy with the work performed, share your testimonial with the company for others to consider when they are looking for the right company to bring their own unique website vision to life.