

Things to Look for When Hiring a Website Designer

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A website is your business portal to your customers. It has to appear professional, function well and be easy to navigate. If it isn't, you'll likely lose their interest and the sale.

You can create your own website or hire a professional. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each?

Do-it-yourself websites cost less, but they require that you or your staff expend time to set it up and maintain it.

Hiring a professional web designer is the other option. Beware—just because someone advertises that they are a web designer does not guarantee that they have the proper credentials and work experience.

Before speaking to anyone, know what you want your website to achieve. Ask yourself:

- How will you use the website?
- Will it be your customer's main connection to your company?
- Will it be a teaser to get people to find out more about your company?
- How many pages will it include?
- What will it say?
- What will the pages look like?

When speaking with web designers, ask to see samples of their other work, such as pages / websites they have created. Make sure their style matches what you have in mind. Then be very specific about what you want. Don't assume that the web designer can read your mind.

Here are some other tips:

Ask for references. If someone you know recommends a web designer, check them out. Find out what it was that individual liked about the designer and determine if it meets your needs. Don't let the fact that the designer isn't local be a stumbling block. The internet and telephone are wonderful inventions.

Check out a web designer's site. Is it attractive? Easy to navigate? Organized logically? Are there any broken links? How quickly does the site load? Answering these questions will help you decide if you want to use that particular web designer. Look at the portfolio (examples of other web sites they've worked on shown on their site). Do you like what you see? What can the web designer do? Does he or she only design websites or can they do dynamic development and database design? The best developers know how to create a site, maintain it, market it and promote it. Does this person do it all? Look for customer

testimonials. They often provide clues to contacting them. For example, the person's full name or company name might be included, giving you an easy way to call or email them to talk about the web designer.

Lines of Communication. How easy it is to communicate directly with the web designer? The contact information page should make it clear. When you communicate with him or her, make sure it's not just through emails. You'll want to talk to the person directly to gauge his or her personality and see if he or she is willing to bounce ideas between you two. Ask as many questions as possible and see if you like the answers. Some questions you should ask are: Who will own the website? Who will maintain it, and at what cost?

Find the best price. Many web designers don't post their prices online—don't let that stop you. Contact them directly, give them a few parameters or specifications, and they'll usually give you an estimate, which you can either accept or refuse, or propose a counteroffer. Find out if the designer requires a percentage up front and what the project payment terms are.

Read the fine print. Insist on a contract. It protects you and the web designer. Make sure the contract includes deadline guarantees, the designer's availability, how much more you'll pay for changes to the project, and whether the web designer will take care of programming bugs that you discover once the work is done. Also find out who will own the website once it is complete. It should belong to you, not the designer. Ask for the source code it is written in and all related files.

Finally, if you're in a regulated industry, make sure all legal and compliance issues are included.

Web designers come in all shapes and sizes, depending on your project, budget, and time line. Larger web firms offer a staff with varied skills and an enhanced body of work, but often charge more and can be more bureaucratic. Smaller firms or a freelance web designer often charge less for work and offer better one-on-one communication.

For more information on how to find the right web developer contact Warren Schultz at warren@tapsolutions.net or call him at **818-281-7628**.