

7 Insider Secrets
For Selecting the
Perfect Web Designer
For Your Next Project

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Introduction

Congratulations for recognizing the importance of doing your research before you hire a web designer. We hope the following information will help you find the best web designer for your project, whether it is creating a new site or improving an existing one.

Having an effective website is critical for your business to succeed. So it is crucial that you find a web designer who will work with you to build the site *you* want: a site that brings you more business.

Most web designers are professionals who want to help you succeed. Expect them to act professionally and treat you professionally. If you meet someone who doesn't meet this standard, keep looking until you find someone who does. We recommend you meet with and speak to at least two or three web designers before you hire one.

It is important you feel comfortable with the web designer you choose, because you will spend significant amounts of time with him or her.

You have two basic options for hiring a web designer. You can hire an individual web design professional, who typically works with other professionals to provide complete web services. Or you can hire a full-service design agency, which usually has a fully qualified team on staff.

Hiring an agency will cost significantly more than an independent or small firm, because the overhead costs are typically higher for such an agency.

Whichever choice you make, we recommend using the information and worksheets provided here to help guide you in this process of selecting the perfect web designer for your project.

Good luck creating a powerful website to help your business succeed!

(Note: Obviously, a web designer can be either male or female. In this document we use only male pronouns to avoid the awkwardness of frequently using "his or her" and "he or she.")

Secret #1

Be clear what you want before you contact a web designer

Your website is a valuable business asset and should achieve specific goals and objectives. Before you begin your search for a web designer, make sure you understand and clearly define the following:

1. What is the main objective of your website?
 - a. Is it to increase awareness of your business or brand?
 - b. Is it to increase leads or sales?
 - c. Is it to obtain subscribers to your e-newsletter or blog?

By clearly defining your main objective before you start interviewing web designers, you will be better prepared to discuss the details with him, including cost. Additionally, knowing your objective will help you track the success of your site after it goes live.

2. What business goals are assigned to your site?
 - a. Are you hoping to increase sales? By how much? 10%? 15%?
 - b. Do you want to inform prospects about a new product or service offering?

The more specific you are about your goals, the more likely you'll be able to reach them without spending excessive amounts of time, energy, and money.

3. What do you want visitors to your site to do?
 - a. Do you want them to contact you?
 - b. Do you want them to sign up for an e-newsletter?
 - c. Do you want them to download a white paper or other resource?
 - d. Do you want them to purchase a product?
 - e. Do you want them to become a member or a volunteer?
 - f. Do you want them to donate money?
4. What is unique about your business?
 - a. It is important for your designer to know what is unique about your business so he can highlight this on your website.
5. Who is your audience?
 - a. Have you defined your ideal customers or prospects?
 - b. This will make it easier for you and your web designer to better understand how to reach your targeted audience.

6. What is your budget for the project?
 - a. Budget is a crucial part of the web design process. You should decide what resources you plan to devote to the website project before you contact a designer.
 - b. If you have an estimated range of what you can afford, your designer will let you know what can and cannot be done within your range.

7. What is your timeline for the project?
 - a. Your deadline will affect the cost estimate for your project, especially if it is fairly soon.
 - b. Whatever you decide, it is not helpful to tell the designer you need it "as soon as possible."
 - c. Do you have a scheduled product launch that is dependent on the website?
 - d. If you don't have a specific deadline, you and the designer you select should decide on a workable deadline.

8. What special features do you want to include on your site? Some possibilities are:
 - a. A blog
 - b. An e-newsletter
 - c. Shopping cart functionality
 - d. Social media integration
 - e. Special forms

9. Have you registered your domain name? *(For example: www.yourwebsite.com.)*
 - a. This is something you can do yourself or have a web designer assist you.

10. Have you signed up for a web hosting account for your site?
 - a. Hosting your website's files and databases is necessary to make your site available through the Internet. You can expect to pay a monthly fee for this service.

11. Do you plan to maintain your site yourself after it is built? Or do you plan to hire someone to maintain it?
 - a. This is a separate cost from designing your site but equally important. This service is necessary for making changes and updates to your site.
 - b. Make sure this is addressed from the beginning.

You should be able to provide the above information about your business to each web designer you interview.

Additional information

The following information will give your web designer even greater understanding of what you want:

1. Provide him with a list of websites you like. Tell him what specifically you like about them.
2. Who is your primary competition? Provide websites, if applicable.
3. Is there a certain feeling you want your site to convey?
4. Have you written the text (content) for your site? Or do you need a copywriter to develop it for you?
5. Do you have images or photos for your site? Do you own these images and photos? Or will you need stock photography?
6. Do you have a logo? Or do you need one designed for you?

Secret #2

Discover the skills needed to create a website

A variety of skills are needed to build an effective website that brings you more business. Although web designers have many of the skills, a team of professionals is usually required to make sure all the needed skills are provided for a project.

These primary skills are needed to create, maintain, and market your website:

1. Creation

- a. Web design and graphic design
- b. Web development and programming
- c. Information architecture; user experience
- d. Web content writing (online copywriting)

2. Maintenance

- a. Webmaster
- b. Web design and development

3. Marketing

- a. Search engine optimization (SEO)
- b. Internet marketing consultant

The web designer you select should possess these skills or have professionals on his team who do. If not, he should be able to recommend other professionals to perform the tasks he cannot handle.

Secret #3

How you can find a web designer

Here are some of the best ways to find web designers:

1. Ask friends and business owners you know. Ask them who built their websites and if they were satisfied with the final product. Also ask them if they enjoyed working with their designers or if there were any problems.
2. If you are a member of the local Chamber of Commerce, check out its directory for web designers or web developers.
3. Go online and search for web designers. If you prefer to meet the prospects in person, keep your search local.
 - Use search terms like “website design company Ann Arbor” or “web designer in Ann Arbor.” This will narrow the focus if you want to hire someone local.
4. If you use LinkedIn, use the search box and search for web designers or developers. Search *LinkedIn Groups* or *LinkedIn Answers*.

Secret #4

How to compare and evaluate web designers

There are actions you should take before, during, and after you interview prospective web designers. It is important that you are aware of these actions, which will help you compare prospective designers and select the best one for your project.

Three main areas you will want to compare are your comfort level with a designer, the quality of his samples and experience, and the proposed price for the project.

Before you interview them

1. Look at each of their websites. They are the best samples of their work.
2. Look at examples of their previous work by checking out their portfolios on their websites. Do you like how the examples look? Do they all look similar or is there a range of creativity? Be cautious of designers who don't display examples of their work.

During your interviews

3. Pay attention to what kind of questions they ask you. What do they ask to make sure they fully understand your needs?
4. Do they seem to be more interested in selling their services, or are they genuinely interested in solving the issues of your web project?
5. Do they offer to explain related details, such as domain name and site hosting?
6. Are they able to create a marketing plan for your website?
7. Are they able to explain about using web data to track, compare, and evaluate site traffic and users?

After your interviews

8. Did they respond to you in a timely manner? This is important because their first response is often a strong indicator of how quickly they will respond to your queries during the project.

9. Did they send you a project proposal that clearly defines their web design process for how they plan to work with you? Does it detail the cost, deadlines, approvals, and deliverables? Or did they offer various design “packages” – with no regard to the uniqueness of your business and its needs?

10. After you complete all your interviews, we recommend you select the top two or three designers for further discussions and evaluation. Since a web project can be a major investment of time and resources, we also recommend that you contact at least two references for each of your top candidates before you decide which one to hire.

Worksheet #1 at the end of this document is a tool to help you compare the web designers after you interview them. This tool will help make your selection process easier.

Secret #5

Key questions to ask web designers when you interview them

The following questions are also included in an easy-to-use worksheet at the end of this document.

1. What is their experience level? How long have they worked in the industry?
How long have they been creating websites?
2. What is their formal web design and programming training?
3. Which of the following web skills will they be able to perform for the project?
 - a. Web design and graphic design
 - b. Web development and programming
 - c. Content writing
 - d. Search engine optimization

For the tasks they cannot do, will they recommend someone who can?

4. Do they offer web hosting services?
5. Do they offer maintenance services for your site after it is designed? If so, what do they charge for that service?
 - a. If you plan to maintain your own site, make sure your web designer knows this and can design it accordingly.
6. Do they offer web marketing services?
7. What will they charge for your web project – to design a new site or improve an existing one?
8. What is the process they use for working with a client?
 - a. Will they give you a detailed proposal that clearly defines the proposed cost, deliverables, timelines, and approval process?
 - b. How often will they update you? How will they update you: by phone, email, or in person?
 - c. Will they be available to answer your questions?
9. How do they handle changes and add-ons after the project has started?
10. What is their billing and payment process? Does it include a deposit?

11. What kind of guarantee do they offer? Don't expect them to guarantee results for your website, but they should be able to guarantee their work.
12. Do they use software programs that will allow someone else to easily maintain your website?
13. Will they give you the names of some of their current or recent clients so you can talk directly to them about their experience working with the designers?
14. What is their cancellation policy if you need to cancel the project after it starts but before it is completed?

Secret #6

Your website is only as effective as the marketing that supports it

No matter how good your website looks, it is only effective if properly marketed. After all, how does your business benefit if you publish a new website that no one visits?

Not all web designers are good marketers, but if you find one who can both design and market your site, make sure to ask them about their experience with the following powerful marketing techniques, which drive traffic to websites:

- Search engine optimization (SEO/Keyword research)
- Social media
- Blogs
- Articles
- Newsletters (e-zines, e-newsletters)
- Special reports, white papers, and case studies
- Email marketing
- Video and audio clips
- Press releases

Secret #7

The low-down on the variables that determine the cost of your web project

You want to create a quality site that makes your business look good. Each website is unique, and you need to take into account all the variables when making a determination on pricing.

Each professional web designer has a unique set of skills and experience, and you should expect to pay the going rate.

Web designers charge anywhere from \$60 an hour to over \$150 an hour, and most web projects will be priced on a fixed cost basis.

For a basic 5-10 page website with good layout and graphic design, it could cost you between \$2,500 and \$3,500, depending on the features you want and the length and complexity of the content.

The cost will be higher if you have more pages or you need additional features, such as logo design, search engine optimization, a blog, shopping cart, a newsletter, and custom coding (instead of templates). A short turnaround time requirement will also increase the cost of your project.

It is important to define what you need at the beginning and make sure the price quoted includes everything you asked for. Changes to scope or additional features added after a proposal is accepted will increase the cost of your project.

Be very cautious of someone who quotes a price that seems too good to be true for your type of site. Web design is a business, and a good web designer will charge you a fair price for quality work. Don't expect a qualified web designer to charge below cost or to work for free.

Also be cautious if a designer offers pre-determined website packages or a one-size-fits-all approach. It could mean the web designer lacks the experience or isn't able to handle everything you need. Or it could mean that he is using a low bid to get hired and then plans to use add-ons to increase your cost.

Bonus Secret #1

11 essential questions you must ask yourself to help determine your comfort level with a designer – before you hire one

You should **ask yourself** the following questions after each interview with a web designer to help determine if you are comfortable with him. Some of the answers will be based on how he presents himself and his experience. Other answers will be based on how you feel about him after you have interviewed him.

It's important to understand a web designer is a consultant to your business – not an employee. Expect him to be an expert in his field who will recommend what's best for your website. Remember, that is why you decided to hire a web designer.

Ask yourself the following questions:

1. Will he be able to do the work?
2. Do you feel good about the individual and his experience?
3. Is he personable?
4. Does he seem professional?
5. Does he seem reliable?
6. Does he seem easy to work with?
7. Does he use language you understand? Or does he try to explain everything in web jargon?
8. Do you think he will treat you fairly?
9. Did he describe how he will work with you and communicate with you during the project? Will he be available to answer your questions during the project?
10. Based on his answers to your questions and overall demeanor, do you think he will be able to meet deadlines?
11. Similarly, do you think he will stay within the agreed budget?

Bonus Secret #2

Warning: essential considerations before you sign a contract

- Make sure the scope of the project is spelled out in a contract or proposal – with timelines and deliverables spelled out clearly.
- You must have plans for maintaining your website after it is designed. You should discuss this with your chosen web designer before you sign a contract. If you choose to have your web designer maintain your site, this should be spelled out in a contract (or proposal).
- The ownership of the entire website, that is, the copyright, should belong to you – except for stock photos and images that aren't yours. Content and images designed for you must belong to you.
- You should own the domain name you select – even if the web designer registers it for you.
- You should be provided access to the original, editable source files of your web pages, so you will be able to edit them – or have another web professional edit them.
- Your attitude toward the web designer you hire will be critical to your project's success. You should be able to develop a good exchange of ideas. It is important to remember you are hiring him for his expertise. Share your ideas and concerns, but don't try to tell him how to do his job.
- While you work with a web designer, he essentially represents you and your company. To ensure your project's success, make sure he is interested in developing a mutually beneficial relationship with you.
- You want to avoid a web designer who seems to be only interested in throwing together a site and moving on while charging you as much as he can get away with. Make sure the designer you select is interested in developing a site that will help you succeed.
- You also want to avoid a web designer if you are concerned that he may try to get you to approve additional add-ons to increase what you pay him.
- Remember, your website is a reflection of your business and is your constant salesman, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It should look good and convey the right themes and messages.

Concluding Remarks

Your website plays a key role in the success of your business. That is why it is vital that you select a web designer you believe will build or improve the site as you want.

You should feel comfortable with and confident in the professional you choose for this task. The relationship you develop with a web designer has the potential to be a long-term one, even if your current web project is only a few weeks or months long.

After your site is live, you may want to call on your web designer from time-to-time for additional assistance. You may want help with marketing your site. You may want to develop new information to add to your site, such as a blog or articles or white papers. You may want to periodically refresh your site to encourage visitors to return.

For these and other reasons, the professional web designer you select can be a valuable resource for your business – on an ongoing basis.

Although your current web project is planned for a few weeks or months, you need to understand that **a website is never finished**. It always will be a work in progress needing to be updated and refreshed periodically. It should reflect the vitality of your business!

Thank you for reading this document! We hope this information will help you select the perfect web designer for your project.

If you'd like to talk to a professional web designer about creating a new website or improving an existing one, please contact us:

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If you found this white paper valuable, we ask you share it with your friends and colleagues, or anyone you feel would benefit from it. Thank you.

Worksheet #1

You can use this worksheet to compare the different web designers you interview.

We've chosen the following five key characteristics to use for comparing web designers before you compare their proposed costs.

- AVAILABILITY to do the project on your timetable
- Your COMFORT LEVEL with the designer
- The designers' EXPERIENCE level
- CREATIVITY, as shown by examples of their work
- REFERENCE CHECK from recent or current clients

We recommend you grade each web designer you interview in the five areas, using a 0-5 scale. With this scale, a "0" indicates *no value* in a particular category and a "5" is *exceptional value*. Higher scores are the most desirable for each category.

To help you make your selection, we recommend you total the scores for each web designer and then compare those scores and each designer's proposed cost.

Table for Comparing Designers You Interview					
<i>Category</i>	<i>Designer #1</i>	<i>Designer #2</i>	<i>Designer #3</i>	<i>Designer #4</i>	<i>Designer #5</i>
AVAILABILITY					
COMFORT LEVEL					
EXPERIENCE					
CREATIVITY					
REFERENCE CHECK					
TOTAL SCORE					
PROPOSED COST					

Worksheet #2

Questions for Interviewing Web Designers		
	<i>Question</i>	<i>Notes from Web Designer's answer</i>
1	What is your experience level? How long have you worked in the industry? How long have you been creating websites?	
2	What formal training have you had in web design and programming?	
3	What skills do you have that will help my project? - Web design and graphic design - Web development and programming - Content writing - Search engine optimization For the tasks you cannot do, can you recommend someone who is qualified in these areas?	
4	Do you offer web hosting services? If so, what is the cost?	
5	Do you offer web maintenance service? If so, what does it cost?	

6	Do you offer web marketing services? If so, what do you charge?	
7	How soon will you be able to give me an estimate for how much you will charge for my web project?	
8	<p>Please describe your process for working with a client.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you give a detailed proposal that clearly defines <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposed cost • Deliverables • Timelines • Approval process - How often will you update me? And how will you update: by phone, email, or in person? - Will you be available to answer my questions? 	
9	How much do you charge for changes and add-ons during the design phase?	
10	<p>What is your billing and payment process?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you require a deposit? 	
11	What kind of guarantee do you offer?	

12	Do you use software programs that will allow me to maintain the website?	
13	Will you give me the names of a few current or recent clients for me to talk with directly about their experience working with you?	
14	Please describe your cancellation process if a project is cancelled after it starts but before it is completed.	