

How to Select a Web Design/Development Company

This list is geared toward the small/medium business owner exploring web design and development options. It is a compilation of tips and advice to help you find the best possible development team to meet your needs and to enter into an arrangement with realistic expectations and goals.

What should you know before your first meeting with a Web Development Team?

In order to select the best Web Services Company for your needs, you must have a clear idea of what those needs are. A new company will have different needs than a company that already has marketing materials and content.

To help you assess what you need, we have assembled a checklist of that you may already have:

Inventory

Determine whether or not you have the following items and assemble the answers (and in certain cases the files) into a format you can take with you. You may need to ask other people at your company or your graphic designer.

- ❖ Do you have a logo?
- ❖ Is it in a digital format?
- ❖ Do you have colours chosen for your company? Do you know the Pantone or hexadecimal values (for an exact match)
- ❖ Do you have a colour scheme in mind for the site?
- ❖ What are the key areas/pages of the site?
- ❖ Do you have any copy/content already prepared?
- ❖ Do you have photos in mind for the site? Do you have the copyright?
- ❖ Do you have a domain name?
- ❖ Do you have web server, hosting space, or even an existing site?

If you answered "no" to some of the questions above, you can add them to the list of items to ask your potential web development company. For instance:

- ❖ Do you create logos, or is there a person you recommend for the job?
- ❖ Do you provide copywriting services?
- ❖ Do you register domain names? Do you provide hosting?
- ❖ Will that price be included in the quote?

Website Options

The next step in your inventory is to decide the functionality you would like for your website.

- ❖ Is your website strictly a brochure for your company?
- ❖ Is your goal to have your website help your support staff by letting your customers look up answers to problems they are having?
- ❖ Do you have a database of information about products or services that you are making available online in a searchable format?
- ❖ Are you planning to sell products online?
- ❖ Do you want any community elements for the website, like a discussion forum or live chat?
- ❖ Do you need password-protected areas for clients or staff?
- ❖ Do you want any other dynamic elements like calendars searchable tips?
- ❖ Do you need to be able to update the content yourself? Will the content be maintained by non-technical staff?

How to Select a Web Design/Development Company

Evaluating Other Websites

We recommend that you spend some time surfing the Web and identifying websites you like on the following criteria:

- ❖ **Design**
- ❖ **Functional elements** of the site that you enjoy and would like to see on yours (like discussion areas, feedback forms, etc.).
- ❖ **Content style** (the way the copy is written)
- ❖ **Purpose** - educational, eCommerce, brochure, community, or any combination of the four

Be sure to keep track of the URLs so that you can share them with the web team you choose. You might also want to speak to the website owners or administrators to find out who did the development and/or design.

9 Basic Questions to Ask your Potential Web Services Company:

During your inventory stage, you may have jotted down some preliminary questions about specific items you require. Here we have assembled some core questions for you to ask about the web services company itself – the practices and skills.

When you move onto choosing a web development company, you need to know the skill sets of the people involved, specifically to determine whether you will be able to have all of your needs met by this one firm, or you will have to have other companies complete the extras like copywriting, Search Engine Optimization, or developing a Search Engine Marketing Strategy. You also need to feel comfortable not only with their competence, but their trustworthiness.

1. **What is the full range of web services your company provides?**
2. **How many years experience do you have in providing these web services?**
3. **What is the average experience of the personnel you have selected for my services team?**
4. **Do you or someone in your firm have experience/certification in Project Management?**
5. **What search engine optimization (SEO) techniques do you employ? Do you have a person who focuses on this area in house, or do you have an SEO company you work with or recommend for this purpose?**
6. **How much will it cost to update or modify my site at a later date?**
7. **Who will own the design, work product, database scripts, and source code?**
You may get a split answer on this one, as there may be specific techniques that the company employs that they do not wish to share. This, however, should not include SQL script for recreating the database, nor customized source code. Ask if there will be any additional elements for which you will NOT be receiving the work files.
8. **Will I receive a copy of all the components I need to be able to run my site elsewhere?**
This is just a follow up question to the previous.
9. **What manuals do I get with the final product? Will I get a style guide?** (This allows you to know what fonts and colours are used on your site in case you need to have another developer change elements of the site later. This is a clear sign of good faith on behalf of the services company.)

Preliminary Tips and Warnings:

We include this short list of tips for those new to the world of web sites to ensure that you have the maximum control over your website in the long run. While it is not that common, but some companies will attempt to lock you into long term arrangements by developing applications that can only be supported by their firm, or owning vital components of your site. If you know enough beforehand, you can avoid such a situation.

1. **Register your own domain name.** If you rely on someone else to do this, you may end up in a situation where your web designer owns your domain name. Yes, this is unethical, but you would not believe how often this occurs. Generally, the business owner realizes this once they try to sever the relationship with that designer/developer. It is an incredibly easy

How to Select a Web Design/Development Company

process if you pick the right registrar. If you would like our recommendation for the registrar we like best for reliability and simple interface (we are not in any way affiliated), you can email us.

2. **Do not get locked into proprietary software.** At some point down the road, you will want to use your content in another way – either on a new site, or in brochures and documents. Make sure the content is reusable.
3. **Do not choose bells and whistles over functionality.** That website built entirely in Flash might look pretty, but search engines can't access the content, people can't bookmark pages to return later, and the loud soundtrack is sending them away without seeing your offerings.

8 Specialized Questions about Web Services and Web Development

There are a few additional questions that may need to ask if you are having custom development done. Depending on the size of your company, and/or the size of the project, not all of the following items may be relevant.

1. What technologies are you suggesting we use in the deployment?
2. What other technology options are you comfortable with deploying and supporting?
3. What other projects have you developed using those technologies? Can I see it/them in action?
4. Do your developers have certification in the technologies we will be employing?
5. What is the support base for the products you will be using for our site?
6. What other companies support this technology, or are we getting into a project that only your personnel can support?
7. Do you have experience integrating and customizing Open Source components?
8. Do you have a network of partners who can provide consultative expertise in related fields like Knowledge Media Design (or a specific area of business acumen that pertains to the functionality of your site)?

Bonus Questions about Hosting

These are questions to help you compare hosting packages. Even if you are getting hosting included with your site development, these are questions you should know the answers to.

1. How much disk space will I have?
2. Do I have a control panel?
3. Are databases included with this package?
4. What functions are included in the control panel?
5. Can I upgrade at a later point to a different package with more options?

Even if it sounds like Greek to you, get these questions answered and preferably in writing (email is fine). At a later point you may want to add functionality to your website, and having this information will become critical.

We hope these items have helped clarify what you need to know and have before you can pick a **Web Services Company** that matches the needs of your organization. If you require more help, feel free to contact us through our [Get More Information](#) page at http://pixcode.com/get_more_info.phtml, or call us at 416-596-9533 ext 290.

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