

## Checklist for Building a Great Website

Whether you hire us to build your website or not, they're some key things that you need to be aware of as a consumer when shopping around for a developer. We recognize that not every job is a perfect fit for our skills, but the topics explained briefly below transcend just about every imaginable web project.

Most of our clients are people who have become frustrated with their existing designer or developer. We also want to make sure the web gets better and better. That's why we put together this checklist for consumers like you. Even if you don't talk to us, feel free to take this with you to your next meeting with a web professional.

*Please know that this is not an exhaustive or highly technical list. And, we use "agency" as a generic term -- it could be replaced by "firm", "studio", "designer", "developer", etc.*

### Desirable traits in a web agency

- Is the agency organized and do they have a plan in place for taking in new clients from the moment you make contact?
- Does the agency communicate regularly and consistently?
- Does the agency understand my budget and can they work appropriately with that budget?
- Does the agency have a design philosophy? If so, what is it?
- Does the agency seem to understand what I do and the personality of my business? If not, do they appear ready and willing to learn more about me and my business?

### Website Setup

- Where is the website hosted and how much does it cost monthly and/or annually?
  - Most agencies don't host their own websites -- the infrastructure costs to do so are too high. Instead, third party hosting companies are the norm like GoDaddy, Register.com, Media Temple and others.
- Where are the source files stored for their website? Does the agency retain those and have a backup plan in case of fire, theft or damage?
- Does the agency use Flash? If so, do they support devices that are incompatible with Flash like some mobile phones and iPads?

## Website Management

- Does the website require a designer or developer to update it or will the site use a CMS (Content Management System) so I can make changes myself?
- If the site uses a CMS, what is it and how easy is it to use? Does it require that I know HTML?
  - CMS' come in two flavors: open-source and proprietary. If they use an open-source CMS like WordPress, Joomla or Drupal, you can easily use your website with or without that agency or developer in the future. If it's proprietary, meaning only that company uses their own system, your site will be locked into it forever making it difficult to transfer in the future if you want to move or the agency folds.
- Does the site integrate with Facebook, Twitter, et. al and if so, how?
- Does the website have a way of easily tracking website views and visitors? How will I be able to see those reports?
- How is the website optimized for search engines? Will it have a sitemap, Heading tags, etc.?

## Future Maintenance

- How easy or difficult is it to add a new page to the website?
- How do we add photos, videos and text later?
- What's the rate charged by the agency for future work? Is it hourly or some other charge?
- If I decide later to add a blog, forum, shopping cart or some other "wing" of the website, how do we make that happen and is the website built to scale with future demand?

## Help and Support

- What's the availability of the agency or developer when I have questions?
- What mediums do they prefer to work with? Phone, email, etc.
- Does the agency have a policy on time limits for returning messages?  
*For instance, we respond to all emails and voicemails within 6 hours (usually less) and 24 hours on weekends and holidays.*
- Does the agency offer training or instructional material for using the website?  
*For instance, if the site will run WordPress for blogs, can they train me or give me materials beyond what's written at WordPress' website?*
- Does the agency offer more than just web design? Can they create my logos, business cards, letterhead, etc. too?

### **Costs for design and development**

- Is the cost for the work set in writing, estimated or unknown?
- How does the agency require payment?
  - 50% upfront is not uncommon. Some, like us, only require payment after the work has been completed.
- Will the agency or developer invoice us and if so, what terms are tied to that invoice? (Payment due dates, interest or late fees, etc.)
- Is there a cost for support, like a retainer fee or hourly charge?
- If the agency delivers a mockup of the website during planning and I don't like it, what happens? Are there cost overruns, free revisions or other limits?