

***Below is an article I copied from About.com by Jennifer Kyrnin. At the end of the article I added my own personal pointers. Enjoy :) Tracy

How To Hire A Web Designer

By Jennifer Kyrnin, About.com Guide

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?

Experience Isn't Everything

Most people will tell you that the most important thing is experience. A designer who doesn't have a lot of experience, they'll tell you, can't give you the quality that an experienced designer can. **I don't agree.** While experience can be useful, it can also be a drawback. Just because a designer has less experience doesn't mean that he or she can't build a beautiful site for you.

Before you base your decision solely on how many sites they've built or how long they've been in business, think about this:

- Many long-time designers are stuck in their habits and might not be willing or able to give you a cutting edge website (if that's what you want).
- Younger designers are more likely to have gone to school to get a Web design degree. While this isn't vital either, it does tell you that this person has academic knowledge that an older designer might only have through practice.

Take Note: If a designer says they've been building websites since before 1995, they are almost definitely exaggerating. When I started working on the Web in 1995, very very few people had even heard of the Web, let alone had set up a business. I was working at an Internet company, which is the only reason I was involved with it at that time.

Ask to See Their Portfolio

While experience might not be important, having a good portfolio *is*. You shouldn't be as concerned with whether the portfolio is made up of live sites, so much that the examples show diversity and range for the designer. Ask to see the portfolio online so that you can see how the websites they've built actually work. This is especially important if you're looking for a designer to build any type of interactivity for your website.

Some people will tell you that the way the potential Web designer's personal site looks is a good measure of how good a designer they will be. But **I disagree** with this too. While I do think having a good Web design business site is important. I don't think that it's a good indicator of how well they would design your site. Most designers design their business site when they're not

working on paying jobs. And if they have tons of time to modify their business site, then they don't have a lot of experience, do they? But they might have a good portfolio. So you have to judge for yourself.

What Skills Do They Have or Offer

To assess this in a Web designer, you need to know what you need on your website. This can be hard. But some skills that they should definitely know include:

- HTML
- CSS
- JavaScript

And it would be good if they know or can bring in as a sub-contractor someone who knows PHP, Flash, Ajax, SEO, content writing, and graphics creation.

The best way to assess this is to ask them.

Take Note: While it is remotely possible that one person will know all of those technologies, it is unlikely that they will know them all well. If they tell you they don't like JavaScript, so they sub-contract all JavaScript work out to someone else, you should consider this a bonus. They know their weaknesses and have figured out a way to work around them.

How Much Do They Cost?

It is very tempting to automatically exclude anyone who won't work for peanuts. But if you do that, you're not going to have a good looking site. You should come up with a price you think is reasonable, but if every designer quotes you something much higher than that, you probably are expecting too much for too little. On the other hand, it doesn't help to just go with the most expensive quote. Just because someone quotes you a rate that's extremely high doesn't mean that you will get an extremely good site. The law of diminishing returns applies. Some rules of thumb for pricing:

- Free means you'll get a very bad site or very very little. At best you'll get a good site, and then when you ask them to make one change they'll never answer your calls.
- Volunteering and barter is different than free. If you run a non-profit, you might be able to find a Web designer to volunteer time for your website. But don't expect it.
- An estimate of \$5-10 per page is extremely cheap. You should expect to pay around \$25-50 per page for a standard HTML/CSS website. More if there is a lot of programming, content writing, or graphics creation involved.
- An estimate of \$500 or more per page is extremely expensive for a straight HTML/CSS website. If you get an estimate in that range from a designer you otherwise like, explore with them why they are charging so much. You may find that you're asking for programming even though you didn't know it.

Don't be surprised if the designer asks for some money up-front. This is good faith money that you will pay them. It also allows them to pay for things like rent and food while they're working

on your site. But **Take Note:** if they ask for more than 50% of the total fee up-front, be very wary. You need to know that they will do the work and not just take the money and run.

Ask for a Contract

If the designer you're considering doesn't usually use a contract, then find another designer. Contracts are protection for both parties, and you both are at risk if you don't have a contract. It should include:

- Dates, times, and deadlines for the project
- The total estimated cost, payment due dates, and how work done over the estimate will be handled
- Boilerplate language for how the contract would be adjudicated

Take Note: your designer should be willing to work out the contract with you. If they have a standard contract that they are not willing to modify for any reason, then you should consider someone more reasonable.

Can You Contact Them?

A good designer will work with you to get your business. That should include things like a free consultation, discussion of how the project should go and status reports as it's going along. Plus, you should have a phone number and mailing address for the designer in case you need to contact them during the project.

Don't Forget to Ask for References

Ask for references of people who they have done similar jobs for in the past. And then **call the references**. Ask questions like:

- Are you satisfied with the work you had done?
- Was the work done on time?
- Was the work done on or under budget?
- Was it easy to work with this designer?
- Would you hire them again? Why or why not?

Do You Like Them?

Finally, 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 offputting, 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.

Here's My Contribution:

Do They Know Anything About Marketing?

When I first started developing websites I was a Business/Marketing major in university. Although I didn't apply my marketing expertise to web development until 2006, I do know quite a bit about marketing and specifically marketing online.

Before 2006 I did what most other web designers still do today: develop nice looking sites that have working links. There was very little, if any, thought put into the strategy or marketing behind the site and many of my clients did not make any sort of ROI from their investment in a website.

Today that is completely different. Marketing and making money from a site is the #1 priority when I work with a client.

Be sure that your web designer understands the basics of online marketing OR the other option is to hire an online marketing specialist to work with your designer. Either way, marketing should be your #1 priority as well...otherwise why are you investing in a website. Right?

Will They Start From Scratch Or Save You Money By Using OPC (Other People's Code)?

Years ago almost every website was developed from scratch. This meant a lot more time and cost in developing websites. Today, fortunately for you, things are very different.

Unless your site needs some special "wind 'em up and spin around with flashing lights" functionality, it's very likely that your site can be developed with free software like WordPress, Joomla or Drupal. AND it's also very likely that you will be able to get at least a 30-50% jumpstart on your design and layout by starting with a template.

OH...templates? Yes. Templates. There are thousands of them available and many of them are absolutely beautiful. But don't stop at a template. Your web designer should be able to take the basic template that you choose and customize it so that it's completely unique...no one will ever know..but you will cause you'll have a lot more money in your pocket to spend on marketing..which is what really matters anyways.