

# 10 Things You Need to Know about Web Design

from the desk of Sean O'Kelly, of Web Design Shop (<http://web-design-shop.com/>)

Looking to build a new website, or revise an old one? Here are ten things you should know to get the best results and make the process as smooth as possible:

## #1 - Identify Your Strengths

It's important to begin with an honest assessment of your business. If you want your website to be a powerful selling tool, you need to determine the most compelling aspects of your business for prospective clients and use those as the key points in your messaging. Even if you can't match the competition in one area, like price or selection, you can focus on other strengths, like quality service, reliability, or your role in the local community.

## #2 – Figure out your goals for your website.

Everyone knows their business “needs a website,” but for a lot of people, they have a pretty vague idea *why*. Just asking yourself some basic questions like “Who is my website for?” and “What would I, as a customer, want from this website?” can go a long way towards making your website into something useful.

If you want to drive people from your website to your store, talk about your excellent location and wide selection, with photos of the exterior and interior. If you want to expand your sales channels, you might make an online shop a major part of your new site. It's important to consider the impression you want to give visitors, and what you want them to do *after* they visit your site.

Some websites update frequently with blog post and new products, while others only update once in a blue moon to change a phone number or staffing information. **Whichever one your project is, make sure your website will be easy to update, preferably by you.** You don't want to be giving your visitors old information, and with many developers, if you ask them for changes down the line, you could be in for a long wait.

## #3 – Look for a developer you WANT to work with.

When you hire a web developer, you need to find an individual or company you can depend upon and won't mind working with. If a developer never has time to discuss your planned project, or they're sloppy and disorganized in getting their proposal to you, chances are you're not going to have a great experience if you hire them.

Look for a developer who understands your business and your needs, and who can respond in a timely manner when you need them. If they're always pleasant and capable over the phone or by email when discussing your project initially, you can expect a smoother development process without the stress and frustration that comes from a developer who can't meet your needs.

#### #4 – Communication is vital during development.

You should expect to hear from your developer fairly frequently throughout the development process, as they send you initial designs and mockups for your approval, give you progress updates, and eventually launch your site. If your developer asks for feedback, it's to your benefit to check it out and give any questions or comments in a timely manner. If you drag your feet, you're only delaying your project's completion, and you could be wasting resources if your developer keeps working, only for you to decide you don't like something later on. Feedback requests are meant to get you the website you want as quickly and painlessly as possible.

You want to keep the ball rolling with your project. If you take a week or more to respond to requests for feedback, logo files, company information, etc., your project can easily slide from a week or two of development to months! Remember, no matter how great your new website is, customers aren't seeing it and you're not getting any value from it until it's finished and launched to the public. Time is money, and good communication can save you a lot of both.

#### #5 – Don't leave all of the writing to your web developer.

Your web developer will write a LOT of body copy for your new site, ranging from excitement-generating call-outs on the home page to technical support information and more. Many developers are experienced writers, so it can be tempting to just let them write *everything* on your site, but that isn't a good idea, and here's why:

They don't know your business like you do. It's important to have a developer understand your company, but they're never going to feel the same passion or have the same intimate understanding of your work that you do. Even if you aren't much of a writer, your developer can edit and clean up what you write, and your website will be richer for the authenticity your knowledge provides.

This is especially true for highly technical products or services. If your developer doesn't know what a solenoid valve is—and they won't—they're probably not the person you want explaining to your customers why you're their go-to shop for all their electromechanical fluidics needs.

#### #6 – Think about how you can integrate your new website with the rest of your business.

Like your branding and your advertising, your website doesn't exist in a vacuum. Instead of simply putting up a couple of informational pages and calling it a day, just in case a prospective customer tries to look you up online, consider how a new website might add to what you're doing already.

Do you do a lot of trade shows? Include a coupon for your web store on cards you hand out. Do you ever interact with the media? Make a section on your website for press releases and media stories. Your website can be an important stepping stone between making a first impression and making a sale.

## #7 – Have a social media strategy.

Remember #2 above, how people know their business needs to be on the web, but aren't sure what they want to do once they're up there? **This confusion is ten times worse with social media!**

In an age when even your ketchup brand has a Facebook page, it seems obvious that you need one as well, but that might not be the case. Many businesses create a social media profile because they think they need one, but they don't have time to do anything with it, or a coherent idea of how it fits into their marketing and service strategy. This could be harmful if prospective clients find your apparently abandoned Facebook or Twitter account that hasn't been updated in years and begin to wonder if your business still exists!

Social media can be a great way to build a personal connection with customers and interact with them, but it is time-intensive. Even posting once a week and responding to interactions with customers via social media will take up much more time than you think, and it's easy to get carried away and think you need a Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, YouTube, and Pinterest account all at once. Talk to your developer about what social media outlets might be best for you, and develop a plan for how you're going to use them.

## #8 – Learn from past problems.

If this isn't your first time having a website made, look at your old website and pick out what you do and don't like about it. Many clients like their existing sites, but just need the ability to update it themselves, or a revision to make the design work better on mobile devices. Other times, a project started with great ideas that the developer was incapable of fulfilling completely, and hiring a new developer is your opportunity to get things done the way you always wanted.

## #9 – Treat your website as an investment.

Chances are, you want your website to last a long time before it needs a major overhaul. A good developer will build your website in a flexible, standards-compliant way that should last you a long time before changing technology and changing tastes make you want something different.

Remember, your website is an important public-facing part of your company, and you don't want a developer with a "good enough" attitude handling that for you. If your web address is going on business cards next to your name and your company's name, you want it to be something you're proud to show other people.

## #10 – Your website should reflect work you're passionate about.

Ultimately, your website is part of your company's identity, you need it to make a strong first impression on prospective clients and customers. You want a website that provides accurate information while conveying the quality of services and products you provide, so it's important to find a developer who understand what you're trying to accomplish.

When looking for a developer, give them a call and see if they have time to chat about your wants and needs. Consider the service you experience while talking with them, along with the quality of past work they show you and their cost estimate. Choosing the right developer is an important step in getting a website you're proud to show clients and associates.

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Hopefully this list has given you some idea of what to look for when selecting a web developer! It can be a daunting process, especially if this is your first website, but a good developer will help you feel comfortable and confident throughout the process! At Web Design Shop, we make it easy by sparing you all the technical jargon and focusing on what you need to know. We begin with your needs, keep you in the loop throughout development, and make sure you end up with a website you're satisfied with.

If you'd like to learn more about what makes Web Design Shop a great fit for your next web project, check us out at <http://web-design-shop.com/>. If you have questions that aren't on our website, or you'd just like to get to know us better, give us a call! We're always happy to chat, and there's no obligation in getting a quote from us.



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