



[8] **Secrets** to Choosing a **Web Design Agency**

Everyone understands the value of a Website. Evidence shows that if your business has a Website, you'll reach a larger segment of your target audience.

The reasons for having a Website are abundant, and you've probably discussed these reasons in meeting after meeting with your marketing staff.

Unfortunately, if you don't have a Website, it's highly likely that you're losing money.

If you need a Website, or you need a Website overhaul, you need an agency that will help you accomplish the task. Make no mistake, a Web Design Agency is incredibly important. An agency will help you create, update, and improve your Web presence by identifying your target audience needs and your business goals. They'll also help analyze your Web Development needs. In most cases, there are three different possibilities:

- Your current Website is in fairly good shape, but needs some updates.
- Your current Website is static, doesn't serve your target audience, and needs a major overhaul.
- You don't currently have a Website, but you know you need one.

If you're in this situation, your first instinct is to search the Web for an appropriate Web Design Agency. However, a search for Web Designers or Web Developers will yield thousands of options to choose from. Unfortunately, going through this myriad of web companies will take time that you don't have. Some companies offer web development for as little as \$100. Others charge thousands. Even if you can decide on a price, how do you choose between a Web Design Boutique, a Web Programming

Company, or a Freelance Web Designer? What if you decide that you want to control the content, but you don't have the personnel to accomplish this?

If any of this looks like a road you've travelled before, you'll want to read on so that you can decide how to move forward on your Web Development quest. Following are eight important guidelines to finding the Web Design Agency that will fit your needs.

Step 1: What Does Your Website Do for Your Business?

This may seem like a fairly obvious question, however, it's one of the most important questions you need to ask yourself. The Web

Design Agency that you choose should also be asking you this question. A commercial Website should focus on getting a return on investment. If your Website is meant to build your brand, your design firm should focus on providing visibility for your site. Finally, if your site focuses on providing information about products or services, it should be an interactively engaging site that exists as an extension of your branding and identity.

What to Look for:

When you're looking for a Web Design Agency, ask them to show you proof of concept. Customer testimonials are a huge positive as are case studies. This information will tell you whether or not a firm is right for you.

Step 2: Show Me the Money or What's this Going to Cost?

Every web project has an associated cost. It's a major factor in your decision-making process, especially when you're looking for a new web design company.

Keep in mind that the old adage, "You get what you pay for" is often very true when it comes to web development. In other words, cutting costs when it comes to the design of your site may not be worth it in the long run. Long-term results should be your focus. For instance, if you spend \$5,000 on your Website development and receive a \$10,000 return, you're \$5,000 ahead. However, if you go the cheap route and spend \$500 and receive nothing in return, you've just lost \$500 for your company.

What to Look for:

Be blunt with your Web Design Agency. Ask them to show you clear results from past projects.

Step 3: Find an Agency with Some History

Any agency worth considering should have a track record that shows positive results for their clients. Your Web Design Agency should understand your business inside and out. They should also have a broad understanding of the industry you exist in and a clear knowledge of your target audience. Ask yourself whether or

not there are similarities between your business and their current clients' businesses.

What to Look for:

Simply ask the Web Design Agency to provide information about their track record with other clients. Have they proven themselves in other industries? How can they show you, in a tangible manner, what the benefits will be for your company?

Step 4: Let's Communicate!

Good Web Design Agencies understand the power of communication, so it makes sense that your agency should be able to talk with you about the complexities or technological issues involved with building your site in a way that is meaningful, but not condescending. If you're not exactly sure what your web design firm is doing, talk with them about it, and if they can't explain it, you might consider looking elsewhere.

What to Look for:

Be willing to ask questions. Your agency should always be willing to answer your questions no matter what they may be. You should feel as if you're getting your money's worth, and you should also understand what your agency is doing for you.

Step 5: It's Always About the User

A Website doesn't just have a user interface, it is the user interface. The design that your agency puts together should focus on usability. This simply means that the use of your Website should be quick and effortless, which is called "information architecture" in the Web Design world.

Accessibility is another major piece of the puzzle. Accessibility simply means that there is an expectation that those who develop Websites make “reasonable adjustments” to a site in order to make sure all users can use the site no matter what their ability level. Accessibility benefits your business because it helps your site reach the largest possible target audience.

Browser Statistics Month by Month

| 2011 | Internet Explorer | Firefox | Chrome | Safari | Opera |
|-----------|-------------------|---------|--------|--------|-------|
| September | 22.9 % | 39.7 % | 30.5 % | 4.0 % | 2.2 % |
| August | 22.4 % | 40.6 % | 30.3 % | 3.8 % | 2.3 % |
| July | 22.0 % | 42.0 % | 29.4 % | 3.6 % | 2.4 % |
| June | 23.2 % | 42.2 % | 27.9 % | 3.7 % | 2.4 % |
| May | 24.9 % | 42.4 % | 25.9 % | 4.0 % | 2.4 % |
| April | 24.3 % | 42.9 % | 25.6 % | 4.1 % | 2.6 % |
| March | 25.8 % | 42.2 % | 25.0 % | 4.0 % | 2.5 % |
| February | 26.5 % | 42.4 % | 24.1 % | 4.1 % | 2.5 % |
| January | 26.6 % | 42.8 % | 23.8 % | 4.0 % | 2.5 % |

What to Look for:

If your Web Design Agency doesn't talk with you about accessibility, then feel free to ask them.

Keep in mind that being able to navigate easily on your Website as well as being able to view your Website on multiple browsers such as: Google Chrome, Fire Fox, Internet Explorer, Safari and Opera is important and should be tested throughout the development of your Website. It ensures confidence in the user and will keep them viewing your Website longer.”

Step 6: How Will Your Site Perform?

When you begin working with your web design firm, you should have an idea of what your goals for the site are. You can sit down with the firm and outline those goals for three-months, six-months, and one-year. This will help you determine what your key performance indicators are.

Common Website goals:

- New sales inquiries
- Higher volume of online sales
- Higher level of brand awareness

Once you've established some goals, you can talk to your agency about how your new site will achieve them. These conversations may revolve around driving traffic to specific pages on your site, or strategically placed “calls to action.”

What to Look for:

Your agency should have certain tools that will help achieve your Website goals. If not, they should be able to develop them. Ask them about what mechanisms they can employ on your site that will drive traffic to pre-targeted pages.



Step 7: SEO - It's More than Just Keywords and Phrases

Content is king, and killer content includes real information, strategically placed keywords and phrases, and adds value to your target audience's time spent on your site. Your web agency should have a plan and systematic approach to optimizing your site for search engines.

What to Look for:

Any agency that tells you they have a magic SEO bullet is not being honest. Run away, quickly! Search engine optimization is more than just pages of keywords, backlinks, or pages upon pages of redundant content. Ask your agency about how they intend to manage the SEO aspect of your site and look for an answer that involves a holistic, information-driven approach.

Step 8: Real Planning is Key

Whether your site is a small boutique-style site or an enterprise-level, e-commerce site, your agency should offer a planned strategy. It should be easy-to-understand, clear, and show the key performance indicators that will prove the site's effectiveness. Your site should be relevant, be authoritative, and trustworthy. These are the building blocks to a successful Website, because these three items will help convert people who are merely browsing into buying customers.

Your agency should be able to help develop a big picture that includes design, color use, functionality, framework, and site management strategies. They should also be able to provide or help you with developing effective content for your site.

What to Look for:

Once again, your Web Design Agency should be able to communicate a strategy with you. Ask them to help you understand the approach they'll take to building your site. Look at this approach and ask yourself if it meets your expectations, provides a practical approach, delivers a quality product, meets your business goals, and is within budget.

Final Thoughts

When you're dealing with a quality web design firm, you'll know it, because they'll ask you more questions than you ask them. They'll want to know about your current customers, target audience, your business, and your industry.

If they focus only on platform or design, your site may fail. Your agency should always have their eye on the larger picture.

If you're in need of an agency that will provide a holistic approach to the design of your Website, contact one of our team members today at [1.866.730.2040](tel:1.866.730.2040)

