



How to choose a web designer - A few pointers when choosing a provider

Looking for a new website designer can be a confusing process. Almost every company will tell you they are the best, and they will give you all the traffic in the world straight through to your site. It sounds too good to be true, and in all honesty it probably is.

Website design is a type of computer programming. That aspect of the process has been eroded over the past few years by the influx of art design companies into the business. Flash graphics, corporate branding and making a site “represent” your business have many a time diluted the reasons that your website exists. When choosing a web design company it is important to consider just what you expect from your website, rather than how it looks. You can have the greatest looking website in the world, but if the only people who see it are those that visit it through links you have provided, are you really getting your money’s worth? The following considerations should be made when choosing your web design company to make sure you are actually getting what you pay for, and not a site to satiate the designers’ vanity. Equally, if your site gets a lot of visitors, but when they arrive they find a site that is confusing to use, slow, or not to a standard representative of your business, what exactly does that say about you?

Usability

A strong corporate site can provide your business with important leads, brand awareness and a validation of the quality of service or product you provide. Visitors to your site should understand immediately what you do, how well you do it, and if you are offering products – how to find them, and how much they cost. It has been proven time and time again that visitors (in the majority of cases) will not read the content of your site in any detail, they will scan, find (or not find depending on the quality of your site) and click through the link they want. This entire process takes seconds, if they cannot find the link they want, they will simply hit the back button and go to the next entry on the search page. Not exactly the glossy image of quality and in-depth concentration some web designers would have you believe. When considering a web design company it is important that their planning incorporates these processes, and provide your visitors with the links they need - clearly and obviously placed within your site.

Optimisation/Optimization

Website and Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) is the clear trend in sites and web companies over the past few years, but what exactly is it? and how is it achieved?

By “organically” promoting your site in the search engine rankings, you will achieve more visitors to your site. Much is made of this by designers, offering various “grey-smoke” solutions that are all unique secrets that they alone have learnt over the past few years. In reality, this is where the “programming” aspect of web-design becomes more important. Bearing in mind that search engines such as Google or Yahoo depend on automated processes (robots) to list and rank your site, a complete and proper specification design based around your company is needed before your site is written, aiming the content around the visitors you want. By planning your site properly, you will achieve an honest ranking based on the content you provide to the robots. This firm basis for your site will give you a natural starting place from which you can build your traffic through relevant press releases, marketing and content updates. Without a carefully worded starting point, you are always fighting against the tide. Post web design optimisation can be expensive and fruitless - if some of that money is well spent before you start; the hard work is already done.



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Ad-Words

Ad words from any of the search engines can be a useful tool to drive traffic to your site. However if a web company offers this as a primary marketing tool, walk away unless you understand what you are actually paying for. It is important to remember that if you are working on a budget you can do this yourself, there is no reason to hire someone if you don't need their time. A lot of companies will offer to manage these services as part of their package, but ask yourself, is this a quick fix for your site while the organic listings grow? or are they simply bandaging the lack of natural search engine compatibility in their design with your money?

Adwords guarantee a position within the search engines "premium" listings if a specified word or phrase is typed in. How prominent your listing is within these searches depends on the amount of money you are willing to pay "per-click" (PPC). Catch-all and generic terms such as "market research", "financial advisor" or "florist" will cost the most, more specific searches such as "florist in High Wycombe" will cost you considerably less, so it is important to understand your customers before you begin. If you are a local, national or international company then work out how you would honestly search for your business online. You don't want to be paying for students, researchers or the casual surfer to visit your site unless they are your target audience. Look on the search sites to judge the costs before you start and try to be as specific as you can. Remember that all clicks cost you money, so you only want to pay for those with the potential to make you money. If you are a local company offering local services then be realistic about who you want to visit and target those users. Being listed as number one in the search engines for your town will bring less general visitors, but guarantee that those that do come have a need for your business. More visitors may improve your designers' claims for optimisation, but ask yourself, will they bring more money to my business? And will that pay for the work being done?

Summary

In all, your website can be a key part of your business marketing plan, but only if done correctly from the outset. It is important that you trust the company from the beginning, and check their history before you hand over any money. Anyone can call themselves a designer, and with a few hundred pounds worth of software, build you a site that looks impressive, but does it really do what you want it to?

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