

First steps 5 | Choosing a web designer

The list of website designers who advertise is endless and the task of selecting one who will do your company proud is a daunting task. This article, by a web designer, gives some pointers to make the selection process a little less painful.

Ten recommendations for those seeking a web design company to work on their site.

1 Are they a full time web design company?

A strange question to start with but it's one worth asking. There are a surprising number of students working out of their parents' back bedroom. If you have a limited budget that might be fine but if you're talking about a serious web development project these people may get out of their depth very quickly.

2 How many people are in the company?

The size of the company is a good indication of its capabilities but also of its overheads. A large company is often unresponsive and tends to charge a higher rate. A one man band can be much cheaper and keener to please but can sometimes be overwhelmed by larger more complex projects. Look for a company that's size best suits your project. Ask for a free consultation with an e-business adviser at Business Link Somerset (08457 211112). Having assessed your project, our advisers can provide you with a shortlist of professional web design companies best suited to your own particular needs.

3 What is the main revenue of the company?

Some companies offer websites in addition to their main business. A number of graphic designers and printers have branched out into the web design business. Equally many technical development houses have moved across into web design. Always ask to see portfolios, speak to clients and ask questions about technical capabilities.

4 Do they charge for initial consultancy?

Some companies will try to charge for initial consultancy or avoid engaging in project specifications until the contract is signed and sealed. A good web design company should always be willing to meet with you free of charge to discuss the specifications of your project before drawing up a fully-costed proposal.

5 Can they build what you want?

Make sure that they have the capabilities to deliver what it is that you require. It helps if they have produced something similar which they can refer you to. Do they have the right resources and technology? Do they offer web hosting and diagnostics for your requirements? What kind of support do they offer?

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6 Are you tied in to them once your site is built?

This is probably the biggest problem faced by website owners. Many web design companies build websites that neither the client nor another web design company can edit. Make sure that you aren't going to have to go back to the web design company every time you want to make a change on the site. Also make sure they are using industry standard tools to build the site in the first place. That way if you are unhappy with them you can go to another company for future development work.

7 What is their portfolio like and can you view the live sites?

You must see some published work. Starting with the design company's own website, and some of their clients'. Do you like them? Are they visually appealing? More importantly, are they easy to use? Also check that they are capable of tailoring their designs to fit the client and that they don't have too strong a house style.

8 Do they have clients willing to talk to you?

Is their service of a standard that their clients will recommend them? If they are good and competent designers then they should have clients who are prepared to discuss their experiences.

9 What is their charge out rate?

Don't be afraid to ask them what they charge per day and what the average value of their projects is. But watch out, some design agencies will have a low daily rate but will make sure that the project lasts long enough to make a profit! A good web design agency shouldn't have a problem telling you their rates. After all it is a waste of everybody's time if your budget doesn't fit with their daily rates. However it is also useful if you give them an indication of what your budget is because they should be able to tailor a project fit your budget.

10 What is their approach to project management?

Will they give you a full proposal with timescales and milestones? Do they have dedicated project managers who will look after the running of your project?

Finally, you might want to check out the independent directory of web designers at:

<http://www.webdesign.co.uk> This will provide you with a complete list of web designers in the UK and allows you to search by county and by skill.

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