

Website Development: DIY or Job it out? ©

In a nutshell, your site needs to be both engaging and easy to use in order to positively impact the interactions you will have with your customers. Your success lies at the effective intersection of Design, Content and Functionality: The Big Three of website development.

Surely your time and money are at a premium – so what's the easiest way get your site up and running and manage it going forward? With so many options available, how do you get the most bang for your buck, and who is best suited to guide you through the process?

Do you have the chops to DIY? Hiring a designer or developer may be safer, but more costly. Can you afford to pay a developer to make future changes for you, or do you want to be able to update the site yourself ... and how complicated might that be?

If you're going DIY, choose a site-building platform that:

- Has easy-to-use admin tools which allow you to change the site flexibly – both design and content – with manageable cost and time
- Allows you to incorporate different types of content (e.g., events, video, social media sharing, commerce, etc.) as needed
- Doesn't tether you to the specific capabilities of that platform, or a specific host
- Is upgraded regularly to keep your site modern web-compatible
- Is available without license fee or obligation
- Offers reliable tech support
- Can support what you might need **DOWN THE ROAD**. Will you eventually need the capacity to promote events, sell stuff, or integrate a customer database? Does your chosen DIY solutions have the muscle or flexibility to accommodate your growth?
- Is mobile-compatible! You probably realize that the number of people using the web on smart phones and tablets is only going to increase. Regardless of the platform you choose, make 100% sure it's mobile compatible.

How do you know you ought NOT go DIY?

An important part of your overall business strategy is understanding what tasks will put you over the edge and take you away from your core competencies. How much time, money, and

in-house skill do you have? Are you THE chief cook and bottle washer and need to find an easy way to get a site up, and manage it all by yourself?

If these simple questions are enough to make you lose your mind, perhaps it's time to seek professional website development assistance.

How the heck do you gauge the best person to hire to create an effective website?

Let's start with what skills you DO have and work backwards: If you've got a solid handle on your own content and visuals, you might only need a technical developer who can take your design and implement it. If you already have a functional working knowledge of an easy to use content management system, but don't know how to turn your ideas into engaging language or visuals, you may need a designer and a marketing person or writer, but not a technical web developer.

Make sure that you have either advisory or core competency in all of The Big Three areas. If you're using more than one person to fulfill these needs, make sure that the vision and objectives are all on the table and everyone is working toward the same goal.

What questions should you ask a potential website development partner to ensure you pick the best one for you?

- Are they primarily a designer, technician, content marketer or some combination of the above? If not yes to all, do they have partners in these other areas with whom they regularly work?
- Are they willing to provide refs from other companies whose sites they have developed? Can you check out other sites they designed? Make sure you talk with those references about the customer service experience they had with that vendor.
- How available and communicative will they be while on your project? Get independent verification of their claims from a client reference they provide.
- Is the platform on which they develop proprietary or open source? Is there a license fee to use the platform they are recommending?
- Will you have access and tools with which to update your own content or will you have to go through THEM to get changes made, and what will that cost you?
- Can you host your site to anywhere you like? Do you need to find a web host yourself? If they host, do they provide backup, security, uptime monitoring, software and server updates, disaster recovery? And what do they charge for that?

- In conversation with you, are they being thorough and careful and asking authentic open questions? Or are they leading questions (in which case they may not be very good at hearing your specific needs and goals...)?

Find someone with whom you can have open dialogue working toward your goals. If their personality and attitude and energy match yours, if they have the kind of drive and work ethic and temperament and curiosity and creativity and adaptability that matches your needs, experience may be less important. You certainly want to understand what their aptitudes are – and whether they actively keep up with new technologies – but don't overlook someone who may not have a fancy resume or client base. Further, someone who has only developed sites for a big corporation may be a good temperament fit for a start-up. It is really about whether that partner is a good match for **you**.

Ok, you've chosen a solid web dev partner. How do you dive into the work together?

Treat them the same way you would someone who was remodeling your kitchen. Be firm on your vision and plan, check in regularly on progress, don't let them go off on a tangent. At the same time, respect their expertise and opinions. An expert craftsman can steer you clear of potholes you don't even know exist!

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