

Selecting a Web Developer – A Guide For Small Business

By: Chris Bachman | April 16, 2014

You have your killer idea nailed down. Initial funding is in place to allow for startup costs. Now you need to make some decisions about how to begin your rollout plan. This usually begins with selecting a website developer.

As much fun as it sounds and as exciting as it can be, getting your website up and running properly is not always the cake walk beginning entrepreneurs think it will be. In fact, this is one area where small missteps in judgment can have huge ramifications on all aspects of your business including burning through your budget, missing launch dates, wrecking marketing plans and possibly killing any chance for further funding.

As a serial entrepreneur, and now owner of a website development firm, I have compiled a few things every entrepreneur should watch for and consider when deciding who to trust this all important business step to.

1. Is site upgradable / scalable

Sometimes a developer is limited either by their skill set or by the technology as to what can be implemented. If

this is just a matter of hiring on another person to fill out the work load at that point, no big deal. If the platform/design that is being used is not conducive to the expansion you foresee, that could be a big deal. If you will need an interactive database later on and your current developer can't handle that...potential trouble ahead. Expect extra costs ranging from reasonable to complete rebuild later on.

A good developer should ask a lot of questions, understand where you are headed, offer advice about what issue might arise in the development process, suggest phases or even an expansion plan if that is needed. Many sites are in fact a team effort bringing together various web experts.

2. What are the SEO steps you are taking?





“Huh?” Or “mumble, mumble, grunt” are both bad answers. Your developer, or at least someone on the development team, should have a strong SEO background and be involving SEO strategies from the very beginning. The time to talk SEO is upfront, not after the site has launched. If they are unsure, not clear in their answers or leave you confused...it might be best to get a second opinion.

3. Specify Everything

Spec Sheet... Before shopping around you would be well advised to make sure that you have thought through and written down as much as possible about how the website should operate, features it needs, goals you want it to accomplish and the look and feel you are after. All that will be decided sooner or later in the development process and the earlier on you can make those determinations the lower the costs and the more likely you will get an end product that you want.

4. Trust – Patience, Understanding, and Communication

Both you and your developer need to be comfortably on the same path, working towards the same goal. What you need is someone who understands what you are trying to accomplish, will work with you to keep the project moving forward, has constructive input and overall builds a sense of trust. Too busy to talk details? Not interested in that little thing that is so important to you? Speaks in “tech talk” and leaves you wondering what they said.....move on.

5. Content

You can't build a site without content. Where does it come from? A good developer will discuss this with you in some detail. All images should be identified as to location, source, size, and who is responsible. Same thing for copy and text type content. This is not something to be figured out after you are several weeks into the project and the finger pointing starts.

6. Do you have a clear contract?

I would rather see a ten page contract than none at all. A contract is simply a way of deciding ahead of time how a relationship between the two of you will work, who needs to do what, and what is the procedure when there is a problem or question.

No contract? You are running blind and at the total mercy of the developer. Good luck.

7. References

Does the developer have references posted on their website? Will they give you names of people to call? Do some sleuth work here and look for older websites they have built, call those people and see how the ongoing support is. Find the



people they haven't given you names and numbers for and talk to them. Have a few specific, relevant questions ready so you can later evaluate apples to apples.

8. Business license

Do they have a license? While there are some good techies who just work from their garage you might find it is better to select someone who treats what they do like a real business and has at least obtained a business license.

9. How much revision is allowed

This can be a sore point that develops into bad feelings if not addresses up front. A developer is not going to be happy with a client who changes things a dozen times. And they shouldn't be expected to be happy with that. It is a waste of time and effort. You, the client, should have a fairly clear idea of what you want built before you ask someone to build it. That doesn't mean that revisions aren't needed or expected, they are. However, they should be addressed up front and defined so that everyone knows what is included in the price and what is extra.

10. What constitutes completion

There needs to be a clear definition of what constitutes a completion of the project. That said, no website is ever really done. What we are talking about here are the project parameters being defined as in the agreement/contract. This is a very important part. If you think the developer should continue to tweak things for months until it is perfect and they don't get paid until then...you will soon be looking for a new developer.

Truthfully, this is something common but often overlooked by new developers eager to get some business. It is a potentially big problem area and it should be addressed up front. If it isn't, that is a warning sign that you need to look for someone a bit more seasoned.



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