

## What to Look for in a Web Designer...so you don't get screwed

**Experience:** If his/her answer to this question is "Yeah, I designed a website once" that should tell you something.

**Online Portfolio:** Your Web Designer should have some sort of portfolio online, take a look at it. Do you like what you see? Call up a website owner and ask about their experience with the developer. Did they get what they paid for? Was the developer easy to work with? Is the site doing what you need it to do? Etc.

**Server Side Scripting:** All but the most basic of websites have interactivity, without it a webpage is just an online brochure (which is fine if that is all you need it to do). However, to start working for you a website needs to have some sort of server side scripting. Do you want the website to collect information from people? Do you want the website to sell your products? Do you want the website to accept job bids, photo submissions, questions from customers? People's needs are impossible to guess...here are just a few examples of things people needed server side scripting to accomplish.

- One client needed a website with an online dating service for its patrons (a nightclub),
- Another needed a way to upload and sell their photos online (a photography studio),
- Another needed to take job submissions over the internet (a construction company).

**Aesthetic Design:** This is a very subjective one but you can be the judge. Are sites that this Web Designer has done pleasing to look at? Are they functionally designed? Are they easy to navigate? Do they load in a reasonable amount of time? Do they have purple backgrounds with yellow text and jumping clowns? (Hint, this is not a good sign)

**CSS:** CSS stands for Cascading Style Sheets, a language developed to separate content from markup. Your web designer should use CSS in some form or another. CSS allows all the text and some of the design elements for the site to be controlled from one document. When you want to change fonts or colors on a site, it's a matter of minutes instead of hours, which is time that you are paying for.

**A Private Server:** Ask your Web Designer if they have their own server or if they just rent space. I'm not saying every web developer has to have their own server, but if they do, this should tell you two things.

1. **They are serious about the business;** nobody has their own server just for fun.
2. **Your website will get better performance.** Virtual hosts (companies that rent space to people for cheap) often severely overload their servers to make more money. Downtime, email problems, slow page-loading, and a million other problematic things are the usual result. You are less likely to encounter this problem with a developer or company that has its own server(s).

**Monthly Fee:** This should be a reasonable number, no more than \$75 a month unless you are getting free consulting time or your website has special needs. A range of \$15 - \$35 is pretty standard for just hosting, depending on the needs for your site and what comes with it (expect to pay more for consulting time, extra storage space, etc).

**Cost:** Every website is unique, and most of the time you usually get what you pay for. If you want your site to do everything but wash your dishes and your budget is \$500, you are not being realistic. On the other hand, if you just paid \$5,000 for a site that doesn't really *do* anything, your getting ripped off.

**A Template:** You shouldn't have to pay your Web Designer every time you need a few words changed, modern sites should be built with some kind of template which allows you (at least) to make basic text changes.

**Features:** What comes with the website?

- Does the site include email accounts, a statistics package?
- Does the developer or company backup the site regularly? Can you make backups? (this is especially important if your site holds important information)
- Can you make changes to the site without paying for them?
- Do you get consulting time? How much? What's the hourly rate?