



Working with Web Designers

by Ken Goodpaster



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Whether a small business or a mega corporation in today's competitive environment, it is unthinkable to go without a presence on the World Wide Web. Statistics consistently show that a Website adds a level of credibility to your organization that often is the deciding factor in whether a client will contact you.

To put it succinctly: If you don't have a Website, *get one*.

With that said, now what do you do? The decision to build a Website, or even upgrade a previously existing site, can be overwhelming when considering the number of options available for a solution. Just walk down any street in your neighborhood, and you will find no less than half a dozen "experts" in Web design technology.

When hiring a Website designer, there are a few guidelines to keep in mind:

Avoid cookie-cutter Web design services. Let's face it, Website design is potentially very time-consuming. It is not something that should be taken lightly. A Website should be a unique expression of your company's core values, business goals, and client promises. It stands to reason that hiring a cookie-cutter Web design service will produce just that: A cookie-cutter site that resembles two dozen other sites your potential client has already visited. These companies commonly offer a narrow range of color schemes and pre-determined page layouts for a dirt-cheap price. But rest assured, at some point in the very near future you will be frustrated by the limitations of their product - especially after you see that the final result has no correlation to the character of your organization, and everything to do with the same template that scores of other businesses have already paid for.

The value of a distinctive Internet presence cannot be underestimated.

Take the time to research Website development solutions. Ask around at your business association, browse the Internet and note the sites that you find inspiring.

But, once you've identified a designer you think will produce the best Internet representation of your business or organization, what next? How do you negotiate a fair contract? What should you reasonably expect?

A Fair Deal

The terms of an agreement with a designer should contain a basic set of provisos:

- **The price for a fully-functioning Website should be set at a fixed sum.** Without a definite price, you are essentially giving carte blanche with no limit on the sum of the fees you will be charged.

- **While a contract should spell out the specifications of what you are paying for, the ever-changing nature of Website design technology cannot be reasonably predicted.** Your needs can also change as the site is developed and tested. So, make sure that you include specifications for changes in the contract.
- **The specifications provided by the designer should be in plain English.** Any technical terms, or jargon, should be fully explained in lay terms. As a paying client, you are entitled to know the definition of every term used in a specification. Don't let a designer use obscure gobbledegook to deflect responsibility for the results they produce.
- **Agree to specific project updates and milestones.** You should review the progress of your Website at regular intervals and suggest specific changes or amendments. Include a stipulation in the contract that entitles you to withdraw if those milestones are not met.
- **A Website should never be considered a finished project.** Hopefully, you will be soliciting feedback from your clients, partners, and associates on a constant basis after it is uploaded to the Internet. Over time, it may be apparent that you need to upgrade the content and support the site for optimal performance. Once a site has been uploaded, you will need someone to maintain it. Be sure to include stipulations in your agreement whether or not the designer will provide on-going support.
- **Your agreement should stipulate the platforms and browsers in which your Website will function.** The Internet is becoming increasingly complex, and you should know whether or not a visitor will be able to view your site while using a Microsoft or MAC computer, and which browser versions are accessible: Internet Explorer 7.0, Firefox 2.0, Avant 10.2, Netscape 8.1, Opera 9.0, Safari 1.2, etc. It is similarly important for you to know that no Website designer can guarantee that a site will be fully functional on all platforms, and that your content will display differently in different browsers. Website design is, at its heart, a series of creative compromises. Your agreement should stipulate specific browser versions you think are necessary.
- **You should also stipulate a list of keywords and commands, or meta tags, for search engine optimization.** Hidden in the source code of a Website is a list of keywords or words that potential visitors will type into search engines to find your site on the Internet. A good list of keywords will increase your visibility and increase traffic to your site, which is the goal. Similarly, there are commands, also known as meta tags, that can tell a search engine to search and include the content of your site in their services. Search engine companies send out tiny programs, commonly known as "spiders" or "robots", which comb the World Wide Web for content. A Web designer can tell those spiders and robots how often they should come back to your Website to update their content. At least in the initial stages after uploading a new site, you will want this to happen fairly frequently. Your Web designer can make a recommendation for the rate of recurrence and when, or if, it should be changed. *(Important: After you've uploaded your Website, it will take approximately thirty to ninety days before these spiders and robots will find your site.)*
- **Keywords and meta tags are not enough.** You will need to submit your Website to at least one, two, or more of the major search engines (i.e., Google Adwords, Yahoo's Search Marketing, etc.). These services often require a monthly fee, as well as a charge for each time a visitor clicks-through to your site from their search engine. The more you are willing to pay for these click-through charges, the more prominently your site will appear on these lists. At least initially, you may want to

hire your Web designer to set up your search engine accounts and load in the keywords you have provided. You should also keep in mind that keywords involve some guesswork, so there is no guarantee that any particular keyword will produce results. *You may want to hire your Web designer to research and recommend a list of keywords for your site.*

- **You should require a warranty from the designer that all of the materials and content are original, or have been obtained via a perpetual royalty-free license agreement.** The designer should also guarantee that your site does not include any intellectual property derived from a third party, or that proper licenses have been obtained on your behalf.
- **Your Web designer should also obtain written consent from any company or organization to which your Website is linked.** In most cases companies and organizations will be pleased that you've included a link to their site, but their agreement should never be assumed.

Last, but not least...

A Website is a vital and indispensable tool in successfully marketing your company, or organization. The authority and credibility a creative and well-designed site can provide your business is often a deciding factor in whether a client will pick up the phone and dial your number.

Ken Goodpaster is a Web designer, and has administrative and business experience spanning nearly twenty years. He is the co-founder of [DK Web Services](http://www.DKWebServices.com).

For more information, be sure to visit www.DKWebServices.com.