Selecting a website professional

Deciding who to use to develop your business website can be confusing. While you can build your own website, there are advantages in hiring expert help – allowing you to focus on growing your business.

You are likely to need a website professional when:

- starting a new business;
- creating a complex website, with online shopping for example;
- your website will be your primary way of engaging with customers; or
- you have limited or no experience in online development.

Because:

- they can create a tailored site with added features;
- you will probably save time and often money in the long term; and
- ongoing maintenance and support packages can be secured if needed.

Top tips

Be clear about the aims of your business, whether you actually need a website and, if so, what you want it to achieve for your business.

Understand the difference between a graphic designer and a web programmer/developer. A web programmer/developer’s role is to build a website’s functionality and features, while a graphic designer specialises in the overall layout and visual appearance. It’s a good idea to select a graphic designer who is happy to work closely with your web developer so if technical problems arise you don’t get stuck in the middle.

Create a clear, written brief of what you expect from the website professional and use it to obtain at least three quotes before hiring.

Seek suggestions of who to contact from friends, industry colleagues or from businesses with websites you like.

Ask for answers to your questions to be confirmed in writing and keep a copy in case of future concerns.

Make sure your website has a content management system (CMS) which allows you to edit and update your content, without having to pay a third party.
Questions to ask

1. How long has their business been operating?
   Try to choose an established business with a good reputation. If you do opt for a start-up organisation, try to negotiate a better price for the potential risk involved.

2. Can they provide samples of previous projects and will they provide details for you to contact their clients?
   Ideally, you want to find someone who has a demonstrated track record of working and delivering quality projects (on time) to small businesses like yours. Be wary of companies who are reluctant to provide you with details of their experience.

3. Based on your requirements, are they able to supply a fixed price quote?
   As with many industries, web development can be difficult to quote for. The developer should bear any additional costs if the project takes more hours to complete than they estimated.

4. If they source images, fonts and graphics, will there be ongoing costs related to copyright?
   As in any contract, be clear about what ongoing charges you will be responsible for.

5. How do they keep clients updated on progress?
   Some designers and developers are reluctant to show you anything until the project is completed. It is important to view the project in its development stages, so you can refine and adjust it to better suit your needs.

6. How many changes can be made before extra charges apply, and are there penalty charges if substantial alterations are made to the scope of work?
   This will need to be negotiated between both parties. If the original briefing document and formal quote are adequately detailed, disputes are less likely to arise.

7. How long would a project of your scope take and what happens if the project isn’t competed on time?
   The timeliness of promised work would be a good question to ask other clients who have dealt with this developer.

8. Do they provide clients with full ownership and backup copies of the files and images used to create the website?
   You should definitely be given full ownership of the files and images used on your website. You have paid for a project to be delivered, the files make up part of the project.

9. Once the project is complete, what support will be provided?
   Any new website is bound to have some problems or areas which need to be changed to improve the customer experience. It would be preferable to have the same person assist you in the launch and first few months of your website’s operation.