Choosing a
website professional

Deciding who to use to develop your business website can be confusing. While you can build your own website, hiring expert help comes with advantages, such as allowing you to focus on running your business.

You are likely to need a website professional when:

- starting a new business
- creating a complex website, offering services such as online shopping
- your website will be your primary way of engaging with customers
- you have limited or no experience in online development

The services of a website professional will help you:

- save time (and often money) in the long term
- create a more complex site with added features
- create a site with a unique design and functionality rather than using a standard template
- with ongoing maintenance and support packages if needed

Top tips

- Be clear about the aims of your business, whether you actually need a website and, if so, what you want to achieve for your business. There are many options when it comes to website functionality, including shopping carts, blogs, booking forms and news feeds.

The features of your website will depend on your business needs and how you wish to interact with your market.

- Seek recommendations from friends, industry colleagues or from businesses with websites you like. Also ask for recommendations through our Facebook group 'I'm a small business owner in Western Australia'. Select websites you like and find out who designed and built them (the developer is often listed at the bottom of the website). Check how the site appears on mobile devices, it's essential it's mobile responsive.
- Create a clear, written brief of what you expect from the website professional and use it to obtain at least three quotes before hiring.
- 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 'front end' of a website – how it looks. It's a good idea to select a graphic designer with marketing experience who is happy to work closely with your web developer, so if technical problems arise they can be dealt with.
- Make sure that your contract states that you own the copyright to the entire website, except for any stock photos or graphics. You should also confirm that you own the domain name, especially if the website professional registered it for you.
- Ask for answers to your questions to be confirmed in writing and keep a copy in case of future concerns.

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Top tips continued...

- Make sure your website has an open source content management system (CMS) which allows you to create, edit, publish, delete, organise and maintain content yourself without having to pay a third party. Check you have all the necessary user names and passwords to access your site.

- How much does your web professional know about marketing? Do they understand 'calls to action' and targeted messaging?

- Attend one of our many workshops to help you develop your digital skills. Visit **smallbusiness.wa.gov.au** to find out more.

Questions to ask

How long has their business been operating?
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.

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

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.

Are there any additional hidden costs?
It's important to know if there are any ongoing costs or charges that may relate to your website, such as hosting fees.

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

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.

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

How will you be invoiced?
It's a good idea to pay the website professional in agreed instalments once certain milestones are reached. This will help you retain control over the project.

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

Do they provide clients with full ownership and backup copies of the code 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 and these files make up part of the project.

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

For more information visit **smallbusiness.wa.gov.au**

Note: This information is not a substitute for legal advice.