

A Guide to Having a Website

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In my time as a web designer, I've realized something about business owners and my relationship to them. Many business owners know that a website can help their sales or give them a relationship with their customers. They know that a website, in general, is a good thing. What they don't know is how a web designer runs their website.

I hope to give you a little insight into this process for one reason - when your web designer (in this case, me) has everything he needs more or less when he needs it, your website will be much better. A web designer is like a publishing company, and you are the writer. Just like a publishing company cannot produce books without the writer's manuscript, a web designer cannot produce anything for your website without your input. So, what exactly does a web designer need from you?

Direction

Most web designers need direction. After all, this is your site; it makes sense for you to tell us what to do. Think of a web designer as someone who works for you, almost. He or she has a little more freedom, but more or less, you are his or her boss.

You are the one responsible for your website, just like you are responsible for your business. A web designer is going to use his or her design expertise to translate your ideas and concepts into a working design, but you have to be the one to say, “I want this content here,” or “I'd really like more of this color if possible.” Just remember that web designers usually know what they're doing in terms of design. That's why you hired them to begin with.

Communication

Maintaining communication with your web designer is important, perhaps one of the most important parts of hiring a web designer. When communication is sporadic or worse, non-existent, a web designer has no idea what you want. Web designers tend to rely on e-mail because it allows us to have clear messages of approved design decisions. After all, the odds of someone other than you sending an e-mail from your address are small. If you really hate e-mail that much, call your web designer about available times for him or her to come to your place of business and confer with you.

As for me personally, e-mail also prevents me from receiving calls in class. Most of my customers have my cell phone number; if you do, you're welcome to text me instead of using e-mail.

Content-related Issues

Sometimes, businesses seem to have trouble with a web designer with content. This fact is troubling, because a website is nothing without good content. If a website stays the same for two weeks straight, why should a customer continue visiting that website?

Most of these cases occur when the web developer does not have the required materials. Whether photographs or text, content does not appear out of thin air. And if you don't have it, ask the web designer for help. I'm available to help with pretty much any need related to your website, if you just ask me exactly what you want.

Deadlines

Deadlines are available in two varieties – designer deadlines and client deadlines. Client deadlines would be those set by you for your web designer. These are good as long as they are reasonable. Client deadlines mean you have a direction for your site that needs to be reached by a certain date. If client deadlines aren't met, the designer better have a very good reason.

Designer deadlines are set by a designer. Unfortunately, they have no measurable consequences. If a web designer asks for content by a certain date but doesn't get it, the web site suffers because of the reasons I listed in the content section.

Bottom line

This list summarizes the problems and solutions to each problem.

- 1. Direct the web designer towards your ideal website while allowing him or her to have freedom in the details of the design. Then refine that design in the revision stage until a design emerges that both of you are satisfied with.**
- 2. Communicate regularly about the needs of the website. Through text messaging, phone call, e-mail, Facebook - it doesn't really matter how. Just stay in touch so when something is need or a problem arises, an answer is never more than a day away.**
- 3. Send stuff! An empty site looks like you gave up on the site. If the web designer's inbox is empty of content, your site is probably empty too.**
- 4. Setting deadlines for your designer is good. If you don't feel comfortable setting deadlines for your designer, accept their deadlines like your job is on the line. Find some motivation to get them things on time.**