Choosing and Using a Website Designer

Introduction

A website is often the first point of contact a business has with potential customers but very few business owners have the skills to design and build a website themselves. There are many free online tools available that can help small business owners build their own websites but these are only useful for the most basic sites.

If a business is looking for a professional, well-structured and secure website that complies with all the relevant legislation, it is worth investing in the services of an experienced website designer.

This factsheet explains the services website designers usually offer, how to choose and brief a designer and how best to manage the process and keep track of costs.

What services can a website designer offer?

Website designers usually have skills in both the technical and creative aspects of building a website. They should be able to help a business with:

- Creating a basic website that introduces the business, its products and contact details.

- Creating an online shop so customers can order and buy goods online.

- Publishing a business blog.

- Updating an existing website that no longer fulfils its key functions or objectives.

- Optimising a website so that it is responsive and viewable on different screen sizes and various devices, such as laptops, tablets and smartphones.

- Integrating social media feeds.

- General website maintenance and updating.

- Making a website accessible to visitors with disabilities.

- Ensuring the website complies with all regulations that affect what can and cannot be included on a business website, as well as legislation governing online transactions (see BIF494 Legal Requirements for Business Websites for more information).

Finding a designer

There are a number of different ways to find a website designer, including:

- **Membership directories of website design trade associations:** These include the UK Web Design Association (UKWDA, www.ukwda.org) and the Web Design Directory (www.web-design-directory-uk.co.uk).

- **Online freelance directories:** Freelance website designers advertise on directories such as Freelance Alliance (www.freelanceuk.com/find-a-freelancer), Upwork (www.upwork.com) and Guru (www.guru.com).

- **Local business networks:** Some local business networks will have a list of recommended website designers.

- **Word-of-mouth recommendation:** Recommendations can be sought from other business owners, who can also provide references for website designers they have experience of working with.

- **Social media:** It can be useful to ask for recommendations via social media platforms such as Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook. There are social media groups that are dedicated to website design and these can also provide useful contacts or leads.

- **Specialist magazines:** 'Creative Review', 'Computer Arts', 'Web Designer', '.net' and 'Digital Arts', often include directories of website designers (see the further information section of this factsheet for more details).

- **Other websites:** Often website designers advertise at the bottom of the websites they have designed, or the owner of the website can be contacted for the designer's details.

Choosing a website designer

A website designer may be an individual working on their own or may work in a studio that employs several designers.

There are a number of issues that should be considered when choosing a website designer including:

- **Design style:** Does the designer's style match the style and values of the business?

- **Previous experience:** Can the designer showcase previous websites they have designed? Can they show that they have successfully brought all the various elements and functions together to create something that has a consistent look and feel, and is also intuitive to use and navigate?

- **Additional services:** What value-added services do they offer over and above other designers? For example, will they provide a training session once the website is complete to explain how to update it?

- **Ongoing support and maintenance:** Is the designer easily contactable and likely to be responsive with technical advice and support to get the website up and running again should a fault occur?

- **Communication skills:** Does the designer listen to what their client wants and give useful feedback, suggesting possible improvements or alternative approaches? Can they explain technical issues and jargon in layman's terms?

- **Project and time management skills:** Are they capable of completing the project on time and within budget? A good designer will give a realistic timescale and liaise regularly to

highlight any areas of concern or reassess the timescale. Will they work effectively with others involved in the project, such as web developers or graphic designers?

- **Commercial issues:** Do they provide a written contract outlining their terms and conditions? Will they guarantee the confidentiality of information they are given during the design process? Are they members of a trade body such as the UKWDA, which requires members to follow a code of professional conduct?

- **Pricing structure:** Do they have a clear pricing structure? For example, do they charge per website page, per hour or per project?

- **Timescales and availability:** When can they start and how long will the project take to complete?

Providing a brief

It is essential for a website designer to have a thorough understanding of the business and the specific objectives for the website.

The designer will need detailed information about the business, its products, its sector, and the style and tone required for the content on the site.

It is good practice to ask a website designer to sign a confidentiality agreement before providing them with information that could be commercially sensitive.

The brief should cover the following issues:

- Who will use the website and why?

- What sort of information does the website need to display? Will it just contain basic company information or will news, analysis and blog content be published on the website too?

- Should the website be interactive, with the ability for visitors to leave feedback or engage in online chat?

- Does the website need to accept online transactions?

- Does the website need to appear near the top of search engine lists such as Google, Yahoo! or Bing?

- Does the website need to be optimised for mobile devices?

To make sure that everyone has the same expectations of what is required and when, a detailed project plan should be provided. A robust and detailed contract should be signed by the website designer and client, containing:

- The budget for the project.

- The deadline for the finished website.

- The number of revisions and tweaks included in the price.

- The criteria for the website to be deemed finished to the agreed standard and brief, and what will happen if the website does not fulfil the brief.

- Copyright ownership for the design work, once completed.

See BIF145 An Introduction to Commercial Contracts in England and Wales for more information.

How much do website designers charge?

The cost of website design will depend on the number of pages and their functionality, and the time required to complete the interface design and the technical development of the website.

The complexity and functionality of the website will have an impact on the cost of developing the site. A complicated e-commerce website, or one with lots of video and other media, will cost much more than a simple set of pages with static information and contact details. Additional services such as web hosting, ongoing website maintenance and statistical analysis of the usage of the site may also incur a fee.

Handling problems

Generally, good communication from both parties is the best way of detecting and resolving any issues as soon as they arise to prevent them becoming major problems.

Speaking to the designer on a regular basis gives both parties the opportunity to do this. It means time is not wasted working on something that does not comply with the original brief, or does not fit with the overall objectives for the website. It also gives the designer the chance to communicate anything they are unsure of or anything that is not going quite to plan.

If problems arise that cannot be resolved in person they should be detailed in writing, setting out what a reasonable solution for both parties would be.

If problems continue to escalate, website design trade associations such as the UKWDA usually have a complaints procedure to follow. Even if the designer is not a member, the professional association may still be able to advise on a possible approach for resolving the issue.

Hints and tips

- Check that all the material selected for the website, especially images, can be used without infringing copyright or, if not, that copyright clearance has been obtained. The responsibility for this lies with the business, not the designer.

- If the website is for a limited company, the site needs to provide all the relevant statutory company information required, including the company's name, registered number, place of registration and registered office address.

- Websites that allow customers to place orders for products or services must comply with a number of regulations. Security considerations are also important.

Further information

BIF145 An Introduction to Commercial Contracts in England and Wales
BIF267 An Introduction to Promoting a Business Website
BIF335 An Introduction to Developing an Internet and E-mail Policy
BIF410 A Guide to the Privacy and Electronic Communications (EC Directive) Regulations 2003
BIF494 Legal Requirements for Business Websites

Useful publications

'Creative Review'
This magazine helps businesses to keep up to date with the latest design trends to ensure websites always look current.
Website: www.creativereview.co.uk

'Computer Arts'
This magazine showcases the best in the digital creative arts, including the best in website design.
Website: www.creativebloq.com/computer-arts-magazine

'Digital Arts'
This is a digital arts magazine that regularly features leading website designers.
Website: www.digitalartsonline.co.uk

'net'
This magazine offers hints and tips for those who have decided to build their own sites.
Website: www.creativebloq.com/net-magazine

Useful contacts

The UK Web Design Association (UKWDA) is a membership body for website designers. It offers a searchable directory of members and links to a number of useful resources.
Website: www.ukwda.org

The Web Design Directory is a smaller database of website designers.
Website: www.web-design-directory-uk.co.uk