

11 Questions to Ask a website Designer Before You Hire One

A White Paper By Marty Dickinson

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"My 14 year old will design my website for me."

"Just copy someone else's layout"

"Can't you just scan my brochure and use that as my website?"

The list of design-related shortcuts that my clients have attempted (or wanted me to attempt for them) could easily fill this page.

website design is always the first place where company owners want to cut costs and save money. Why is this so? Probably because the science of website design is the most misunderstood component of the Internet.

"Anyone can make a website in 10 minutes"

"Design your own website without any programming knowledge"

"FREE website templates"

These are all headlines I've seen on probably thousands of websites out there. Have you ever visited the website for Boeing or Comcast or, one of my favorites, Copper Mountain Ski Resort? When you visit their sites, what's the first thing that comes into your mind? Your answer is likely, "Great, I'm there. Where's the information that I'm looking for?"

Conversely, when you visit a site that has been produced with obvious shortcuts, what comes into the minds of most people? "Is this a real company? Should I trust them? Don't they have enough money to get a *real* website?"

See the difference?

A talented website designer can quickly get your visitors over the hurdle of wondering whether they should do business with you or not.

Having a successful website on the Internet has everything to do with trust. You've got to be perceived as real first, that you have a proven track record second, and that you can provide something that helps to fix your visitors' problems. If your site visitor does not believe in you right off the bat, you're likely to lose that visitor forever. A skilled website designer will create a site for you that earns its credibility and you'll make a solid return on your investment as a result.

Questions to Ask Your Potential website Designer:

There are so called “website designers” on every street corner. Be extremely cautious before you make your final selection. Ask the following questions to help you make your choice:

1. “Do you have sales experience?”

Think of your designer as one of your sales people. Would you hire a salesperson that doesn't know how to create a need? Would you pay a marketing director that doesn't have a proven track record? The best designers are creative people who are able to *sell* with their design and website layout concepts. Make sure you hire a designer that has some experience in sales.

2. “What type of Internet marketing strategy training have you had?”

Not only should a designer know how to sell, they should also have a working knowledge of what sells on the Internet. Do they know about the importance of the Upper Right Quadrant (URQ)? Do they know about how to use “the safe zone?”



What are the names of some Internet marketing experts that they've learned from? When was the last time they attended an Internet marketing seminar or workshop? Do they know what it takes to guide website visitors through the pages and inspire them to take action? Have they just figured all of that out on their own (be careful!) or have they learned such techniques from others?

A website designer should be familiar with the process of creating sales pages and shopping cart pages in a way that will bring you results rather than distracting the visitor from the sales process. When you ask to see sample websites that the designer has worked with, ask for sites that demonstrate their ability to convert visitors to paying customers or opt-in list members—not just samples of pretty pictures.

3. “Is this your full-time job?”

Many would debate me on this issue; but I believe you're either an Internet professional or you're just a wanna-be. I've found that part-timers in this business have other commitments that demand their time—at the worst possible times! Always work with full-time Internet professionals because they will be accessible when you need them.

4. “How many are on your team?”

Longevity is important to me as a service provider. When I am in need of services from others, I'll choose a company that has the most potential of being, well, "here next year." This question in and of itself isn't a deal winner or breaker. Some of the best companies I've worked with consist of just one person. The key is that by asking this question, you'll be able to get an honest answer to the next, which is: "Are you able to maintain your current workload with that number of employees?" By asking this question, usually one of two responses result. You may be told that 1) "We're just about to hire some more people because we're swamped," or 2) "We really could use the work because our people are just sitting around." Always choose a service provider that is growing.

5. “Do you offer any Internet marketing services beyond website design?”

Some people are "programming-people," some are "marketing-people," and some are "design-people." A website and Internet strategy should have one main purpose and that is to achieve business growth in one way or another. If your designer offers to optimize your site for search engines and go through the submission process for you, for example, make sure they've achieved favorable search results for others and that they're willing to spend some time on the marketing end of your website. Marketing a website is not a 30-minute task. It is an ongoing process of testing and monitoring. Beware of the designer that tries to belittle the SEO process by suggesting all he has to do is add “meta tags” for you and you'll magically appear on Google at the top of the list.

6. “Will I own my website and all of its contents?”

If you've read any of the other articles on this site, you'll notice that I'm into "control" big-time. If you don't have access to all usernames, passwords, tools, scripts, programs, and original graphics files, you will not be in full control of your site. In the dreaded event that your designer gets hit by a bus (or goes out of business), your anguish will be minimized by having original files so that you can provide them to another designer down the road. Demand any original files produced with PhotoShop, Illustrator, Fireworks, Flash, or other graphics program and access to special utility files that are used with your website.

If your designer uses images and photos from resellers such as iStockPhoto, be sure to either purchase the images yourself from iStock or get payment receipts from your designer and original files of those images. Such image resale companies have staff that manually visit websites and try to charge website owners \$250 a piece for using images and photos that are not paid for. One designer I heard of was taken to court with a lawsuit of up to \$18,000 for using images not purchased through the reseller.

7. “Do you design from scratch or use pre-made templates?”

Many people are against using pre-made templates. Others don't understand why you'd use anything else. Templates are sometimes a great way for a low-budget company to get started on the Internet. After all, a template can be purchased for usually under \$50 and then customized for another \$200 or \$300. I've found, though, that a custom design will pay for itself faster than a templated site. This is because a custom site is really the only way to feature the uniqueness of the company or service you're trying to provide. But, for the right website in the right industry, templates are a valid option.

8. “What is your average turnaround time per project?”

Typical graphics components of most websites should not require more than two weeks to create and integrate into your website. More involved design or programming projects can easily take longer because there is much more to plan. I've heard designers complain for years how slow their clients are in providing content for the websites. If you, “the client,” are not ready to submit your content, then ding content and making decisions resulting in delayed launches. If you know what you want and have the content prepared, the designer can work much faster for you.

9. “Do you charge by the hour or by the project?”

This is something very important to understand about design work. Whether a site costs you \$100 or \$100,000 to create is really not as important as what you might think. The critical question is whether your site will make that money back for you in three months or less.

If you're not sure whether you have a product that has a high enough value or quality, and you'd like to be conservative, then test the waters with a discount design. But, if you are confident in your product and are planning on serious and aggressive marketing, don't skimp on the design. Get it quoted as a complete project and know exactly what that includes. Hourly rates will typically apply as you request design alterations after the initial design phase is approved.

10. “How will you allow me to make content changes to my website?”

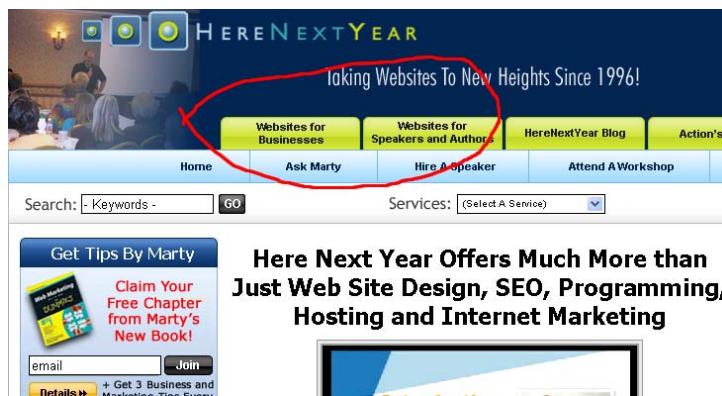
The days of sending basic text changes to your designer to add to your website are over. Plenty of content management systems (CMS) and easy-to-use HTML editors exist today so that anyone with basic MS Word skills can edit text, add photos, and create new pages. Make sure to hire a designer that knows how crucial it is for YOU, the business owner, to be involved with

maintaining your website content. You should be able to make basic changes to your website and your designer should encourage that. Choose a designer that will recommend and support the best possible content editing option for you.

One of the great programs we've been offering is to use WordPress blog software for full websites. A blog is a website; a website is a blog. The only difference is that blogs have a few more “cylinders under the hood” as I always say. The way we create them, most people would never even know the entire site is being supported by blog software. The websites don't even look like those “bloggy looking blogs” you might have seen. We even converted the entire HereNextYear website into WordPress format. Why are blog sites the new evolution of websites today?

1. **Save Money** by making basic content changes yourself instead of paying your designer
2. **Save Time** by integrating your website with Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and others
3. **Add Audio and Video with Ease** whenever you want
4. **Integrate Custom Design** into your website avoiding that “bloggy” look.
5. **Automate Search Engine Optimization (SEO)** so that every page you add to the site can be automatically configured for high positioning on Google's organic search results.
6. **Power to Grow** to hundreds or even thousands of pages
7. **Setup, Training and Support is Available** through HereNextYear even if you don't have us create your website. We'll work with your designer or you as little or as much as you need us.

Ask your designer if your website design can be added to WordPress or visit www.HereNextYear.com to see our WordPress Website Options



11. “What do I need to supply you to get started?”

Some designers will respond to this question in this way: "Just send any pictures you want and a logo if you have one and I'll take it from there." If someone says that to you, run as FAST as you can in the other direction! A designer who only asks for a logo and a few photos is an amateur!

The appropriate response should be something like this: "I have an extensive questionnaire to go over with you. It will take some time on your part, but your responses to these questions will prove essential to helping us PLAN for a website for you that pays for itself."

We call this questionnaire a **website pre-flight** document. If you already have a designer lined-up, it might be worth the \$27 we charge for access to our pre-flight as this document is available to the public through our Action Store at BusinessMarketingActionStore.com.

With any website project, your goal at the very least should be to get enough new business from the Internet to pay for the creation cost of the website. This pay back will inspire you to implement another phase, which we call around here the Internet Promotion Phase (or IPP). But, that's another white paper that you can sign-up for at:

www.herenextyear.com/help-topics/outsourcing-internet-marketing.php.

Next Steps...

The decision of choosing a website designer is an extremely important one that should not be taken lightly. Be cautious if you go the route of using a volunteer, friend or family member because it will only be a matter of time before that person gets side-tracked with other projects or interests. Always get a backup of anything a designer does for you so that you have control of the project. And, never hire someone that will prevent you from having that control. Most importantly, be responsible for your own road map to a successful website design. Formulate your own plan and outline for the designer to follow. Avoid withdrawn statements like, “I don't know what I want and I don't want to know anything about it. Just go make me a million bucks!”

Marty Dickinson started his first website in 1995 which grew quickly to become one of the largest in its field. Today he manages nearly 100 of his own websites and, with his team of 7, has planned, implemented, managed or contributed to more than 300 client projects through his online promotion company called HereNextYear.com. To outline his methods for others, Marty offers live training workshops and has self-published four books including *Winning the Internet Dogfight*, *Getting Brutal with Google*, *Convert Me Now!*, and *Surprise Cash*. His first commercially published book is in bookstores everywhere and on Amazon, ***Web Marketing All-in-One for Dummies*** (Wiley 2009).