

Preparing To Employ A Web Designer

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Document Purpose

Finding a good web designer isn't an easy task. With this guide I can't stop you meeting or employing a cowboy or your project failing to hit the mark.

In such a saturated market place such as web design there are things you can do to reduce risk, reduce the probability of your project losing its direction. We are going to improve your judgement and ability to make employment decisions by reducing the number of unknown factors.

This document is designed to stimulate thought and awareness. Prior to assessing a potential freelancer or design company I instead propose a departure from normal practice.

Let's look at how you can prepare for the design process. With focus you can minimise the chances of making a poor decision and have a much more intuitive feel of what will contribute towards the success of your project.

The Journey

The design process is a journey. Like any journey, to plan and follow a route to our destination we have to be furnished with some absolute basic information:

1. Knowledge of where you are currently and what resources you have.
2. An understanding of where you want to get to, and when you want to get there by.
3. Understanding points 1 and 2 will help you plan how to get to your destination in a way which will please the people you want to without wasting resources.

I know how simple this sounds but believe me that most people who start the design journey have very little idea as to what assets they currently have, what if anything is wrong with them, where they want to get to, and indeed by what route is most appropriate.

Without a sound understanding of location, destination and route, as an employer you are seriously handicapped in your ability to employ a web designer.

Simply, you are attempting to employ without any knowledge of what you are employing for. Success becomes a matter of luck than judgement.

Where Are You?

Your knowledge of where you are will vary tremendously upon your role in your organisation, how long you have worked there and also the kind of role you occupy.

You may be self employed or the owner of your own business. If that is the case you will likely have a handle on everything. You know all about your website, whether it works, whether it doesn't, who made it, when they made it and what your reservations were at the time.

You know if it has performed and you will know why, if it hasn't.

The same isn't necessarily true for people in larger organisations. You may be an employee who doesn't know where the IT department is, let alone who was involved in making the current website. Its purpose may be difficult to fathom if not impossible. You may be in the unfortunate position that you do not have the full picture of your company and what it does.

Regardless of the above, it is important to take stock of how things are in your organisation.

1. What are the goals of the company/organisation?
2. What future developments are in the pipeline?
3. Do you have a corporate style?
4. Does your organisation have a particular work ethic or moral code?
5. What do you sell or what service do you provide?
6. Who are your customers? What are their values? (this will be featured in another guide)
7. What marketing assets does your company already have in place?

This list is by no means exhaustive each point here and each point you will think of is too big on its own to be dealt with here. Some items such as defining who your customer is will be dealt with in another detailed guide.

Defining your customer is perhaps the single most important thing you can do and should not be underestimated. Where you are going and how you get there, will be affected most heavily by this one factor.

The purpose of this section is that after considering the above, you should be able to have a mind map, or a list of factors which are important to this project and that will shape its growth.

Make a point of writing such a list or pinning a large piece of paper on the wall to map important factors.

Where Are You Going?

Your mind map will start to suggest potential destinations, the things you added to the list will give you an idea of what your customers and therefore your company want, when by and whether they have moral and legal obligations about how they can achieve it.

Your mind map is going to be reflected in the website that you will be making. This is why we discussed corporate style. You would be amazed at how many companies embark upon designing a really important asset like a website and then months later totally change their corporate style. Such a big change is likely to be known about by some of your unseen colleagues for months and months. Seek them out before investing time and money into your project.

The goals of your organisation, what it wants to achieve, when fully understood by you will be an amazing tool in selecting a web designer or design company. You will come to know quickly if the personalities that you meet share your values, have experience in delivering the solutions you are looking for and whether they are capable of projecting your company.

How Are You Going To Get There?

OK, time for the gritty part. Remember we discussed customers? Well whatever your organisation type, Limited Company, Self Employed, Academic Institution or Charity. You will all have customers, or end users of some sort.

Let's take some time to think about them more.

Just who is your customer? It helps to imagine your average customer as a single person, give them a name. Think about what they like, what they don't like. What are the things they insist upon? What are the things they will run away from screaming? Add all these details about your customer to your mind map, or if you prefer, make an additional one.

I will make a questionnaire available on www.pauledwards.biz which will allow you to gain a really firm idea of who your customer is.

Your new site or how your old site will be remodelled is all about them. Your website serves and services your client. Whoever you choose to make your website must design it for your customer, and not for you.

This is a major stumbling block for many employers. They start to impose personal taste upon a site which is not designed for them. Try to think as your customer and dare I say it, trust your designer.

Your ethics and moral standpoint, as well as other factors like the size of your company and what your customer likes will probably have determined by this point whether you are looking to employ a company or a freelancer to do the work for you.

Do you want the personal service and lower cost of a freelancer, or do you want the benefits of employing a larger company? Both have positives and negatives but one will likely fit more with what your client would approve of.

Each company or freelancer will have a profile or personality just as your average customer. It's a matter of selecting the right shaped block to fit in the right hole.

Nearly There...

The personality of your chosen web designer will have a big pull in how your website is delivered. Each company or designer will have their preferred methods of creating and styling a website. Your site will need to be delivered in a way which your client feels comfortable with, has the technology to view and the knowledge to use.

Let's imagine for a moment that your end users are predominantly in developing countries. Your clients have access to computers, but they are slightly older models with lower screen resolutions and more limited processing power.

Why appoint a web designer who excels in building sites which require broadband to view, which has lots of flash animation, lots of memory intensive, bandwidth intensive "features" when you can likely employ a cheaper designer who excels in producing simple websites for such a target audience?

Please don't misunderstand me, your clients may all be web designers who will be impressed by nothing less than bleeding edge technology. However, a relevant point is made, and who you employ will impact heavily on end result and total cost.

The knowledge you have gained in understanding yourself and your customer will make sorting the wheat from the chaff so much more simple.

Conclusion

Know yourself. Know your customers. You will naturally seek the right kind of person or company to build your site for you.

This guide has given a really brief introduction to what there is to consider in picking a web designer and indeed the work that has to be done before you get that far.

You will find many more guides available at www.pauleddwards.biz which will go into much more depth about topics such as "who your customer is" and "how to assess your existing website". I thoroughly recommend reading them as you embark upon your project.

As always, if you wish to talk in more depth about anything relating to web design please don't hesitate to get in contact with me by phone, email or using the contact form on the website.

I wish you well in your endeavours.

Paul Edwards

info@pauleddwards.biz