Special Report: What Makes A Web Site "Affordable"?

Does this situation sound familiar? You need a web site for your small to mid-sized company, so you call around and email some web design firms. You get lots of vague and confusing talk in jargon you don't understand, a huge variation in price quotes and no basis by which to compare "apples to apples".

Affordability = Value

If your web site doesn't deliver value to your business it's a waste of good money. An effective web site delivers value by increasing your bottom line. It can bring in new leads, qualify leads and save staff time by answering questions. It can improve your competitive positioning, increase brand awareness, and get time-sensitive information out to your target audience. It can serve as an integral part of your sales process or you can sell directly from the web site.

Value = Price divided by Effectiveness

Let's say you're an independent consultant with a web site made five years ago – very inexpensively – by your secretary's college-aged son.   It looks amateurish and much of the information on it is outdated but the original designer doesn't answer your calls and you can't update it yourself because it doesn't have a content management system.

Many of the people who come to us for help are in exactly this situation!

If your average contract brings $3,000 in revenue, *how many $3,000 contracts are you losing* by allowing this unprofessional site to represent your business? These opportunity costs may not show up on your balance sheet directly, but they can make or break you.

Say that now you have your site completely redesigned by a professional costing $6,000. It's obvious that only two new contracts resulting from the site will pay for its $6,000 one-time cost. Your new site will bring in more business and you can update the information on it yourself with the content management system.

The fact is, in today's world, people judge you by your web site (or lack of it) and, in today's economy, you can't afford to lose these opportunity costs.

Getting back to pricing, why is it so varied?

A recent survey in the DC metro area found that costs for a brochure type web site varied from $1000 to $10,000 and above. Consider the following factors to understand why this is.

1. Technological Know How. Web site technology has changed dramatically. Today's business customers need content management systems and other database-driven, programming intensive capabilities. Many designers find it hard to make the switch from older-style, "static" sites to dynamic, Web 2.0 technologies. Their pricing may reflect their skill set. If pricing is low, the resulting web site may not have today's important business capabilities.

 2. Experience levels. Web design is a field where experience really pays off.   The more experience the designer/developer has, the faster he can create a professional site. Less experienced designers sometimes charge more for database-driven sites because they want to make sure they get paid for the extra hours they'll spend – essentially learning – on your web site project.

3. Farming out work to other countries. Some designers farm out design work to save money. The practice often causes more problems than it's worth due to language differences and unresponsive contractors, among other reasons.

4. **Template-based sites.** Inexpensive template sites may sound good at first but they're limited in layout and function, "boxy" or "blocky" looking, and, for a variety of technical reasons, can't be found in search engines.   A template site is not suitable for a serious business.

5. Dealing only with large companies. Some web firms won't touch small business clients. They prefer to deal with large companies with deep pockets, who require little "education" about web capabilities and online marketing.

6. Extensive design work. Your site must strike a balance between aesthetics and message. An overly designed, very graphic intensive site will cost more, but *can actually interfere* with getting your message across. This is another case where an experienced designer is key to success. For best results your web designer should be equally knowledgeable in three areas: Design concepts, programming and small business marketing.

7. Flash animation. A "100% Flash" web site will easily cost well over $100,000 and take many months to build due to the animation, which is very labor intensive. This added expense will <u>not </u>increase value for small business customers because no search engine can index "100% Flash" web sites.

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➡ In Summary: How do you get the greatest value?

Whether you're commissioning your first web site or looking to redesign your existing site, you need to do your homework. Look at your competitors' sites and think about exactly what information you need on your site and how it will fit into your sales process.

Then look for an experienced designer, who has successfully designed database-driven sites for at least five years and works with small to mid-sized businesses. Look at their portfolio, ask questions and make sure specifics are spelled out in a written contract.

Make sure your new site will have a content management system so you can make changes to the information on it yourself without paying a web designer every time.

Aim for a balance between aesthetics and function, and avoid both high-end "100% Flash" sites and low-end template based sites.

Remember, if the price seems too good to be true, it probably is!

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For more information, see *"Ten Questions to Ask the Web Designer <u>Before</u> You Sign the Contract"*

available from Affordable Web Design.

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