



Web Site Development Part 2 - Selecting the Suppliers:

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In this second part of a four-part Fact Sheet, our E-Business Advisers discuss the crucial matter of choosing the right web designer to get the job done:

Now you have defined your web site project and written up your plan, the next step is to seek suitable skilled and professional Web developers to turn your plan into reality.

1. But how do you determine the best choice of supplier?

Selecting the right web developer to work on your company Web site can be a challenge.

You want to be sure that the developer can do the work proposed; that they have the staffing resources required, skills to deal with all your technology needs and willingness to maintain close involvement with your project.

Good web developers tend to be good communicators and listen carefully to potential clients before providing a proposal document, ensuring they have a clear understanding of the project, its goals, and project-related technologies.

Good developers, based on their experience, can offer additional ideas and suggestions for managing enhancements to the project scope and make it easy for your business to provide feedback and monitor project status.

Most web developers have general web development skills – but need to call in appropriate experts when special needs arise.

No one person can be an expert on every technology and a good developer has connections into a wider network of technical people should the need arise.

2. Flexible Approach

Dependent upon your technological requirements, it's a good idea to evaluate a developer's flexibility and skills across the range of different Web site platforms.

Some only develop Microsoft-oriented sites, others have a wider range of skills and can apply them to even the most demanding of projects.

Given the opportunity, you'll also want to work with a local supplier who takes responsibility when problems arise or delays occur.

Many companies using remote developers may be pleased with the initial project outcomes, but find it difficult to deal with their suppliers when things go wrong.

3. Experience Matters!

A supplier who is experienced handling similar web development projects and the potential problems, is much more desirable than one who will convince you that nothing can go wrong and that all projects are completed on time.

You'll want to select an experienced web site developer rather than hiring the proverbial "teenaged nephew who seems to know a lot



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about the Internet" - or the perennial favourite "a bloke I know down the pub!"

You wouldn't let your company accounts be done by a niece who is "not bad at maths" - so why risk wasting your money with a potentially incompetent web designer?

Unfortunately, many small businesses have picked this option.

The low development costs can be a key factor, but longer term, this could prove more costly - it's really the worst choice you could make.

Some HTML programming skills and graphic design won't make up for the lack of experience most teens have with running a business, developing effective marketing communication, and implementing sophisticated Web-based technology.

4. Tips for Selection:

- Get three estimates. This ensures you get a well-rounded view of project-related issues and costs. The likelihood of bad communication is less when three potential suppliers review your project.
- Make your selection based on overall value not just cost. Spending a little less on a web site that generates a much lower return on investment isn't a good investment
- Understand that your project will probably cost a little more than projected - and, that it will likely take a little longer than you think.

Going in prepared will help you keep your peace of mind. If the supplier has a good change management process, changes to the budget and timeline will be justified and well documented.

- Use a consistent process to evaluate potential web suppliers. Consider using a checklist to rank suppliers on specific / important criteria.

An example is provided at the end of this Fact Sheet.

- Once you have made your final decision to award your project to a supplier, it is important that you both agree, in writing, all aspects that make up the project.
- An agreement should also include project-related expenses, such as hosting, training, ongoing site maintenance, plus wherever appropriate copyright and software licensing restrictions.

5. Checklist

Consider if the supplier demonstrates the following:

- History and suitable business experience
- Evidence of remaining in business – e.g. strong financial background
- Formalised business and development processes
- Understands branding / marketing aspects of project
- Understands the required technological aspects of project
- Understands usability / target market aspects of project
- Provides a fixed-price and fixed timescale project estimate

