WWW://???

Questions
to Ask Your
Web Designer

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Introduction

Many entrepreneurs rely heavily on web designers. In addition to designing and updating the web site for the entrepreneur, web designers also often assist with areas such as domain name registration and hosting.

Some entrepreneurs have found that this heavy reliance can turn into a nightmare in the event their relationship with their designer sours or they just want to make a change. In some cases these entrepreneurs have found that *their web designer controls access and even ownership of their web site and domain name!*

Horror Stories I Have Heard

Here are some real live horror stories told to me by my clients, students and readers.

1. After a dispute with their web designer, one company found their web site AND e-mail was disabled. They had no copies of their web site, so I had to find new hosting for them, find archived copies of their web site on the web, recreate all the forms and re-upload their site quickly to get them operating again. In the meantime, they may have lost 1,000s of dollars.

2. One of my students had custom programming done by a web designer for her shopping cart. When she went to change hosting companies, she found that she could not move her shopping cart program as it was owned by the designer. She had paid for 1,000s of dollars in development costs that were now wasted.

3. Spelling and pricing mistakes on web sites that remain uncorrected for weeks despite repeated requests by the site owners to the web designer to have them corrected.

4. Web sites being redirected to other pages, making it difficult for search engines to find them.

5. Web sites that re invisible to search engines because they are designed in formats like Flash and frames that search engines have difficulty indexing.

6. A web site designer demanding a full partnership in the business or they will set up a competing site and take their existing clients.

Protecting Yourself

Of course, not all web designers are unethical. But there are a lot of people professing to be web designers who lack experience, skills, and business knowledge.

Therefore, it is prudent for you, the web site owner, to ensure that you are protected and that the 100s or 1,000s of dollars you pay are well spent.

Here are some basic ways you can make sure your web site belongs to you and to improve your web site's chances of Internet marketing success.

Who Owns Your Domain Name?

Many web site owners let their web designer register their domain name for them. In some cases, the web designer lists themselves as the owner and main contact and the real web site owner can't move to new hosting or make changes without the permission of the web designer.

To check to see who owns your domain name, try Whois Source.

To protect your domain name, we recommend that you register your own domain name using services like GoDaddy.

GoDaddy lets you register your domain name for as low as $8.95 per year. If you need to register a .ca name, try Dotster.

Most hosting companies now give you an ID and password to access and change your domain name. You should create a password database or document to record the login information and make sure

all these passwords are kept safe. It is also a good idea to print copies of all passwords and access information sent to you.

You should also be careful about domain name renewals. If you forget to renew your domain name, someone else may take it, rending your web site and email inoperable and making all your business cards, brochures and advertising obsolete. I strongly recommend you set up a system to remind you about your domain name renewal. It is important that you also keep your contact info up to date as it is very difficult to make changes to your domain name if your email address is changed and your old one no longer works.

Where is it Hosted?

If you are hosting your web site with your web designer, you have no control if the relationship sours.   When you host your web site it is important that you are working with a reputable company and that you have all the IDs and passwords and other information necessary to manage the web site yourself.

You can consider the suggested company recommended by the web designer, but you should ensure that their relationship is arms length and you can continue to deal with the hosting company in the event of relationship problems with your designer.

If you are looking for a good quality, inexpensive hosting company, try iPowerWeb. iPowerWeb offers 10,000 MB of storage and up to 2,500 email accounts for only $7.95 per month.

Want to see how well your hosting company is doing? Try this free service from Internet Seer. Internet Seer will test your web site every hour to see if it is working and then email you to let you know it is down. In addition they will send you statistics each week showing what percentage of the time your site is down.

When choosing a web site hosting company, you should also ask if they provide statistics tracking.

How Can I Track Statistics?

It is critical to your Internet marketing program that you know how well your web site is doing. Good quality hosting companies will provide you with these statistics as part of your package.

A decent quality statistics package should track the following statistics.

- Number of unique visitors.
- Number of page views.
- How many visitors are from search engines and what key words they used to find you.
- How many people come from country domains such as .ca (Canada), .de (Germany) or .uk (England).
- What search engine "bots" have visited recently.
- What pages of your site are most popular.
- What web sites refer traffic to you.

Ask to see a demo of the statistics offered so you can ensure the tracking will meet your needs. If you don't have tracking available, you can try free services like Extreme Tracking or AW-Stats.

Who Owns Your Web Site?

This sounds so simple. You pay for the web site so you own it, right?

Maybe not! Here is a clause I found in **MANY** sample web designer contracts I found online:

Copyright to the finished web design site produced by [web design company] will be owned by [web design company]. The Client will be assigned rights to use the Web Design Project as a web site, once final payment under this agreement and any additional charges incurred have been paid. Rights to photos, graphics, source code, work-up files, and computer programs are specifically not transferred to the Client, and remain the property of their respective owners.

Many web designers and programmers feel that the creative work they do on your web site is copyrighted by them and that they retain an ownership right. So they just license it to you to use without giving you the original files so you can make changes yourself later or change designers. This is especially true in cases of programming code where

programmers feel they can use the code on their other client's sites, but you can't change or move the code.

To protect yourself, ensure that your contract with your web designer includes who owns the web site and all its components, including source code of any programming and that you retain the right to change designers and hosting.

What Formats Will Be Used?

The way your designer sets up your site affects your ability to move it and your ability to market your web site.

For example, if they have used Flash, frames, multimedia, or database generated web sites your web site *may be invisible to search engines* or not index fully in the search engines, making it harder for you to attract visitors.

If they used custom programming in formats such as php, asp, perl, cold fusion or other systems, you will need to know this so that when you move to another hosting company, you can ensure they support the same formats. Cold Fusion, in particular, is a database program that requires special, more expensive hosting and programming.

What Custom Programming is Involved? Why?

Custom programming is expensive and may take many hours of troubleshooting before it works properly. After all, if large professional firms like Microsoft have to continually issue patches to their programs to make them work properly, what is the chance a less experienced programmer will develop a bug free program for you in the first attempt?

Here are some questions to ask your designer in this regard:

- What custom programming will be done?
- How much will it cost?
- Why use this instead of an "off the shelf" option?
- How long will they continue to fix any bugs?

Programmers love to program, so they will sometimes use a customized programmed solution such as designing their own

shopping cart system rather then using affordable, proven technology that is already developed and trouble free.

I highly recommend using proven tools as it is usually less expensive, has fewer bugs and has less potential ownership problems than programming from scratch.

What Tools are Used in your Web Site?

When tools such as shopping carts and auto responder systems are added to your web site it is *critical* that you own the tools and that you have a list of all the tools used and *all the IDs and passwords* to them so that you can manage your own site if need be.

Do I Have E-Commerce Capability?

Most successful web sites let visitors buy right online.   You can easily add e-commerce capability to your web site using 1ShoppingCart or PayPal.

1ShoppingCart is a secure web-based shopping cart that can be added to any site. Features include e-commerce capability with over 150 merchant service providers, an upsell module, an electronic coupon and discount module, unlimited auto responders, broadcast e-mail, newsletter management, affiliate tracking and management, ad/revenue tracking, digital delivery system to deliver e-books and software, survey forms and a pop up wizard.

It will work with most credit card merchant services systems, including PayPal or you can use it to capture orders and process them manually if you prefer.

PayPal offers a low cost method of letting people pay by credit card or from their bank account online. They also offer a free, basic shopping cart that you can add to any web site.

If your designer is adding e-commerce to your site, make sure you know which system they are using, and the pricing and features. Make sure you own the software being used or are the registered owner of the service.

Who Is Doing The Work?

Some firms contract out portions of the work to others. Ensure you know who is doing the work and what your obligation is to them.

How Can I Save Money on Design Costs?

Web design can be very expensive. Here are some tips on how to save money on design costs.

Start with a professionally designed template.

For as low as $10 US, you can purchase a beautifully designed, professionally designed template for your web site from services like Template Monster. Template Monster has 1,000s of web templates to choose from and offer them in common formats such as html and Flash. If you want a unique look that no one else has, you can pay more to purchase exclusive rights to the template.

If you want an all in one system, Atomic Shops enables you to quickly build and update your own professional website, complete with hosting, 1500+ templates, email, 2000+ stock photos, newsletters, shopping cart, message boards, forms and much more. Very affordable at under $20 US per month INCLUDING hosting.   And it even connects into eBay.

You can either edit these templates yourself using software we will talk about later in this guide, or you have your web designer edit them to add your own content. This will save a lot of time and expense.

An additional benefit is that you know exactly what you're getting. Because web design is a creative process, you may not like the first few versions your designer comes up with. With 1,000s of templates to choose from, you will be able to get the look you want.

If you still want a custom look, you can use Template Monster to find out what you like and then have your web designer set up something similar.

Royalty Free Photos

When a graphic designer set up an e-book cover for me, they informed me that there would have to be an extra charge of $300 to license the photo they used in the design that came from one of their professional photo databases.

One of my clients had a web designer use photos that they had no permission to use and had to take them down and redesign the site when this was identified later.

Make sure that you know who owns any of the photos used in your web site.

I use services like Stock.Exchange and IStockPhoto to find good quality royalty free photos to use on my web site and in my newsletters. Most of these photos are free or very low cost. ($1 to $3 per photo at IStockPhoto.

Can I Update my Web Site Myself?

It is important that you retain the capability of updating the web site yourself even if you don't use it all the time. This helps keep costs down, quickly correct errors and update information on your web site, and lets you make changes to your web site in the event of emergencies.

One of my clients asked a web designer to set up a web site he could edit himself. The designer set it up in a programming language called php which cannot be easily edited unless you are a programmer or web designer. So make sure your web site is designed in html, so that you can edit it yourself.

Html web sites can be easily updated using an excellent software program called Macromedia Contribute. Macromedia Contribute allows beginners to update their own web site without learning web design, in an easy-to-use "what you see is what you get" interface similar to Microsoft Word.

Macromedia Contribute is made by the makers of Dreamweaver, one of the most popular professional web design programs. It is meant to

be compatible with Dreamweaver and other html sites, while making it easier for beginners to use.

At a cost of only $149 US, it is affordable for most entrepreneurs.

How Do I Choose the Right Designer?

With a great template plus software like Macromedia Contribute, you may be able to have a high quality site without a web designer.

But if you do need a professional web designer, here are some tips on choosing the right one.

1. Review their portfolio of web sites they've done to make sure their style is what you are looking for.

2. Contact some of their previous clients and ask them:
   a. Are they happy with their work?
   b. Was it on time and on budget?
   c. Were there any surprises or problems?
   d. Did they receive all the access information needed for the web site, hosting and tools used?

3. Ask for a copy of their web site services contract to ensure the terms and conditions meet your approval. Or use your own contract written to the terms and conditions you want.

What is the Role of a Web Designer in Marketing my Site?

I like to think of a successful web site as a stool with 3 legs. If all three legs are strong, you have a strong web site. If any of the 3 legs is weak or missing, the stool falls over.

The 3 legs are:

1. Your knowledge of your customers and their needs, your products and services.

2. A high quality web site that showcases your products and services and speaks to your customer's needs. You can make this "stool leg"

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