



The Quick Guide to

# Marketing Your Business on the Internet

## **There's a Better Way to Do Business on the Internet!**

Are you a business owner who can't wait to take advantage of the Internet?

This free guide offers some real-world website advice for small to medium-sized business owners. Inside we'll reveal:

*How to launch a great website at an affordable price!*

*The best way to promote your business website!*

*The benefits of owning an online business!*

*The truths and myths about search engines!*

*How to choose a great website name!*

*Why you shouldn't create your own website!*

*...and much more!*

## *Hiring a Web Designer*

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provided courtesy  
of Stone Rose Design*

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## CHAPTER 6—HIRING A WEB DESIGNER

### Creating Your Own Website

Unless you're an experienced website designer there are several reasons you shouldn't create your own business website.

#### ♦ Nothing Substitutes for Experience

Just as registering a business name and opening a store doesn't give someone the expertise to run a business, owning a computer with even the best graphics or website authoring software won't make anyone a skilled web designer.

Only years of design experience can give one that "artist's eye" needed to create websites that are easy to use, accessible, and easy to maintain. Anything less simply isn't worthy of your business or your time.

#### ♦ Print Design Isn't Web Design

Even if you may have access to experienced print designers, perhaps even in-house, the skills required to create a website aren't the same as those needed to create print materials.

However you should certainly take advantage of your designers skills by hiring a web designer who can take your existing materials and seamlessly convert them into a strong website.

#### WEB VS. PRINT DESIGN

Cost	Paper costs, color costs, printing costs, distribution costs, etc.	Though short-term development costs are higher, long-term costs are far less.
Production	Proportional to the number of pages.	Small cost for additional pages.
Layout	Hi-Fidelity; Virtually unlimited control of all elements.	Lo-Fidelity; less control and options.
Typography	A virtually unlimited number of typefaces can be used.	Any typeface can be specified but only a few (Times, Arial, Helvetica) can be guaranteed to be available on more computers.
Tangibility	Paper easier to read than a computer screen.	Extra skill and care is needed to make information easy to find, read, and print.
Maintenance	Reprinting required for the smallest change.	Websites are easily and inexpensively upgraded significantly reducing long-term costs.
Implementation	Desktop publishing and design software. No programming skills required.	Websites authored in HTML script. Advanced features require more advanced scripting and programming.
Distribution	Printing, mailing, and fulfillment costs.	No cost to e-mail web address.
Novelty	None. "Hey I got this great ad in the mail" not often heard.	Lots. "Hey I saw this great website" not an uncommon expression.

PRINT

WEB

#### ♦ Your Time Has Value So Don't Reinvent the Wheel

Buying web training for your designers is certainly one way to create a great website but requires far more time and cost than hiring a web designer.

Rather than wait months for a "first-attempt" website you can hire a web designer and own a profit-generating website in a matter of weeks.

### Hiring a Web Designer

"A picture is worth a thousand words." A memorable cliché that best explains why you probably shouldn't make your own website (or brochure, stationery, business cards, or any other promotional materials which represent your business).

As mentioned above, graphic design, the visual arts to be more specific, is a skill developed over the long term. Just as knowing how to type doesn't make someone a copywriter no collection of software and books can substitute for the years of practice necessary to develop savvy design skills.

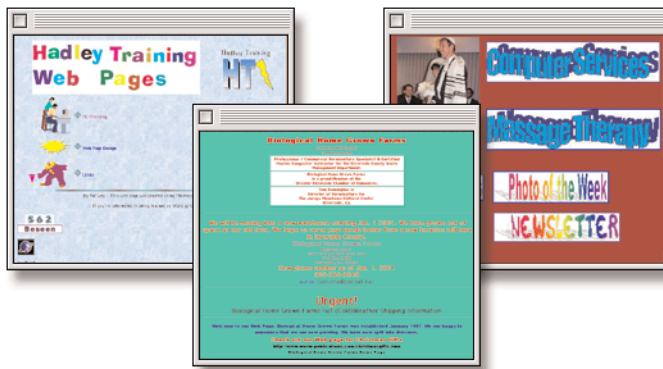
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*Owning web design software doesn't make one a competent designer any more than owning a set of tools makes one a competent mechanic.*

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It's these artistic skills—the sense of shape, color, composition, etc.—that distinguish designers from technicians allowing them to combine elements into a strong visual message that's far more than the sum of the parts.

Unfortunately it's often easy to see when this advice is ignored as evidenced by the following examples of home grown websites. (The website URLs have been omitted to protect the innocent.)



Just a very few of the problems with these sample home grown websites include: A logo composed of flashing garish characters, red text on lime green background—very hard to read, poorly applied “freebie” clip art, visually challenging background pattern, distorted, rainbow and blue colored graphics against a bright red background, and a wedding photograph having no relationship to any feature on the website.

But bad design isn't reserved for novices—there are plenty of poorly designed websites for which web design “pros” were paid a handsome price.

That's why it's so imperative for a business owner to be able to hire a qualified designer at an affordable price. Toward that goal the next two sections detail some of the qualities of a skilled web designer and some useful strategies for evaluating web design firms.

### Web Design Skills

If you want a professional website, hire a professional web designer. But before you begin to interview candidates it's important to understand some of the skills that distinguish a qualified web designer.

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*The best web designers aren't just artists but also demonstrate strong technical and marketing acumen.*

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To help you identify the right candidate here's a list of noteworthy website skills you'll typically find in a skilled web designer.

### PDF

(Portable Document Format)  
File format created by Adobe for publishing documents electronically.

The Acrobat Reader software is free from [www.Adobe.com](http://www.Adobe.com)

This document is available online as a PDF file.

### PERL

Perl is a powerful computer language, especially used for writing CGI scripts which handle input/output actions on Web pages.

One typical example of using Perl is for transferring information from one webpage to another.

### COLD FUSION

Website development software that allows webpages to be created on-the-fly from databases.

Similar to Microsoft's Active Server Pages development software.

### JAVASCRIPT

A scripting language designed by Netscape to add interactivity to web pages such as image rollovers.

Don't confuse JavaScript with Java. Java is a rich platform-independent programming language invented by Sun Microsystems, much like C++, capable of creating stand-alone applications.

### Communication Skills—Seek someone who:

- ♦ **Makes a more than earnest effort to understand your needs. Understands you may not know all the Internet jargon necessary to perfectly explain your needs and ideas. That is, hire a good listener.**
- ♦ **Respects your ideas and intelligence. Just because you may not be a web designer doesn't mean you don't have great ideas.**
- ♦ **Provides clearly written proposals and contracts.**
- ♦ **Details project goals, deadlines, and responsibilities.**
- ♦ **Regularly offers cost-saving alternatives.**
- ♦ **Details their approach to the development process.**

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*Find a web designer who is a good listener. Just because you may not be a web designer doesn't mean you don't have great ideas.*

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### Artistic Skills—Search out someone who:

- ♦ **Creates visually cohesive, easily expandable websites emphasizing concise copy, seamless navigation, mature layout, and ease of use. Their work should be able to pass "The Print Test": If the site were printed in full color would it be attractive enough to mail as a brochure?**

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*The best designers are masters of simplicity—they strive to reduce the number of visual elements to increase the visual impact of each.*

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- ♦ **Creates complementary print pieces such as catalogs, brochures, stationery, business cards, etc., in the course of creating an online presence.**
- ♦ **Converts almost any existing printed materials to a representative web-friendly format.**
- ♦ **Creates quality animated advertising banners.**
- ♦ **Selects appropriate imagery and can incorporate it seamlessly into any style design.**
- ♦ **Has mastery of web color and other image-related skills required to display images with high quality.**

### Technical Skills—Hire a web designer who:

- ♦ **Creates and maintains sophisticated e-commerce websites.**

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*16% of All websites are e-commerce capable.  
(Source: NetFactual.com)*

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- ♦ **Implements sophisticated interactive features such as online stores, customer feedback forms, and onsite searching.**
- ♦ **Powerfully enhances websites using scripting and programming languages such as Cold Fusion, JavaScript, SQL,**

### CLIP ART

Typically royalty-free images. The term comes from printed catalogs of royalty-free artwork which could be clipped and pasted as needed.



### FLASH

Sophisticated frame-based animation software published by Macromedia.

Flash animations are typically small in size making them excellent choices for websites.



### Perl, PHP, and Active Server Pages (ASP).

- ♦ Amends and maintains websites authored by other web designers.
- ♦ Finds creative solutions to overcome limitations of software development tools.
- ♦ Enjoys close relationships with Internet Service Providers insuring low-cost, quality hosting services.
- ♦ Creates effective online versions of print catalogs in either HTML or PDF formats.

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*In real estate it's "location, location, location". In web design it's "experience, experience, experience"!*

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### Advertising Skills—Look for someone who:

- ♦ Creates effective copy for print and website marketing materials.
- ♦ Designs brochures, logos, and other advertising materials.
- ♦ Authors successful advertising slogans, tag lines, and domain names.

#### A SAMPLING OF MACINTOSH WEB DEVELOPMENT TOOLS



### Entrepreneurial Skills—Interview someone who:

- ♦ Shares your business sense.
- ♦ Understands website promotion and helps you clarify your website goals and vision.
- ♦ Offers methods to cut costs while increasing online presence.
- ♦ Is an authority in the field, who perhaps authors design-related articles, conducts public lectures, or trains others.

### Choosing a Web Designer

Web design is an unlicensed discipline. Unlike nurses or lawyers anyone can buy website design software and instantly declare themselves a skilled website designer. To buttress their claim they can also join web designer guilds or certification organizations and adorn their webpages with plaques provided with a paid

membership. These organizations do have value, for learning and sharing, but not as a source for accreditation.



The unfortunate result is that website design skills and pricing run the gamut. On one occasion we received information from, to be polite, a clearly unskilled web designer who pitched that “You can’t get a good website today for under \$10,000.”

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*Web design is an unlicensed discipline. Carefully evaluate whom you consider hiring.*

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There are certainly good, affordable, web designers to be found, but as with any business services search it comes down to knowing how to evaluate their skills and then asking some hard, revealing, questions.

### Evaluating Websites

The most direct gauge of a web designer’s skill is their portfolio. The portfolio should offer at least a half-dozen professional, graphically diverse websites that are indicative of the types of websites they can create for you. If the designer claims they can create an e-commerce site it’s certainly reasonable to expect a few to be displayed in their portfolio.

You can also glean quick insights about a web designer’s skill by looking for a number of website red flags such as:

- ♦ **Counters. No one needs to know how many visitors you have any more than how many sales you make each day. A website counter can be set to start at any number making it impossible to confirm its authenticity.**
- ♦ **Excessive use of bright text on a dark background challenging the vision of the visitor.**
- ♦ **Hodge-Podge or other visual gotchas and animations that are inconsistent with the look and feel of the website.**



Examples of “send email” clip art found on home grown websites.

Neither are appropriate for a professional business website.



◆ **Distorted or poorly implemented graphics**



- ◆ **The website requires a specific hardware or software configuration, such as Internet Explorer or a 17" monitor.**
- ◆ **Inappropriate music upon entering the website. (Imagine hearing a stock market ticker each time you open a newspaper business section.)**
- ◆ **Animated "Hey! Great News!" message tickers (Why challenge visitors' patience?)**



It's also a good idea to ask the designer to evaluate your competitors' websites to both gauge their design values and brainstorm ideas for your own site.

### **Interviewing the Prospect**

Here are some no-nonsense questions and considerations that will also help to quickly reveal the website designer's skill level.

- ◆ **Do subcontractors design their websites? If so, who will maintain and update the site should they leave?**
- ◆ **Did they create all the work in their portfolio? If not, who authored the other portions?**
- ◆ **How do they charge and bill? Do they itemize costs?**
- ◆ **Are there any administration or setup costs?**
- ◆ **Do they offer a package deal, hourly, a combination of both? Why?**
- ◆ **Are they willing to detail all the costs involved, including hosting and maintenance-related fees?**
- ◆ **Do they offer reasonable payment terms?**
- ◆ **Will they detail the costs of the websites in their portfolio?**
- ◆ **What do they charge to register a domain name?**
- ◆ **How long have they been in business?**
- ◆ **How many total websites have they completed and why are all not displayed in their portfolio?**
- ◆ **Do they have a close relationships with local ISPs?**
- ◆ **Do they have good references? Can they offer testimonials?**

There's another important reason to inquire about references—because you don't want to buy someone else's website.

Though a website isn't a piece of software it can be copied, edited, and claimed to be created by someone other than the author. It's certainly uncommon but it's good to

### **URL**

(Uniform Resource Locator)

URL is synonymous with web address.

The most common way to use a URL is to enter into a WWW browser program, such as Netscape or Internet Explorer.

### **.TV .CC .WS**

As a result of the difficulty to find a good dot-com domain name some countries are vigorously marketing their own domain designations as an alternative.

### **.BIZ .INFO .PRO**

Three new domain extensions, .biz, .info, and .pro, will become live in late 2001.

Business may file to request one these domain names before they become available for registration.

### **SEARCH ENGINE- SPIDERS**

Spiders and Robots (or "bots") are automated programs that explore the Web.

The most common Spiders collect Website addresses for Search Engines to index.

be aware that the practice exists.