

5 Common Pitfalls of Web Development

This article is geared towards the company, business owner, or persons investigating bringing an existing business online, updating an existing website or web presence, or creating a business online (shopping cart, etc.).

Congratulations! You're a big step ahead. You have probably already weighed the pros and cons of expanding a conventional brick-and-mortar presence against building a beautiful website and online marketing plan and have opted to try this new Internet stuff. But, this path does have obstacles. Some of these obstacles can be navigated by you personally or persons at your company who are in charge of the project. Others are not so easily avoided. These challenges are often confronted only on the development side of your project – meaning the development company you choose is a key component of a successful project. Only by knowing of and being able to navigate around or over all of these obstacles will you have the most successful (and profitable) experience online.

The 5 Common Pitfalls of Web Development:

1. Selecting a Web Development Company
2. Lack of Planning/Understanding
3. Cost
4. Timeline
5. After Launch - Ongoing Operation

Selecting a Web Development Company

The first and perhaps most costly pitfall in any website project is something you can't personally control once you're locked in – your web development or Internet marketing company. So, spend time evaluating this one. Do your due diligence. The web industry is a very interesting industry and as you proceed down the journey of bringing or creating your business online you may get a sense of this. Unlike other professions web design or web development does not yet have rigorous guidelines or authoritative organizations. This is probably due to the fact that the industry is just so incredibly new. The precursor to the Internet was only first invented in 1972 and only gained widespread use both as a tool for consumers as well as business in the late 90's.

Because of this you will probably experience great discrepancy between various companies' prices', timeline, and overall quality of work. So do your due diligence. Research each firm you are thinking about choosing. Ask for references. Ask those references their experience before, during, and after production or creation of their project. Pay particularly close attention to the experience during and

after the project. Have updates been made in a timely fashion? Are emails and phone calls responded to promptly? Are suggestions being made about the direction of the project or marketing?

One of the biggest things to keep in mind when selecting a web design or development company is that this industry in particular lends itself to a partnership relationship – not a legal or monetary partnership – but a co-existence partnership. The web development company feeds off your project, it provides a stream of revenue to help the business sustain, and your project, if done correctly, should be an indispensable part of your company. Your web project should save you money, making processes more efficient, it should make you money, bringing in leads and sales. When such an important part of your business is run or being handled by software another company is ultimately responsible for it is best to look at your development company in this light – as a true partner. You can and should grow together over the years.

Ask yourself, “is this a company I want to partner with?”

The answer to that question, after doing your due diligence, should be enough to evaluate and navigate this first most common pitfall.

Lack of Planning/Understanding

The second pitfall of many web development projects is simply a lack of planning. Don’t kid yourself, it is a necessary step! But, the amount of time that will be necessary is directly proportionate to the complexity of your project. Additionally, although planning is all encompassing, particular attention should be paid to the “understanding” of your project. This relates to the intangibles, the things that might not be necessary for the creation or operation of your site, but the things that will lead to its grand success. Understanding refers to the audience of the site, the behavior of that audience, your ability to communicate your own experience and knowledge about that audience to your web development company. Beyond that or perhaps as a springboard off it, the marketing of the site will be infinitely more successful with this understanding. Pages can be coded in such a way, certain text can be used, designs mapped out, that address your audience(s).

Planning of your site across many variables, interaction, design, market segments/audience, phases, launch procedures, and post-launch procedures, will help you have a full understanding of what is going on, where the project should and needs to be at every milestone, and ultimately will help you and your web development control costs and keep timelines tight.

Cost

In the web industry there is a term called “scope creep.” With custom web design and development in particular this scope creep is a big problem. Scope creep refers to the expanding of projects or the specific items within a project. For example, a basic website is planned between a company and a web development firm. It is agreed that the website will have 10 pages, 10 images, and a contact form. But, mid-way through a representative from the company has a great idea. Why don’t we include a photo gallery! This is great. A photo gallery will give the company the opportunity to showcase their talent and

will also feed the egos of the new owners of the gorgeous work created. This is scope creep – the addition of items not planned or discussed mid development.

If a good web development company has been selected proper planning should be done and therefore cost is not usually an issue in these regards. But, when additional things are added, cost has a tendency to become a problem. In general, the most cost effective and time efficient (more on this later) way to deal with these great ideas is simply to shelve them. Your primary goal should be launching your website. The most important thing is establish something immediately, get those preplanned items out that will help you build an audience and get in front of your audience immediately. Then down the road, go through the process again, address your web company with your ideas, plan their execution, and add them to your site. Not only will this save you money, and time, but it will also be a value added service for existing users of your site.

Another issue that arises in web development regarding cost is the major discrepancy between full company prices and freelance prices. As can be assumed, company prices are typically much higher – often times many times higher than freelance rates. Regardless of which you personally decide to go with, by considering the first pitfall you should be able to make a good decision. In the web industry there exists a big gap, a mountain of freelancers who are great at what they do, but are often fly-by-night in that their rates are sometimes so low (to get the work) that they cannot afford to support your website after launch. Consider that even a freelancer, who let's say should charge roughly \$30/hour in order to maintain a modern living, also has overhead in terms of time spent looking for clients and marketing him or herself, time spent discussing and selling him or herself for projects, and finally the lapse of time between projects. With this in mind you should be able to come to a complete understanding of proper freelance prices. Another thing to consider when comparing the costs of a project, particularly the difference between freelancers and a development company is the speed and expertise with which these entities can draw on to effectively complete a project. One person can only know or do so much. On the other end of the spectrum there are some companies that gouge their clients based on their clients' position in the marketplace – this is also something to be wary of. Ultimately, ask yourself, "is this a company or freelancer I want to partner with?" When you ask yourself this question outside of price, the matter of cost often becomes immaterial.

Timeline

Timeline is all important in the web development industry. But, it often falls to the wayside. Unlike print, advertising, or conventional marketing companies, there are no *real* deadlines. Deadlines are almost always determined by you the client and your web development company. You don't have a magazine schedule or print schedule to abide by. Because of this timelines are often flexible, which in and of itself is not bad, but often things can get stretched too much. Be wary of this. Get a complete timeline up front, but understand that additions, changes, revisions will all effect this timeline.

After Launch - Ongoing Operation

Have you heard yourself asking the question – "how much will my site cost to maintain?" This is a common question asked by people looking into building a website. What you should ask is, "what do I

need to do to make my website a success?” Subtle difference, but the answers will lead you to the numbers you are looking for. Generally speaking there is only 1 ongoing cost of a website, hosting. Hosting is like rent for your website. It is the place where it lives, where it gets “served” from. Hosting can range from only a few dollars a month to thousands of dollars per month.

But, outside of hosting there aren’t many costs, unless you want there to be, or need there to be, in order to make your website a success. The ongoing operation of your site is all important in the success and marketing of your site. For example, constant updates are a signal to search engines, and visitors, that you care, that you are up-to-date, an expert in your field. Also, adding additional tools can be viewed as added benefits that will keep users coming back.

If there is one all important thing to keep in mind both about your site launch (while it’s being built) or after it has gone live it is:

Just because you have a website, doesn’t mean users will come.

You must market it, on and offline, update it and add tools or resources for users. Current estimates put more than 110 Million distinct websites on the Internet, with over 20 billion pages. What makes your site different? How are users going to find you in all that mess unless you take steps to grab their attention?

Knowing the 5 pitfalls of web development is a great first step to avoiding them. Take your time, perform your due diligence and you will be on the path to a well crafted, successful website!

<http://www.boutell.com/newfaq/misc/sizeofweb.html>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_sites