

Why Hire a Professional Web Developer? When I can do it myself.

In the beginning, web designers and webmasters were publishers essentially creating newspapers online. Overtime, good web designers have developed into not only artists but programmers, market analyzers, and most importantly user specialists. Web design is not limited to creating cool graphics and using HTML to upload a website to an online server. There are other factors involved.

Can you afford to take time away from managing your business to learn all there is know about creating a dynamic, useable, professional website? Would you videotape your own commercial for television or print your own business cards? Are you going to risk your business identity and your marketing to an amateur web site?

There are several points to consider when deciding to build a web site and build it yourself. Granted, it is easy to build a web page using the What You See Is What You Get (WYSIWYG) web editors available. FrontPage and CoffeeCup are only two programs that come to mind that can help anybody unfamiliar with HTML (HyperText Markup Language) to build a web site. The problem is that these software lack a practical knowledge of "usability" and design fundamentals. They also do not help you figure out why your design looks great on Internet Explorer Browser viewed with a 64-bit True Color monitor setting but look completely different in FireFox viewed with a 128-bit High Color monitor set at 1200 x 800 pixels.

Beyond HTML, let's discuss what building a quality web site requires.

Search Engines. After you have uploaded your website, it is not automatically registered with all the big search engines (Google, Yahoo, MSN, AltaVista, Excite, etc.) and it doesn't matter if your domain name starts with an A or a Z. The search engines will not list you until you have registered your site, found reputable sites to link to you, placed your meta tags in the web site's code, produced web content rich with key phrases but still readable and appropriate for your target market.

Web Usability. It is not only important to create an aesthetically pleasing website, but one that your users will want to return to learn more, shop more, or keep up to date with the latest news about your company or

community. That requires fast loading times, common-sense navigation, simple and focused content, as well as attractive graphics.

Design. Yes, it is true; you need an attractive web site. It should not only provide information, but it should also be welcoming and focused on what appeals to your target market.

Animation. Too much of a good thing is bad. Yes, it is kind of cool to have stuff that moves on your screen but after a while users will either ignore it or not return to your site again. Movement is nice for a short time, but you will notice that professional websites use animation to a minimum if at all.

Flash. We've all heard about it. How cool it is. Although, be aware that if the image is not designed properly, the majority of Internet users do not have the bandwidth to view them properly if at all. Websites that use Flash effectively use it for banners or advertisements. Most all-Flash sites are within the entertainment industry and many times does not need the search engine optimization techniques that Flash can hinder.

Programming. Do you now how to make the images change as you move your mouse over them? Can you create a form that will send you its results via e-mail? JavaScript, Perl, PHP and many other languages perform these and more. Programming can be important in creating a website dynamic and useful enough for your customers.

Browsers. Did you know that not every web browser is created equal? FireFox, Internet Explorer, Opera, Mosaic, etc. are each created by different companies (Mosaic owner actually created Netscape). Some web authoring software will format your site for one browser but it will look completely different on another browser.

Monitors. Resolution, colors, font size, all affects how your website looks. An 800 x 600 monitor using 246 colors will not show that great chartreuse color you picked for your logo and top banner. Web-safe colors are important to quality design.

Remember, your website will reflect your business' personality. Is it saying what you want your customer's to here?