

Planning & Budgeting for a Web Site

Every day I get asked how much a web site is and you would think that by now after more than 10 years I could answer that question. The problem is that not all web sites fit nicely into a little take out box.

What do you think about that question? It is the same kind of a vague question that could be asked in any industry, for example; How much is insurance? How much is a car? How much is it for a house?

The question can not be readily answered unless there are more details. So we need to sit down for a meeting and hash out the details. More often I find that my potential clients are simply not ready to build a web site.

They may not be ready financially because they thought what they were asking for was inexpensive.

Some are not ready because they don't have any content. We will touch on content later. Please read on...



If the web site was a “hamburger” I could tell you on the spot what the cost would be.

This is a metaphor that I use a lot and I think it is fitting because everyone thinks they understand the “hamburger”. If web sites were like hamburgers (and someday they will be) my job would be a lot easier.

Web sites are not easily understood by the public at large. So, I am writing this article to help you understand more about what you are asking for when you inquiring about having a web site built.

The goal here is to help you plan and budget for a web site.

Custom vs Template

Just like the difference between a truck off of a dealer's lot and one that has a lift kit installed and flames painted on the side, a web site can be designed to your exact specifications or you can use a template.

There are a lot of nice templates out there that are free or cost around \$60. Templates can be modified but the “look” is already established. I often tell my clients to surf the web and show me what they like in web sites because I can retro-fit anything out on the web for your needs. This saves you both time and money.

If you want to see original design performed for you, expect that you will pay more for your web site. In general you will get 3 iterations and charges for subsequent designs after that. While you could have me design your web site for you, I can also refer you to some stellar designers that I know.

If you want to play the game “**I will know it when I see it**” you may get stuck in the design phase for a very long time.

Do you know what you want?

This is absolutely key to planning and budgeting your web site. Do a little homework and look at what your competition is doing. Do you see a variety of web site styles? Are you finding some functions that you think you might like to have for your web site?

For example; online applications or estimate forms, newsletters, surveys, member logins...

Here is another question you should be asking yourself; “Do I want the ability to update the site myself?”

This is an important question because it relates to how you might want to handle monthly or weekly updates to your web site.

Some web owners simply don’t have the time to dedicate to keeping a web site fresh and need assistance with that. Or do you think that having the ability to update the site yourself will save you money? Do you want to update your web site a lot?

Having the ability to update the web site yourself will also increase cost because of the need for a database to store page data and the scripting involved to make it so that you can interact with the database.

Database Driven Web Sites

We have talked about web pages that are controlled by a database before [click here](#) for a review on different web site types. CMS (Content Management Systems) almost always require a database to hold the page information.

Anything with a login for members requires a database.

To keep things in perspective, a web site that uses a database has more technical aspects involved with its use than a static web site.

Static pages are written in plain HTML (Hyper Text Markup Language). When you start adding functions like "login" or "search" more specialized scripting needs to be written to interact with a database.

Note: There are many different disciplines involved to produce a web site. Designer, Programmer, Copy Writer, Search Engine Optimization, and Web Marketing.

Rule of Thumb

Like any industry, web development has a general rule for estimating web site building. It is generally between \$100 and \$200 per static page.

Notice I said "static". If you need specialized scripting for special functions then these functions need to be looked at in great detail in order to give you an accurate cost estimate.

It may be worth paying a few hundred dollars for a feasibility study to see if your business plan can support the building of a complex database driven web site.

Oh, were you thinking that you could take 20 pages and throw them all into one long page for \$100? If you can find someone to do that for you, hire them.



Most web designers or developers will give you an estimate based on the pain factor. More experienced professionals will charge more because they have endured more pain. Less experienced professionals will be more hungry and have yet to experience the pain.

Ultimately you get what you pay for. Many new web designers have not encountered enough problem-solving to be of any use to you.

I encourage my customers to shop around not because I am the lowest price (gosh I hope not) , but because I want them to learn what it is they are purchasing. I go through the same thing when I want something. Every quote I get teaches me a little bit more about what I am asking for.

Time Factor

If you are in a hurry to put up a web site consider some of the do-it-yourself products that almost all web host companies have in their offerings. Most of them are somewhat easy to use. Just pick a template, start typing sales copy and you are done.



When hiring a web designer or web developer you are in essence renting someone else's time and resources. There is always more time involved than you would think for a web site to be completed.

The larger your project is in complexity and pages the longer it will take to produce and the more chance of cost and time overruns.

Chances are the individual or firm you have hired is not working solely on your project alone.

As a web owner you have the responsibility of providing information for your project. If you delay the project, do not assume that the web site vender can simply pick up where you left off or speed up just for you. You may have broken momentum in your project and you will have to be patient for its completion.

I know someone out there will say: "Hey!, isn't it the customer's needs that should come first?". Certainly, but we must be talking about a hamburger.

My advice to those who are seeking to build the next Amazon.com should consider both time and cost contingencies for their project's budget.

In other words, don't set off any advertising until your web site is complete and online.

Are You Ready for A Web Site?

Do you have a logo? Do you know what you want your web site to "look" like?

Most important of all, what is the purpose of your web site? Is it just a digital brochure? Good. Then it sounds like you know what you want.

Is your web site suppose to generate leads for you? If so, do you have an unbelievable offer to use for these leads? Do you know who your target customer is?

Web site check list:

- Domain Name Ideas
- Company Logo
- Web Design References
- Contact Information
- Page Content Written

If you don't have the answers to these questions then I encourage you to start taking notes and preparing a plan for your next web site.

You may have noticed that I listed domain name ideas first in my list above. It is because everything hinges on that domain name.

If you need help coming up with a new domain name, get in contact with [Site Mechanix](#). We love to help businesses brainstorm about new domain names and help them register the domains right so that they have full access to them.

You Are Not Alone

There is an entrepreneur born every minute. Perhaps because of a layoff or simply a desire to do something different.

Take stock in your friends and colleagues. Ask them what they think of your idea. Get a consensus of how the web site should look with samples of other sites to compare. Do this with logos and sales copy if you have it.

Believe it or not, the people around you want you to succeed. If not, find some more people.

Many of my clients use business coaches and mentors. These are also great resources.

If all of this is too over whelming and you especially need help with content then you might want to look at hiring an advertising agency.

Yep! An ad agency has everything you need to help you develop a complete package. They can assist with not only with a logo but a whole branding package as well to make your company "look" like a million bucks.



Ad agencies have staff with all the varied disciplines under one roof. They can write all your content and produce a marketing plan. They can just as easily produce your web site.

You can even play “I know it when I see it”, ...they don't care.

All you have to do is sign the checks.

OK, Site Mechanix is not an advertising agency. We are a web site consultancy with many resources. We can help you with any and all parts of your web site development.

Hiring an ad agency (and I can recommend some) is a very solid idea and should be considered if you are serious about your business plan.

However, if you are feeling a bit undercapitalized, Site Mechanix may be able to show you ways to achieve your goals online with little expense. There are ways to tap into your own sweat equity when funding is limited.

So, without the overhead expense of commercial real estate, we can find the resources you need for your web site whether it be a copy writer, designer or programmer. Our resources are virtual!

The key is knowing what you want.

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