

WEBSITES:

COSTS VS RESULTS

While IT services and websites may come with a costly price tag, there are some ways to ensure you get value for money while maintaining a vital presence on the Worldwide Web.

WITH our increasing dependence on websites, there's a lot of chatter among business owners about the rising costs of IT services. The good news is that as more people and businesses rely on websites to research product information and to make vital purchasing decisions, websites are also delivering more profit.

Lots of people in business make poor decisions relating to their website because they fail to take the time to learn about the medium. Instead, they try to cut corners that are ultimately more expensive to fix.

Have clear goals

Most websites are built for one of two reasons: credibility or profit.

Most service-based businesses need a website to prove credibility to potential and existing clients. These websites should provide extensive information about the services provided, why a client should choose them, an up-to-date portfolio and an easy method of contact. These websites tend to be smaller, but require clever dynamic content to be effective.

Retail and event organisation businesses must turn a profit from their websites. Their focus should be on product information and strong photography to encourage purchase. Retail websites are naturally large because of the number of products most shops carry. They also tend to be more expensive due to the need for businesses to frequently update their prices and product range. Most retail websites therefore have a database and easy management interface.

Clarify your website goals before engaging a web developer. If you expect to make money from your website, you should treat it like any other business expansion and write a plan.

Research online competition

You can save a lot of money by checking out the mistakes your competitors have made online and avoiding them. Don't just check the local competition, research similar companies in other regions of Australia and around the world.

Watch your own habits when researching products; pay attention to what grabs your eye, where you click on the page, what you searched for and how easy it was to find essential information



like contact details and prices. Keep a list of the things you like and what you don't.

Be especially careful of gimmicks which might catch your attention but distract from the message or purpose of the website.

Get organised

Disorganisation is the major reason budgets are blown in the web design industry. You can be several thousand dollars out of pocket if you do not get this right.

Be aware that most web development companies charge by the hour, which means if you are disorganised, you'll be paying by the hour for someone to get your materials in order.

Collect all your branding and marketing materials

This should include your logo, corporate colour scheme, business cards, brochures, letterheads and print advertisements. Ensure you have vector copies from your graphic designer of at least your logo.

These materials are more essential to the web design process than anything else and leaving it up to your developer to recreate digital files from business cards or printed material can incur hours of unnecessary extra work.

Consider providing a written brief

A clear and articulate design brief is crucial to the design process - if you don't write one, your web developer will need to spend extra time putting one together. A good design brief will include extensive details about your company, the aims of your website, your target audiences, your budget and time frame and examples of designs you like.

Be clear about how you wish your business to be portrayed

This doesn't mean providing a layout for how you want your website to look - that's what you're hiring a web designer for. Be confident about what your business does, its target market and the image you wish to project. Are you looking for something professional and clean or modern and funky? Do not leave the

guesswork to your designer otherwise, you may be up for extra design costs when the visuals don't meet expectations.

Deliver the final version of your text, not drafts

Many web developers will not start work without final text - any changes to this text require manual changes and will incur an extra charge. Deliver the text digitally in a Microsoft Word document rather than as printouts to avoid the need for retyping.

Hiring a professional

Consider at which point you need to engage a professional. If you are working with an idea or concept, you will need to pay consulting fees to transform this into a realistic project. This requires planning, experience and industry research.

Working with a local company in Far North Queensland will be considerably cheaper than hiring a capital city firm - you're likely to be paying less than half by keeping your business here. You'll also have the added advantage of working with someone familiar with your industry and readily available for meetings.

Many businesses try to save money by hiring a whiz kid or friend. Sometimes this can be an effective way of saving money, but ensure you see examples of work before committing.

How much?

Websites are custom built so the following are estimates only. Service-based businesses: \$2500 - \$3500 for a new website. Allow \$500 a year if you make minor changes once a month.

Online shop: \$5000 - \$7000 for a new website.

As with all goods and services, you get what you pay for however, careful consideration of your business goals and expectations coupled with thorough planning and preparation will ensure every dollar is well spent.

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