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Wait, Wait… What is a Full-stack Web Developer After All?

BY **EDWARD CHUNG**, PMP, PMI-ACP, ITIL FOUNDATION · DECEMBER 18, 2014

Summary: a full-stack web developer is someone who has honed skills in both front-end web design/development and back-end/server coding. You can count on a full-stack web developer to design, code, implement and maintain a fully functional modern interactive website on his/her own (not just a static website with a few pages).
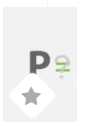
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Full-stack Web Developer

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With the ever evolvement of the almighty World Wide Web, new job functions are created virtually every day. Just a few years ago, you only needed a **web designer** to create the visual design in Photoshop and/or Dreamweaver and a **web developer** to code the front-end/back-end scripts and the website was ready to go. At that time, websites were charged based on the number of "pages" (a concept borrowed from print design).

Fast forward to the present, we now have (not a exhaustive list) :

- visual designer
- web designer
- UI designer

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- UX designer
- interaction designer
- art director
- front-end developer
- back-end developer
- web developer
- mobile developer
- database developer
- database administrator
- web master
- web server administrator
- SEO specialist
- web analyst
- web security professional
- quality assurance tester
- project manager
- growth hacker
- ...

Several roles may be taken up by the same individual depending on the size of the company and the resources. Very large and profitable companies may gather experts from each field in their teams with a view to create the best-ever-possible web products of the world.

But normally, in the down-to-earth company, the web designer/developer distinction still applies. The web designer will be responsible for the visual/web/UI/UX/interaction design while the web developer will do the front-end coding/back-end coding/database administration/server setup/debugging/etc. However, problems always occur in areas when the two have to work together yet only either one takes responsible. Factors like miscommunications/false assumptions of job role and scope/misunderstanding of the technology/etc. will render the end product a subpar one.

This is where a full-stack web developer can fill the gap. A full-stack web developer masters the best of both worlds (or to a minimum understands both worlds). (S)He will be able to steer the web projects in the right direction utilizing the best practices and latest advancements in the technology. (S)He will design and code the whole web project themselves or supervise others to perform the tasks by overlooking the whole process from scratch to finish.

When websites and web applications become more and more interactive and sophisticated, understanding the technical capabilities of the systems and having an eye for artistic/usability judgement are critical to the success. So it is natural for web professionals to evolve to full-stack web developers in due course.

> ❝ *Designers will become more like programmers as programming becomes more like design.*

However, designing and coding are two distinct skills that require different regions of the brain to master . The right brain is for visual and creativity and the left brain is for structure and organization. Designers are predominately right-brainers while coder left-brainers. So there is still only a handful of full-stack web developer on the market .

Benefits of Being a Full-Stack Web Developer

1. You can build a professional website from scratches for your employer.
2. You can be a competent member in **cross-functional Agile teams** where you can perform both front-end and back-end development. As Agile project management is fast becoming the norm for web application development and UI/UX is gaining in importance for the success or failure of any web application, you will be seen as a valuable team member contributing to the success of projects.
3. You can **start your own** website design and development business.
4. **You can build your own websites and monetize them** through Adsense, affiliate marketing, selling your own products and more. The best of this is the flexibility of earning extra money alongside your regular job. There are many great examples of web developers turning this business into a career and quitting their regular jobs.
   - as an example, you can utilize your knowledge in web development to help others to select the most suitable website hosting plan with an earning of **US$85 per referral**.
     - **Click here to join the A2 Hosting affiliate program for free**. *For a limited time, you will get US$10 upon signing up (there is an earning threshold of US$100 (i.e. 2 referrals) before they will send you the money).* You will need to have a website to be eligible for the program.
     - Don't worry if you don't have a website, you can get unlimited hosting for a monthly fee as low as US$3.89 (with use of coupon code: WHTPRIME, please activate the discount here and click "Web Hosting" on the menu bar).

Reference

- Job Titles in the Web Industry by Chris Coyler
- Don't call me that by Colm Tuite
- Understanding Your Brain for Better Design: Left vs. Right by Kayla Knigth

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Devlin ⊙ July 7, 2021 at 22:32

Is there any course (Beginner –> Advanced) that you would advise for a beginner like me to explore to become a full stack developer.

Reply

> **Edward Chung** ⊙ July 28, 2021 at 07:25
>
> ✎ Yes, you can find a lot of such courses in Udemy at a very reasonable cost. Wish you success!
>
> Reply

Dylan ⊙ May 23, 2021 at 20:12

Great article, thank you very much for the explanation. I am just now beginning my journey with full stack dev. I have been using WordPress with elementor and would like to become more efficient in my coding skills and server management.

Reply

> **Edward Chung** ⊙ May 31, 2021 at 13:39
>
> ✎ Best wishes to you! Good luck!
>
> Reply

Rubix Market Research ⊙ March 31, 2021 at 21:13

Your blog is really a guide to people who are willing to learn more on this topic. Thanks

Reply

Vishal ⊙ September 24, 2020 at 13:56

Is it true that full stack developers are eating the jobs of UI/UX designers?

Reply

> **Edward Chung** ⊙ September 30, 2020 at 11:43
>
> ✎ Yes or no. For the simple website, there would be the case. However, if for an enterprise-grade website, UI/UX designers are still irreplaceable as they are the experts in the field. Full-stack developers are sometimes considered Jack of all trades.
>
> Reply

Jenny ⊙ July 14, 2020 at 00:29

Thanks, I finally know what I am now!!!! I started programming on punch cards in the 70's, morphed to web dev using just html in the 90's, incorporated css in the early 2000's, hated JavaScript snowflakes when JS came into the scene and it had security flaws, learned various databases and created many professional websites with full stack expertise. But I didn't understand where my "middle brain" (GUI with right brain, DB and server side coding with left) expertise fit into the world of specialization. Thanks for this great article!

Reply

Paul P ⊙ June 13, 2020 at 06:14

Thanks. Very informative and very inspirational. I have been skirting around the idea of programming since Pong! Someone close to me once said, "you have to start somewhere". What words of advise you have for someone who is afraid to take the first step to programming. Thanks.

Reply

> **Edward Chung** ⊙ June 16, 2020 at 14:33
>
> ✎ Wish you every success!
>
> Reply

lhanshi ⊘ April 24, 2020 at 21:02

As a recent computer science graduate, I was intrigued as to what a full stack developer is. Fortunately,your post cleared all my doubts about the field. I am more equipped to pursue the profession. Thanks for sharing.

Reply

> **Edward Chung** ⊘ May 1, 2020 at 09:39
>
> ✎ All the best for you!
>
> Reply

Avantika ⊘ March 4, 2020 at 19:20

An informative one. As a fresher, i gained extensive knowledge on the role of a full stack developer.. Thanks for sharing.

Reply

> **Edward Chung** ⊘ March 9, 2020 at 10:47
>
> ✎ Wish you all the best in your path to becoming a full-stack developer!
>
> Reply

Pud Cusac ⊘ February 15, 2020 at 04:38

Hello!

Nice article. Just wanted to make a quick note that this left brain/right brain thing has been forcefully debunked by science:
(quick article) https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/right-brainleft-brain-right-2017082512222
(whole book, with all the details) https://www.amazon.com/dp/B00QPHURT6/

I liked your post though 🙂

Thanks.

Reply

> **Edward Chung** ⊘ February 19, 2020 at 14:21
>
> ✎ Oh, that's indeed very kind of your to provide the argument from another side. I am reading it right away! Thanks!
>
> Reply

faisal zia ⊘ July 23, 2019 at 15:04

Thank you, a quite helpful topic to know what a full stack developer actually do?

Reply

> **Edward Chung** ⊘ July 30, 2019 at 14:01
>
> ✎ Thanks! Do you aspire to be one?
>
> Reply

TequeñoSamurai ⊘ July 21, 2019 at 04:58

I feel like the more I learn about Full Stack, the less I want to work for a company. And become a full time freelancer.

Reply

> **Edward Chung** ⊘ July 30, 2019 at 14:01
>
> ✎ Great! Just go ahead!
>
> Reply

Raj ⊘ August 23, 2017 at 16:21

Does taking online courses for becoming full stack developer useful?I mean to say will the beginners have any chance of becoming freelancer just by learning the basics?

Reply

> **Edward Chung** ⊘ August 24, 2017 at 13:55
>
> ✎ Hi Raj,
>
> It really depends. But taking online courses will build give a solid foundation for beginners to flourish. I myself find online courses useful. Thanks!
>
> Reply

heping ⊘ April 29, 2017 at 10:08

thank you！

Reply

Sathya ⊘ August 11, 2016 at 01:37

I found this information very useful. Thank you Edward 🙂

Reply

Mostafa Elsayh ⊘ June 17, 2016 at 20:01

What do you mean with honed skills?

Reply

> **Edward Chung** ⊘ June 20, 2016 at 16:18
>
> i.e. perfected the skills
>
> Thanks!
>
> Reply

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