Web site pricing: Guide to prices

It is always difficult to know how much a website should cost. There are many reasons for this, and this guide aims to explain the difficulties and discrepancies between different companies pricing models. The following are the main reasons for things being complicated:

- The Internet is relatively new, so there aren't many people with experience commissioning websites to draw from.

- People who do have experience with website commissioning are usually too busy, so what they do know has not disseminated. You couldn't go and buy a book on website pricing like you could do on the pricing within other engineering disciplines.

- Many website buyers are young or don't otherwise have much experience with business pricing in general, so the full costs of placing a team on a project and managing it with business discipline aren't always understood from past experience.

- The market for websites is highly distorted for many reasons:

    - a lot of individual programmers pose as mature businesses, to the point where they actually intentionally deceive. Because work is often not conducted in person, it is not obvious whether you are dealing with an established company with an established processes and mature team or not.

    - many companies intentionally advertise very low prices to appear competitive. You probably expect your web site to have a unique design and functionality determined by a proper consultation process. However computer technology allows work to be copied very easily, so these low quotes usually reflect a very basic and inflexible off-the-shelf kind of approach.

    - also bare in mind that many companies actually don't have experienced programmers, just web designers, so may *rely* on using an off-the-shelf approach. It is often the case that companies can't customise how systems work even if you want to pay them to.

    - there are many naïve web developers out there who are new to the industry but trade as equals due to the low barrier of entry. Most web developers are inexperienced in quality engineering or business pricing so will under-budget your development and then run into problems when this becomes apparent.

    - off-shoring (e.g. to India) creates substantial problems in project management,

but the lower prices banded-around muddy the water of expectations. A team culturally-closer to you will almost certainly cost more in terms of the initial quote, but likely will provide better value (and considerably fewer headaches) by the time you have something ready to launch.

- there is huge disparity between the level of design fidelity between different websites, as well as the uniqueness or complexity of functionality. Two websites can have the same basic outline but cost very different amounts to build, so it is very important to look beyond rhetoric and establish exactly what fidelity/sophistication you are going to get on a project. You probably have expectations in line with the kinds of websites you regularly visit, but these successful websites are likely to be some of the best websites around – an average quote will get an average website, so consider how many awful and mediocre websites that are out there. Consider that website implementations matching your requirements can range from quick and cheap, to more expensive than your business model can budget for, so we recommend you consider the fidelity issue very carefully by providing agencies links to example sites of the fidelity you want.

- there are often requirements that aren't design or technical, such as for consultancy, support, and so on – whether these are included or not always varies between companies. So check whether you are getting quotes for a full solution, just for the requirements you've mentioned explicitly, or somewhere in-between.

- language barriers, time constraints, budget constraints (that can't stretch to a full requirement documentation process), or competitive processes between lots of companies can result in rushed proposals. It's a good idea to make sure that your project starts off on good footing and that all the quotes you've reviewed are written to equivalent requirements or that the discrepancies are otherwise taken into account. Sometimes big and expensive requirements can be hidden within a single word of a briefing or a single square centimetre of a design, and it is very easy for agencies to miss them; we call these situations 'implied functionality' and they have a habit of coming up throughout the website production process.

It is very important to properly budget. Don't put yourself in a situation where:

- you take a risk by choosing just the cheap option then don't spot problems soon enough and not have enough money for the right one if things go bad.

- you choose the right one but don't budget for extras you had forgotten to ask for, and run out of money. This is why contingency budgeting is so important and is used across all engineering disciplines.

The following illustrates prices for different example levels of Composr website development. Please be aware that this is a very rough guide: every project is different and our intent here is only to give you a feel for how things are priced and where costs can go.

£100 (approximately $158 USD)	A Composr install with a small amount of customisation (for example setting up a couple of galleries and placing blocks on the front page to feature their content)
£500 (approximately $792 USD)	A Composr install with a quick custom theme developed, done on the fly by a programmer, with some limited scope for amends upon client review
£1,000 (approximately $1,584 USD)	A Composr install with a new designer developed theme implemented by a programmer, with some limited scope for amends upon client review
£2,000 (approximately $2,392 USD)	A complete Composr website development, setting up some default pages, implementing a new designer theme, and make a reasonable number of design amends
£4,500 (approximately $5,381 USD)	As above, but with set up of eCommerce support and development of modest custom functionality (for example, a new property listing system). Alternatively, you could have professional designs for about 2 screens (plus home page), implemented to a high fidelity and interactivity level.
£8,000 (approximately $9,566 USD)	As above, but with more than modest custom functionality. You could expect a few fairly complex custom modules to be developed or substantial alterations to standard features. Alternatively, you could have professional designs for about 5 screens (plus home page), implemented to a high fidelity and interactivity level.

£12,000 (approximately $19,008 USD)	As above, but with a mobile theme developed, good Facebook integration, video transcoding, or import of a lot of existing content from an old website.
£20,000 (approximately $23,916 USD)	As above, but with all the options together. At this point websites are getting very rich, and produced to a very high level of fidelity. These kinds of websites are usually considered serious investments with ambitious goals for making a significant impact on a particular sector.
£30,000 (approximately $47,521 USD)	As above, but with a considerable amount of technical support, consultation, and provision of an advanced hosting infrastructure.
£50,000 (approximately $79,201 USD)	As above, but done to a further great scope.