Hiring a web developer

Talking Points

Location

Experience

Frameworks

Costs v. Value

So you’ve registered your small business, acquired a little seed money, and ready to get started designing your very own website. You’re scanning the web and see sites such as Web.com, WordPress, and Square Space and you think to yourself “Oh this is going to be a piece of cake.” You design the website exactly how you want it to look then sit back, hands behind your head, and wait for the dough to roll in. Then…crickets. You check Google Analytics and see that there were 50 visitors to your site...they all have the same IP address…your IP address. The only person visiting your site is you. What happened?

Designing a website or mobile app is much more than a few clicks of the magic button. Design takes time, thought, effort, and expertise. Would you allow anyone off the street cut your hair, watch your children, or drive your car? No! Would you allow your barber to cut your hair, a trusted caretaker with your children, and a mechanic drive your car? Without hesitation, you would allow each of those. Likewise, with design and development, you NEED a dedicated professional to handle that aspect of your business and ensure the user experience matches your goals. So how does a small business owner find the right designer to work on their project?

Experience

As a freelance web developer, I often get silly questions like, “Do you have any experience developing websites that feature pictures of kangaroos?” Often, my answer is “No.” Most reply, “Oh well. You’re not the right fit for my project.” Here’s the problem with that scenario…

At the heart of every website are the big 3: HTML, CSS, and JavaScript. For now, we won’t focus on what each of those mean or how they play a part in web development. Just know that knowledge of those 3 means you can pretty much conquer the world of web design. Placing a picture of a kangaroo on a website is the same as placing a picture of a house on a website. The type of picture is irrelevant to the task or experience required to accomplish that task.

Instead, focus on the skill set that each prospective developer brings to the table. A better question for the developer would have been “Do you have experience placing images on websites?” or “Do you know HTML?” The difference is subtle but if the developer knows how to perform a certain task, they can perform that same task for you, another client, or in any other scenario where that skill is required.

Let’s take this a step further.

If I’m diagnosed with a medical condition that requires surgery, I want the most experienced, decorated surgeon in the world. No one would let a resident physician perform such a complicated procedure. Web design is the opposite. When hiring developers, I tend to focus not on experience as it relates to years, but how much experience do they have with modern frameworks and design trends. The most popular web design frameworks and building tools have been around for 5 years or less. Why? The web is ever changing. Technology advances faster than you can blink your eye. Like mobile phones, 3 weeks after you build a new, efficient website, there’s a newer, more efficient way to build.

Freelancing and Availability

Freelance developers never sleep…I repeat, freelance developers NEVER SLEEP. We rest on occasion. Chances are that freelancer has 50 clients they are servicing on a daily/weekly basis. You’re not as much of a priority to them as you may think you are. It’s not that freelancers care little about your project; truthfully, freelancers simply lack the time and resources to handle such a huge workload.

You’ve created a small business that is sure to take off with the right help. Why not invest in a digital marketing agency that comes fully loaded with a design team instead of a single guy sitting in his mom’s basement struggling to answer 1,000 emails and design requests? My advice is to “Do it right the first time” and save your business a ton of money.

I’m sure you’ve heard of the most popular freelancing sites today. However, trust me when I tell you that is the fastest way to the destruction of your digital footprint; it’s the beginning of the end of your small business. Never trust a stranger overseas to understand your product and service like someone local. The key to a great design is your designer understanding the who, what, when, where, and why of your business. Find someone who shows interests in you and your business, not your checkbook.

Getting the most value

Digital marketing agencies typically have a well-rounded team of experts with varying and cross functional skills. When it comes to hiring a developer, make sure they offer the most value for the price. For example, let’s say developer A knows how to perform 3 tasks and charges $1,000 total. Developer B knows how to perform any task and charges $2,000 total. Which do you select? Most small business owners will go the cheap route as would most consumers. May you need more than 3 tasks but you can get away with those 3 for now. This is the thought process of many small business owners when it comes to websites, mobile apps, and digital marketing. I encourage owners to stay forward thinking. Maybe you don’t need those skills today but what about 3 months from now? Does it make sense to keep seeking and hiring a new developer to perform something that your business needs? Instead, work with a developer who is part of a team with many functions and skills. That way you can accomplish any tasks that comes up in your small business.

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