

Web designers: professional code of ethics

Elliot Chandler, 23 March 2017

Code of Ethics – Summary

The **World Organization of Webmasters** publishes a professional code of ethics that members of the organization are expected to have signed. The code provides several guidelines for how Web professionals should conduct themselves. Most prominently, the code of conduct emphasizes that professionals should behave in a manner that shows **respect for their clients**. While that premise is hardly unique to the Web development field, it is heavily emphasized in the code of conduct that this is a core tenet of ethical behavior for Web developers. For instance, it exhorts its readers to understand their capabilities and limitations, and not overrepresent their skills to their clients. Another element of the code of ethics that is somewhat specific to the Web development field is the importance of understanding and not violating the client's **intellectual property rights** in the context of one's work; as well as violating the client's rights it also can expose the client to legal risk, for instance if confidential information is erroneously disclosed by the Web developer.

While the code is aspirational ("we recognize that our Code of Ethics are not enforceable by law"), it does touch on some regulatory ethical codes, such as those related to privacy and intellectual property, as well. Source: <http://webprofessionals.org/webprofessionals-org-code-of-ethics/>

An Example Ethical Dilemma

A recent example of an ethical dilemma in Web development was portrayed on the blog *Clients from Hell*. The story relates a Web developer being requested to provide assistance with illegally copying a competitor's Web site design. Despite the client's relationship to the employer being informal, performing and helping support illegal behavior is nevertheless unethical. Source: <http://clientsfromhell.net/post/158231629841/i-havent-done-freelance-design-since-i-was-a>

Resolving the Above Dilemma by Looking at the Code of Ethics

According to the World Organization of Webmasters, the ethical dilemma described in that article should be handled by denying the request: "it's our responsibility to protect the intellectual property rights of others." In addition, the code of ethics states that "it is our responsibility to effectively communicate to our clients." For that reason, by my interpretation of the code, the developer should clearly communicate that the client's intentions are both unethical and illegal, even though it may cause tension within the relationship with the client.