



# 5 things you need to know before engaging a web developer

PhiloBiz has been providing web and digital marketing services to clients since 2007.

Based in the UK and working primarily with UK based clients, we take a slightly different approach to Web development, putting business needs, intentions and aspirations first.

This guide has been produced to give some pointers to things a business owner should ideally consider when engaging a web developer or designer. We have not just given our preferences, at least not without explaining why!

# 1. Avoiding the Lock-In

Websites can be built using different software and on different platforms.

It's important for you to understand how your website will be built so you know how easy/difficult it is going to be to get support in the future.

We decided, 9 years ago, to build our websites using WordPress, but there are developers who would never consider using this platform.

In truth, some of the basis for this preference/prejudice is personal, but sometimes there is a less obvious reason.

We decided to use WordPress as it:

- Keeps client costs down – there is no core software to licence (although there may be paid addons to extend functionality).
- Has an army of qualified developers available to support clients, should we no longer be maintaining the website.
- Makes it very easy for clients to make their own content updates.
- Is very easy to extend and develop the website as the client's business grows

Some developers use Joomla, which is again an open-source or 'free' software. We moved away from that as, at the time, it wasn't as easy to extend the functionality of a website when built on Joomla.

Some developers use their own bespoke software to build client websites.

Our concern here is that it can be very difficult to update, maintain or develop those sites without the cooperation of the original developer - you are effectively 'locked in', and we believe that is to be avoided.

We would urge you to ask the question about software and platforms, so you are at least informed and know what you are getting into.

That way you can make a deliberate decision, based on all the facts, rather than finding out one year on that you can do nothing with your website because your developer has disappeared or raised their prices to an unsustainable level.

## 2. Are They Interested in You and Your Business?

Some web developers offer packages, some web services companies provide subscriptions at various levels, that include web templates and options.

We believe in producing bespoke solutions, based on the client's business and this doesn't mean we use this as an excuse to charge more!

I (Dee) came into the web business quite by accident. As a Mentor for The Princes' Trust, I was horrified, in the early days of the Web, to discover the grants and loans the Trust had made to young people starting their own businesses, had been all but eaten up by the cost of a website.

The cost of the website did not reflect the fact that these fledgling businesses were boot-strapping. I can only liken it to a car salesman selling a 17-year-old a Bentley. It wasn't what they needed, they couldn't afford to run it and they didn't have the experience to 'drive' it.

We believe in treating every client as the individual they are. We ask for a questionnaire to be completed first, simply so we can have a more informed discussion with those who think they might want to work with us.

We ask questions about the business stage of growth, how it is funded, whether there are yet any paying customers.... Not to see how *much* we can charge, but to see what would be sensible for the client to invest in the website – initially at least.

For start-ups we believe in developing out an initial 'Minimum Viable Website' to keep costs down and to ensure it can be readily updated and changed to reflect the changes in direction a business start-up inevitably experiences.

When you are looking for a web developer:

- Do look for one who is interested in your business and not just wanting you to fit into one of their 'standard' packages.
- Do ensure there is nothing about your business that goes against their values or about which they have no interest or understanding. You want your developer to be as interested in your business as you are.
- Do make sure you keep enough of your web budget back to maintain and support your website in the year ahead.
- Do ensure they are aware of any specific requirements your business type has. There may advertising standards you must adhere to or disclaimers you must include.
- Do make sure they understand and appreciate your level of technical expertise and competence and can support you.
- Do ensure they are not trying to sell you a Bentley when a Ford Focus will be more than adequate.

A good web developer will be interested in you and your business. They should be interested in your business goals and your plans to achieve them and be able to offer appropriate advice – how else can they properly build a website that reflects your 'brand'?

### 3. Time and Money?

It's important to know how long a new web project will take and how much it will cost; Also, when the payments are due.

A web developer should be able to give you an idea of how long your web project will take BUT you must remember that the estimate he or she gives will be dependent on you keeping up your side of the deal. If you do not deliver the feedback, information or content requested, this will impact your project plan timeline.

If you are very late delivering what has been requested, you should expect your project to be archived or completed with placeholder text and images.

It's not unreasonable to be asked to pay a deposit, although we would be wary of handing over more than 50% of the project price at the outset.

There will usually be stage payments, with the final payment due before the site is switched on in the live environment. By that we mean, visible on the Internet.

The last thing anyone wants is to fall out about money, so it is important that you ensure your developer knows what you can afford, before he or she starts and not halfway through the project.

Equally, you want to be clear that your developer has quoted you a price for everything needed for the type of website you have requested. You don't want to be hit with an unexpected bill for an ecommerce plugin before your website can go live.

Many developers will use 'Developer Software Licenses' to keep client costs down. This means the software used on your website is licensed to the developer and not to you, but it is perfectly legal for the software to be used on your website, whilst it is on your developer's hosting and maintained by them. This isn't a problem unless you decide to switch developers, when you'll need to license your own version of the software used.

Ask your developer:

- What their project payment schedule is and check that is acceptable to you
- How they handle requests for changes to the original specification (you should be as wary of requesting scope-creep as your developer should be in allowing it)
- How software is licensed, and how those licenses are renewed
- What happens if you cannot meet a delivery deadline
- What happens if they miss a delivery deadline
- How things like stock images and domain name purchases are paid
- What happens when the website is set 'live' with regard support for bug fixing (we stay with clients for 30 days from handover to iron out any wrinkles)

Read the small print in the agreement paperwork so you know what is covered, how disputes might be handled and what is not included.

## 4. What They Need from You, When and How?

Even though you are instructing a professional web developer they are going to need inputs from you.

They are going to want an idea of your design preferences. They'll know what good design is, but they will also want you to be happy with the finished site, so they will seek your inputs (or should do).

The web content will need to come from you, maybe not in a finished format, but you are going to have to play a part in the content creation process.

In our experience, content creation is the one thing that holds up all web projects. Clients think they'll be able to easily create their web content but find, when the time comes, they can't.

Ideally, your web developer will have access to a great copywriter who will be able to help if you can't create your own web copy. If not, you'll need to find the words yourself or find your own writer.

Your developer will also need any design elements that exist for the business brand – logos, brochures, style guides etc. In this way they can ensure your website matches the look and feel of your brand.

**If this is a new business and new website I really do urge you not to get too hung up on the branding at the get go.** Launch a well styled but simple website to start your business off, make some sales and use the revenues to do the branding and bespoke design work.

Design work is like buying original art – it's for those with a high income and deep pockets. I have seen too many start-up businesses spend their available cash on a logo design for a business that then fails in the first three months.

A business idea is not something you can or should brand. A business idea that has, to an extent, been proven by the making of sales (and sales to your mum don't count), is worth branding.

We make use of questionnaires for both the design concept and the content collection.

We actively seek inputs from clients about what they are looking for visually when it comes to their website. We also walk them through the content for each of the key pages on the website, giving prompts about what is required.

If our clients are unable to create their own content, we have an in-house copywriter who will work with them to help.

You need to be clear, when speaking to developers, what they are going to need from you, when and in what format. Also ask how they will help you (for free) to deliver what they need and whether there are any additional paid services which may help.

Always remember that rarely does anyone 'buy now' because of web design. It is the words on your website that make the sale.

## 5. What Happens After the Website is Launched?

Launching a website is a little like having a baby; you think it is all over, but in fact it has only just begun.

If you just launch your website and do nothing with it, nothing will happen. It doesn't matter how beautiful the site is, how well-crafted the content is, how compelling the offer is nor how desperate you are to make a sale – nothing happens if you do nothing.

You need to consider (as a minimum):

- Where the website will be hosted
- Who is responsible for taking and storing backups
- Who is going to be attending to security
- How is the software going to be kept up to date
- Who is going to fix things when they break
- Who is going to update the content
- How is email going to be processed
- How are social media sites going to be linked to the website
- Who is going to fix things if the website is hacked

At risk of mixing metaphors, your website is like your car. Your car will take you anywhere you want to go provided you service and maintain it, keep it locked and secure, refuel it, tax and insure it and learn how to drive it (or employ a chauffeur).

Your website can take your business where you want it to go provided it too is serviced and maintained, kept secure, refuelled (with fresh content), kept 'legal' by complying with the up to date requirements of the search engines and has a competent driver.

We mentioned earlier that you should not spend your whole budget on the initial website development, and this is why. There is no point in having a website built if you are not going to either take care of it yourself or pay someone to do what is necessary on your behalf.

We provide support and hosting packages at different levels and will create a bespoke package, dependent on client needs and capabilities.

If a prospective client balks at the need for ongoing support, we would rather not work with them as we know their initial investment in the website is going to be wasted. The website cannot work for the business if it is not properly maintained.

There is a limit to what can be included when you want to produce a brief guide, so this isn't exhaustive, but rather a list of what we consider the important things to explore and understand, simply because it is where we have seen developer relationships go wrong.

If you have any specific questions, not covered here, you are welcome to email me, [dee@philobiz.com](mailto:dee@philobiz.com), and I will do my best to help.

If you'd like to speak to me, you can book a slot here: <https://bookme.name/philobiz/book-an-introductory-call-with-dee>

If you think you might like to work with us and need a new website, please start here: <https://philobiz.com/wordpress-development/>

If you already have a website and need help in figuring out why it isn't working for your business, we can do a website review for you and help: <https://philobiz.com/website-review/>

If you need technical support for a broken WordPress website please either email [support@philobiz.com](mailto:support@philobiz.com) for assistance or use this link <https://bookme.name/philobiz/book-an-introductory-call-with-dee> to book a time to discuss the issue.

Whether you decide to work with us or not, we wish you and your business success and hope this little guide helps you on your way.

Dee and the PhiloBiz Team