



SPUTNIK
WEB DESIGN & MARKETING

GETTING YOUR WEBSITE DESIGNED & BUILT

A GUIDE TO AVOIDING THE PITFALLS & COMMISSIONING
A WEBSITE THAT WORKS FOR YOUR BUSINESS.

BY HELEN ALDOUS | SPUTNIK WEB

www.sputnikweb.co.uk | contact@sputnikweb.co.uk | +44 (0)1484 680 380

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By Helen Aldous | Sputnik Web

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contact@sputnikweb.co.uk
http://www.sputnikweb.co.uk

+44 [0]1484 680 380

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Getting your Website Designed & Built.....	2
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An introductory note.....	4
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Choosing the right Web Design Company. The most important step.....	5
---	---

What to look for in a Web Design Company.....	5
A company who combine the 3 essential elements of Web Design.....	5
A company with a track record.....	5
A company with happy clients.....	5
A company you get on well with.....	6
A company who can help you market the website.....	6
A proactive company.....	6
A company who understand Search Engine Optimisation.....	6
What to remember.....	7
What to Avoid.....	7

Commissioning your site.....	9
------------------------------	---

What type of Website do you need?.....	9
Static Websites.....	9
Content Managed Websites [CMS].....	9
Other things you will need.....	10
Domain Registration.....	10
Web Hosting.....	10
Things to bear in mind.....	10
Images.....	10
Content.....	11
Price.....	11
Things to avoid which will cost you time and possibly money too.....	11

The process.....	13
------------------	----

Planning.....	13
Design.....	13
Production.....	13
Launch.....	13
Post-Launch.....	14

After the Launch - Online Marketing.....	15
--	----

Search Engine Optimisation.....	15
Google Analytics.....	15
Google Adwords Pay-Per-Click Marketing.....	16
Social Media Marketing.....	16
Other forms of Online Marketing.....	17

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An introductory note

I have written this guide to help you commission a great website that works.

After over 12 years of working in the Web Design Industry I have a wealth of experience which can help you to avoid many of the common pitfalls inherent in the Web Design process and make sure that you end up with a great Website that works for your business.

I have seen many businesses fall prey to unscrupulous or inept web design practices [often being the company picking up the pieces after a business had wasted significant amounts of time and money] so would like to use this opportunity to pass on some of my experience.

I hope it will give you a good basic grounding in the process of getting your business online successfully.

This guide is broken down into 4 Key areas

1. Choosing the right Web Design Company. The most important step
2. Commissioning your site
3. The process
4. After the Launch - online Marketing

Choosing the right Web Design Company. The most important step

Anyone can call themselves a Web Designer so its important to know what to look for in working with a company who can successfully create your site. Working with the wrong team can mean a bad result and wasted money and time. The points below will help you shortlist a company to work with.

What to look for in a Web Design Company

A company who combine the 3 essential elements of Web Design

- Design for User experience – making sure the site is looks good and is easy to use
- Technical ability – making sure the site functions well
- Marketing knowledge – making sure the site meets its target market

Many Web Design Companies cover one or two of these areas but its essential to get all three or your website will fall short of its goals

A company with a track record

It's essential to do your research and view several company portfolios to see a good solid grounding of previously built sites. Do they show at least 8 different sites in their portfolio? Are the websites in their portfolio all different? If they aren't that could be an indication that they just use one template for all designs and don't create bespoke work or that they design with a "one-size-fits-all" mentality. All businesses are different and will require individual solutions.

A company with happy clients

Check the site for testimonials from satisfied clients. A good Web Design Company will be able to show evidence of successful working relationships.

A company you get on well with

A website build can last for months and be potentially stressful. Its essential that you are working with people that you get on with and trust. Honesty and transparency are also essential qualities of a good Web Design Company. Your Web Design Company should also be happy to explain all the technicalities to you in terms you understand and not hide behind a wall of technical jargon. They should also be happy to advise you in the building process; after all, they should have more experience than you in this regard.

A company who can help you market the website

Online marketing is key to your websites success so you need a Web Design Company who know how to do this. Whether by using Blogs, Social Media, Search Engine Marketing, Pay-Per-Click Marketing or a host of other methods, your Web Design Company should be able to advise you on the correct marketing strategy for your business.

A proactive company

Your Web Company should take the time to understand how your business functions. A good Web Designer will listen to your ideas and business needs and then make suggestions and create solutions to reach that goal. They should also be honest enough to tell you if something won't work or is just a bad idea and explain why. A company who design robotically will not be helping you get the most out of your site.

A company who understand Search Engine Optimisation

Amazingly, many Web Design Companies don't understand Search Engine Optimisation and instead rely on outdated methods such as Keyword Metatags and Link Farming which no longer work with the most important search engines, and may even be penalised in some situations. It's an expensive mistake to end up with a site which is not coded with Search Engines in mind and which will never

do well in the rankings. Always ensure that your Web Design Company are up to date with Search Engine Optimisation and can show you some well ranked sites they have worked on.

What to remember

- **Clarify in your mind exactly what you want your site to achieve**, whether this is selling products, providing further information on your company etc. The clearer your focus the easier for your Web Design Company to hit the nail on the head.
- **Big isn't necessarily better** – larger agencies often outsource their work to smaller companies so the work you get is the same. You are paying for a layer of account handlers and management. Smaller companies have lower overheads and you will get a more personal service.
- **Your website is the shop window for your company** and reflects its professionalism. A shoddy, badly designed site can and will deter customers.
- **Your website is there to do a job** – to sell your company service or product. This is the most important thing to bear in mind for both yourself and your Web Design Company.

What to Avoid

- **Print Designers who “do a bit of web design”**. Many cannot design with the complexity of the Internet in mind and you will often end up with a great looking site which is difficult to navigate, has poor usability, is out of date code wise and invisible to search engines. You need someone who specialises in design for Web as a medium.
- **The bloke in the pub or staff member who will design your site cheap/free**. Web design is a constantly evolving field with many facets including User Interface Design, usability, coding, and marketing amongst others. Anyone can put together a web page with the right tools but the

chances are that it will perform poorly on all levels. A good analogy is the building trade. Anyone can do a bit of DIY and possibly put bricks together to build a wall and call themselves a Builder but would you trust them to build your house extension? Probably not wise.

- **A Web Designer who is purely Technically focused.** There are many talented Web Developers who are great at coding. However, they don't see the point in design for the end user so although the site will work fine, users will be frustrated by unattractive design/navigation /usability and leave to go to a competitors site. An unattractive and badly thought out site is a poor reflection on your company.
- **A Web Designer who is purely Design focused.** For the same reason a Designer whose sole focus is the visual look of the site is definitely to be avoided. Form and function of the Website must go hand in hand in order for it to be successful. A website that looks great but doesn't function is no use to anyone. Again, users will leave straight to your competitors site.
- **Purely Flash Based sites.** Flash is still fairly invisible to Google and its difficult to get good search engine results. There are often usability issues inherent in pure Flash sites and Flash Splash pages are very unattractive to visitors, often causing them to leave before they even get into the site. Small creative elements of Flash within a site work well but full Flash sites are often best kept for very specialised cases.

What type of Website do you need?

Websites can be broadly broken down into two different types. The type you need will depend on your goals and business requirements

Static Websites

Static websites can only be edited or updated by your Web Company or someone with knowledge of HTML and access to the server. You can not log in and edit them yourself. Although offering less flexibility, static sites may be ideal for a business who only needs a small web presence. Static sites are usually cheaper to produce as they are less labour intensive.

Content Managed Websites [CMS]

Content Managed or CMS sites offer a wealth of functionality and allow the user to log into a back end administration system in order to edit text, upload images, create new pages and generate new content. They are ideal for companies wanting to ensure a constantly improving web presence and who want control of the site themselves. CMS sites are often built using systems such as JOOMLA or WORDPRESS, both flexible systems for creating Content Managed Sites.

- E-Commerce – A content managed site may also be E-Commerce enabled, allowing the business to sell products or services online. To process payments online you need to have either a Merchant Account which is set up through your Business Bank or a Paypal Account [suitable for smaller online shops]. Your Web Design Company should be able to advise you on these options.
- Community Based Sites – Businesses can generate Brand loyalty and awareness through creating an online community around their product or

service. This is serviced through a Content Managed Site

Other things you will need

Domain Registration

Your Domain is the “name” of your site, for example www.sputnikweb.co.uk. The “top level domain” [.com, .co.uk .org etc] you choose may have implications for site performance so you need to choose wisely. Your Web Design Company should be able to advise you on this. Domains are generally registered for a period of 2 years

Web Hosting

Your website needs somewhere to “live” and this is where Web Hosting comes in. Broadly speaking, hosting costs generally depend on the amount of traffic your site will attract and how much disk space is needed. The more traffic the greater the bandwidth needed and the higher the cost.

Things to bear in mind

Images

Your site will need high quality images, often of your product, team or service. Poor quality images can reflect badly on your company so its often worth commissioning professional photography. Your web company should be able to organise this for you and assist with Art Direction to ensure the finished result is a suitable reflection on your business. Its important to remember that you must own copyright for, or have bought the rights the use any images that you use on your site so its not possible to just take images off the Internet or use found images. Your Web Design Company should be able to source Image Library shots for you if necessary.

Content

The phrase “**Content is King**” is very important to bear in mind with reference to your website. A website is a constantly evolving entity and generating great content is key to getting future visitors and customers as well as good Search Engine rankings. Many companies create a site and forget about it but this won't help you with Google or getting people interested in your products or services. You need to plan to keep generating good, useful and interesting content on the site in order to drive it forward. Interesting content encourages people to link to your site and is key to getting good Search Engine Results

Price

Your site will be the link between you and a potential customer so its worth investing in it. There are many people selling website design for a very low price but like everything in life you get what you pay for. It's generally better to opt for a simpler website that is well built and designed than a big badly built monster. A good web company will be able to design your site with future expansion in mind. Conversely, paying a lot for your site is no guarantee of quality either. You may be paying for layers of management and business overheads that a smaller company doesn't need to charge. Be honest with your Web Design Company as to how much you want to spend. A good company will be able to tailor the site to your budget. Your Web Design Company should be able to give you a fixed price for the work agreed so you wont have to worry about hidden extras.

Things to avoid which will cost you time and possibly money too

- **Changing the scope of the work after sign off.** Ensure you are happy at each sign off stage of the process. Changing the goal posts after an area of site has been built to the brief may mean that your Web Company needs to add on additional charges. Therefore ensure you are happy with the site structure and design before it's built.
- **Delaying providing content** – Every day the launch of your site is delayed

is another day you are hiding from your potential new customers and from Google's indexing Search Bots. Its surprisingly common to have a site 95% finished for months awaiting final content. Provide your content on time and your Web Design Company will be able to get your site ready for attracting customers.

- **Design by Committee** – The development of a website can be seriously derailed if it is “designed by committee” with everyone in a company disagreeing with the direction the site should take. This scenario often results in a site with which no one is happy, including yourselves and your customers. A better way to plan your site is to allocate one person who is in charge of liaising with the Web Design Company and working on the direction of the site. Monthly or staged meetings with the CEO or manager will ensure that everyone is happy with progress and that development runs smoothly.

The process

Web Design Companies work differently but Website Development generally follows a similar path. In outline

Planning

- Meet to get a good understanding of the Business in Question.
- Agree the Goals that the site needs to achieve.
- Agree the Brief.
- Fix the price to create the site.
- Sign a Contract.
- Arrange Domain registration.
- Arrange Hosting.

Design

- User Interface analysis – Looking at how people will use the site.
- Generation of Mock-Ups of the “Look & Feel” of the site [usually 2 sets]

Production

- Building the site
- Frequent iterations in order to check site progress
- Testing of the site

Launch

- Final 'Snag list'
- Getting the site live
- Testing

Post-Launch

- Google Analytics
- Online Marketing if required

After the Launch – Online Marketing

Whilst it may feel like the end of the process, the Launch of your site is only the beginning. Many businesses make the mistake of sitting back and thinking that the site will market itself but this is not the case. Without pro-active Online Marketing even the most interesting site will struggle to attract visitors as no one will see it. You may wish to handle this yourself but your Web Design Company should be able to assist with Online Marketing should you require it.

Your Web Design Company should be able to put together a strategy to ensure your site attracts high quality traffic. A Web Strategy should be tailored to the needs of your individual business. For example, a Website for a Law Firm will have very different Online Marketing needs to that of an E-Commerce shop selling Pet Accessories. Your Web Design Company should understand this and tailor a suitable strategy to meet your needs.

Although each Web Strategy is different it may use some of the following methods.

Search Engine Optimisation

Being visible on the search engines for keywords relevant to your business is very important in order for people to be able to find your goods or services easily. It's essential that you check that your site has been built to a good basic level of "Search Engine Friendliness" in order to be indexed by Google and other Search Engines. Your Web Design company should be able to offer additional Services including Keyword Research, Competitor Reports and SEO Consultation in order for you to continually improve your results.

Google Analytics

Your web company should be able to install this onto your site. Google Analytics is the baseline for measuring the success of your site and offers invaluable

detailed statistical information. With this tool you have access to a wealth of information such as visitor numbers, the time they spend on the site, their locations, the pages they view and for how long, and how they found your site. You can even see such detail as their operating system, Browser and connection speed. This information allows you to measure the success of your marketing efforts and focus them more precisely.

Google Adwords Pay-Per-Click Marketing

Google Adwords Pay-Per-Click Marketing is a great way of getting qualified traffic to your site. When a user types a search query into Google your advertisement appears on the right hand or top of the page, therefore you are targeting people at the very point that they are looking for your product or service. You can control the budget and have it capped at a “per day” level. Although you can set up a Google Adwords account yourself its very easy to set it up incorrectly, get a poor click-through rate, and spend money unnecessarily. Your Web Design Company should be able to set up an account correctly for you, which will save you money in the long run, and manage it for you if required.

Social Media Marketing

Social Media relates to the participation in online communities and can be a very effective way of letting people know about your company. Sites such as Facebook.com, Twitter.com, Digg.com, Stumbleupon.com and a myriad of others can all play a part in your Online Marketing Plan.

It may also include

- Blogging
- Podcasting
- Video
- Forums

However there are definite Dos and Don'ts to this kind of Attraction Marketing [marketing without old-school intrusive methods] and it should be approached correctly. Your Web Design Company should be able to advise you.

Other forms of Online Marketing

You may also use a combination of the following platforms to publicise your company

- Email Marketing
- Banner Advertising
- Whitepapers

I hope this Guide has answered any questions you may have about commissioning a website and given you valuable pointers about the process. I wish you every success in your venture.

Helen Aldous has been involved in designing websites since 1997 and is a Director of [Sputnik Web](#), A Web Design Company creating useful Web Solutions for companies large and small.

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