



44 Questions to Ask Before Hiring a Web Design Company

Think of a **web design firm** as your marketing partner. The website it designs for your business will play an integral role in your company achieving its online marketing goals. Whether having a website designed brand new for the first time or redesigning an existing one, the hiring decision you make will dictate your website success.

With so many options of web design companies, both online and local, it can become overwhelming to determine which one is the right fit for your business. But actually, the best approach is to **use a thorough hiring process**. Just like hiring a new employee, choosing a web design firm takes interviewing, reviewing performance results, requesting a portfolio of their work and checking references.

The Initial Consultation

To help you with your interviewing preparations, **here are 44 questions to ask before hiring a web design company**. The initial consultation also gives the company a chance to ask questions and get to know your business, your target audience and the objectives for the website so it can apply its expertise in developing a plan to help you achieve your online business goals.

Once you **do your due diligence**, the answer will become clear as to which website design firm to entrust the success of your business to with your important website design project.

1. What services do you offer?

In addition to all facets of website design, many web design companies offer web development, hosting, copywriting, e-commerce solutions, and digital marketing services such as social media, SEO, or PPC management. While it's very common to assume all of these services are related, they are, in fact, very different services requiring very different skill sets.

Do not assume that a company is good at one thing just because they offer another. Almost every web design company on Earth now offers digital marketing services as well; it doesn't mean they really know their stuff so don't make that assumption. It's great to have one company handle most or all of your digital work, but it's more important to get a solid result.

For example, our expertise is heavily weighted toward digital marketing. While we offer web design services, we strictly limit what we'll work on. We won't build e-commerce or social media sites and we don't build custom web apps anymore. We are, however, quite good at building lead generation sites for B2C and B2B service businesses. We're a small company; if we tried to tackle everything we wouldn't be really good at any of it.

2. Do you custom design websites or use pre-made templates?

Often times, web design companies offer both options to meet the needs of their clients. Some businesses want to establish a strong brand, so they want the unique look and functionality a website designed from scratch provides. Other businesses are not that reliant on an online presence and opt to save money with a template that can be customized. Discuss your website needs and ask for a price comparison of the two before making your decision.

3. Can you provide examples of websites that your company designed?

Looking at the design style of these sites will help you evaluate the design diversity of the firm. Also note the performance of the sites, whether the navigation is easy to use, if the websites are well-crafted, if the designs are current and modern, and how well the design matches the business style. Ask questions. Find out why things were done the way they were. You may think an example site looks too simple only to find out that was exactly what the client needed.

4. Do you have case studies that show the results your web designs provided for businesses?

A website is not just about having an online presence with a site that looks good. It's about getting a return on investment and having that website deliver business results. Ask for case studies. These case studies should provide specific results, such as increased online sales by a certain percentage, increased leads by a certain amount, or boosted the conversion rate by a certain percentage in a specific time period.

5. What strategies will you use to generate revenue for my site?

The company you select to design your website should be just as concerned about generating revenue for your website as you are. As such, they should be able to list proven strategies that they typically incorporate into a site design. These results-oriented strategies should be in line with your goals, such as prominent placement of your business phone number, an appealing slideshow on the home page that reinforces your business, featured products or sales prominently appearing on every page of the site, and calls to action that are prominently positioned to grab the visitors' attention.

6. Will you review my current website and analyze its performance before making your design decisions?

If you have an existing website, not all pages may need a redesign, especially if they are hitting high performance marks. Find out if the web design firm plans to analyze your current site's metrics to evaluate its strengths and weaknesses before implemented any design changes.

7. What is your policy regarding building websites for my competitors?

This can be a good or bad thing. For example, if a company has designed websites in the past similar to yours, they may have a better understanding of what works and what doesn't. That said, you don't want a clear conflict of interest. This is a good question to ask and to use in your evaluation process, but I wouldn't rule someone out entirely if they built a website last year in the same industry but don't have an ongoing relationship with that client.

8. How will my project be managed?

Typically, a website design process includes four stages: strategy/research, design, site development, and launch and evaluate. When learning about the project management process of a web design firm, ask whether there will be a specific manager or contact person for your project, a timeline for the different stages, the manner in which you will receive progress reports and whether a project management system is used to manage tasks.

9. How much time is devoted to analyzing my business, market and competitors?

Planning out your website is key to ensuring its success. This requires researching your industry and performing a basic market analysis before planning the website's overall functionality, content structure, elements, delivery and other components.

10. Who will be working on my website?

Some web design companies may devote one person or a team of individuals to your project, depending on the scope of the work you want performed. For example, you could have a graphic designer, programmer and copywriter working on your website. Knowing who will be working on which components of your project is important for understanding how your project will be managed.

11. What are the qualifications of those working on my project?

It's important to know the scope of experience of the person or team working on your project. Feel free to ask for samples of other websites they have done, discuss the expertise they have in web design and development tools, and request client references. The portfolio and references should be updated with the most current work.

12. How long will it take to complete my website?

Typically, the turnaround time for a website design is based on the scope of the work required and how quickly you provide them with needed information, such as text. But you should ask how much time the firm will be devoting to your project and its average turnaround time if they have all the content. It's also worth discussing what happens if they don't meet their target date.

13. How many pages will my website be?

This is something that you will work out with the site design firm once content has been agreed upon. Search engines like websites with several pages of quality text and typically websites have standard pages, such as About Us, FAQs, Contact Us, and Privacy and Terms of Conditions. Together, you and the firm you select will determine other pages based on your business, such as Products or Services, Resource Center, a Blog, Case Studies or Testimonials, Photo Gallery, etc.

14. How much input will I have with my website design?

During your initial consultation, a web design firm should ask you questions to get a feel for your business, the tone and style you want to portray, and the types of web design styles you like. This will give the designer an idea of the type of aesthetics you're looking for in terms of site components and provide strategic information as to the purpose of your new site, your target audience and the content it should contain. Most firms work hand-in-hand with its clients to be certain they are providing them with the type of website they desire.

15. What happens if I don't like the initial design?

Generally, initial project agreements call for either unlimited changes or a certain number of revisions. Others have multiple sign-offs on proposed colors, design layout, images and type fonts so you have an idea what the end design will look like. It's important to review the process and the policy for changes with the design firm.

16. What do you need from me to get started?

Typically, you need to provide any images, text, or other content you want on your site. If you choose to have the text done by the firm's copywriters, you'll need to provide basic information. If you provide your own copy, it may need a few tweaks for better search engine optimization or design presentation. Whatever the case may be, you should be notified in advance of any revisions needed to your copy and why they are needed.

17. Will my website be built to expand as my business grows?

It's critical that your website is built with room to grow, especially if your company may add new products or services in the future. Inquire about the scalability of the design and whether new navigation buttons can be added without having to pay for an entire site redesign.

18. Can you create a logo for my site?

Most website designers can create a logo for your business as part of your initial project quote or for an additional fee. Ask about experience in this area and look at other logos the firm has created, paying particular attention to graphic appeal, how well the style matches the focus of the business and how well the logo establishes brand identity.

19. Can you help me get images for my website?

Having actual photos pertaining to your business is always best for that unique factor, but oftentimes stock images are necessary. So there are no concerns over copyright infringement, ask designers whether they have access to a large selection of public domain images, or if you need to pay royalty fees based on usage.

20. I already have an established brand, will my website provide a consistent look?

For companies with an established brand, you want to be certain the website development firm creating your new website has experience in maintaining brand consistency. Ask how they approach such projects and what steps they will take to ensure the web design is in line with your current marketing strategies.

21. Will you be outsourcing any of the work?

Some design companies use independent contractors for certain components of a project. This allows them to offer a wider range of services in a cost-effective manner. If outsourcing is done, ask for the credentials of all independent contractors who will be working on your website and how project coordination is handled in-house.

22. How do you price your services?

The pricing structure of web design varies among companies, so ask whether a flat project price or hourly rate is used. Keep in mind that price is based on experience, expertise and the scope of the project. The pricing should be in line with the quality of the firm's work, which will reflect in how they value your brand and the importance of its online presence.

23. What is included in the price?

It's important to know exactly what you're paying for when given a project quote. Ask for an itemized list of deliverables that are included in the price and ask what isn't included. For example, some firms offer hosting or maintenance that is not included in the initial project's price.

24. What is the billing procedure for work outside the project's initial quote or agreed upon deliverables?

As your project progresses, you might want additional services outside the original scope of the project. Find out how billing works if you decide to add other features or elements after work on your website has begun.

25. Will my website be compatible with smartphones, tablets and other mobile devices?

Mobile websites are a must for businesses with an online presence. Find out how the web design firm approaches the mobile component of web design. For instance, a responsive design may be used to accommodate all visitors, whether accessing it from a desktop computer or a mobile device. Or, a separate mobile site may be included as part of the initial website design. The important factor to determine is the breadth of experience the web design company has in developing mobile applications and the reasoning behind the approach it takes.

26. Do you build search engine optimization into websites?

Nowadays, almost all websites should be coded with SEO in mind. There are all kinds of technical issues that a new website can introduce. If you're having a new site designed, it's a good idea to have a third party SEO firm conduct an SEO audit prior to launch to make sure there aren't any major issues.

27. How do you determine keywords for my site?

Having the right keywords on each page of your site is an essential SEO marketing component. That said, a full keyword study is completely outside the scope of most website designs. It's important to consider how keywords will be used. If you are relying on organic search traffic to meet your goals it would be a good idea to have a third-party SEO company not only conduct a site audit, but also a keyword study.

28. Do you perform other SEO services?

If so, ask about the experience of those who will be providing these SEO and SEM services and the strategies used. Request examples of past projects that show results of their efforts. Also determine whether these services can be included in the scope of your project or if they must be billed separately.

29. Do you do A/B testing?

Conversion and usability testing will allow you to see whether your Web pages are optimized to give the best results. A/B or multivariate testing involves creating two different Web pages and testing their performance against each other to determine which is garnering the most conversion rates. Ask if the website design company offers split A/B testing as a follow-up service and what the cost will be.

30. What type of content management system do you use?

The content management system allows you to manage your website's content without the need for coding. The most advantageous content management system offers the option of updating your website yourself or having the website firm integrate the content and do the updates for you. Ask whether the type of system used is a third-party system or a custom built one of their own. You also want to find out if it's a web-based interface, if it supports WordPress and e-commerce platforms, whether it works in all types of browsers, including new and previous versions, if it looks professional and unique, and whether you have access to all its functionalities. If you're not familiar with using a live content management system, ask if training is offered.

31. Do you offer e-commerce services?

In addition to web design and development, a comprehensive website design company offers e-commerce services for businesses conducting online sales. Ask for specifics when inquiring about e-commerce solutions because they vary among web design firms. Some commonly offered e-commerce services are shopping carts; the ability to add discounts; support for multi-currencies; a customer database that interacts with your online store; cross and up sell features; inventory control; customization; reporting; and SEO integration.

32. What web standards and practices do you follow?

A web design and development company should be current on all design trends and follow current web development standards so your website works on all operating platforms and in all browsers. Inquire as to whether the web design firm is current on CSS and HTML standards established by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C). Be sure to ask if its conduct code validation to ensure site coding complies with W3C standards.

33. What type of IP address will my website have?

If the web design company is handling this for you, ask if you will receive a unique IP address rather than a static IP address. A unique IP address ranks higher on search engines and is not considered spam by most e-mail providers.

34. Do you offer domain name registration?

Before a website can go live, it needs a name. Most full-service web design firms will handle domain name registration. Ask the firm if it will check whether the name you want for your site is available, if they will register it for you, how many years the domain name registration is for and the cost for performing this service.

35. Will I be able to see the website as you're creating it?

Reputable web design firms will make your in-progress website available for viewing during each phase so you can make suggestions, changes, or content edits. Inquire about the review and input process that you can expect.

36. Will the functionality of my website be tested before it goes live?

Web design companies typically test new web design functionality prior to launching it live. As part of this testing phase, you should determine if it includes testing for syntax errors, cross-browser compatibility, correctly uploaded files, and functionality of forms, links, scripts and other elements on the website.

37. Will my current site experience downtime as you update it?

Once the redesigned site is ready to go live, it's important to know how it may impact your current website. Ask what will be involved in the transfer process, if there are any risks and how any downtime can be minimized.

38. Will I own my website once it's completed?

It's important to find out whether you will own the domain name (registered in your name, not the web design company's), website design and hosting account (registered in your name, not the design firm's), or if the website design company requires your site to be hosted on their servers. Also find out if you will receive all source files for your site and access to your hosting account, backend administration platform and server. Also be sure to ask if you will be required to lock into an ongoing contract to keep your site live and functioning, or if the completed site will be delivered to you upon completion. You also need to know the name of the company where your website's domain name is registered, all user names and passwords and the name of the hosting company.

39. Who owns the site's artwork?

Some designers may copyright their original artwork. You need to know the firm's policy and negotiate terms in advance so you own all original artwork and content on your site. Also ask whether you will be given the original graphic files.

40. Do you offer web hosting services?

As part of their website services, web design companies offer web hosting. This means your website will reside on its hosting server. Even if you already have a web hosting provider, it's a good idea to ask what the web design firm offers in terms of hosting plans, whether the fee includes a unique IP address, how much bandwidth, processing power and disk space are included, its guaranteed uptime and speed of access, the type of control panel or user interface, methods of access to tech support, and if there are fees for sponsored links, pay-per-click, search engine submission or optimization, or any other additional fees. You might find a better deal than your current one.

41. Will you integrate social media into my web design?

Linking social networking sites to your website is now part of the norm in website design. Find out if the web designer will do this and at what cost. Some web design companies go a step further and offer social media integration services to help you generate more leads and turn them into sales. Ask about social media marketing plans, like setup and management, blogger outreach, and monitoring and measuring.

42. Do you offer on-going maintenance after my site goes live?

As technology and trends change, you may want to have additional web design and development work done on your website. This could include updating content or updating compatibility with browser changes. Ask the web design firm if they offer maintenance services and if they are provided on an as-needed, on-going, or retainer arrangement. Find out what the prices are to update content, and make minor and major edits.

43. How do you measure results after the site goes live?

Your relationship with the web design company should not end once your site goes live. The firm should measure the results of its web design. You might hear terms like page views, unique visits, time on site, bounce rate, conversion rate, inbound links, search engine ranking, etc. Ask how this is done in terms of analytic tools and what numbers or benchmarks you should expect your website to produce. Find out how often you are provided with these statistics and the procedure for improving any that don't meet performance marks.

44. Will I be able to access my website statistics without contacting you?

Web design businesses use various analytics to monitor the performance of websites. They should be willing to provide you with access to this interface. Ask about obtaining a password so you can view your website statistics online at any time.

Your new website design should be a reflection of your strategic business goals. It's important that the web design and development company you select is on board to help you achieve them. Taking the time to ask far-reaching questions before hiring a web design firm will ensure you retain a results-oriented partner that will help you achieve tangible results that translate into a measurable return on your website investment.

by John Crenshaw

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About the Curator:

[Lisa Chapman](#) helps company leaders define, plan and achieve their goals, both online and offline. After 25+ years as an entrepreneur, she is now a [business and marketing consultant](#), [business planning consultant](#) and [social media consultant](#). Online, she works with clients to establish and enhance their online brand, attract their target market, engage them in meaningful social media conversations, and convert online traffic into revenues. Email: Lisa (at) LisaChapman (dot) com. Her book, *The WebPowered Entrepreneur - A Step-by-Step Guide* is available at:

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