



Hire or DIY your next website

Need to build a website for your new business or need to update your current website? Confused on what is most cost effective and what will yield the most ROI: DIY Web Design or hiring a web designer...or even a web strategist?

There are a lot of things to consider:

How much time do you have? Do you have time to learn how to build a website or is there a tight deadline?

What's your level of knowledge: design knowledge, XHTML knowledge, CSS knowledge, cross-browser issue knowledge....etc?

What's your Budget? Large, small....nonexistent?

What's your desired level of control (both short and long term)? Are you interested in updating your site daily? Or are you interested in being highly involved in the design process?

What's your desired functionality on the site? Simply information conveying or is it interactive (can make reservations, purchases, fill out forms)?

What are the goals you have for the website? Do you want to be a top search engine result or are you interested in creating a community with your existing customers?

Let's compare and contrast the pros and cons between these two --very different: paths.

TIME & KNOWLEDGE: DIY vs HIRE

Do you have the time to build a website....REALLY?....Really, really? Be honest and realistic with your time budget and if you have time to do it yourself. Or if your plan is to hire out, make sure to budget time to manage the project (writing copy, reviewing designs, getting photos)

DIY WEB DESIGN

HTML is not that hard to learn! It's true, *basic* HTML is not that hard. My analogy I often give is it's a similar undertaking to learning a foreign language, because, yes, it is its own language. So if you have A GOOD AMOUNT of extra time and energy to pour into learning HTML intensively, you could probably create your first webpage/site within a few short weeks.

There are plenty of great resources for learning HTML quickly...and there are several options that can help you build it.

1. ADOBE DREAMWEAVER

Dreamweaver software is the industry leader and industry standard for website creation and editing.

Its also very flexible for both beginners and gurus alike. You can see your site in a visual mode, simply see it at the code-level, or BOTH. It also has an "auto-fill" function, where the program will try to figure out what commands you are trying to call in and will offer you proper options as you are writing! It also color cues correct HTML, XHTML, and CSS code.

HIRE WEB DESIGNER

What is the advantage of hiring a web professional? In a word: time....and time is money, honey.

Web designers are well versed in the ins and outs of all forms and current standards of HTML, SEO, and maybe even some JavaScript and PHP. Did I lose you with any of that? Exactly.

Web designers walk you through all things web in laymen's terms. They will give you recommendations on the constantly evolving web standards, help implement your branding and design standards, incorporate search engine optimization principles, and give their expertise, experience, and efforts in all those acronyms that you don't know the meanings of.

A professionally designed website will also need less maintenance in the long term if it is properly set up. It will rank better in search engines with proper architecture. Not to mention, a web designer can make your website more interactive and even set the website up in a CMS (Content Management System) so that YOU can easily update it easily.

There are also TONS of resources to learn how to build a site using Dreamweaver such as books, webinars, and even YouTube videos.

2. WORDPRESS

WordPress is a FREE and popular content management system. It's completely "Open Source" which means the software grants users the right to use, copy, study, change, and improve its design by making the source code completely open to the public. So any WordPress site can be completely customized, according to your availability to research its functionality or code structure and your HTML, CSS, and JavaScript knowledge. WordPress is also used for all types of websites including creative sites, corporate sites, and blogs. WordPress sites are being created everyday by novices, experts, and everything in between.

There are TONS of resources for WordPress, paid and free. There is the WordPress site itself, www.wordpress.org. You can view sites built in WordPress by going to its sister site, www.wordpress.com. There's also many books in written form and Lynda.com has WordPress books in video form. Additionally, there are free YouTube videos, outside blogs, and seminars. Looking for a conference? WordPress has that too; it is called WordCamp and is probably coming to a city near you soon.

This section focused on WordPress because that's what Newhouse Studios is most familiar with, but there are many other content management systems. At the time of this writing, Joomla, Drupal, and ExpressionEngine are also very popular content management systems.

3. BLOGGER

Google brings us so many things awesome, and Blogger is no exception.. It's a free weblog (blogging for short) host. You can be the sole contributor or have multiple profiles (most content management systems can too). You can post pictures and content, choose and customize layouts, and it's even mobile friendly.

There are fancier blog tools out there, but Blogger is FREE and easily customizable making the best bang for the blogger buck.

So as you can see there are tons of free to almost free website building options out there. You just need to invest the time.

And all of this will be done by set deadlines (i.e. on time).

Nodding your head, but still worried about the cost? Well, let's look at that. It's true, a new website could cost anywhere between \$4,000 - \$10,000, and that's a lot of scratch for ANY business. But despite your initial sticker shock it's actually more cost effective when considering all the investment on doing a website yourself software, education, implementation and TIME.

First you need a image-editing software, like Adobe Photoshop. The full version is \$699 or Elements (bare bones version) is \$120. Then you'll need a HTML editor. Adobe Dreamweaver is industry standard and it's very flexible for both beginners and gurus alike (read #1 in DIY for the full breakdown) is another \$399. After you purchase the software, you will want to invest in a few texts to help get you through...these three would be a great start STYLING WITH CSS (\$27*), an HTML, XHTML, & CSS Visual Quick Start (\$12*), and Transcending CSS (\$32*) grand total: \$71 (+shipping). *-Costs according to amazon.com

Next, there is your time investment. At the very least you need to read the books for the technical knowledge. This will take one to SEVERAL weeks to digest. Then there is the time investment for the content procurement for items like, images, graphics, articles, forms, etc. Gathering all of your content items together can also take a week or two. Next, you get to do the fun part....design! But that will also take some time and some revisions, which will take another week. Now you are finally ready to code. IF you don't run into any problems that need troubleshooting (do you know how to troubleshoot web problems as they arise?), you can add one to two weeks in production time. Take that GUESSTIMATED time and multiply by your hourly rate. Yeah, you are "paying" for that time and delegating it on top of your current workload. What's your subtotal?

Is the cost of hiring out is sounding more and more affordable yet?

What's Your Budget? Large? Small? Nonexistent? DIY vs HIRE

Budgets make or break many businesses. It's important to weigh your options in how much to invest monetarily into your website.

SMALL TO NONEXISTENT BUDGET: DIY WEB DESIGN

Not many businesses budget in website development when dreaming of starting a new business or even in their initial business plan. If that is the case, DIY web design is a great option.

It is important to know all things involved with your business, so it's not a terrible idea to familiarize yourself with some basic HTML. The only real cost would be the web hosting and education (or time to learn HTML).

There are many affordable web hosting options. GoDaddy.com, for instance, offers web hosting for as low as \$1.99/month. It can't get any cheaper than that!

DESIRED LEVEL OF CONTROL: DIY vs HIRE

What's your desired level of control? Thinking in the short term, how involved will you be in the design process? Thinking in the long term, are you interested in updating your site on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis? Are you creating a temporary site for now with plans of investing more time and money into a more complete website later?

"I'LL ADMIT IT, I'M A CONTROL FREAK" AKA DIY WEB DESIGN

The term "control freak" is not a four-letter word. Steve Jobs was a control freak, so was Frank Lloyd Wright, not to mention Oprah, who is notorious for her control freak-dom. And they are all secure in that. Admit your strengths.... and your weaknesses.

This is directly relatable to your ability to hire an outside consultant like a web strategist. They will most likely have strong (and educated) opinions on how you should design or change your website, and if you think that might conflict with your overall business goal, it might make sense to educate yourself on HTML and keep *your* standards intact.

SET ASIDE BUDGET FOR WEB DEVELOPMENT: HIRE WEB DESIGNER

Your business is one of the lucky ones if it has the forethought and budget set aside for web development. A website is often a large chunk of a marketing campaign, especially these days.

There are many options available to you depending on your budget. Smaller budgets may mean you might hire a web designer to modify a template. A larger budget typically allows to have a completely customized site.

A website is a great investment in any economy, for almost every type of business, and is a completely quantifiable form of marketing (through analytics you can track traffic, sales conversion, etc).

"I TRUST THE EXPERTS" AKA: HIRE WEB DESIGNER

You know your strengths...and you know your weaknesses...and your weakness is not knowing what the heck is going on with all the web strategies, that search engine optimization stuff, and what the latest trend in the "world wide web" is today. And that's okay! That's why you hire an expert. You hire lawyers for your legal representation, doctors for your health, and web strategists for your business' success online.

Now web strategists aren't fascists. Feel free to tell your web team what things are a priority and what you would like to have control over, like updates, blog entries, and general web maintenance.

DESIRED FUNCTIONALITY: DIY or HIRE?

What does your website need to do? Does it need a shopping cart, a dynamic map, or need forms for people to fill out online? Would you like to incorporate message boards, news articles, file downloads, or automated customer service?

Some websites simply spread information about their brand, products, services and/or contact details. Others engage the customers and compel them to take an action: go to a location, make a purchase, post a comment, or fill out a form. What is your desire for your website's functionality? What is the priority for these functions? Are these "nice to have's" or "GOTTA have's" for your business to function?

MINIMAL FUNCTIONALITY, MAINLY INFORMATION BASED WEBSITE: DIY WEB DESIGN

Basic HTML will answer this need. Many businesses are based only on in-store, on-site, or in-person interaction and their website is strictly for conveying information and brand reinforcement. If you have basic HTML knowledge, you can easily fulfil your business' needs yourself.

HIGHLY DYNAMIC, TONS OF FUNCTIONALITY: HIRE WEB DESIGNER

E-commerce, animating slide shows, dynamically filling forms....oh my! There are a lot of bells and whistles you can put on your website, and a lot of them take a higher knowledge of HTML, XHTML, and CSS. These forms of functionality frequently require JavaScript, database, and PHP knowledge.

WEBSITE GOALS: DIY or HIRE?

IT DOESN'T MATTER IF THIS IS A DIY SITE OR A HIRED WEB DESIGNER, THIS APPLIES TO BOTH

Do you want to be a top search engine result or are you interested in creating a community with your existing customers? Do you want to increase sales and generate new leads? Would you like stomp out the competition with your new website? What about being the next Fortune 500 breakout company through your new website?

These are all great goals but how are you going to reach those goals...Really? You have got to be:

1. **SPECIFIC & REALISTIC:** Be as specific as you can and as realistic as you can. It's easy to dream that your site will generate a 1000% jump in sales. When? How? Describe what you want to accomplish with as much detail as possible and in increments that are plausible.
2. **PRIORITIZE & CHALLENGE:** Once you have your set goals, decide which one you want to work on first. Prioritize them, get all sectors of your business, not just the website, working on it. Then make sure to set goals that challenge you to work harder after you attain each.
3. **MEASURABLE:** Get Google Analytics installed on your site. This will show how many hits your site is getting, what pages they are visiting, how long they are on your site, what your most popular pages are, and what areas of country or WORLD are on your site. Communicate within all departments of your company and see how all of these things affect them and use that information to come up with new, specific, and realistic goals.