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How much does a Web site cost? >

Executive Summary:

Like just about everything else, the cost depends on what you want, when you want it and how much work follows that.

By Janeson Keeley

When a Web site developer gets a call from a prospective client, the conversation often goes something like this:

Prospective Client: "I would like to get a Web site. How much does it cost?"

Developer: "It depends. What sort of site do you want?"

As a prospective client, you need to understand that the Web developer isn't being obtuse. In order to give a quote for building a site that will best meet your needs, the conscientious developer needs to understand the purpose, requirements, and budget you have defined for your project.

Purpose. Do you want to drive customers to your brick-and-mortar business? Provide resources to your existing customers? Sell items online? Improve your visibility as an expert? Create an online community?

Requirements. Are search engine rankings important? Do you want to be able to update your site yourself? If you want an e-commerce site, how many products will you be selling?

Your budget. You may be reluctant to disclose your budget to a Web site developer for fear that the developer will pad the estimate to "use up" the budget. While understandable, this attitude is ultimately counterproductive. A knowledgeable developer will be familiar with many different Web site construction techniques. It is only by knowing the budgetary constraints under which you are operating that the developer can balance your desires and requirements with the most cost-effective methods for achieving them.

"The Answer My Friend..."

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For example:

- Custom sites are usually more expensive than those developed from a template. While using a template is an easy way to save money, Salem graphic designer Sue England cautions, "The pitfall in using a template without customizing substantially is that there's no guarantee that a competitor won't use the same one. Which bears the concern, how do you differentiate your business from the competition?" Customizing a template may be an option.
- Being able to update a site yourself doesn't always save you money. Some content management systems have expensive monthly fees, restrict what you can do, take a great deal of time to learn, and make it more difficult for search engines to index your site. It

may, in the long run, be more effective and less expensive for your Web site developer to update your site than for you to do it yourself.

- E-commerce sites and sites with interactive features are likely to cost more than sites without these elements. However, there are many different tools for implementing these features. "A package purchased from a vendor may be more expensive than having someone customize an existing freeware package," notes Bob Flack of Roanoke-based Flack Software Services, Inc.

Having trouble finding a Web site developer with whom you are comfortable? Call the Better Business Bureau. Ask your acquaintances. Check references. And, when you make that call, talk about your purpose and requirement first; then ask about price. 

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