Are You Getting Ripped Off?
Critical Things You Should Know About Websites

A Simple Guide to Buying, Maintaining and Securing Your New Website

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Commissioning Website Projects

Commissioning a new website is exciting! It is an opportunity to bring new energy into your business.

Understandably, it is also a significant investment. Website projects are complex, and changes to the scope of work can result in additional fees and project delays—which we would all like to avoid. The following guide should help you understand how to get your new website project completed on time and in budget.

Approvals:

Successful website design and development relies on firm decisions made at key points. Subsequent changes could result in significant change orders of up to 100% of the work already completed. These key approval/decision points are:

1. **The Wireframe:** The skeletal model for the website's page layout of elements.
2. **The Design**: Which can be fully custom or based on a template/theme.

3. **The Sitemap:** A blueprint for the entire structure of the site's content and navigation.

4. **Content:** Includes text, animations, images, videos, PDFs, forms and other assets you want on your website.

5. **Development:** Websites are usually created on a separate **development server** and moved to the final **production server** (or live server) when they are deployed/go live. You will be asked to approve the website before it is deployed. There are typically a number of revision rounds before final approval.

Consider this: Building a website is similar to building a house. Once the foundation and framework for the house are in place, subsequent changes can be quite expensive to accommodate—in the worst case scenario a complete do-over may be necessary. Make sure you are happy with the wireframe and design in the beginning and things will go much smoother throughout the rest of the website development.

If, as a business owner, you are primarily interested in the website as a **lead generation tool**, you might choose to delegate these decisions to your professional marketing company. They will consider factors such as **search engine optimization, positioning of content, calls-to-action and your brand identity**—all with the goal of converting visitors to leads—as they prepare to build your site.

Scope:

Make sure the estimate you receive includes all of the elements and functionality required to meet your business goals, and are included in a written estimate in the form of **The Scope of Work**.

Check your scope of work carefully. If an element or service is not in the scope of work, it is also not included in the estimate. Some website development companies use this "loophole" to offer seemingly low-cost websites and then tack on additional charges once you're hooked! Thoroughly understanding this document is therefore very important.

Common add-ons that may increase fees are:

1. **Content writing and images:** For maximum marketing "wow," client stress reduction, and shorter timelines, It would be better to have these included in the website scope of work, however, some business owners prefer to do this part themselves—usually with the intent of reducing the budget for the website.

    To avoid surprises, check to see if content creation or editing is included in the scope of work—if not, the development team will expect the text and images you provide to be ready—**final and complete**—for immediate inclusion in the website without the need for further editing.

    Also, don't forget all the headlines, calls-to-action, related text graphics and other text snippets that you will need to attract attention and get visitors to engage with your site. When content creation is **included** in the estimate, these critical marketing messages will be professionally created for you.

2. Design: Photo editing, premium images, custom graphics (icons, infographics, illustrations, video, etc.) can all significantly enhance the look of your website and are typically estimated on a case-by-case basis. It is important to know that if you have chosen a theme instead of a custom design website, these items are not generally included in the theme. Make sure you work with a website company that is not only technically superior, but also highly creative and will estimate the creation of impactful custom imagery and icons for you.

3. **Features:** Features such as e-commerce solutions, shopping carts, calendars, forms, etc. may be added to your website using widgets, plugins, and custom coding. While widgets and plugins are pre-developed, they still require research and testing to make sure they are robust and compatible with: other software on your website, mobile devices, browsers, and operating systems. If a plugin isn't available, or does not completely fulfill your online needs, additional custom coding may be necessary.

4. **Revisions:** Revision rounds should be clearly defined in your scope of work. Make sure you understand the number of rounds included and what they involve. Major changes, for example those which impact the website layout or require additional custom coding, usually result in change orders.

Usually, once the website has been designed, developed and reviewed by the project manager provided by your website company, **version (or round) one** will be presented to you. Once you provide your feedback, work begins on **revision one**. Any additional changes requested while **revision one** is in process will be included in a subsequent revision round. This process repeats until your final approval.

Two revision rounds are generally included in the estimates most quality website companies provide. Keep in mind that additional revisions not included in your scope of work may incur additional fees.

5. **Warranty:** Make sure you have a guarantee ensuring that before your website goes live it will render correctly on PCs, Macs, and most common mobile devices that are running the latest operating systems and using the most current versions of Chrome, Firefox or Safari as the browser. Also, be aware that browsers have changed over time and it is unrealistic to expect a new website to display correctly with an outdated browser—this is especially true for older versions of Internet Explorer.

It is important for you to know that once your website is approved and made live, factors exist that are beyond the control of your website development team, such as periodic upgrades to your website's content management system (CMS), web browsers and the various plug-ins and widgets that make your website work. These are independent bits of software and may be updated over time by their developers—possibly generating

unforeseen conflicts down the road. Ongoing updates and troubleshooting are not included in the project **unless specifically stated** in your Statement of Work. Update and maintenance programs are usually available under a separate agreement.

Things You Should Know About Theme (or Template) Based Websites

Themes provide a great way to manage budgets and timelines, however, there are **pros and cons** which you need to consider when purchasing a new website:

1. **Pros:** Lower costs and shorter project timeframes (compared to custom design). There are many great themes offering different designs and layout options—and they are customizable within certain limitations.

2. **Cons:** Special features outside of the theme options may require custom coding, which is not a problem, but may incur additional fees. If you anticipate extensive changes to a theme or want more control over the look and functionality of your website you should consider a custom design.

Not all themes are created equal! The developers that create pre-built website themes, like all businesses, vary in quality. If you have decided that a theme-based site is right for your business goals, make sure that the website company you choose use themes that are technically robust and responsive (meaning they automatically reconfigure for smartphones and tablets) from reputable theme development companies.

Be diligent when talking to website companies regarding custom design—custom should mean 100% custom design which is uniquely yours. Some companies use the term "custom" to describe customization of a theme—**it's not the same**!

And finally, a comment on ownership: When you use a pre-built theme, you are licensing the use of that design (you don't actually own it). It simply means that while you can use the theme for your personal website or to promote your business, what you *can't* do is sell the theme itself. In practice, this rarely leads to any concerns for the usual website owner—it's a subtle point but worth knowing.

Things You Should Know About CMS Websites

Conceptually, content management system (CMS) websites are built on 3 layers of software:

1. **The Content Management System (CMS)**— this is the foundation for the website. Wordpress, Joomla and Drupal are the most common CMS platforms, and Wordpress is the most common for individuals and small businesses (there are many others).

2. **The Design**—this can be a custom design or it can be a prebuilt theme created by a development company. This layer provides the "look and feel" for the website.

3. **Plug-ins** (modules and widgets)—are pieces of code that make the specific features on the website function—for example "pay now" buttons, calendars, image rotators, etc.

These 3 layers of software are installed and tested by the development team to ensure that they are compatible with each other, and that the website renders correctly when viewed within a web browser.

The possible combinations of PCs, Macs, smartphones and tablets—each potentially using different browsers, such as Internet Explorer, Safari, Chrome or Firefox (as well as different versions of these various browsers)—are enormous. These combinations alone make *good* website development complex and challenging, not to mention the other factors possible.

Like any software, each of these 3 layers needs to be kept up-to-date with changes to computer operating systems, browsers and the other software within the website. Updates will be necessary periodically, and you may choose to purchase a maintenance program to have this done for you.

Things You Should Know About Hosting and Registrars

The difference between a website **host** and a **registrar** can be confusing—here's a quick overview.

A **host** provides a place where you can "park" your website files. Examples of hosts include: GoDaddy, Rackspace, Network Solution, Media Temple etc.

Hosts need to be selected carefully as their service levels and prices do vary. You can move your website files from one host to another if you don't like the service.

On a side note, be wary of any website development company that locks you into their hosting. If you decide to change hosts, they may not release the website files to you!

Hosting should not be confused with the registrar.

The **registrar's** role is to provide your web address (also called a URL or domain name). The registrar and host can be different companies although many registrar companies also offer hosting services as an upsell product. In practice, it can be convenient to have the same company as your host and registrar (but don't get fooled into thinking this is your only option).

Your website address (domain name, URL) is essentially rented for an annual fee, which is paid to the registrar. It is very important that you **pay these fees promptly** or you will risk losing your domain name. Automatic renewal is typically an option within your account.

Your registrar will send you email notifications with warnings that your domains are about to expire—**do not ignore them**. But also be aware that there are scammers sending emails to trick you into giving up your domain name (which they then hold hostage). Read the details carefully and go into your password-protected account to make payments and other changes.

DO keep the login and passwords to your registrar and hosting accounts in a safe place. **Do NOT** share passwords to accounts without careful consideration. **DO** change passwords to protect against unwelcome account changes.

Also, make certain that it is the owner of the business that purchases the domain name as well as the hosting service. Other trusted individuals can be added on to have admin access and authority, but the business owner should have the ultimate control and administrative rights.

Things You Should Know About Email

Email is absolutely critical to businesses and it needs to work—every minute of every day. There are many different types (and quality) of email solutions available.

Hosts and Registrars often provide email services as an upsell product—they are low cost and billed on a monthly basis. These solutions work well for individuals and micro businesses, however more established business should consider more robust email solutions with business user features.

Some website development companies may offer to include email addresses—this is almost always referring to the **host**-type email set up only. If you are looking for a business email solution we recommend you contact an IT services provider. For more information on pricing and proposals, download our free guide: How to Choose a Website Design Company from our Learning Labs Library: **www.Ocean5Strategies.com/learning-labs-library**.

In Summary

1 When commissioning a website project, **take a good look at the Scope of Work**. If the price looks low, there is a good chance something is missing! If it looks high, are you being offered things you simply don't need?

2 **Understand** the differences between **custom websites and customized websites** which are typically built on a theme. Some companies are not always clear as to what they are truly offering in their marketing materials—make sure you ask the question!

3 A **Content Management System (CMS)** website needs regular maintenance—primarily to prevent unscrupulous hackers from messing with your website (and therefore your business). Professional maintenance agreements are a very smart choice—think of them in terms of insurance.

4 **Hosting and registrars** are not the same things. Understand the difference and always protect your domain name.

5 **E-mail** is a business critical system. Make a conscious decision about your e-mail provider. If you choose to use the service provided by your host or registrar, know that it is unlikely to be as robust as a professional application platform such as Google Apps or Microsoft 365.

So there you have it—a simple guide to website ownership. If you still have questions, please give us a call at 703-988-9896, or visit Ocean5Strategies.com.

Ocean 5 Strategies works with businesses to improve their sales and marketing processes, driving increased sales revenue and profit.

To learn more, contact us at:
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