

10 Tips for Choosing a Webmaster

By Richard Hernández, CPCM

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Your Web site can make or break your business. A good Webmaster can tip the odds in your favor by providing you with a best-in-class Website. How do you decide who to use? Below are ten tips to help you make a better decision.

1. **Experience**. This is probably the single most important criterion for picking a Webmaster. Experience means less “learning curve” time to develop your company’s Web site, more value for your money, less risk, higher quality, and a stand-out site that avoids the all-too-common “cookie cutter” approach. A good Webmaster should have at least 2 years of experience and/or about 20 sites that they have personally developed.
2. **Programming Skills**. As a minimum Webmaster needs to know how to code in Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) and/or a HTML editing program such as Front Page 2000 or DreamWeaver. Knowledge of other programs such as Java, XML and Microsoft Web development tools and is a plus. A Webmaster should also be proficient with using electronic graphics tools such as Adobe Photoshop since you will need to edit photos to place on your site.
3. **Cost**. A typical cost for a Webmaster is between \$75 and \$150 per hour, depending on the type and complexity of the work. This is a good starting point to determine if the proposed price is reasonable. In addition, you need to find out if your prospective Webmaster subcontracts out his or her work. If so, find out what type of work and how much. You don’t want to pay for someone to broker your job since this adds unnecessary costs, delays, and risks. You also need to ask what it costs for minor updates to your site such as adding an e-mail or changing a phone number.
4. **Support Team**. Some business Web sites have numerous pages that must be “digitized” and/or “back-end” systems that must interface with the site. Integrating these various hardware and/or software system requires a back up team. Also, high-end Web sites require specialized technology such as Webcasting, special security, databases, etc. Your Webmaster should have a team in place, internal or virtual, to handle large and/or specialized requirements. Ask for this information during the interview process.
5. **Customer Support**. Developing a Web site is only the first step. Maintaining it can be costly. In fact, a common estimate is supports costs 20% per year of what the site cost to develop. Your Webmaster needs to provide customer support to ensure your Web site always works properly. Things to look for are 24/7 service, multiple ways to contact customer support, and a service policy statement. You might also try and call the Webmaster’s customer support service – before you sign up – to see how well they actually respond. You should also ask the Webmaster to provide you with a list of their current clients as references so you can ask about the quality of their customer support.
6. **Quality Control**. Does your Webmaster use a checklist or other structured approach to capturing your requirements? Do they use a checklist to test the various features of the Web sites they develop to ensure they all work? Does your Webmaster provide a written guarantee of the quality of their work? If the answer is no to either of these questions, then you should be concerned. Web sites can quickly develop problems such as bad links, slow loading pages, etc. It’s better if your Webmaster finds these problems and correct them before your customers or prospects do.

7. **Cost Saving Strategies.** Web sites are not cheap. There are two basic types of costs – development and support. A basic e-commerce Web site can cost a minimum of \$50,000, which includes the Web site, an electronic catalog and a payment system. There are many ways to save money using different Web development techniques and technologies. You need to ask your prospective Webmaster about how they advise their clients in this area – and for examples.
8. **References.** Due diligence is a must when selecting a Webmaster. Ask for references and Web site addresses of other projects he/she has accomplished and call them to ask if they were satisfied with the work.
9. **Alliances & Partnerships.** Your Webmaster should be able to supplement his or her services through a network of alliances and partnerships. For example, referrals to Web-related services such as online marketing, e-mail customer support, Web business plan development, etc.
10. **Interpersonal Skills.** Last and not least, does the “chemistry” between you and your prospective Web master work? Having a good rapport with your Webmaster will make your life easier and help reduce any miscommunications. You should also rely on the input you received from references (see above) to help you decide about whether you can have a good working relationship.

A Web site is only part of a company’s technology. You should find out if your Webmaster can help you develop a plan on how to integrate the Web with other technology tools used by your company? This criterion is a good tiebreaker.

Picking the wrong Webmaster can hurt your business in the following ways:

- Late entry to market
- Lost business due to poor site design
- Increased costs
- Creates an opportunity for your competitors
- Potential legal liability

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION. Please contact the author at:

Richard J. Hernández, CPCM
E-MBE.net
P.O. Box 617995
Chicago, IL 60661
312-404-2224
rhernandez@e-mbe.net
www.e-mbe.net

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