

Net Results

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Welcome

Spring has officially sprung. Flowers are blooming, grass is turning green, weather is warming up. Almost even feels like summer. What a great time of year.

I was hoping to think up a nifty segue into this issue's featured article – “7 Questions to Ask When Hiring a Web Designer” – but I couldn't come up with anything. Maybe it's around 7 weeks into spring already? Perhaps flowers blossoming puts you in a questioning state of mind? Ah well... maybe just take your laptop to the park and enjoy reading this one outside in the sun!

FAQ: What is FTP?

FTP stands for File Transfer Protocol. It is a method for exchanging files over the Internet, namely uploading and downloading from/to a web server. It allows you to grab files from your web site (assuming you have the ID and password), so that you've got a (backup) copy on your computer and to place files on the web for the public to view. FTP is, essentially, the way web developers modify and add web pages (and documents) to a new or existing site so that they can be seen on a web site.

If there's a web-related question that you've been wondering about, feel free to send me an email (info@nrichmedia.com). Chances are you won't be the only person to find the answer useful in improving your web site.

Featured Article: 7 Questions to Ask When Hiring a Web Designer

A lot of people, when searching for a web designer, don't know where to begin. They're not sure what they're looking for or what to ask in order to determine if there's a fit between themselves and the designer.

As with hiring any professional, it's always helpful to get referrals from friends or colleagues who are satisfied with their recently designed web site. That way, at least you're confident that you'll be dealing with someone reputable, who does a good job. But, what should you ask the designer when you first talk to him or her? Following is a list of seven questions to ask:

1. Can I see your portfolio?

Now, you know if the answer to this one is 'no' you probably don't want to go any further! The designer should have his/her own web site (which, hopefully, you like the look of) and, on it, several samples of sites they've created, which appeal to you. The portfolio should give you a good idea of what the designer is capable of and their range of styles. If nothing in the portfolio impresses you, you can't expect that the designer will create something for you that you'll like.

2. What is the cost?

This is generally foremost on most people's minds. Sometimes it's best to get this one out of the way right from the outset. You might have a certain budget in mind and once you find out the price realize that there's no point talking any further. This can actually happen with a lot of products or services you plan to purchase. It can be a bit of an education to learn that a decent web site costs more than \$100. (If you find someone who'll do it for that price, don't expect much.)

As with anything, you get what you pay for. Quality does cost and most people find that it's better to do things right from the beginning. I can't tell you how many people have come to me a few months after having hired someone cheap and getting no results from the web site they're embarrassed to tell people about, wanting to start all over.

You need to look at your web site as an investment. If it's done properly, even if you get just one or two new clients from it, it usually pays for itself quickly. Many people think they can't afford to have a web site now, but maybe, after they've worked for a few months or a year and saved up, they'll be able to. Truth is, that may be a few months or year of a loss of potential income (or business-building) that you won't get back. Instead of asking yourself if you can afford a web site now, the more appropriate question may be, "Can I afford not to have a web site now?"

Cost will usually depend on the number of pages needed on the web site, the intricacy of the design, whether each page (or section) will have its own unique look, the need for special features such as a newsletter subscription box, a contact form, Flash animation, audio/video clips, search engine optimization, and online sales.

You may get a predetermined price based on the above factors or an hourly rate, with an estimate of the overall cost.

Be sure to find out if you'll be paying extra for graphics incorporated into the design, what the taxes are (if any), and any other "extra" charges.

3. What is the production process?

Asking this should give you a general sense of what your involvement will be. Will you be getting assistance in writing solid marketing copy for the web or doing it on your own?

What about the design? Will you be able to give input if you want to? Will you be allowed to hand over the reigns entirely to the designer, if that's what you prefer? Determine what sort of involvement you'll want to have on getting to a design that you love. You may have a distinct image in your mind or some examples of web sites you've seen that you really like that you wish to convey to the designer. Or, you may have no idea what you want, just that you don't want fuchsia text on a lemon yellow background and, that you trust the designer to work his magic.

4. What are the timelines?

Usually, the designer will need some input from you before she can begin work. An idea of what pages you'll need, what the content (text and images) of those pages will be, a logo (if you have one), and style preferences will be required in order to start putting together a design for your site. The designer should be able to tell you how long it will take to come up with a design mock-up from that point. This may include time for revisions, based on what you think of the initial concept.

Once you've approved the design, the second phase will be to actually build all of the pages and make the full site live for the public to view. Depending on the initial agreement, this may include optimizing your web site for the search engines (e.g., Google).

5. Do you have some client testimonials I can read?

Again, same as Question #1, if the answer to this one is 'no', head for the hills! Obviously, the more testimonials a designer has, the longer he's been around. You might get a good deal if the only testimonial someone has is from their mom, but does that instill a lot of confidence in you?

Client testimonials are one of, if not the, best ways to learn how good someone's services are. Don't be afraid to ask for these and read them.

6. What about a domain name and web hosting?

Your site will need a domain name (e.g., yourname.com) and somewhere to "live" in order for the world to be able to see it. Does the designer offer these services or can she help you set these up? If so, what are the costs? There is often a small set-up fee and then annual (or monthly) fees for these services. Find out what these are up-front to factor into your advertising budget.

7. How can updates to the site be made, after the site is up and running?

Often people aren't thinking about keeping their web site fresh in the future, just getting it up and "out there." But, in order to keep people coming back to the site and to have the latest information on your site (not to mention to do well in search engines), you'll want to make sure the content is updated at least every few months.

If you're proficient at web editing software (such as Dreamweaver), this should be a snap for you. Otherwise, you can either see if there is some form of a content management system for you to use (or have one custom built for your needs) or, it might be a more efficient use of your time to simply have the designer do the updates for you on an as needed basis. Find out which method suits you the best and what the associated costs will be.

By the time you've finished grilling the poor web designer with these questions, you'll probably have a good sense of what it would be like to work with him. Does this feel like a relationship that you'll be comfortable with? Did she make you feel like you could ask questions without being laughed at? It's important to really feel that your needs will be met and that you even enjoy the process, not to mention that you'll be happy with the outcome.

Give all of these questions some serious thought when interviewing potential web designers and you'll be sure to make the decision that's right for you and your business.

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About nrichmedia
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nrichmedia creates innovative and unique web sites and other multimedia for ethical and socially responsible businesses and organizations. We also offer web site maintenance, CD-ROM production, and more.

nrichmedia was founded by Nathaniel Richman in 2000. Nathaniel graduated from the Vancouver Film School with a Certificate of Recommendation in Multimedia Studies in

1997 and has been working in the web design and new media industry ever since. He previously received a Bachelor of Mathematics degree (Honours Actuarial Science) from the University of Waterloo and worked in the pension consulting industry.

Nathaniel works with several other designers and programmers, according to the needs of the project, to provide the client with the most professionally designed web site or presentation possible.

“Working with Nathaniel on my web site was easy... he listened and provided a design I am very happy with. I am getting great feedback about my site and clients have told me they 'read every page' when they were learning about my practice and services. As I continue to need materials for my business, Nathaniel listens and quickly provides just what I am looking for. He has designed a business card, brochure, and letterhead that are consistent with the look of my web site. He has provided me with a professional look and I feel confident handing out my materials to prospective clients.”

- Ann Schlarb, Counseling Hypnotherapist (www.annschlarb.com)

To learn more about nrichmedia's services, view our online portfolio, and read glowing testimonials from many satisfied clients, please visit www.nrichmedia.com.

Web Site Design and Promotion Blog

For plenty of tips and tricks on designing, marketing, and promoting your web site, have a look at www.websitedesignandpromotion.com, a blog co-authored by nrichmedia and Juliet Austin.

Recent postings include:

[Foundational Links](#)

[Are you Baffled by the Key Word Selection Process?](#)

[Be Considerate With Your PDFs](#)

[Get Walking](#)

Feel free to place a comment on any of the posts there. It's an easy way to get a link to your site, which can increase your exposure and help your site's search engine rankings.

Charitable Causes

nrichmedia donates 5% of proceeds on all projects of \$500 and above to charitable organizations. We are pleased to have supported and continue to support several worthy causes. To see a list of the organizations we support, please visit www.nrichmedia.com/causes.htm.

The Not-to-be Missed Link: lesstoxicguide.ca

The Environmental Health Association of Nova Scotia has produced its Guide to Less Toxic Products – <http://www.lesstoxicguide.ca>. The title pretty much says it all. This is a very comprehensive listing of environmentally friendly alternatives for personal care, household cleaners, baby care, and more. Still a work in progress (although, by nature, it probably always will be), this site is a great resource for making your life and the planet safer and greener.

Archives

To view previous editions of Net Results, visit www.nrichmedia.com/archives.htm.

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