What You Should Know Before You Hire a Website Designer
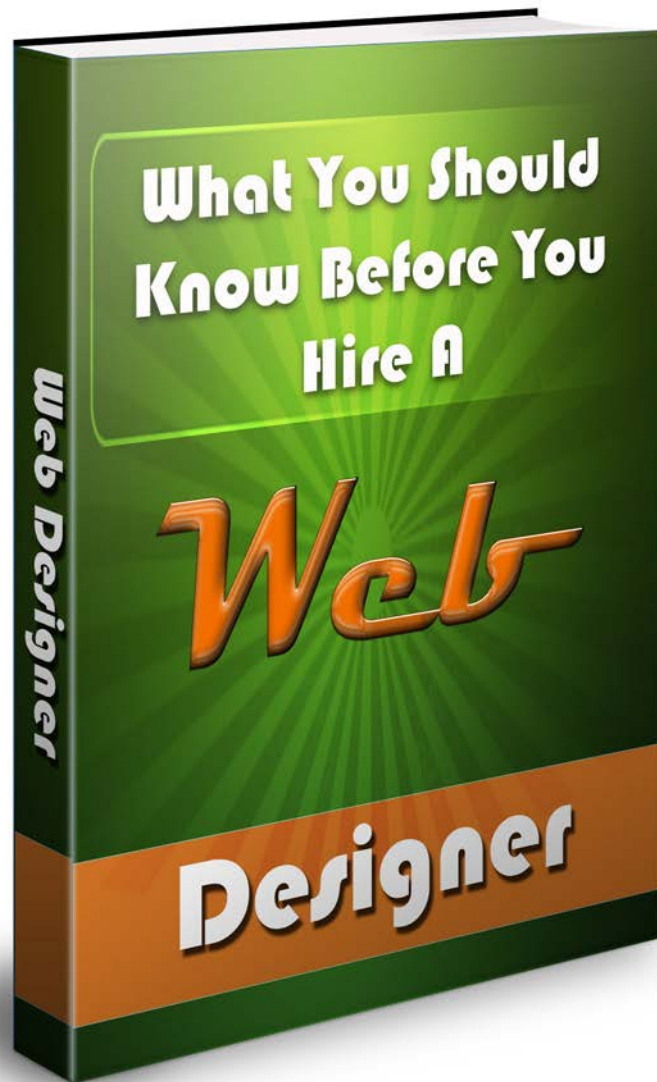
by Reno Web Design Group

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Introduction

The backbone of your business marketing is your business brand. Without a strong, memorable brand, you are marketing something that few people will understand or recognize. Unfortunately, branding is not a simple thing. Your brand is comprised of everything people see, feel, or think when it comes to your business; therefore, branding your business must encompass a number of widely variant elements. One of the most powerful players in the branding game is your website, and unless you are a graphic designer, marketing expert, and web developer all rolled into one, chances are you will have to hand the important task of creating your website over to the experts. Before you do, there are some things you need to consider. This report will cover those issues, we hope you enjoy it.

To your success in,

David Schroeder
Reno Web Design Group

The Benefits of a Great Website Designer

While it may be tempting to go with a bargain-basement design deal, or to use a free template for your web design needs, you really can't afford to cut corners when it comes to design. There are a number of ways in which great web design can benefit your business (and in which bad design can hurt your business). Read on to learn more about the benefits of great website design:

- **Branding.** You already know how important branding is. A great website design will embody your business brand and help bring it to life. Poor design will work against your brand, as it will be generic and forgettable, which cost your business money in the long run.

- **Professional image.** If you don't hire a professional to design your website (i.e. if your design is not "great"), then your site's very important branding elements could end up looking sloppy or amateurish. Is that the message you want to send to potential customers?

- **Adaptability.** Great web design takes into account the inevitable – the need to adapt. Over time, there is no doubt you will need to update your website (it is actually recommended that you make regular efforts to keep your website current, for both your visitors and the search engines) to keep it functional and relevant. Great design means that your website is created with adaptability in mind, so that you don't have to go back to the drawing board and start from scratch just to keep up with the times.

- **Responsiveness.** Today websites need to be responsive which means they display correctly across all web and mobile platforms. You want a website that will display and function correctly on mobile devices such as iPhones, Droids, iPads, Tablets, etc. If you have a website that is not responsive, it will not display or work correctly on mobile devices.

The Elements of a Great Website

An effective site is one that attracts visitors, keeps them interested and engaged, inspires them to come back, and ultimately converts them into paying customers. Here are the elements of an effective website:

- **Navigation.** This is perhaps the most important element of web design. Your site's navigation features are what will enable your visitors to travel from one page to the next, find specific items of interest, and form associations within your content. Without well-planned and executed navigation, you will lose site visitors and a lot of your valuable content could go completely unfound and unread. Navigation elements include primary/secondary navigation, menus, search bars, inbound links, and breadcrumbs, among other things.**Hierarchy of importance.** A good website design will naturally guide the viewer's eyes from what is most important to what is least important on the page, and in the right order. This is accomplished through the strategic use of fonts (including sizes, effects, and emphasis), spacing, graphics, and element placement.

- **Organization.** This goes hand in hand with the previously mentioned web design elements. Before you can even begin to design a website, you must first outline (or "map") out the site's organization. (Of course,

your designer will help you with this, but you must at least know what you want to accomplish with your site.) Your site map should include every page of your site, as well as how visitors will get from each page to the other.

♦ **Design aesthetics.** It goes without saying that your site should be pleasing to the eye. A number of different elements contribute to a design's aesthetic value, including typography, graphics, colors, and layout.

♦ **Branding.** Your business website should be created with your brand in mind. It should be an extension of the message and feeling you want to convey with your brand. Therefore, an effective web design will incorporate your business brand logo, colors, tag line, and any other elements that will help people associate your site with your brand.

Web Design Mistakes to Avoid

Now that you are familiar with the elements of effective website design, it will be helpful to also know what to steer clear of. Here are some common web design mistakes you should avoid:

- **Keeping visited links the same color.** This is especially important if your site has many pages. Your site visitors may easily get confused and flustered if they are expected to remember every single page of your site they've already been on, especially if they are looking for something specific. Don't lose site visitors because of this easy to remedy mistake.

- **Fluffy text.** Sure, there's a lot you want to say to your site visitors, but you must break it down into tiny, bite-sized pieces or you will lose their attention. Keep your text simple and to the point, and organize it into small paragraphs (no more than 3 or 4 sentences), with bold paragraph headers that clearly outline the page's content.

- **Design elements that are ad-like in appearance.** Studies show that site visitors have the ability to virtually blind themselves (or, mentally ignore) web content that looks to be an advertisement. Therefore, if there is anything important on your page that even slightly resembles an ad (pop-ups, banners, and animated graphics, for example), you should reconsider the design.

What to Expect from a Great Web Designer

Once you have in mind what you want and need out of your website, you must commission its development. You might be surprised to find that your web design services include much more than just a simple end-product design. Here is what you can expect to get from a web designer:

- **Research.** When you hire a designer to create your website, you are entrusting that designer to build something that is unique to your

business. A professional designer will do the necessary research to determine that your design is, in fact, original and unlike any of your competitors' designs.

♦ **Multi-medium translation.** Your website must translate well in a variety of mediums, meaning it must look good on everything from the tiniest smart phone screen to large desktop screens. Therefore, your designer will deliver your design in a number of different formats, suitable for every device your site may be viewed on. Responsiveness.

♦ **Design advice.** As someone who is hiring a web designer, you are not expected to know anything about the fundamentals of effective design. While it is imperative that you put a lot of thought into what your business stands for and what you want to get out of your website, it is the designer's job to offer you guidance on how you can best accomplish those things. A good designer will have the knowledge, skill, and experience to help shape your ideas into a tangible and effective product.

♦ **Search engine optimization (SEO).** It is not enough just to have a great website. You must get people to visit your website. Be sure to choose a web designer that is well-versed in search engine optimization strategies, as good SEO can literally make or break the success of your website.

- **Support.** Your web designer should provide ample support to help you add, change, or remove content from your website, as well as all perform other administrative functions for your site.

How to Choose the Right Website Designer

You will find that, when it comes to hiring a designer, it may seem that the options are endless. And they may very well be. From part-time freelance artists to corporate-world web design teams, you have your work cut out for you if you want to weed through all that's available in order to find your right fit. How do you choose the right website designer for your business? Read on for some pointers:

- **Freelancer versus design company**. Each option has its own pros and cons, and you will need to weigh these out to decide which is best for you. You can expect to spend less money when you use a freelance designer; however, a design company is likely to deliver a more complete customer service and technical support package for the cost. Also, consider whether you prefer a more one-on-one approach (freelance), or to have a team of professionals working on your one project (design company).

- **Reputation.** The best way to find a great designer, and fast, is to ask for recommendations. If people you trust, who you know are successful, refer you to a designer, then chances are you've found a talented and reliable professional to work with. You can also search the web for designers, and read customer reviews to gauge their reputation in the industry.

- **Experience.** Your web designer of choice should have a considerable amount of experience, and should be well established and time-tested. While getting a great design is extremely important, it is just as important that your designer sticks around long enough to provide you with the support you need. There may be no guarantee of this, but a designer with years of experience is a much safer bet than someone just out of the gate.

- **Portfolio.** Any reputable designer will be able to provide you with a portfolio (or at least some examples of work done in the past). One of the best ways to see the work of a web designer is to check out the designer's personal website.

- **Vision.** Design takes a certain amount of knowledge and technical skill, but a great designer must also have an artistic vision. When you interview web designers, consider what they are bringing to the table. Is it just the technical ability to execute your site's creation, or can they actually offer up creative ideas to strengthen and build on your branding and commerce goals?

- **Pricing.** Because each design project is unique, it is impossible to estimate exactly what you will have to spend before you've hashed out all of the details of what you want and need and received some estimates. However, most of your designer bids should be in the same ballpark, for the same job. An excessively high or low price in

comparison with the rest indicates an unrealistic or inexperienced designer.

Conclusion

A lot goes into building your brand, and your business website is one of your most powerful branding tools. Don't skimp when it comes to creating, growing, and strengthening your brand. Contact the experienced professionals at Reno Web Design Group to handle all of your web design needs. We can be reached by phone, at 775.591.8093, or email: david@renowebdesigngroup.com

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David Schroeder is the founder/owner/CEO of Reno Web Design Group which specializes in helping local businesses build a meaningful online presence.

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