Kiwi Website Design
& Digital Marketing

18 THINGS TO FIND OUT WHEN
CHOOSING A WEBSITE DESIGN COMPANY

Table of
Contents

Table of
Contents

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Having a website is essential now for every business. The internet is where people look for products and services, even if they eventually complete the transaction or make their enquiries in person. People will check the directions to a company in the car while on route by looking up that company's website on their phone, they will check reviews about the company's product or service online, and they will read about the company when doing their initial research.

So, whatever size of business or organisation you have, and whatever industry you are in, a website is beneficial. Buying one is not always a straightforward process though. Everyone knows whether they like a website or not, but not everyone knows why they like it, the technical properties of the website that make it look like it does, or the even more technical elements which enabled the website to be found and efficiently browsed. Many companies in the industry use jargon plus the types of company that offer website design services varies greatly, and the range of prices you will be quoted is vast.

To help you make the right choice when choosing a website design company we have put together this list of 16 essential things you should find out. It is not too technical – it focuses on process, management and usability more than code – but you will have the knowledge you need to talk to a potential website designer once you finish going through it.

Here are the 16 things you should find out when choosing a website design company.

1. What Experience Do They Have?

You should ask questions like how long they have been in business and how many years' experience the key people in the company have. These are important considerations, but the best way to learn about the experience of the website design company is to look at their portfolio.

The best portfolios feature a broad range of clients with a range of different types of design. You don't have to find an example within their portfolio that is exactly what you want, but their previous experience should demonstrate two main things:

   ✓   The company's technical competence (features, speed, SEO etc)
   ✓   The company's ability to portray the business in the right way (the website design matching the brand and image)

Finally, it is also beneficial if the company has built a website in the past similar to the one you want, or has built websites for other businesses in your industry.

2. Is It A Proper Company?

The website design industry is made up of individuals who build websites at the weekend from a laptop on their kitchen table, to agencies employing hundreds of people. You should therefore make sure you are happy with your website design company's setup. In particular, make sure they have the resources to complete the job, are up-to-date with the latest trends and issues in the website design industry, and are in it for the long haul. After all, the last thing you want is to get the website built by a competent friend of a friend who disappears after four months because of a job offer in another part of the country.

Website
Hosting

3. Website Hosting:

It is important to know upfront the cost of hosting your website. Generally, most of the companies in New Zealand make quite a bit of money with hosting. They consider it recurring revenue and which they get every month of every year without doing any work.

Let's take it this way. If a website design company has 300 clients and each client paying them $20 extra per month for hosting, it means they are pocketing more than $6000 per month and that's recurring revenue every month.

We at Kiwi Website Design believe in complete transparency. If your website is hosted on the best servers in the world with 99.99% uptime guarantee, the cost should not be more than $250 - $300 per year.

For domain name, your website design company should not ask for more than $20 per year. Usually .com domains are even cheaper. You can easily buy them for less than $15 per year. And .co.nz domains are generally $19 per year.

4. What Is The Cost to Build the website?

Cost is important for every website design project. The issue with the website design industry, however, is there is very little consistency in prices between companies. This means you will usually encounter a broad range of prices for the same job. This starts from essentially free (where you do-it-yourself), up to tens of thousands of dollars.

The advice when looking at price is similar to the advice you would follow when making any significant purchase:

☑ **Put a budget in place**

☑ **The cheapest option is rarely the best**

☑ **You get what you pay for**

It is hard to give a ballpark estimate on the sort of price you should expect to pay because every company needs something different from their website. Most SMEs in New Zealand getting a customised website with reasonably standard features should expect to pay in the thousands. Companies that charge in the hundred are unlikely to deliver a full and/or professional service and, unless you are getting a website that is particularly large or bespoke, pricing over $5k is probably expensive.

5. What Platform Is The Website Built In?

This can get technical, but it is important you understand the basics as it can save you money and hassle in the long run. In general, your website can be built in two different ways:

1) *Using an open source Content Management System (CMS) like WordPress or Joomla.*

2) *Using a bespoke platform.*

The vast majority of websites on the internet are built in an open source CMS. This gives you greater flexibility and control over your website. For example, it is easier to change developer or get someone else to add new functionality.
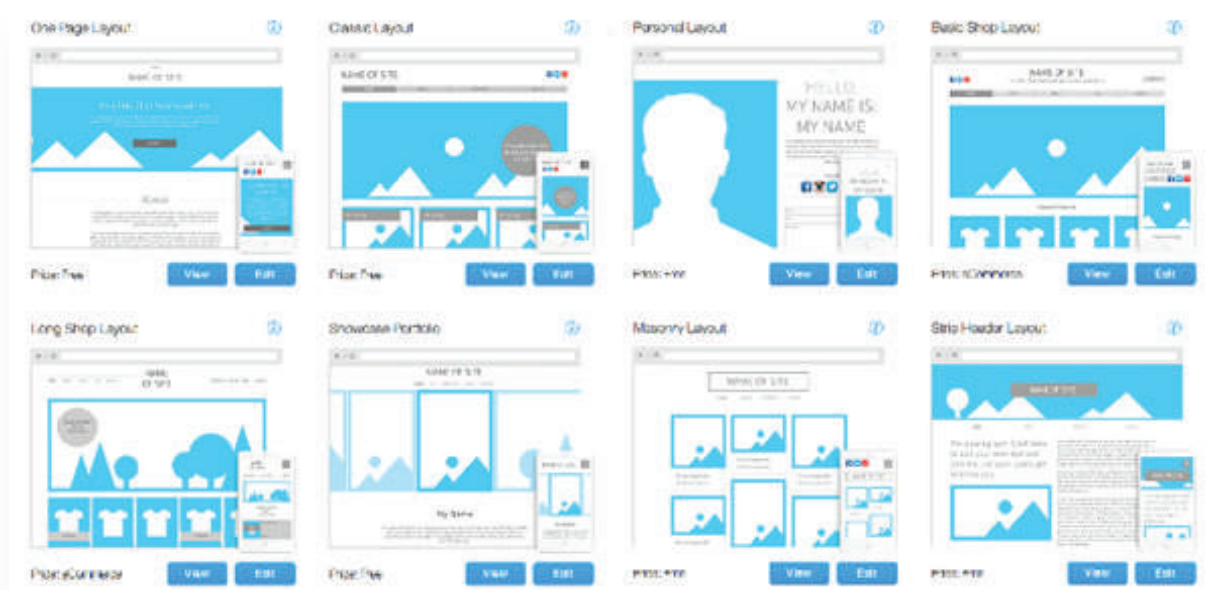
6. Websites Built on Templates.

These days, there are literally thousands and thousands of templates available on the net. Generally most of the website design companies build websites on templates. It means that they will show you some generic templates. You will choose the style you like. They will buy the template for $50 and customize it to suit your needs and load your content on it.

Building the website on template has its own disadvantages. Usually templates based websites are not SEO friendly. There are limitations like you cannot customize everything. It is highly likely that you will see your competitors' websites built on same template which will look similar.

If you are investing decent amount of money in your website, always tell your website design company not to use any templates. Always go for Custom Design.

We at Kiwi Website Design do not work on templates. We always custom design and develop from scratch and at the same time keep it very affordable for Kiwi Businesses.

7) What Support Will You Get.

A website is not a static item. It therefore needs ongoing support to keep it updated, patched and secure. You may also need support and help in using the website, with hosting, managing emails, or updating the website content. The support you get from the website development company is therefore critically important.
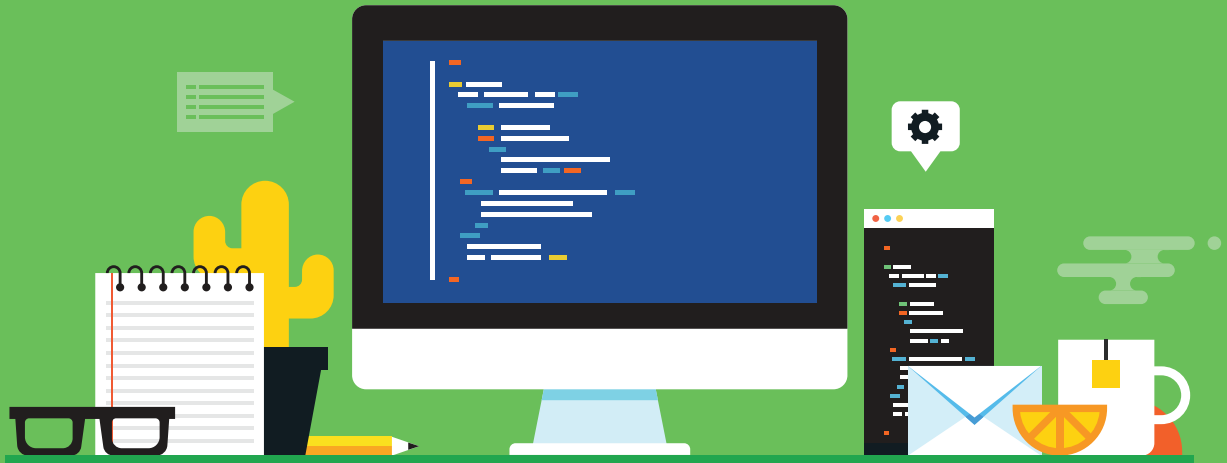
If you don't have proper support in place you will have to pay for someone to fix the problem or add the functionality. It is much better to ensure the company designing the website offers proper support.

Check the detail of the support offered too. This includes how quickly they respond when you raise a support issue, and whether the contract includes proactive support as well as reactive:

Proactive support – proactive support involves keeping the platform, plugins and software on your website up-to-date

Reactive support – involves responding when you raise a problem or question

8. Can You Update The Website?

A website design company will typically build your website using a CMS or in HTML. One of the main differences between the two options is a CMS gives you the ability to change the content on the website without knowing how to write or read code. It is almost always best to get your website built using a CMS.

9. Will The Company Do Everything?

There are a lot of steps involved in building a website, but some company's only look after some of the elements. For example, they will not do any SEO, they won't provide hosting, they will want you to provide them with some of the graphic design work, and you will have to write all the content. It is much better if the company does all this for you. This includes describing your business or products – a website design company that gets a proper understanding of your business and objectives will be able to produce professional, conversion-oriented copy for the pages, as well as handling all the graphic design and technical work. They will also optimise it for SEO.

Ideally the website design company you select should also offer digital marketing services like ongoing SEO services, AdWords management, social media marketing, content marketing, and more.

10. What Is Included In The Cost, And What Will You Have To Pay Extra For?

Always find out what is included in your contract, what is extra, and are there any hidden charges. This means paying particular attention to the scope or specification of any paperwork or contract you are given. If this is not clear, make sure you ask. Some things to pay particular attention to include which features are included, is support included, and is hosting extra.

You will never get a contract that includes unlimited updates of any size, so make sure you understand what falls within the scope of the agreement, and what is considered additional development. Make sure also you are happy with the rates you will be charged for any additional work.

11. What Samples Can They Provide You?

Check as many samples as you can of previous projects the company has completed. Look at both the design and functionality of the samples while trying to get ones that closely match the website you are getting built.

It is also good to look at testimonials as this gives you an insight into how other people view the client's work – both the end product and the process it takes to create it.

12. Will The Website Work On All Devices?

People browse the internet on a range of devices, and they expect websites to work on them all. In fact Google goes as far as supressing websites on mobile search pages that do not work properly on mobile phones. As mobile search is now about as commonplace as desktop searches, it is crucial your website works on all devices.

Your website design company has two options to deliver this:

☑ **Responsive design – this means the website dynamically changes to adjust to the size of the user's screen**

☑ **Mobile website – this is a separate website built specifically for mobile devices**

Responsive design is widely regarded as being the best option. This is because it covers screens of all sizes, plus it means you only have to maintain one website. With a mobile site, you essentially have two different websites, i.e. two websites need updated when there is a change.

13. What Staff Do They Have And Who Will Take The Lead On Your Project?

You should find out how big the company's team is to make sure you are happy they are sufficiently resourced to complete your website and deliver support as specified. Also find out if they outsource any of the work. Outsourcing is not in itself bad, and is a common practice in the website design industry. The lead designer should be in-house though so that the main person working on the site is the person who understands your business, your objectives, and your customers.

Some other things you should find out are what happens if the main designer is not available, and what happens during holiday periods. These questions are particularly important if you are working with a small website design company.

14. What Are The Payment Terms?

As with all significant purchases in your business, make sure you are happy with the payment terms. Find out when you have to make the first payment, and how much that payment is. Also check when the next payments are due, and find out if you can pay in instalments.

15. Is The Site Robust Under The Hood?

The parts of the website you can see are not the only important elements. This is a bit like a car – the parts of a car you see and interact with are incredibly important, but the engine is crucial too.

There are three important elements to your website's "Engine":

① SEO – *are there plugins that help to optimise your website for SEO?*

② *Speed – to deliver a good user experience and rank high in Google you must have a fast website. Ask about things like caching, image optimisation, and speed optimisation in general.*

③ *Security – unfortunately the internet is awash with hackers. Usually the most sinister thing a hacker wants to do is hijack your website for the purposes of distributing spam. This is still incredibly disruptive, damaging, and costly to fix when it happens, so check what security measures the website design company puts in place.*

16. Do They Understand Your Business?

Your website should reflect your brand, message and image. For example, a flashy and informal style of website is unlikely to be suitable to an accountancy firm. Your website design company should therefore take time to get an understanding of your company, your objectives, your products and your services.

Business experience is crucial in this regard. In other words, it is much better to deal with individuals in a website design company who understand both website design and business.

17)
How Long Will The Development Take?

The average for a typical website is 4-5 weeks.

18. Is The Company From New Zealand?

Finally, make sure the company is from New Zealand. It is always good to support local businesses, but there is another reason for getting your website designed by a local company. A local company will have a better understanding of your business and, crucially, your customers. They will therefore be able to reflect your company and brand more appropriately. It is also easier to deal with a company you can talk to or visit in person rather than one you can only Skype or email.

There is a lot involved in selecting a website design company, but going through the 16 points on this list will help. It will also make the design process easier – you won't have to spend as much time managing it, there will be no surprises, and the end product will meet your expectations.

★ **NEW ZEALAND** ★