

HOW TO OBJECTIVELY EVALUATE WEB DEVELOPERS & WEBSITE PROPOSALS

ROI = RESULTS ON INTERNET

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- Sending Out Requests for Proposal
- Protecting Your Confidential Information
- Evaluating Website Proposals and Making the Decision

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Results Driven Websites

Hiring the Right Web Developer

At this stage, you should have a short list of between five and seven web development companies that meet your baseline criteria. It is now time to contact these companies, request proposals, and carefully select the one that is the perfect fit for you.

The worksheet provided below will assist you in evaluating each web developer on your short list. I have designed the worksheet in three sections: Communications, Referrals and the Proposal. Your task is to give each prospective vendor a score between 0 and 10 for each line item (0 being the poorest and 10 being the best). The worksheet will provide clear indications of which prospects should be in your final pool of candidates.



You may download and complete the Web Developer Score Card as an Excel spreadsheet from:

<http://resources.intechnic.com/dev-score>

Communications: Pay Attention to Early Signs

When you approach a prospective web developer, it is in your best interest to be thorough in your communication. Since communication is a two-way street, you have to convey your exact expectations carefully. Detail your goals explicitly, and state what you expect from the website. Proceed only when you have a mutual understanding.

At this point, do not offer all the specifics. It is web developers' job to ask questions and offer solutions. You can then assess the responsiveness and expertise of each web developer based on each presentation.

After you have provided your goals, they will create a proposal. Their proposal needs to outline clearly how they can assist in reaching your objectives.



Your initial communication with prospective web developers gives great insight into the energy they will put into your project. Communicate, communicate, and communicate more by phone, e-mails and face-to-face. Ask questions and pay attention to nuance in their responses. This is your opportunity to screen thoroughly in making your decision.

Score each vendor (using a table or chart) on a scale from 0 to 10 for each of the following criteria:

- Do they have a thorough understanding of your business objectives? Do they demonstrate an in-depth understanding of your needs?
- Have they identified and offered adequate solutions to your specific issues and concerns?
- If you already have a website, have they identified shortcomings and recommended areas of improvement? Were they able to think on their feet, show abundant energy and readily offer appropriate analysis and solutions?
- Did they appear professional, credible and knowledgeable? Did they represent themselves as true experts in the field of web design and development?
- Did they agree with everything you said, or did they offer alternative courses of action? Were they resolute in their suggestions even if you posed resistance?

- Did they communicate clearly? Did you achieve a mutual understanding? Were they attentive to your comments and ideas? Are you able to envision a productive relationship with them and realize a successful product?
- Were they informative and generous with preliminary ideas? Did they offer innovative and exciting insights that are compatible with your goals? Did they satisfactorily answer all your questions?
- Did they ask you the right questions, and were the inquiries relevant and insightful? A web developer who has few or no questions will most likely not produce great results.
- Did they show a process or methodology (worksheets, questionnaires, interviews) to help assess your needs and ensure you have the same vision? Most reputable firms do have processes in place to achieve this goal.
- What is their turnaround time for returning your calls and e-mails? Are they prompt with feedback to your questions? A good indicator of their future availability throughout the project is their responsiveness during the sales process.

Sending Out Requests for Proposal

If you feel that any of the companies on your short list failed the initial communication test, eliminate these candidates, regardless of how impressive their proposal appears. You don't even need to request a proposal. Effective communication is paramount to any project. Failure to communicate clearly at the beginning is a red flag that communication problems will most likely continue for the duration of the project.

Send the remaining candidates your RFP and be sure to indicate the deadline for the proposal and full submission instructions. Also, include detailed contact information for follow-up inquiries.

Finally, make yourself available to your prospects if they have questions. You are equally responsible for providing pertinent information a web developer candidate needs to complete the proposal. Give all potential candidates an equal playing field by answering all questions promptly and diligently. If some questions are better answered by members of your team, make the connection so the developer's questions are answered thoroughly and accurately.

Protecting Your Confidential Information

If your project or RFP contains any proprietary or sensitive information (such as a unique idea, business methodologies, trade secrets, etc.), you must request a Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA) from each vendor before disclosing any details or sending your RFP.



The NDA protects you by prohibiting use and disclosure of your confidential information outside your working relationship. Many vendors have their own NDAs, but it is wise to have your attorney prepare an NDA that fully protects you.

Asking for References and Examples of Work

While prospective web developers are working diligently on their proposals, ask for their references. You should check the references for valuable information about your prospective web developer. Experience, reputation and a positive track record are three essential attributes that should factor into your decision. It is in your best interest to assemble a full profile on the company so you can make an educated decision.

When you request examples of work from your prospects, ask for a diversified portfolio. You want to see a broad spectrum of their work so you can compare and contrast their results. You want be confident that the vendor has the expertise and the skill set to fully achieve your specific business results and that the company is not a one-trick pony. Reviewing the varieties of their work provides certain exposure to subtle and stark distinctions in diverse businesses. Examples of their work should parallel your vision.

If they cannot provide references, or if they do not have at least three websites for your review, beware. Any established, reputable developer

should be able to fill this request. Contacting the references can be done immediately or following your determination that this is the vendor you want to offer the job. Devote adequate time to this step. It may be time-consuming, but it should be the preliminary and major contributing factor to your decision.

When you contact a prospect's clients, do not limit your inquiries to their satisfaction level of the website. Ask how the developer handled the unexpected issues along the way, how they resolved the problems, and was their approach collaborative. Get a full assessment of the developer's efforts from start to finish.

On a separate sheet or table, score each vendor on a scale from 0 to 10 for each of the following criteria:

Portfolio Overview

- Were examples/references provided relevant or similar to your business objectives?
- Was the vendor quick to offer references? Was there any reluctance or resistance?
- Were you impressed with the examples and websites they provided? Were there any issues or aspects of websites they produced that were a cause for concern (outdated or ineffective websites, lacking functionality, etc.). These website are supposed to represent the web developer's best work.

References Evaluations

Ask each of the reference contacts the following questions and score their answers with your notes:

- Did the vendor fully meet their expectations? Did the website achieve their business objective?
- Was the website completed on time and on budget?
- Would they hire this web developer again? Why or why not?
- How responsive and reliable was the web developer to this client? Were they congenial and pleasant throughout the process?
- Were there unanticipated charges?
- Were there problems that were directly caused by vendor? How were problems addressed in general (regardless of origin or cause)?

Evaluating Website Proposals and Making the Decision

You should have received multiple proposals from different web development companies. It is always a good idea to schedule a phone call or a meeting with each web developer to review and discuss the proposal in detail. This provides the perfect opportunity for you to examine and explore all aspects of this company and the proposal. You may also request information about a Content Management System (CMS), examples of additional websites and any other useful documentation.

Your decision should be based on the compilation of the prospect's presentation, their overall response time to requests for information or communication and the collective feedback from references. They may have a stellar presentation, but if they are slow to respond and lack good references, can you be sure they can walk the walk?



Your chances of selecting the best developer for your website will greatly improve if you make your decision as objectively as possible. You must examine all criteria of the presentations. While the proposal may remain the primary decisive factor, it should not be the only one. Do not make your decision solely based on the quoted price (we will cover this separately).

As everyone's proposal will vary in levels of detail, price and style, you may find it difficult to compare proposals side by side. You will see a wide range of styles, from inspiring designs and creative taglines to technical jargon and marketing plans. The following worksheet will help you parallel and extract the important information and objectively evaluate each of the proposals despite the differences in the presentation style.

On a separate sheet or table, score each proposal on a scale from 0 to 10 (0 being the worst, and 10 being the best) for each of the following criteria:



You may download the Proposal Score Card as an Excel spreadsheet at <http://resources.intechnic.com/dev-score>

- Did you like the proposal and the presentation? Your overall first impression is very important. A well-written proposal is in many ways like a well-designed website. After all, a proposal's objective is to sell web developer's services to you, just as your website will sell your products and services to your customers. If a web developer has effective sales presentations, they probably have a solid grasp on sales and marketing, which are necessary disciplines to build a successful business website.
- Does the proposal accurately, clearly and completely identify your business objectives? Did the vendor fully understand your requirements and address issues effectively? Does the proposal include a specific plan of action to meet the objectives? How would the vendor approach the goals to ensure they are met? Do you think the plan is solid and realistic?
- Are these goals S.M.A.R.T. (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Timely) or the equivalent? Remember, you want specifics. Don't settle for goals just to "increase your sales." Seek goals that are specific with an appropriate timeframe.
- Does the proposal address all the points and requirements listed in your RFP? Is this a well-constructed, informative and impressive response to your request for proposal?

- Is the proposal “on target” with your company’s needs? Does it appear to be a generic, template-based proposal, or did the company actually make an effort to construct it specifically for your business and your project?
- Does the proposal give you confidence that the web developer understands your business and your industry adequately to successfully market and sell your products or services to your customers?
- Overall, how do you rate the web developer’s marketing and sales skills based on the proposal/presentation, examples provided and the effectiveness of their own website?
- How do you rate the web developer’s design and creative skills based on what they have demonstrated: their presentation, examples provided, and their own website?
- How do you rate the web developer’s technical skills based on the demonstrated understanding of technical issues, examples of work and their own website?
- Does the proposal explain the project flow, steps or methodology the web developer is employing for your project? Does it appear complete, and does it make sense? This is where you will see how web developers differ vastly. Look for steps that ensure smooth project flow and quality control, and guarantee better results. (More on project flow later.)
- Does the proposal include all the services that are essential to your website? On a scale of 0 to 10, rate the value of each of the proposed services (as separate criterion), their importance and your confidence in web developer’s abilities to provide these services successfully:

- Content Management System
 - E-commerce / Payment processing
 - Hosting
 - Mobile support
 - Search Engine Optimization (SEO)
 - Social Media Optimization (SMO)
 - Copywriting
 - Photography
 - Video production
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- Does the proposal indicate who specifically will work on your project? Does it appear to be a complete team with all the skill sets required by your project? Will the vendor assign a dedicated account executive or a project manager? Have you met that person?
 - Are the quote and payment terms within the parameters of your budget?
 - Do they explain what is included in the quote and why they believe it's necessary? Does it provide a full breakdown with no combined budget items? Can they justify the quote? Is the hourly rate acceptable? Pay attention, not only to the initial quote for the project, but also to the hourly rate, which will come into play for additional work outside of the original contract.
 - Is the proposed timeframe parallel with your desired "go-live" date? Does the proposal clearly state project schedule and a full breakdown of milestones?

- Does the proposal outline warranty and post-launch support of the website?
- Does the project include training? For example, will the web developer provide training to your team on CMS (Content Management System)? If so, is there a separate and additional cost?



After evaluating each of the proposals using this score card you should reach a final score for each web developer. This will allow you to objectively compare vendors side by side to make your final selection. Remember, your decision should be made not only on the proposal, but also on the overall experience preceding the proposal.

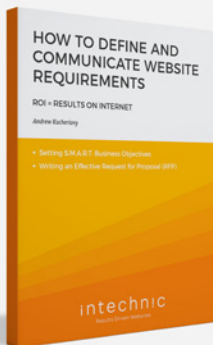
Once you have made the decision, the courtesy is to notify all of the vendors who submitted proposals. Some companies may ask you for the reasoning behind your decision to not go with them. This information allows companies to improve, so offer it if you desire to do so.

Recommended Further Readings:



Choosing the Right Partner for Your Website Project

<http://resources.intechnic.com/start>



How to Define and Communicate Website Requirements

<http://resources.intechnic.com/requirements>



How to Find the Best Web Developer for Your Website

<http://resources.intechnic.com/search>



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Intechnic is a full a service Web Development company offering an extensive range of Internet services to businesses and organizations around the world. We specialize in web development, strategy, usability, mobile, marketing, hosting and more. Intechnic's industry-leading team is at the forefront of pioneering results-driven Internet business solutions and technologies.

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