



The Five-Step Process To Choosing A Developer To Build Your Next Generation Website

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Is it that time again already? You check out your website and note that it's reflective of an era gone by – yup, it's a couple years old and doesn't seem to reflect all of the new services that you've launched since then. Also and in the fast

website is a bit of a mystery. And so here's the \$64,000 question - how do you identify the best web development company to create your next website? And the answer is – you have to start by asking the right questions.

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paced virtual world of the Internet, it's time to upgrade your site so it "bests" the competition and reflects well on your company and the services you offer.

Choosing a web developer to build your next generation website seems like alchemy to many. And true, the magic of combing technology and artistry to create a "world class"

The best way to approach this process is by developing an RFP (a Request For Proposal). After that, you'll choose the web development companies that you believe are qualified to bid on your RFP, and thirdly, select the web development company that best meet your specific requirements. This article focuses on the first aspect, or the five step process of creating an RFP that will allow you to choose a developer to build your next generation website. It briefly summarizes the actions required to complete the following two aspects of this process.

Step One. Annotate your RFP as such – it's a "request for proposal." The prospect of securing new business always is an attention getter – so say it exactly this way. Specify that the document is confidential, if it is. In some cases, you may want to obtain a signed Non Disclosure Agreement (NDA) prior to sending the RFP to the web development companies. Specify who in your company will be coordinating this process, and detail that individual's phone number, email address, and mail address. Provide information regarding the format of the response you require – as an example, that responses to the RFP must be emailed and be in a Word document.

Step Two. Next provide the background



"...provide the background of your company, your company's short, mid, and long term objectives, a summary of the product (including product attributes, benefits, and its value proposition), and the objectives of the new website."

of your company, your company's short, mid, and long term objectives, a summary of the product (including product attributes, benefits, and its value proposition), and the objectives of the new website. As an example, the site may be an acquisition channel, a pre-sale relationship builder, a source of product information, and a lead generation vehicle. Often times, the web development company may be asked to develop a strategy and implement Internet advertising and marketing programs to support the deployment of the new website. If that's the case, include it in the RFP. The prospect of securing a larger client usually makes a web development that much more attentive and focused on doing a great job for you.

Step Three. Include a link to your current website. Discuss what you like about it, and what you don't. What has worked – and what has been a disappointment? Also, offer some links to other website sites that you like, and explain why you like them.

Step Four. Provide realistic deadlines so the agency will know when their response is required. In some cases, a face-to-face meeting once the web developer has received your RFP can be very productive. Meet at their place. This will allow you to eyeball their facilities and the quality of talent in the agency, while offering them the chance to ask follow up questions to the RFP that they received. Make certain to give the web developers a sense of when the final decision will be made.

Step Five. Now it's time to ask the specific questions to help you assess the relative strengths and weakness of the various agencies. Here are some questions to consider including in your RFP:

1) Agency information including



size, personnel, length of time in business, ownership, average client's billing, and annual billing.

2) Rate of employee turnover per year.

3) Process flow of work – how does the agency handle its workflow working with clients? Average turnaround

time on projects.

4) Description/resume of primary contact person to be assigned to the account and secondary personnel.

5) Fee/billing structure (hourly, project, and retainer).

6) Company philosophy, strategic analysis capabilities and overall approach

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"The more time and energy that you commit to developing a thorough and detailed RFP so the web development company can understand your business, product, and requirements, the more informed responses you'll receive and the better position you'll find yourself in when knowledgably selecting the web development company that will best meet your requirements."

to Internet marketing and traditional advertising/marketing.

7) Agency capability overview including experience in general multi-media production and web based marketing. Make certain that they outline and detail the following areas:

a) Creative and technical capabilities – in house staff, freelance staff.

b) On-line/Internet media buying capabilities and how they are handled (i.e. – in-house vs. outsourced)

c) Copywriting capabilities.

d) Web site development capabilities – experience, examples of work, tenure, and etc.

e) Web hosting capabilities – the selected vendor may not necessarily be required to provide any hosting services, however background information on capabilities should be included in response.

8) Methods of providing measurements of results/effectiveness of programs and campaigns. Specific examples should be provided.

9) Outbound email campaign experience i.e. – email lead management including messaging, delivery, database mining as well as experience in turning leads into sales, if applicable.

10) Loyalty programs using web based marketing, if applicable.

11) Client list and references and samples of work (if possible related to Internet and/or video products/services).

12) How specifically will the agency meet the objectives you've set? How will the website they design do the same?

Now, you're almost ready to go. Conduct your own due diligence on web development companies and agencies to identify which of those best meet your requirements. A local company is a plus, as is a company that has specific experience creating sites for your own market target. Sometimes, I've received great value by asking the top three web development companies to design a splash page for me that would be representative of their work, while paying them \$500 or \$1000 for their efforts. This shows that you are serious and allows you to use any great ideas you receive, even if you happen to not choose the company that suggested that particular concept.

Finally, match up the responses to the RFP with your requirements. Often times, it's good for this to consist of a team that includes the stakeholders of the website, such as sales, research, and marketing. If you have a specific question about choosing the web development company or evaluating an RFP, send an email to me at the address at the

end of this article.

The more time and energy that you commit to developing a thorough and detailed RFP so the web development company can understand your business, product, and requirements, the more informed responses you'll receive and the better position you'll find yourself in when knowledgably selecting the web development company that will best meet your requirements. A website is often a company's first opportunity to make a good or bad impression to prospective customers. And a website can be an excellent way to differentiate oneself and inexpensively educate prospect and collect leads. Good luck on your way to developing your next generation website that shows off your company and your product. And stay tuned for other actionable columns and articles that you'll find through each issue of "Broadband Properties." ■

About the Author

Don Kent is CEO of eCablevision, a broadband consulting company. He has spent over 26 years working with early stage companies specializing in the delivery of broadband and digital content services. Please address questions or topics that you'd like to see discussed in subsequent columns to Dkent@eCablevision.com.

