

How to Find and Work with a Designer: presentation for BAEF 10/21/03

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What decisions need to be made before hiring a designer and starting to work?

- Determine the **purpose and scope** of the project
 - Are you trying to
 - Sell a product?
 - Provide information?
 - Provide a service?
 - Is it an information-only, "brochure site? A portal site? Do you require advanced programming such as ecommerce, chat rooms, forms, databases?
 - Make an outline of your site navigation, or site architecture (e.g., Home, About Us, Our Product, etc., with any sub pages listed under each main navigation item.)
 - Can an individual provide what you need, or is it a more complex project which requires a team containing both designers and programmers?
 - What is your budget?
 - Time frame to complete the site (be realistic!)
 - Content: Whether writing it yourself or having it outsourced, remember to include time to create the content, if it's not already written. This can be a big job that many clients overlook.
 - Remember to register your desired domain name before someone else gets it.
- Articulate the **"look and feel"** you want to achieve.
 - Try to come up with a few adjectives, for example, "high tech, cutting edge, dynamic," or "solid, reliable, professional," or "funky, whimsical, off-the-wall."
 - Do you have or need a logo?
 - Do you have collateral (brochures, business cards, catalogs) the designer will need to match?
 - Do you have pictures or other materials you want incorporated in the site?
 - Do you have a color palette in mind?
 - Are you concerned that your site be quick to load, or more interested in having lots of attractive graphics?
 - Do you want Flash or other animation (cool, but expensive)? Mouseovers?
 - Will the site remain constant, or will it need lots of text or graphic updates?
 - Are you likely to want to expand the site in the future?
 - Does your site need to expand and contract to fit any monitor size and resolution? (This limits the designers' choices considerably, so you will probably get a much plainer looking site.)

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How can someone who's not experienced with design hire a good designer?

- Look at lots of sites and evaluate what you like and don't like.
- Look at lots of designer/design company portfolios. If a designer doesn't have a portfolio website, forget her.
- When you've made a short list of designers/companies whose work you like, review a site from each against kkh's "[Website Review Checklist](#)" Is the designer easy to talk to and understand? (If not, he's probably a programmer at heart!)
- Go through a guild or other intermediary (e.g. <http://www.creativemoonlighter.com>, www.gag.org)

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The process of building a web site (adapted from www.kimhughes.net)

- There are lots of ways to build web sites, but here's one fairly standard approach:

- **Initial consultation:** discuss your ideas, including color palette, collateral (logos and other pre-existing marketing materials), and the overall look and feel of your site.
- **Comps:** when the first round of designing is done, you'll be directed to a url where you can see one or several comp(s) of your web site. A comp is basically a large graphic: it looks the way your finished site will look, but has no functionality.
- **Revisions:** you have a chance to revise the design, and suggest alterations, additions, etc. Depending on your budget, there may be several iterations of this step.
- **.html build-out:** when you're satisfied with the design, you sign off and the site is cut up and built out into a functioning web site, including any rollovers or animation.
- **Programming:** if your site requires advanced programming (e.g., a database driven shopping cart, a chat room, a bulletin board), the programmers will install those functions.
- **Launch:** when the site has been tested and reviewed, it will be uploaded to your domain and you are live!
- **Marketing:** you may need banners, pop-ups or other marketing materials to advertise your site on other sites. Similarly you may need to have your site optimized for high search engine ranking.
- **Maintenance:** most sites need at least occasional updates, which can be done on retainer or for an hourly fee.

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How a web page is created

- Similar in concept to a Word table comprised of rows and columns, with the borders set to "invisible." Some cells contain graphics, and some contain .html text.
- Most sites use one or more templates, with areas left as blank table cells which are designed to have text or graphics which change on every page. But the template remains the same from page to page.
- .html text functions much like text in a Word .doc: it's easy to update.
- Graphic text is simply a picture of text; you have a lot more control over the appearance, but you have to update it in Photoshop and re-export the graphic.
- It's easy to make changes to the template at the comp stage, and much harder (therefore more expensive) once the web site is built out. So be sure to take the time you need to decide you're satisfied with a design before signing off on it.

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Do's and Don'ts

Do's

The better the designer understands what you want, the more likely you will be to get it. (For example, "Don't ask me what I want, I can't tell you—just make it look better," is not a useful critique.)

Ask questions if you have any concerns at all about what you're seeing on the screen. Don't wait till the site is all built out, assuming something that you don't like or understand will disappear on its own. Browsers vary a lot from one to another; the designer may not be seeing what you see. Don't be afraid of sounding ignorant, most clients haven't been through the process before either.

Be sure to tell your designer if any of the graphics she's creating for your website will be needed for print work. The resolution used on the web (72 dpi) is not sufficient for good printing.

Send graphic files as .jpg, .gif, eps, .ai, .bmp or .tif. (either Mac or PC is fine.) If sending more than two or three files, compress them into a .zip, .rar or .sit file.

Provide text in Word .docs with as little formatting as possible. Only very short items (two to three paragraphs) should be sent pasted into an email. (The browser often inserts a hard return at the end of every line, all of which have to be removed.)

Use Word tables rather than creating columns with tabs.

Send your highest quality graphic files. If we get a fax of a Xerox of a logo drawn on a paper napkin it's going to be garbage in, garbage out.

Indicate what text is to be hyperlinked by underlining it, and *indicate where the link is supposed to go*. For example: "The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog." [link to www.lazydog.com]. If you want to make the designer really happy, put in the hyperlinks yourself in Word.

Let your designer know if you think the majority of your viewers will be using AOL accounts.

▪ **Don'ts**

Don't expect the designer to edit your content. What we receive is what we put on the web site!

Don't use initial paragraph indents In Word .doc's, and especially don't indent paragraphs using the space key! Word .doc's must have a hard return at the end of every paragraph, not at the end of every line.

Don't put in any fancy colors, fonts or other formatting; the web designer just has to take them all out and put them back in differently. Using bolded or italicized text is fine. Word-generated bulleted lists are okay, but if you want to make the designer really happy, don't actually put in the bullets, just indicate which items are in the list.

Don't underline *anything* unless it is to be hyperlinked. Again: on the net underlining is *only* used for hyperlinks.

Never use ALL CAPS. It's perceived on the web as shouting at people.

Don't send graphic files embedded in Word, send them as separate files. (They don't come out of Word the same as they went in. Why? Ask Mr. Gates.)

Don't over-compress .jpg's (save at "high" resolution). Don't save .jpg's more than once (you actually lose data every time you save the file).

No Microsoft Publisher files! Many designers can take either Pagemaker or Quark, however. Just check which one they use.

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How the web is unlike print

- Far less control over subtleties of text design (e.g. leading, kerning, etc.).
- Ditto over layout of html text in general.
- Fonts: why is there such a limited selection?
- Monitors vary widely in color cast; Mac monitors differ from PC monitors as well.
- Color on screen may bear little relation to color printed out.
- Browser variations in font size, permissible .css tags.
- Graphics at web resolution are not suitable for printing!
- Web pages in general are not designed to be printed.

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