

Nine Questions You Should Absolutely Ask Your Future Web Developer

In April of 2014, Forbes.com contributor Mark Cenicola published an article entitled [Nine Questions You Should Absolutely Ask Your Future Web Developer](http://www.forbes.com/sites/theyec/2014/04/25/nine-questions-you-should-absolutely-ask-your-future-web-developer/)¹. It contains excellent advice aimed at helping busy small business owners make more informed decisions when it comes to getting help with their websites.

Below are the questions Cenicola says business owners should ask, along with my responses to those questions.

1. **How long will the project take?**

As with any project, the time it takes to build and launch your website depends on its complexity as well as how long it takes you to respond with approvals or needed content.

Simple projects with johnny-on-the-spot responses could take just a few weeks to complete. Most projects take longer because they are usually more complex and not the only thing on a client's plate. 60 to 90 days from kickoff to launch is a typical timeline for the majority of my clients' projects.

Projects involving committees tend to have longer timelines because of the more complex approval process.

2. **What other services are provided?**

I focus solely on your website as the hub of your online marketing efforts. While I have experience with many ancillary areas (e.g., hosting, graphics, social media, SEO), with few exceptions I use this experience only to help guide decisions.

Cenicola, Mark. "Nine Questions You Should Absolutely Ask Your Future Web Developer." *Forbes*. Forbes Magazine, 25 Apr. 2014. Web. 20 Jan. 2015. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/theyec/2014/04/25/nine-questions-you-should-absolutely-ask-your-future-web-developer/>.

3. **How much will it cost?**

Fees for very simple sites aimed at providing visitors with basic information about a business or organization start at just under \$1,000.

Most businesses choose sites with more complex feature sets, because those sites offer options that make running their business easier, help the site look and work better with less effort, or make it easier for visitors to do business with them.

Most of the sites I create cost between \$2,850 and \$4,500 to produce.

The cost of sites for businesses or organizations with more complex needs such as e-commerce, audio, video, scheduling, etc., depends on the time and expertise required.

All but the most basic sites I create have feature sets that are somewhat unique; once I know what we would like to accomplish with your new site I will determine what features will best help with that mission and provide a firm price to carry out the work.

4. **What do I need to do?**

Unless we have contracted with someone who will provide your copy and imagery, you will be responsible for creating the copy, headlines and captions for each page as well as providing me with quality imagery.

You will need to provide vector-format files for any artwork that must be included, such as your logo. If exact colors are required, you must provide the values for those colors so that I can recreate them.

Oftentimes clients are not familiar with the processes or terminology that is part of creating a website - for example, the phrase "vector format" in the previous paragraph. I try to avoid technical jargon where plain English will do but never feel bad if a request still seems unclear. Just let me know I haven't explained it in a way that helps you get what you need.

If you have special requirements that involve products sold on the new site, online self-service scheduling, podcasts/audio, video, a portfolio or other special items, content must be supplied in a clear, organized fashion.

If you require specific features or design elements, you must communicate them in writing prior to the start of the project, and ensure that they are part of the proposed work plan. It's not unusual, however, to have a better course of action become apparent partway into a site development project. But the earlier you can communicate changes, the less costly it will be to change course.

You will also need to review work and provide decisions from time to time. If decisions are made by a committee, one person must act as a point of contact, collecting all feedback and providing me with a decision that reflects your group's consensus.

Some new clients are taken by surprise when they learn they have an important role in the process. While I handle the technical and design aspects of your site development process, I know - and respect - that this is almost as big an undertaking for you as it is for me. But I will be available to guide you when needed, even when there is something only you can do, or decide.

5. Will training be offered/included?

Yes.

Training usually consists of two half-hour, one-on-one sessions covering routine updates and all of the common day-to-day tasks involved in managing a website. We will only cover what is needed for routine site updates, so no technical knowledge is needed.

Those with the writing skills and level of technical aptitude to confidently use e-mail or post to Facebook can usually learn site update basics fairly quickly.

If your site has special features we will likely need to include more training to ensure you are able to manage them. Also, if you plan to share maintenance duties, please let me know so that we can plan for adequate training of additional people who'll have access to administer the site.

6. What happens if the site breaks, is hacked, or malfunctions?

If this occurs within the first 30 days following your site launch, I will work to restore your site at no additional charge provided the measures I'll put in place when we develop the site aren't defeated or otherwise disabled.

I can also create a maintenance plan for you that will provide a cost-effective, longer-term means of ensuring your site is up to date and as protected as possible, and that I can conduct a cleanup and restore operation in the event of an attack or malfunction.

It is unfortunate that by virtue of using software that enables site owners to manage their own sites we also make it easier for those sites to “break,” so to speak. Because of this, I have specific requirements and recommendations that are slightly more costly in the short term, but will protect you and your site over the long run. When we work together, we will cover this topic in greater detail to ensure the best outcome for your site.

7. Is any business or industry research done before designing?

Yes.

Before I start on your site, I'll ask you for specific information that will help me create a site that is optimal for your business or organization. Because most smaller businesses and organizations do not have large enough budgets to allow for deep research, I ask only a few very targeted questions. The answers to these questions almost always produce enough information to create an effective website.

8. Is it mobile compatible or responsive?

Yes. Since about 2011/2012, all sites I create adapt to common device sizes such as those found on smartphones, the iPad and other tablets. There isn't an additional charge - we will build this way from the beginning.

I watch trends and understand that with almost no exception, a huge percentage of people visit websites with smaller screens than those on traditional computers. When it is hard to use your site with a tablet or smartphone, visitors get frustrated and may give up or visit a competitor's better-designed site.

I do not build separate mobile sites. A single site that is designed to display well on most devices ensures that your visitors have a good experience, with consistent design elements and branding, regardless of how they access it.

9. **Who owns the site/domain name/hosting?**

You do. Always. Additionally, if I need to purchase a service on your behalf I will either do so in your name or transfer it to you.

Even if you don't understand the technical aspects of your site, it is important that you always hold the keys, so to speak. If anything happens to me or if you decide to work with someone else in the future, you will own everything.

Thank you for taking the time to learn more about how I work with individuals and organizations to create polished, professional websites that they can maintain.

As you begin the search for a partner who can help bring out the best in your organization, I encourage you to read the original "Nine Questions" article for information about each topic and, of course *absolutely* ask them of any other potential website partners.