



In Step: Good Discovery Makes Great Websites



Many small business website development projects start with great vision but end up generating less than stellar results. Small businesses faced with budget constraints and little or no experience in the process of business web development often find themselves on the wrong side of their finished web project wondering exactly where things went wrong. Usually the answer lies with both the client and the web design or development company.

It's All about Communication

The job of a good web development company is to help you take the vision you have for your website or web project and turn it into a reality. An initial “discovery meeting” should be the first step in working with a small business web design and development company. The way to make that process most effective is for the client and the developer to have a clear understanding of both the big picture and the fine points. The goal is to arrive at a consensus for your project that meets the project objectives you have outlined. Those objectives should be guided by the budget and technical considerations that you and the web development company have identified prior to beginning your project. As we all know, the devil is usually in the details.

The best way to insure maximum results for your small business web development project is to take some time in preparation to get clear in your mind what exactly you are trying to accomplish. The next step in the process should be a good fact finding mission guided by the web project manager or web developer. The web developer should use this opportunity to not only gather the details of your project but to clearly understand your vision and what you want the end result to be. From there it is crucial that lines of communication between you and the web development company or web designer be kept open each step of the way to ensure a continued consensus on the project direction.

With that in mind, we've laid out a few words of wisdom to frame that first conversation. The aim is to help you make the most out of the “discovery” process and light the path to a successful project.

Good Process Makes Good Partners

- 1 Broad Strokes** - Take some time to think about what you're trying to accomplish with your website or web project. Hone in on how your project fits with your business, your industry and ultimately your customers. If the project is for internal use, how does it fit with your staff? Your website is ultimately about a business or marketing solution that solves a problem or set of problems. What are you trying to solve? What are you trying to accomplish?
- 2 Who Are You?** - Help your web development company understand your business and your brand. If it's a new website or a redesign that reflects a new look, it's helpful to have some of your promotional materials, logos, letterhead, etc. available for the discovery meeting. You want to convey who you are as a business and how you present yourself to the world. The company or web developer you are working with should be interested in this and be able to summarize it back to you. If you're a new company tackling small business website development for the first time and don't really have too much in the way of branding or logos, don't sweat it. A good website design company should be able to work with you to create design elements that reflect who you are or recommend a copy that specializes in logo or branding for business. Keep a list of websites you encounter where the web design speaks to you. The important thing is to reach a good design consensus.

- 3 Remember Your Audience** - As your thinking about your business website development project, focus on your website visitors. Who are your customers? That's ultimately who the website or web development project is being created for. Who is going to be using the website and how are they going to be using it? What's the goal? Are you looking to generate leads from your website, automate your ordering process, sell products online, allows customers or staff to access certain information? Since you are the voice for the end users of the site, make sure and give them ample consideration during the discovery process.
- 4 You Don't Have to Do It All At Once** - The beauty of the web is that it is a dynamic and flowing medium. Your website can evolve in phases and you don't have to accomplish everything in Phase I of your web project. You can brainstorm without barriers about what you want. Then, hone in and decide where the best starting point is. This is an area where an experienced web developer should be able to provide guidance. Perhaps phase I of your business web development project will be a new site creation that focuses on good design and offers essential content about your company and your services. It might include a newsletter subscriber "call to action" box on each page. Phase II might be the addition of an online store that allows customers to view order history and create reorders. Phase III could integrate added functionality to the store like the assembly of certain components, detailed reporting or a place for customer reviews. For small business web design and development, budgetary constraints have to be contended with. A website can be a work in progress and grow with your business. Breaking the project into digestible pieces can not only help you in getting better insight into what the priorities are but it can also help in spreading out the cost.
- 5 The Devils in the Details** - You don't need to know every detail in advance in terms of how the project will look. A good business web designer or developer should work with you through the process to draw out those fine points. It is useful to give some thought in advance to as many elements of the project as possible, particularly where projects involve interactive customer-based websites. To that end, it can be helpful to sketch out the step-by-step flow of what you're trying to accomplish and how information flows. You might have a crystal clear idea in your head regarding how each element should look and behave. Putting it on paper helps communicate it to the web company.

Or, maybe it's a bit murky and setting the pencil to paper can be extremely helpful in clarifying your own ideas and objectives. Whether designing a new site or redesigning an existing site, jotting down a site outline is a great starting point. What are the key sections of the website? What content do you want to include for your visitors and where do you want them to go? During the initial discovery meeting, the objective should be to do a lot of fact finding. The more details you can provide the web development company, the faster and more effectively you can bring your vision to fruition.
- 6 Don't Sweat The Small Stuff** - While it is very useful to put some serious thought into the project for your initial discovery meeting, the nature of business web design and development projects is that many fine points will be shaped and forged as the project development unrolls. That's why an integral part of the process should involve the web development company staging your project on the web (preferably in a staging area of the web company's server). Then, as steps are completed and the project moves forward, a consensus on the final result is maintained. Small adjustments as the project progresses are common and expected. As long as all of the key points are in place, don't

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feel like you can't adjust minor details as things move along. With that said do keep in mind that major revisions or additions to project development can add hourly labor and impact the cost. Make sure you understand how much "adjustment" space you're allowed without incurring additional costs. If you have a change or addition that is going to impact the bottom line on the proposal, request that you be notified in advance and have full veto or approval before work proceeds.

Conclusion

The best way to ensure that your web development project doesn't miss the mark is by preparing for the process and selecting a small business web development company that can help you to realize your vision. Hopefully, this guide will serve as a useful tool in the creative and development process. It was designed not only for small business owners and managers but to be shared with the website developer or designer you ultimately engage. The process of good web development is about reaching a consensus defined by budget, vision, technical requirements and good communication. The blending of those elements serves to lay the groundwork for success with your project and a final result that realizes your vision and serves your business.

Note: This article is part two in a series on small business website design and development. The first article in the series can be viewed here: [All Grown Up: Why Your Small Business Needs a Web Solution Not a Website.](#)

About The Launch Pad

The Launch Pad shares insight through research studies, white papers, newsletter articles and most importantly feedback from our clients to help small businesses and organizations succeed with technology and on the web. Our team has been helping businesses and organizations develop and manage cost effective technology solutions aimed at growing small business since 1992 expanding our capabilities and services with the growth of the web to include managed hosting, website design and development and domain registration.

Your pursue your vision... we'll manage the technology

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