

BRAND YOU in The WEB WORLD

by Carolyn Campbell

Leadership Coach for the new age of business

In the past few months a surprising number of folks have come to my office in tears, frustrated, or just plain 'fed up' with trying to create a website. Many have chosen to keep their old, outdated sites rather than endure creating a new one. The growing rift between designers and business owners is a bit unsettling— neither seems to understand the other, and both never feeling fully appreciated.

Recently, I went through my own website odyssey. After a rough start finding the 'right' team, I ended up with immense appreciation for the process and a site that is simple AND attractive.

So, what made this process successful? The most important part: I knew what I wanted my website to represent, how I work best, and where I was unwilling to compromise. Ah, yes! Rule number ONE! You are the one who knows your business best! Trust that! Then make sure you find a designer or team that works best for you and your design.

Must haves:

1. Know what you want.

Go online. Get examples of sites you like and ones you don't like. You have a far greater chance of being happy with the final product if you've done your own research. Before I met with designers, I made a rough layout of what I wanted (especially the 3-D press buttons!).

When things went astray, we could all refer back to that and say, "What's still true? What's different?"

2. Allow yourself to be 'picky'.

Take time to find the right person. When you interview them, do they take time to understand what you do? Bring them samples of what you like. Bring them examples of what you don't like. If you have had negative experiences, tell them about it. Notice what they say. If they don't ask questions about you and your business, this is a big red flag! Go somewhere else.

Once I've interviewed a designer and they feel they may be a good fit, I will pay them for 3 hours of their time to create a 'rough' sample. This gives me a chance to see if they can truly do what they say they can do. My web guy, Michael, went so far as to work with me to layout the rough mock up. I hired him on the spot.

3. Make sure the web folks have experience working with your type of business.

Interior designers have a different clientele than therapists. Nonprofits are different than retailers, even if they are selling things. Your website needs to connect with your clients. It's important that your website serves your clientele's approach to business.

4. Choose people who will help you see through the haze when the inevitable confusion sets in.

This is where your 'team' is so vital! Make sure your web developer understands your work and your style. Make sure they care enough about what you do to create a cohesive site that is visually enticing and web savvy. And here's the tricky part ... they should understand how to code your site or have someone working for them who is a coding guru. All too often I'm seeing people using mediocre coders. Yikes! With all the changes in the web world, it is increasingly difficult to find someone who can do both. If you do hire a web developer, make sure they know their stuff. Personally, I always have a web coder who will take a peek and make sure they're doing it right. Trust me, it's so easy for them to gloss over some really important back end coding ... and you will never know!

When you work with your team, don't give over your power. Yes, let them do their work, but don't forget ---- NO ONE cares more about your business than you do! And, at the same time, once you trust them, listen to their expertise. If you have chosen well, they are worth their weight in gold!

As the project moved forward, I couldn't help but express my appreciation for their incredible support. Each told me how rare it was for clients to express appreciation. No wonder there's a rift! (I want everyone to know just how awesome these folks have been! To see their contact information, go to the end of the article.)

5. Choose a web master who understands how the web works and can articulate this in language you understand.

Currently there is a huge push promoting costly ways to make your website SEO savvy. While there are some fundamentals that a good web designer will attend to, don't get snagged into spending a ton of cash when what you need is some basic tools, good content and easy navigation.

And remember: Oh, so important!!!!

Don't try to get the cheapest. It's too much of a hassle.

You'll want to balance simplicity, professionalism and design.

Your brand is vital to you. Your voice is essential to your clients. Because your website is your primary calling card—which can get passed around faster than a business card—you want it to represent you.