



**get
ready!**

a few questions to get you started

Questions to Ask Before Selecting Your Web Designer

Design & Development

Revamping a website is a big undertaking, and can feel like an overwhelming task if you have never gone through the process before. With a simple search, you'll find a large number of companies that claim they design & develop websites that will drive traffic and generate leads, but how can you verify that they do? Whether your business wants to build a new site from scratch or redesign an existing site, the web company you select will play a critical role in your website's success.

This is why it's vital to ask your prospective agencies the right questions during your selection process. To find a web company that you'll feel confident in calling your partner, view your search as a vetting process, and examine your prospects carefully and thoroughly. During this process, you'll need to ask the appropriate questions to make sure the web company aligns with your business's goals and future ambitions.

Your questions should focus on a company's size, team specialities, design style, value-added services, portfolio, etc.

To alleviate some of the stress, we've compiled a list of essential questions to ask web design companies that will aid you in your search. You'll want to know these answers during each stage your website project:

- [Planning](#)
- [Design & Development](#)
- [Post-Launch](#)

Planning

What kind of research will you do on our business?

A successful website requires thorough research of your business and your industry well before the beginning of your website's design concept. Partnering with a website developer that understands your business, your market, and your customers is essential to the success of your website, so this first step is one that you cannot afford to gloss over. Before even thinking about creating a website layout, your developer should be conducting keyword research for detailed insight.

Ask for a sample keyword map that they have done for another client in your industry, and see if it aligns with your business. Not only is keyword research relevant to developing your sitemap, but it's also fundamental to your search engine optimisation (SEO).

If you have an existing site you'd like to revamp, it's always a good idea for a marketing analyst to review your current metrics, and understand its strengths and weaknesses before making any changes. Find out if the web developer plans on analysing your site's metrics before laying out design plans.

Do you work in-house or outsource your projects?

Believe it or not, some agencies that list web design and development as a service offering often do not have the expert or even necessary staff in-house and will outsource the work. This can lead to communication challenges, project delays, and ultimately additional costs. If a potential web partner plans to refer your project to outside support, it's essential to know who they'll be using and how they will be working. Keep in mind; you'll want to do your due diligence and research the partner they use as well.

To compare, our team works full time and in-house. We believe in the value this brings when it comes to communication and meeting project deadlines.

How will our website project be managed?

A well-performing website should go through a six-step process: Research, strategy, design, development, launch, and review. For specifics, ask your prospective web design companies about their project management workflow. Will there be one point of contact or multiple? What's the process of each stage? When should your company expect progress reports?

At Caged Fish, our Project Managers are your main point of contact that will lead you through the entire process start to finish. They send out weekly reports to include current timelines, tasks, budget, and any other necessary information using a tool called Basecamp and allowing full transparency and all stakeholders to discuss the progression of the project.

What assets do we need to supply?

Before the process begins, you'll want to start gathering your company branding assets such as logo files, brand guidelines, fonts, and colours. Your next step will be to determine who will be responsible for collecting photos and writing your website content. Your web partner will typically provide you with imagery and content guidelines, like word count limits and file types and sizes. Still, it's important not to underestimate the amount of time this will take.

Average time to write a page x Number of web pages

As an example, let's say it hopefully takes you on average 3 hours to write and edit a compelling web page with excellent SEO framework. If your website contains 25 pages, you'll be looking at about 75 hours of dedicated writing to your site content. Depending on your business needs and your staffing capabilities, this may not be an achievable goal, in which case you'll want to know that you can rely on your web agency to be there for assistance at any point in the process.

How much time will the project take?

The length of a website project will vary from project to project, and the scope of the work required. An average timeline for a simple website redesign is 4-6 months, provided that all deadlines are met by your business as well as the agency.

Your potential web partner should be able to give you a realistic timeline based on your needs and specifications and provide a schedule with critical milestones for a successful launch. Both you and your web partner will want to be as transparent as possible when it comes to your website schedule. At Caged Fish, we provide our clients with a full timeline from start to launch soon after the first kick-off meeting.

We walk through each assignment and due date with our clients to provide a thorough understanding of what's expected by both parties. We advise our clients on best practices to meet the due dates and offer assistance during any point the schedule starts to skew to get the project back on track.

Design & Development

Do you work with custom or template websites?

Web design companies may offer both custom and template websites based on the scope of your needs and goals, but you'll want to know the difference between the two before making your decision. A template website, while a cost-effective option, may hurt your business in the long run. They are developed to be used for every kind of possible website, therefore including unnecessary back-end coding that can affect your SEO and slow down your site speed.

It is also nearly impossible to keep up with the effects that WordPress or plugin updates can have on your website and functionality. Since a template website has so many moving parts that rely on one another, one broken plugin can have a domino reaction on the rest of your site. This typically will lead to a business rebuilding their website again from the ground up, only two or three years later.

A custom website, on the other hand, is built only for your business needs and avoids back-end code that is unnecessary to your business. It allows you to make front-end updates easily and builds up with you, resulting in a website that lasts longer over time. Plus, a custom website establishes a robust online presence for your business that is unique to you.

What Content Management System(s) do you use?

A content management system (CMS) allows you to manage your website's content. The most advantageous CMS offers the option of making updates yourself. Ask your prospective web developer if they use an open-source CMS (such as WordPress or Drupal) or if they use their own custom CMS.

Often, a custom (or proprietary) CMS will not allow access to source code and therefore limits your ability to add content or add custom metadata. Be mindful that if you decide to add functionality to your website, you might get the response of "That's not supported at this time", or "We can custom build it for an extra cost." A custom CMS also typically means that your website will be hosted and owned by your provider, leaving you without a website if you decide to change hosting providers down the road. You're also likely to be met with a licensing fee and/or a costly renewal fee. Consider these additional questions if you're talking to a web developer with a proprietary CMS:

- Does it support e-commerce?
- Which browsers are compatible?
- Can I make updates on my own?
- Will I have access to all its functionalities?

If you decide that having access to make changes to your website and customising your content is essential to your business, you'll most likely want to choose an agency that offers an open-source CMS. In this case, you'll probably own your website and will have the ability to host it anywhere.

Do you optimise websites for mobile and SEO?

Search engine optimisation is critical to any well-performing website and should be included from the very beginning of your development, not just added in later. Ask the prospective web company about the experience their SEO team has, including if they have any certification. Then, surprise the agency by asking even more detailed questions about their SEO strategies. What page speed do you aim for? What kind of planning do you put into creating title tags and descriptions?

Are your websites mobile friendly? With over half of web traffic coming from mobile devices, and considering Google's mobile-first indexing, having a mobile responsive site is imperative for businesses.

At Caged Fish, Our SEO specialists are injected into all stages of our website projects – sitemaps, designs, and even development – to ensure your website is built with the framework you need to be found online.

What other services do you offer?

Web hosting

As part of their services, web companies often offer web hosting plans. There are some accessible and inexpensive options available, but consider limitations before you invest. Ask if their hosting plan includes a unique IP address, how much bandwidth you'll be allowed, methods of tech support, and how much up-time will be guaranteed. Note that the hosting type will have a significant impact on your uptime and site speed. Shared hosting means they will take one server and split it into hundreds of sections, allocating portions of the resources of the server to each user. So, if just a handful of sites have an unusual volume of traffic, all the other websites on that server will be affected because all the sites share the same resources.

The value of your website's speed should not be overlooked, since it is a critical piece in your website's success. A slow website will affect your SEO ranking and organic traffic, your performance of paid search ads (on Google and Facebook), user experience, and ultimately your conversions. 40% of consumers will leave a page that takes longer than three seconds to load.

E-commerce services

A comprehensive web developer offers e-commerce services to conduct online sales. When inquiring about their services, ask specifically about their experience with e-commerce platforms and features, including shopping carts, inventory control, and customer interaction.

Will we see the progression of the website?

A respected web designer will provide progress updates available for viewing during each phase of project development. They will also encourage you to give feedback or make suggestions with an open-door policy to ensure full transparency and communication.

How many design revisions do you allow for?

Often, it's during the revision and approval process when miscommunication can occur. As a client, you want to love your end product, and your web designer should be able to give that to you. It's essential to know how many changes you can make during the approval process, and if there will be any additional cost for further revisions.

Will our present site experience down-time while developing our new website?

Before the development of your new site is underway, it's essential to know how the development process will impact your existing website. Ask if there will be any time throughout the project that your current site will

be at risk of downtime. A smooth transition is imperative to your customer experience.

As a comparison, Caged Fish builds each one of our websites in a multi-stage process to avoid any down-time between the planning stage, the design and development stage, and the testing stage, so that your website launch can take place smoothly and seamlessly.

Post-Launch

Will I own the website once it's launched?

It's necessary to find out if the domain name will be registered in your name, or if the web developer requires a website hosting on their servers. Again, keep this in mind if your web company uses a proprietary CMS. Also, ask if you'll receive all source files, access to your hosting account, and back-end administration. You'll also want to determine if your business will be required to lock into an ongoing contract to keep your site live, or if they plan on delivering the completed site after the launch date.

Will I be able to make changes and updates on my own, and to what extent?

Many businesses find that their biggest hurdle with their current CMS is that they can't make the changes they want without contacting their developer and incurring outrageous costs. This poses an issue when a vital piece of a website's success is making continuous and relevant updates. Gather as much information as you can about your ability to add or remove pages, change your footer, or incorporate videos into your website after it launches.

Our agency gives you the keys to your castle after your website goes live. By using WordPress, our clients find it easy to make changes to their site. We even provide our clients with training for a complete understanding of their CMS.

What support do you offer after the site goes live?

Training

If periodically updating your content on your own is essential to your team but you aren't confident in your skillset, it's good to ask your developer about any training they can provide to your organisation.

Our clients receive a one-hour training session on their CMS with one of our specialists either inhouse or via conference call. We'll even record the training and send along a copy that they can refer back to. Our clients learn to navigate, modify, and change content on their own with confidence.

Analytics

Your partnership with your web solutions firm shouldn't end at the launch of your site. The agency you decided to work with should have service offerings and in-depth knowledge in measuring the success of your website: request samples and interpretation of post-launch reports. Remember, any website designer can launch a website – It's what happens after the launch that will matter to your business.

On-going CMS maintenance

Themes, plugins, modules, and the CMS core itself will require updating every once in a while. Monthly updates help keep your website safe and bug-free, as well as make sure you have the newest features, better compatibility, and smooth browsing experience for your users. A big part of website updates is security releases. So, even if you're not currently looking for the latest and greatest features, keep in mind that you still need to keep your site secure. Most website hacks happen to sites that have not been updated. Ask what your web developer will do to maintain your CMS.

Can you provide a portfolio of websites your company designed?

With the answers the prospective web developer has given you, it's time to do some fact-checking on your own by taking a look at their portfolio. Note whether the websites have a modern look and feel if their designs stand out in the related industry and if the user experience aligns with what you're looking for in your website.

Look and feel aside, do a little detective work to see if SEO is contained within their portfolio websites. Are the sites responsive and mobile friendly? Are their page speeds efficient? Do they optimise title tags and descriptions? Looking at a web developer's portfolio will provide valuable insight into their design models. When completing this process, it should be clear to which agency you can confidently commit to in developing and designing your website.

At Caged Fish, we turn complex ideas into simple, functional website solutions. From concept to design and deployment, we work with you to create a website that attracts visitors, gives them the information that they want, and moves them along in the sales process.

Are you curious to know how Caged Fish can assist with your website design? **Drop us a line.** We look forward to hearing from you!