MARKETING BY MARLOW

How To Lower Your Website Design & Maintenance Costs

Hiring a graphic designer to build your website is like hiring a painter to build your car.

Below are 16 ways to save money on your website design or redesign project.

1. **Consider a free or affordable template-based website**
   This is the cheapest and often fastest way to get your company online. You'll look like the masses. And you won't differentiate yourself (particularly important for commodity products and services). WordPress offers 1 theme for every 6,000 sites.

2. **Determine the look and feel you want *before* meeting with a designer**
   Share examples of websites (and other graphic design) that you like to convey to your designer what you want. This reduces the time required for design concept and design production.

3. **Be your own project manager**
   If you are technically proficient and well-organized — you can hire your own web design team: copywriter, graphic designer, illustrator, photographer, and/or web developer. Just like being a general contractor, you'll know exactly what you are paying for, and save money by not paying someone else to manage the project.

4. **Think small**
   Generally, smaller web design agencies and independent creative freelancers are less expensive than large web development firms, which pay more overhead. Small web teams are usually more agile, more responsive, and have less bureacracy.

5. **Tell your designer you want a CSS (Cascading Style Sheets) website**
   CSS websites can save you money in the long-term by reducing maintenance time and future redesign costs. Not all CSS websites are created equal — hand-coded sites require less HTML code and are more flexible when you want to make site edits. Note: CSS websites can potentially cost more upfront.

6. **Ask for fewer design comps**
   Design mockups, or "comps" to designers, take an extraordinary amount of creative time to develop. *Limit your comps to one or two*— you'll save your designer some time and yourself some money. Also, with a CSS-based website, you can often make small design edits, like color changes, during or after production.

7. **Avoid image-based navigation systems**
   Image-based navigation systems can take *4x as much time to create and maintain* as CSS-based text navigation. Graphic designers love images because they can control fonts. But you'll learn to hate images when your designer explains it'll cost hundreds of dollars to update your navigation because dozens of images must be Photoshopped.

8. **Do you really need a Content Management System (CMS)?**
   If you don't edit your content frequently (think weekly), and your site is under 50 pages, a CMS may cost you more money and time than it is worth.

9. **Ask your web developer to use free open-source software and scripts**
   Avoid proprietary technologies that lock you into monthly or annual contracts, with possible expensive upgrades. [*once*, I paid for a site built in Cold Fusion. Later, I learned Cold Fusion developers cost $125

per hour and the necessary upgrade for a Cold Fusion dedicated server would cost thousands of dollars. Never again.]

10. **Don't ring that bell**
    Unless you are in the entertainment business, your site should not entertain. Most Flash, animated, and other in-your-face visuals are simply expensive gimmicks that distract your audience from the information they seek. It's reported that as many as 25% of visitors will immediately leave any site that loads a Flash introduction.

11. **KISS — Keep It Simple, Stupid**
    Usability studies show that web visitors miss subtle design elements — a hallmark of traditional graphic designers with heavy print production experience. Simple layouts simplify coding, as well as maintenance â€' lowering your costs.

12. **Listen to alternatives**
    Do you really need that slick 360 degree virtual tour that cost your realtor $2,500? Perhaps a semi-custom slideshow of static images would work for under $500. Small stylistic differences are not always trivial — subtle design elements can cost hundreds of dollars to implement.

13. **Check credentials**
    If your designer does not know how to create a *layered Photoshop* file, then RUN AWAY, quickly. Your web development time will most likely increase without the appropriate production art. Likewise, ask for three references and check examples of prior web-specific work.

14. **Do not edit edits**
    The beauty of the web is its dynamic nature — the ability to change content after production. Don't pay for edits prior to site launch. Work on getting your site visible fast and edit post-launch.

15. **Take your shot**
    Acquire your own website photos. Custom photography is expensive. Although stock photos can be affordable, your own photos are more authentic and they only cost you your time.

16. **Learn to share**
    Shared web hosting at companies like CrystalTech.com can be purchased for as little as $6 per month — a fraction of the cost to host your own site or pay to host a custom CMS on a dedicated web server. And, remember, nonprofits can receive up to 50% off hosting fees through many vendors.

Contact Scott Marlow

I develop simple, sensible hand-coded CSS websites, custom WordPress blogs and WordPress-powered websites for small businesses and nonprofits.

Make Contact Today