



eBuilders





INTERNET DESIGN AND MARKETING

The eBuilders Guide to selecting a Web Designer

With the following short guide we hope to give you and your business a better 'grasp' of how to select a web designer.

We also include a short explanation of some of the - often misleading terms used to 'measure' web site 'success'.

Before we start - here are four quick points we would like to make:

-  Great graphic designers do not necessarily make great web designers
-  HITS are not the same as UNIQUE visitors or page views.
(more later)
-  A great looking web site is virtually useless if you don't have good search engine position.
-  Great web sites have great beginnings. Knowing where to start is half the battle.

www.ebuilders.co.uk

Before selecting a web designer you should:

DETERMINE YOUR WEB STRATEGY

What are your objectives?

Do you want to sell directly from the web site or do you wish to use your web site as an online brochure – producing leads to sell in a more traditional way?

Determine a budget

You don't need to spend thousands of pounds on your web design – but clearly a budget of £5000 will create more than a budget of £1000 or £500. Be realistic about what you are trying to achieve. Don't expect an all-signing, all-dancing site if your budget is limited.

Become familiar with the web.

Spend some hours 'surfing' the net and 'bookmark' sites you like the design of. Show these to your proposed designer. We find a surprising number of business owners have commissioned web sites when they have little or no idea of the web and how it works themselves. They have left this all to the web designers – often with disastrous results. It's no coincidence that these are the same people who often mistakenly think that the Internet doesn't work – just because their first attempt did not prove successful. (Just remember none of us would be walking now if we had given up the first time we tried)

Local or Global?

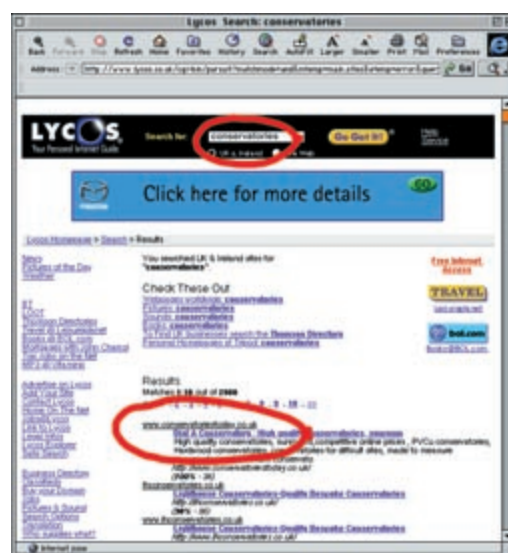
If your strategy is more local than global then clearly the Internet will work differently for you compared to organisations operating nationally or internationally. Top search engine positioning will not be such a great priority as most of your web visitors will come via local more traditional advertising. However please don't make the mistake of assuming a 'lower quality' site will do. Your visitors will still 'judge' you against all the sites they visit – so you still need an easy to use / navigate web site with a professional feel.

Determine a deadline.

Be realistic – if you want a site urgently make sure designers you speak to understand this. Also be prepared to work with the designers and provide feedback/approvals as quickly as possible. eBuilders can have sites up and running within the week – however 3 - 4 weeks is a more realistic time scale.

Search Engines!

Ask your web designers for evidence of success in placing sites they have previously designed high in the search engines. Web design and web marketing / search engine promotion are quite different skills. Ideally they should be carried out by separate people / organisations. (working together) A lot of web designers do not even know how to design a site that both looks good and is search engine friendly. If they can't show you proof or fill you with confidence on this issue – don't use them. Also their 'proof' should be from one of the major search engines / directories (Yahoo, Hotbot, Altavista, Excite, Lycos, Google) – not one of the many smaller engines that now exist but which few people actually visit!



Example of our success in the Search Engine Lycos.co.uk. No.1 position searching for the term 'conservatories'

Graphics!

Avoid the extensive use of graphics on your site – they take longer to download and spoil the viewing pleasure of your visitors who are likely to 'click away' if the page takes too long to load. This is why we said earlier "Graphic designers do not necessarily make great web designers". Better to have smaller images, which load quickly along with interesting well-written text that catches the visitors interest. The smaller images can be 'thumbnails' which visitors can click in order to view a larger image if they require. Its also worth remembering that its mainly the text within the 'body copy' of the web page that search engines 'read' (index). If your home page, in particular, consists of one or two large graphics and very little text it's unlikely to rank high in search engines.

Plug-ins

Special software or 'plug-ins' that needs to be downloaded in order to view a site should be avoided. They tend not to be search engine friendly and will often take quite a while to download.

Frames

Please make sure your web designer avoids using 'frames' to design your site. Frames are a method of displaying two or more separate web pages on your browser screen at the same time. We will not go into a detailed explanation here of why you should avoid them – suffice to say that any designer 'worth his or her salt' should know they are not particularly search engine friendly. If they don't know this, avoid them.

DIY

Of course you can design your own web site. Simple software to do this is readily available to download on the internet and is often given free with computer magazines. However unless you become a very proficient user (which takes time) your sites will tend to look 'amateurish'. In our opinion it is much better to use a professional. The DIY programmes are often just 'too simple' (a bit like desktop publishing) and will not give you the editing features necessary to create a search engine friendly web site. Also beware of the many so-called "friends of friends " who have suddenly become web experts and claim to design sites. They could be using this free simple software. Ask them the same questions that you would ask any web designer and in particular 'what about the search engine successes?'

Final approval

Before 'approving' any final web design insist on viewing that design online. Often designers will present their ideas on a laptop – where the proposed web design is stored on the hard drive. That's fine – but be aware the hard drive will deliver the images much faster than the Internet. You don't want to find that this design you like on the laptop 'takes all day' to download when its on your web site.

Our final tip . . .

So often we find that the design of the company web site is 'relegated' to the IT department. While we wouldn't suggest that the IT department shouldn't have an input, – we would point out that this is primarily a marketing issue. After all, you would rarely consult the IT department over the design of a new brochure. When you start getting those web enquiries you need to make sure they are responded to as quickly as possible. You should at the very least respond with an email acknowledgement. In our experience those in sales / marketing are best placed to do that.

Hits, Page Views and Unique Visitors

One of the most widely misunderstood issues on the internet is the difference between hits and unique visitors. If you asked people which is the more impressive statistic – 500 unique visitors a day or 100,000 hits a week? – Most would choose the latter. The answer is that both these figures could in fact represent the same thing.

Hits

If anyone who isn't a network engineer mentions 'hits' to you, they're probably trying to pull the cyberwool over your eyes. Hits are the individual requests a server answers in order to render a single web page completely. The page document itself plus the various images on the page and any other media files embedded there all represent individual requests to the web server. Each of these requests is called a hit - a hit is a request to the server for a file not a page.

In other words, the more images used in a page, the higher the hit count - so while hits may be a good indication of poor page design, they won't tell you much about traffic.

To give you an example of how misleading 'hits' are consider a web page with 10 images (graphics) on it. One individual request to view that page would count as 11 hits – one hit for the HTML code that makes up the page and 1 hit for each of the 10 images 'called' from the server. (Please note this example is somewhat simplified - in order to explain the principle)

Page Views

Similar to hits, page views are files requested from the server but are limited to the web pages themselves (i.e., HTM or HTML files, or Hypertext Mark-up Language files). While a little more concrete than hits, page views do not give specific information about surfers or their behaviour, for example, the length of time that they remained on a specific page. It is, however a good indication of how well your site is received. If you are averaging more than 6 page views per unique visit you can consider yourself to be doing well.

Unique Visitors

We believe that a count of 'unique visitors' is the best way of determining your web site effectiveness. Unique visitors are tracked not according to the files they have requested but by their unique IP (or Internet Protocol) addresses, which are much like online fingerprints. (For the technically-minded there can be disadvantages in this method also – as some ISP's use a different IP address for every file requested, thus making one visitor look like many – but we won't go into that here)

EXAMPLE

If we have a site averaging 500 'unique visits' a day and each visitor views four pages which each consists of seven images and one HTML file (representing eight hits) you will have a site 'claiming' 112000 Hits a week!!

$$500 \text{ visitors} \times 4 \text{ page views} \times 8 \text{ files (hits)} \times 7 \text{ days} = 112000 \text{ HITS}$$

As you can see web design and Internet technology can be fraught with obstacles for the uninitiated. Armed with these facts, you will we hope be able to make a more informed judgement about the services on offer and the claims made by potential suppliers.

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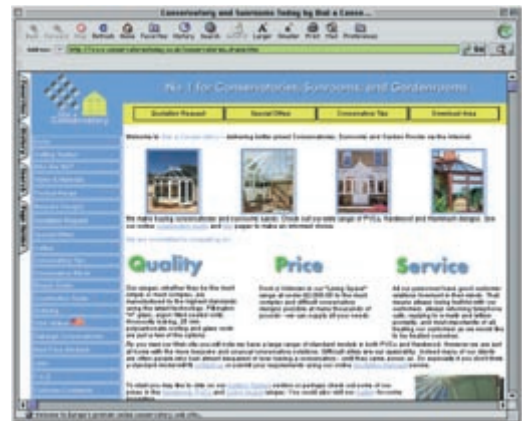
Here are just a few examples of our past work - check out our website at

www.ebuilders.co.uk

for further examples.



www.almostimpartialguide.co.uk



www.conservatoriestoday.co.uk



www.conservatoriesonline.com



www.livingunderglass.co.uk



www.windowstoday.co.uk

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If you would like to submit your details to our most recent creation (launched September 2000) – Windows Today – you may do this at: http://www.windows.today.co.uk/submit_url.htm

Alternatively telephone eBuilders on 01903 856679 to submit your details.

eBuilders offers a Search Engine Optimisation and Promotion service plus competitively priced web design.

For further details of how eBuilders can help your business establish its web presence use our contact details below.



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