



Comparing apples with apples

How to select the right
website partner

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Not all website studios are the same.

In fact, chances are, if you're sourcing multiple quotes for your website project, you'll probably find there are a number of differences between the different firms.

There's nothing wrong with this. It's normal, and to be expected.

The difficulty is differentiating between the firms (and accordingly, quotes) you're provided.

So it ends up being Apples vs Oranges, and never an easy, straight comparison giving you confidence to make an informed decision.

Unless you have deep knowledge of the medium, websites are still an unknown entity to most business people due to their complexity and the myriad of different design and technical approaches available to delivering them.

The issue is you can very easily make the wrong decision and end up with a website that doesn't meet your expectations or needs.

If this happens, it's generally too late. You probably won't even realise things aren't working out until you've already invested serious time and energy into the project.

More often than not, you're contractually committed, and there isn't the budget (or time) to start again.

So you end up frustrated, and in some cases, back at square one, with potentially serious questions being asked about how this all went so wrong.

So how do you make a confident, informed decision in choosing the right website partner?

Hopefully this resource can help.

To help you gain a better understanding of the suitability of the web studios quoting on your project, this document is broken down into the 10 essential considerations we think you need to be across.

1. Why are you looking at developing a new website?
2. Transactional or Transparent and Helpful?
3. In-house or Outsource?
4. Specialist or Jack of all Trades?
5. Content First or Content After Thought?
6. Custom Design or Purchased Theme?
7. Leading-edge or traditional Development model?
8. On-going Support or On Your Own?
9. The Proof is in the Pudding
10. Properly understanding Price

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It's important to highlight that there aren't any right or wrong answers or approaches to the considerations listed.

What matters is understanding what's important to your business and specific scenario.

Use this guide to help you define who is the right partner for you.

1. Why are you developing a new website?

Defining why are you developing a new website is the first question to clearly understand.

- What is the purpose of your website?
- What is the issue/s you're trying to solve?
- More leads? More sales? Better service delivery or information transfer?
- If you already have an existing website, where is it falling down?
- If you have an existing web developer, what aspects of their service have led you to look at other alternatives?

Hint: the things you are dissatisfied with are the first one's to address

- What will success look like for you?

Why is this consideration important?

You've got to have a good handle on the answers to these questions, because understanding them will go a long way to helping you define what is important in selecting the right digital partner to work with.

2. Transactional, or Transparent and Helpful?

When speaking to the different web firms, what has been their approach in your communications?

Is their approach sales focused or solution focused?

There's nothing wrong in just getting a really quickly delivered quote to sign on the dotted line - if that's what you are looking for. Not everyone needs a tailored solution; sometimes you are just after a pre-packaged, standard solution to meet a quick and existing need.

But if you are looking for something bespoke that speaks about you, and is tailored to meet these needs, you are going to want to select a website studio that is taking the time to deeply understand your situation and is focused on delivering strategic value.

- Is the web studio's focus on driving the sale?
- Or has the web studio been value driven and accordingly focused on understanding your needs firstly, and then through this process, openly discussing and exploring different options to define a solution that delivers real, considered strategic value?

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3. In-house, or Outsourced?

Who is doing the work? And does this matter to you?

Websites truly can be created anywhere. It's the perfect example of an industry where the only essential criteria is expertise and access to digital technology. The location where it occurs really is secondary, but that doesn't mean it's not important to you. In some cases, this aspect is very important.

Outsourcing, particularly to offshore development options is almost always going to be cheaper. But the saying "You get what you pay for" also rings very true in many cases. Here's the important things to be mindful of.

Locally created, in-house, will be more expensive, however...

- **More control and management** (you know who's managing and driving the strategy).
- **Easier communication, same time zone and ability to meet in person if needed.**
- **Faster response times and less of a chain of communication between you and the person building the website.**
- **Greater legal protections should something go wrong.**

Outsourced and/or offshore, will be cheaper, however...

- **Less control and management** (who is actually managing and driving the strategy?).
- **Potentially harder communication, different time zones and no ability to meet.**
- **Longer response times due to extra 'back and forth' and potential breakdown or loss in communication.**
Note: These hidden costs can end up costing you more in both time and money in the long run.
- **Less, or potentially no legal protections should something go wrong.**

4. Specialist, or Jack of all Trades?

Gone are the days when creative agencies could do everything.

The web is far too complex, technical, and based on user experience principles for someone without expert digital skills and experience to properly deliver.

Yet for some reason, it's very common for creative agencies in other disciplines such as branding or advertising to think they can create websites. God forbid though you suggest getting a web developer to design your branding or advertising campaign!

The web is a highly specialised medium.

As a design discipline it's as uniquely specialised and different as graphic design is to architecture. You wouldn't get a logo designer to design your house, so why would you consider a branding agency for your website?

And before you get convinced that it is actually a branding or marketing project, remember that digital devices and screen interactions have nothing in common with offline communications. Sure, you're going to need a brand style guide. But that isn't going to deliver best practice UX and UI principles to ensure your website is intuitive and engaging for people to use.

The same rule applies to digital agencies.

Any agency selling you the dream of being able to create the website and also do the search engine optimisation (SEO), or social media campaigns, is almost definitely going to fall well short on at least one of those aspects (or they're going to outsourcing it).

- **So if you are looking for a high-performing website solution, make sure you have web experts delivering it.**

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5. Content First, or Content After Thought?

When you break it down, there's 3 essential components to any successful website (Content, Design and Technology).

Content needs to be the first consideration. Leaving this to last won't end well.

You can't create a high-performing website without knowing from the outset the key focus, message/s and content structure of the site. Without this, you are simply designing blind.

- **Are the web studio's you're talking to asking you about your content?**
- **Has it been asked who is writing or supplying the content?**
- **Has it been asked where the visual content is being sourced from?**
- **Has the web studio explained that they can assist you organise and create these elements if you don't have them ready?**

6. Custom Design, or Purchased Theme?

Not all website designs are created equal.

There's many ways to design a website. In short though, there's two approaches:

1. **Bespoke, custom design**
2. **Purchased theme** (with your logo and brand colours applied to it)

There's pro's and con's with both approaches:

- A custom design is created to specifically meet your exact needs. It's going to be a lot more expensive, but it is fully tailored and bespoke to differentiate and work for you. Remember Content first?
- A theme is going to a lot more economical, but you could wake up tomorrow to discover your main competitor is using the exact same theme. It's almost definitely going to be slower to load, and you're going to have to force fit your content to suit the design of the theme. With themes, it's one size fits all.

What's important to define is what do you need to make your website a success?

What's important to understand is what are you actually getting and paying for?

If you want your website to be truly unique and communicate your point of difference in the marketplace, you're going to need a custom design. It's impossible to truly differentiate with a theme template that's cheaply available to every other business on the planet.

And no. Buying a \$59 theme, using free or cheap plugins, and putting your logo, photos and brand colours into it doesn't make it a custom design solution.

If you're not sure, you can usually check to see if an agencies work is custom designed or uses a theme by throwing the URL into this site: <https://gochyu.com/>

- **Have the web studio's clearly defined if they'll design you a custom website solution, or do they use purchased themes?**

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7. Leading-edge, or traditional Development?

With technology advancing continuously, it's imperative you don't select a technical development approach that leaves you behind through utilising an outdated model.

In simple terms, these days there's two main web development models:

- 1. Leading-edge "Headless" model** that separates the front, visual design of the website from the back-end functionality and content.
You can discover more about this approach [here](#).
- 2. Traditional model**, where the website design, back-end functionality and content are housed and deeply interconnected together.

If you want a custom design solution with a focus on high-performance, you'll definitely want to look into a headless website.

If you're happy with a purchased theme, and want to use free or cheap plugins to provide functionality, a traditional model is more suited.

So ask the web firm to clarify the following:

- **Is the development model utilising a leading-edge "Headless" development approach?** (and if so, why?)
- **Or is it using the traditional website build model?** (and if so, why?)

8. Accessible, or Liable?

Making websites accessible to people with disabilities is important, not just legally, but also morally as well as commercially.

There is complexity to creating accessible websites, and a range of different levels and options you can aim to achieve. So whilst you may decide it is not pertinent to you, understanding the different parameters, approaches and impact this may have on your website is what is important.

- **Have the website studio's raised accessibility requirements with you?**
- **Are the website studio's able to talk you through all of the different considerations and options relating to accessibility?**

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9. The Proof is in the Pudding

Every web studio is going to tell you they are the best web partner for you. Three good ways of determining the validity of this are:

Analysing their portfolio of work - focusing on how they solve problems.

Carefully analysing the quality of work the web studio has in their portfolio is a must review task to complete. But don't be fooled by pretty pictures.

- **Are the web studio's outlining how they understood their client's needs and showcasing how they solved these problems?**
- **Are the web studio's documenting the methodology and process they take to create their solutions? How they'll work with you is very important.**
- **Are the web studio's highlighting the outcomes and value their work delivered to their clients?**
- **How fast do the web studio's sites load?**

Fast page load speed is an essential user experience requirement.
Slow speed = lost customers.

Referrals and Testimonials.

Feedback from other client's they've worked with is a clear way of backing up what the agency is telling you about why you should choose them.

- **Are the web studio's showcasing testimonials and referrals from other clients?**

Awards and Recognition.

Awards aren't everything, but they can be a good guide of recognising quality of work.

- **Are industry experts and peers recognising the work of the web studio?**

10. Properly understanding Price

Price is always one of the most important considerations when sourcing a number of quotes.

Anyone that says differently probably isn't being totally upfront.

But there's always more to pricing than meets the eye. Don't naturally assume the higher-cost firm is simply overpriced or trying to rip you off.

Always take the time to understand why there's a difference in cost.

Instead of thinking *"What will I save with the lower quote?"*, ask yourself *"What am I missing out on?"*.

Having an understanding of WHY there's a variance in quote costs will enable you to make a much more informed decision, and go along way to ensuring you're happy with the final result.

- **Have the website studio's clearly documented their pricing and broken it down into itemised components?**
- **Are the website studio's able to explain the costs associated to each component in their pricing?**



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