

Your website is your business. Optimizing it is ours.

You've received at least two proposals for your web design project. Let's assume your decision isn't based solely on price. How do you evaluate them to make the best choice?

How to Compare Web Design Proposals

Here's our list of 10 Good Questions to Ask as you weigh each proposal.

1. Does the proposal reflect a real understanding of your needs and goals or is it a generic document with your company name and a few relevant details?

A lack of attention to your needs in this crucial stage increases the likelihood of misunderstandings, frustration, and disappointment down the road. Strong proposals include information as to how the design firm will approach your specific project (not a one-size-fits-all "here's our process" formula).

2. How many design options do they offer?

Some proposals include only one design option, while others may include two or three (or more). Even if you're totally in love with the firm's design portfolio you should see more than one alternative, if only because it helps you understand the benefits of different visual directions.

3. How many "rounds" of revisions do they include?

If there is only one round of revisions you can expect to: a) settle for something that doesn't quite work for you, or b) pay for additional rounds to get it right. Make sure you have an idea of what each additional round costs.

4. Does the proposal include content development or editing, or are they just going to "plop in" your content?

Even if you have good, strong, web-ready content, the web design proposal should include time to format and display it properly (for easy scanning and obvious calls-to-action). If you don't have content, do they offer content development or editing as additional services?

5. Will your site be optimized for the Search Engines?

If your proposal includes content development does it specify keyword research? Browser titles, meta descriptions and links? A crawler-friendly site map? Is there a strategy to minimize disruption to your current Search rankings? If basic Search Engine optimization isn't part of the proposal you may pay more for it when you hire a SEO firm after the site launches.

6. How will you update your site?

Does the proposal include a content management tool to update your site yourself, or a web maintenance package? These days, content managers allow anyone with basic computer skill to do normal updates. This isn't something you should have to pay for every month (unless you're dead-set against doing it yourself).

7. If the proposal includes a maintenance contract, will your hours expire?

What will happen if you pay for "x" hours per month but you don't make any changes in the month... will they carry over? What about at the end of the year? Be careful: Unnecessary maintenance plans can add substantially to the lifetime cost of your site.

8. Is there a project timeline or schedule?

The proposal should include a timeline or estimated project schedule. If you require a specific "launch" date, make sure the proposal allows for a little wiggle-room. Understand your own obligations to provide feedback, content etc. in a timely manner and how that impacts the schedule.

9. What is the charge for work outside the defined project scope?

It's not unusual for the scope of your project to expand or "creep" once work begins. How does the proposal address this concern? You don't want to be surprised by a big invoice at the end of your project: You want to be informed of potential extras before you incur the expense.

10. Who is on your project team?

Does the proposal indicate the primary members of your project team? Is there an established structure and process for project management? If you don't even know who you'll be working with you had better find out! Clear communication is an essential part of every successful project.

11. Bonus question: Does the proposal demonstrate relevant project experience?

If the web design firm has successfully completed similar projects you have a good indication that they can handle your project. (We call it "domain expertise" and it means you don't have to pay to reinvent the wheel.)

About Resolve Digital

Resolve Digital is a web design and optimization firm with offices in San Francisco CA and Christchurch New Zealand. We create effective, visitor-focused websites and web applications in Ruby-on-Rails. Our professional website evaluations help our clients convert more prospects into customers.

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