



Ecommerce for Artists

An integrated, modular curriculum developed collaboratively by CraftNet member schools and artists as an introductory guide to establishing an entrepreneurial Web presence. Created with the generous support of the Appalachian Regional Commission.

The complete *Ecommerce for Artists* curriculum—or any of its individual modules—may be downloaded free-of-charge at www.craftnetglobal.com. © 2009 Regional Technology Strategies, Inc. Permission to reproduce and distribute this document is granted provided citation is given.

MODULE 6: DIY vs. Hiring a Professional Web Designer

So far, this all sounds too complex for me. Should I really create my own website, or should I hire somebody?

You are right, building a website is not a simple task. It involves a number of things:

- Knowledge of design elements.
- Strong writing skills.
- At least a passing knowledge of the technical side of Web design.

You may feel at ease with designing the visual dimension of a website, but the writing and the technical aspect may not be your strongest skills. A professional Web designer has training and experience in balancing all the necessary skills.

The other point to consider is that you may not want to spend the time necessary to build a successful site. You need to ask yourself if you have the time available to spend away from your artwork so that you can develop a Web presence. So gauge your strengths and limitations, weigh the constraints on your time and against your budget. Only you can make a well-balanced decision.

As a final thought, even if you hire a Web designer, you will need to be an integral part of the planning, in shaping the written content, and in determining the visual aspects of the site. You can't expect to simply hire a designer and then check back in when everything is done. You know best

What should I expect of a Web designer?

There's a lot of competition among Web designers. You need to beware of those who may not have the expertise to design the type of site that you envision. To ensure that your Web designer meets your expectations, you first of all need to be sure that you have answers to the following questions:

- What kind of information do you want your site to include?
- Who do you think will visit your website?
- Are you going to use your site to sell your artwork or is your website going to serve solely as a gallery?
- Do you think you will want to use a database for your website?
- How much do you want to utilize search engines?
- How quickly do you want your website to become available online?
- How much can you afford to spend?

Take time to carefully consider each of these questions, because their answers will go a long way toward more clearly defining the expectations that you bring to your working relationship with your Web designer. Building a website is an ongoing, back-and-forth negotiated process, so it is important that you and your designer understand each other.

You should expect the following from this Web development process:

- The clearer you are about what you want—what sorts of basic features, how the website generally will look—before you meet with the designer, the smoother the process will be.
- Once the work is complete, the designer should provide you with a digital copy of all the files that she has created for your site.
- The designer should help you place your website with the Web host.
- The designer may be willing to help you optimize your site for Internet search engines.
- The Web designer you choose should be able to ensure that your website functions efficiently in a number of different popular browsers, such as Internet Explorer, Firefox, and Safari.

Check out the following site for more complete information on what to expect from a Web designer: <http://www.sitepoint.com/article/how-to-hire-a-web-designer/>

ACTIVITY: Responding to the questions above, write out your complete answers, because you can expect that the Web designer is going to ask you similar questions before starting work on your website.

If I decide to hire a Web designer, how do I find a good one?

To begin your search, you need to research and compile a list of potential designers:

- Use a referral from another artist or someone you know and trust. However, don't expect to simply take the recommendation without doing your own research.
- The Web host you chose may also provide design services.
- Try using Google or check www.craigslist.com to find Web designers in your local area.
- Check out the Yellow Pages in your telephone directory.

Include both freelancers and agency designers on your list. Also, at this point, include both local and out-of-town designers, if you like their work. Telephones and email make it possible to collaboratively build a website at distance and virtually, although meeting face-to-face to resolve design issues may be the easiest way, logistically speaking.

Once you've collected a list of designers from several sources, you need to do some thorough research. There are many things to consider when reviewing your list of potential Web experts. One of the most obvious tests is to check out each designer's own professional website, in addition to sites that the designer has created. Browse through the pages and find as much information as you can, asking yourself a number of questions as you analyze each site:

- Does this Web designer appear to understand ecommerce?
- Is it easy to find information and to get back to where you started?
- Do you like the navigation system?
- Do the links work?
- Is the design consistent and fitting with the artwork (or other products)?
- Is the use of colors appropriate?
- Is there a site map that can be found easily?
- Does the site have rich content, in other words, plenty of detail?
- Is the text easy to read, with the use of fonts consistent?
- Does the site load quickly? (If the customer is using dial-up, you may not know.)
- Are the pages designed so that the customer won't have to do unnecessary scrolling up and down and back and forth?
- Has the designer included the artist's portfolio?
- When you visit the designer's website, does it provide information about technical expertise?
- Are there titles (headlines) that help focus the reader's attention and move it along?
- Does the site have a contemporary, up-to-date look and feel—both in the technology used and its overall appearance?

ACTIVITY: Develop a list of three potential Web designers that you think would fulfill your purpose. Visit their websites and answer each of the questions above.

How much does it cost to design, implement, and sustain a website?

Costs will vary according to where you are located and how you approach your choices. Remember the following with regard to cost:

- The clearer you are about what you want, the less time it will take the Web designer to complete your site, which means you will spend less money. Having the draft text written and the images available, in addition to knowing what kind of look you want, all will help the designer create a strong site that suits you.
- Special features such as a shopping cart will add to the cost.

- Keeping changes at a minimum will help to keep costs down.

Some typical approaches to costs for a small site with between three and 10 pages are:

- Hire a Web design firm—likely \$2,000 to \$5,000.
- Hire a local designer—likely \$500 to \$1,500.
- Hire a designer to customize an existing template to fit your needs—from \$200 on up.
- Use a template like those offered by Dreamweaver or Microsoft FrontPage. Others are Joomla, Rapid Weaver, Sandvox—up to \$400.
- Utilize a service for a template offered as part of your website hosting package. One example is www.homestead.com.

For more information, visit: www.costhelper.com/cost/computers/website-design.html.