

## Design for the Long Run

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In the last three years there has been a big change in the design industry. With the introduction of four-color multi purpose printers, which have photo capabilities, anyone with a few bucks can start a design studio. However there is still something to be said for experience and a record of quality work. What I am trying to say in a pleasant way is that, time really is the best teacher. With all the luck in the world and all the good intentions, a good designer is not made without time on the job and training.

I have seen some new trends on the web and it's starting to concern me, and it's getting harder to see the fine line between web junk and good web site design. Let me give a few examples and elaborate this.

1. The online web site "wbees.com auto builder" is a web based application that claims, a beginner can build a professional website. Now don't be fooled by this one, it's a very nice business idea but the out come is nothing less than pure up sell. They show you a great site template with all the bell and whistles, and when you get to the 11<sup>th</sup> hour, you find you just don't have the knowledge to finish the site. Now for all you hard-core designers with a hankering for detail, I'm sorry to say with this tool you have to stay inside the lines. There is no custom work allowed with most of these web-based tools and you can't get at the code. The thing that bothers me the most is that they mislead the customer into thinking he or she can develop their website with very little effort.

2 "Buildasign.com" This web site lets you build your own signs; you know magnetic signs, banners, and the like. Now some of these sites really have nice layouts but the actual graphics are clip art and it's most likely taken from the web. You need to be concerned with copyrights and design infringements. The real killer was that their pricing was pretty much the same as local companies that do all the work for you. A real sign company will help you with the permit process, variances for big signs, and in most cases give you the elevation and color sketch before the sign is even done. I was in the sign industry for over 15 years and let me just say signs are very important to the bottom line. After all it's the first and the last thing the customer sees, so you want to make a good impression.

3. Have you ever seen the online services that offer a wide selection of graphics designers that sub contract themselves through this web service? Well first thing you have to pay for is the membership. Then you will typically pay a small percentage more on their work because the design service needs a cut as well. Worst of all in some cases you have to pay before you get the product, with out the opportunity to touch and see the item in person you just never know. The real drawback for me is it's hard to contact a real person though such methods. In design you need to have good communication, to get the project done right and done quickly.

When you take on the task of inventing a concept and developing a website or graphics design it involves at least three different areas of expertise.

- a. A professional web designer to build the graphics elements that will work with the site and its functionality.
- b. Quality web developers with knowledge of Cold Fusion, ASP, Java script & programming, html, xml, and a whole lot more. They can make the graphics interactive or even animated.
- c. A search engine-marketing specialist to create the content for the site text and develop the backend code for search engine relevancy. Content is important for pictures and graphics it builds relevancy.

Here is the bottom line with designing anything such as websites, signs, print work, or even a company logo. When you have a professional with years of experience do the work, you are putting together your experience with the designers, and that works for you in the long run. You have a real chance to make something unique and effective.

I'm a designer but even with all my abilities and experience it just made sense for me to hire a Marketing Professional when it came to promoting my business. You have to look at it this way, would you let a plumber do surgery on your child or a doctor fix your pipes? Most likely not!  
So, I suggest that you have as many professional people around you as you can afford and take advantage of what they do so well.

In most cases if the link in the search results has the word Free, Cheep, Freeware, Clipart or the like it is most likely not what you expect. Just try it on Google; search the term "Free Graphics Design" and see what you get. The results are unreal over 169 Million site links returned and just try to find that needle amongst the haystack.

The best way to avoid hours on the net and or a whopper of a headache is to find your designer the old fashioned way: the yellow pages. That's right, let your fingers do the looking! Most people forget this wonderful tool mostly because we don't want to take the time. Now for all you computer nerds out there, is a website [www.yellowpages.com](http://www.yellowpages.com). Go there and check your local area for a site for your state and city.

Here's my final point and it's the most important element, when you are trying to pick the right designer. First of all you have to ask yourself what am I trying to achieve and what do I expect the outcome to be when the designer is done? If the answer is more than one paragraph and it keeps getting longer as you go, than you have more than the 'average' design project. Take some time to make a list of the key points such as business model, market, subject of each page,

graphics and so on. Below is project template that I make before I build a website or intranet which will help you keep things in order.

#### Web Design Project Specs:

- Website Model such as a full width design, left navigation or right navigation, and finally Top navigation. There are many other sizes, and website types to consider but deciding what type needs to be done first.
- Target Market (General Audience, Adult site 19 or older, Teen site 15 to 19, Kids Site 7 to 15)
- Business name (should match the domain name)
- Domain Name (www.something.com) your domain name should contain no more than three words preferable less and use your main key words. Example: www.nywebdesigns.com
- A List of the web pages you would like, make the names of the pages descriptive like this  
"New\_York\_graphics\_design\_web\_development\_studio.html "and always use the underscore not spaces.
- The subject of each page (The subject determines the name of the page and the content, links, meta tags, Title, Description and keywords.)
- One or two paragraphs for each page on the subject
- A picture for each page with a short one line description
- The fonts you intend to use no more than three on any page.
- A list of key words or phrases taken from your text about 50 all together. But remember it is best to only use 1 or 2 keywords for each page and that fallow the subject.
- A detailed description of the business and its intent, about 250 charters long.

One of the elements most projects end up missing is consultation a very often poorly done process, which should be done before your designer / developer touches a computer. Advice for some reason has been considered an expected and underpaid service up until the last 5 years. For example if you hire a mechanic to repair the family car before he even get out the estimate sheet you flood him with question after question, and he is expected to provide a professional and well thought out solution at a moments notice. America has been trained to not only expect the best service but because of the food chain industry where insulted if we don't get it fast. So if you want good quality advice than the best policy is to pay for it. Consultation will from this point on provide you with up to date information and be an invaluable business tool.

I've been in the web design and graphics industry for over 25 years and Albany Graphics has helped so many people and businesses to develop their web presence and bring their company to the next level. If you're looking to start a new online business or just revamp an existing one I will be more than happy to help. Now maybe you only need advice or have a quick question please feel free to give us a call.

What most businesses miss is that their business is unique, and it needs an individual and hands on service. Don't leave the future of your business up to a company when you haven't even met the designer in person yet. Call us today and make the best business decision of the day.

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