

Designers VS Programmers

By Deborah Collier



Every business at some time in its lifetime will work with a web development company, creative agency, programmer or designer. However during any journey to Internet or marketing heaven, entrepreneurs and business minded managers might experience some unexpected challenges and experiences on the way. It's important to know how to work effectively and efficiently with creative and programming experts, to ensure that the best results can be achieved. How do you get the most from programming and creative suppliers? What do you need to understand about them, and what are the pitfalls to avoid? Deborah Collier, Managing Director and Chief Strategist at Echo E-Business delivers some valuable insights and experience of working with web programmers and designers.

Web design companies usually comprise both graphic designers and programmers. Larger companies may also have project managers, usability experts and web site strategists. While programming is a technical task, the building and problem solving aspect can be extremely creative, yet the way to work with a programmer or programming company, may be completely different to working with a creative or design agency. The greatest issues arise when businesses have the wrong expectations of very differently skilled experts and don't understand what motivates them.

We are living in 'global age', enabled by new technologies, where we can source, work and collaborate with a variety of experts from all around the globe. If we can understand these individuals, what motivates and what hinders them, we have the ability to create amazing online businesses, as well as profitable and fulfilling relationships.

Here are my 5 top tips for working with web programmers and designers to achieve these goals:

E-Lesson 1: Web development and creative agencies are not business experts

The greatest mistake that business can make is expecting a web development or creative expert to know what legal information should appear on a web site or how best to implement shipping and tax into an e-commerce store. 'Creatives' and programmers are generally not branding, marketing or sales experts either, and so it is important to plan business, branding and other marketing elements well ahead of any e-business or web related project.

E-Lesson 2: Programmers and designers have different skills

It's extremely rare to find a programmer who is a great designer or a designer who is a great web programmer. A designer may work well with basic web page design languages such as 'html' and 'css', but it is unlikely they will have more in-depth technical expertise such a database and application programming. These skills take years of knowledge, training and experience. Similarly, a technologist or programmer is very unlikely to be a fantastic graphic designer. If you require a web site without any special functionality such as e-commerce, choose a great designer with 'html' and 'css' skills. If you need a web site with more advanced programming, but don't have budget for stunning creative work, choose a technical web developer with reasonable graphics skills. If you have a good budget, work with a larger web agency or both a web programmer and a graphic designer. The ultimate choice is an e-business consultancy with a team of business, technology, marketing, usability and design experts to hand.

E-Lesson 3: Programmers and designers are motivated differently

Programmers are most motivated by functionality, resolving technical problems and using the latest technologies. Ensure you ask the right questions about the work they plan to do for you. Are there any other alternative or lower-cost technologies that suit your needs? Will the technologies be future-proof? Have they documented any essential programming? Have they documented how to use any applications and do they provide training? It's rare to find good programmers and technologists who can train in a user-friendly way and so references will be a helpful decision making tool.

'Creatives' are motivated differently to programmers. They are stimulated by the visual appearance of the final web site, animation or graphic they have created. Like programmers, designers and 'creatives' are easily bored by projects that don't challenge them. Creation by its very nature, needs a certain degree of freedom. Try not to micro-manage 'creatives', but at the same time, ensure their work conveys your organisation's messaging and branding. That way, you will be giving them helpful guidance without stunting their creativity.

E-Lesson 4: 'Creatives' are emotional beings

In general, 'creatives' and designers need more encouragement than business, technical or financial staff. They are motivated not only by their final design, but also by the happiness their 'work of art' will give to their client and the people viewing it. There are a few things to understand when dealing with 'creatives'. Firstly, patience is key. A creative may produce ideas at the early stage of a project that don't fit your needs. At the last minute, they will come up with something amazing. It's important not to push a creative too hard, but at the same time ensure they understand timelines. Let them have the space to create and think. Secondly, be careful with criticism. A single negative remark has the power to make a creative to feel so bad that they are unable to respond creatively. Positive criticism and encouragement is a good lesson for dealing with any kind of supplier, but even more so with 'creatives'.

E-Lesson 5: Don't expect a web design or creative agency to write your content

Web programmers and design experts are not generally skilled with writing marketing, sales and business content. So many businesses make the mistake of expecting a web agency to plan and write the content for them, or don't realise how long it takes to prepare the text for a web site. If you don't have search engine optimisation and web writing skills yourself, you will need a marketing specialist or web copywriter to do this essential part for you. However copywriters won't have search engine optimisation, web page layout or web site navigation expertise. These are critical skills needed at both the planning and implementation phase of any web project. A company with search engine optimisation experts, web copywriters and web site architects, are the ideal choice for preparing and planning your web site content.

Online business and maximising your presence on the Internet, isn't about clever programming and great graphics. It's both an art and a science, which requires careful planning, collaboration and motivation among a variety of different skill sets. The most successful businesses online will be those who understand how to choose and maximise the potential of those that they work with.

Published in 'Start Your Business Magazine' June 2010

A note from Echo E-Business

If you would like help with any area of your e-business strategy, supplier selection, professional marketing services or e-business training needs, please contact us on:

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Deborah is the founder of Echo E-Business, a consultancy specialising in e-business strategy, marketing and e-commerce.

She has worked with a number of blue-chip organisations, as well as SME's and is regularly consulted by the press. A public speaker, author and trainer, Deborah's creative and strategic insights will help you increase your profits using the Internet.

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