

5 WAYS TO SAVE MONEY ON YOUR WEBSITE PROJECT

Start small. Unless you've already tested and PROVEN the following items, don't spend any more than \$1,000 - \$5,000 or so on your initial online efforts:

- **What is your offer?** What are you offering; for how much; how does it help your prospective customers; why should they buy from you (and not someone else)? Back it up with testimonials from satisfied clients.
- **Does your sales copy create action?** Are you using any of the following to generate leads from your website: an opt-in to your newsletter; a \$1 trial purchase; prompt for a phone call for a free consultation; a request for a free estimate / brochure / catalog; a white paper download; etc.?
- **Have you tested your sales flow?** And measured the results of each and every step?

If you HAVEN'T done any of these steps, there are very inexpensive methods you can use to create, test, and prove them.

If you HAVE done these steps and you're ready to make a significant investment in your website, then here are five ways you can save money, as well as time, effort, headache, and frustration:

#1: Save Money on Content Management Systems

A Content Management System (CMS) is a tool that allows you to create and manage your website content in-house, without the knowledge of HTML. Many web development companies will try to sell you on the idea of using a full-scale CMS, and will charge you additional fees to set it up.

Example: We have two clients who each were sold on a different full-scale CMS by their previous web development companies. One client has a custom-developed system; the other has a free, open-source system. Both systems are so complex to use that both clients hire our firm, on an hourly-basis, to maintain their websites for them. It would be faster for us, and cheaper for the client, if we could update their website directly in HTML code rather than having to do it via the CMS because these systems are simply cumbersome to use.

Recommendation: You do not need a full-scale CMS unless you plan to update your website at least once a month or more often. If you only plan to update your website every three months or less, you'd be better off paying a web developer an hourly rate to make those updates as they come up. If you foresee updating only a few pages on an on-going basis (a press release page, for example), your money will be better spent if you ask your web development company to code a simple, custom updating tool for just those few pages.

#2: Save Money on Images

There are numerous websites that provide very inexpensive, royalty-free stock images. Often times, you don't need to do a professional photo shoot or purchase \$500 images to make your website look professional.

Example: A client hired us to redesign their 7-year-old website that had only two low-quality images. They wanted to use a different image coupled with a key message in each section of their website, but they didn't have the budget to spend \$300-\$500 per image from well-known photo websites. We recommended www.iStockPhoto.com instead where quality, professional images cost under \$25 each.

Recommendation: If you purchase low resolution images for web purposes, you may end up spending less than \$10 per image. Our favorite site is www.iStockPhoto.com.

#3: Save Money on E-Commerce

If you plan to have an online store to sell your products or services, you may have a choice between paying the license fee upfront or outsourcing the service by paying an ongoing monthly fee.

Example: A client of ours, a small local shop, decided to sell its products online because they had customers who moved out-of-state and wanted to continue to enjoy their products remotely. The client couldn't afford a license fee of several thousand dollars for a custom online store, but they were able to afford a monthly ongoing fee of a couple of hundred dollars. After 12 months the sales weren't as high as they expected, so they took the online store down. They were glad they spent a lot less on a technology that ultimately failed to bring a return on investment than they could have otherwise.

Recommendation: Choose the pay-as-you-go option and save on upfront fees.

#4: Save Money on Web Analytics

Web analytics tools allow you to collect, measure, and analyze your website traffic: how many users visit your site, what pages they are viewing, what websites send users to your site, etc. There are sophisticated paid analytics tools, but Google Analytics is free and does the job well. Most people know about Google Analytics, but enough people don't that I had to talk about it here. And even the people who do know about Google Analytics don't know all of the things it's capable of.

Example: A client was getting ready to make a major redesign of their website, and had a question on what was the smallest screen size they should design for. We told them to look at their Google Analytics to see what screen sizes their existing website visitors were using to make an informed decision.

Recommendation: Google Analytics is free and has more information than you'd ever want to know. Just kidding! You DO want to know all the information it provides.

#5: Save Money on Flash

Don't let any web development company talk you into creating an all-Flash website, or even a Flash intro page, sometimes referred to as a "splash" page. Flash developers typically charge more than web developers; search engines can't read Flash; more than 80% of users don't like Flash intros and thus click on the "skip intro" link.

Example: A prospective client called because they needed to make updates to their existing website. Unfortunately, the entire website was created in Flash by an amateur graphic designer whom they recently fired. Not only did the site have an unscalable layout (which made it more expensive to make edits because of the additional time involved), the original designer didn't provide the native Flash files to work from (which meant their entire website would have to be recreated). So, to make some simple edits to the copy now required an entire redevelopment of their website.

Recommendation: Don't create an all-Flash website or Flash intro pages; however, feel free to create Flash animation(s) that will be inserted into your HTML pages, if you have good use and budget for it.