

7 Things Your Web Designer May NOT be Telling You

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[Practical Websites](#), South Africa

Legal

While the author has noted some disturbing trends in the web design industry, he does not claim that all web designers and/or web developers engage in these practices. They are, however, commonplace enough to present a risk to unsuspecting clients.

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Introduction

A lack of transparency (by any vendor/supplier) can cost you a boatload of money...

Websites are no exception.

If your web designer or web developer isn't honest with you, you may very well find yourself paying a lot more money than you anticipated.

Sadly, you may find yourself in a position where you have to fork out more and more money on a regular basis.

On top of that, some of the things they don't tell - or do for you - can cost you even more money in terms of lost visitors, leads and sales.

The saddest part is that you will never know how many more visitors you could have had, or how many more leads and sales you could have had.

You don't know what you don't know...



And all for what?

The oldest motivator of all: Greed.

You see, for many web designers, you are simply another cash cow. They keep on finding new ways to milk you for more money, under the pretence that "you need to do this thing too...".

The way the web design industry is set up, you don't stand a chance. You will either allow yourself to be extorted, or you will end up with a dysfunctional website.

Here are 7 things your web designer may not be telling you - and ALL of them can cost you money:

1. Control:

Many web designers offer hosting as part of your website package. As long as they control the (virtual) real estate your website is built on, you are at their mercy.

In many cases clients are expected to enter into maintenance agreements, and you cannot simply get out of the agreement.

Of course, if anything happens and you cannot pay the maintenance fees on time, your website is locked up, and becomes inaccessible to visitors.

If you ever have a disagreement with them, or you want to leave due to unaffordable fees, you may find them reluctant to let you go. In some cases you will be charged a substantial cancellation fee.

In any case, upon moving you will also have to pay someone to move your OWN website onto your OWN hosting - where it should have been since day 1.

Perhaps the biggest frustration about the lack of control is the fact that you cannot make any changes to your own website.

After all, your "professional design company" handles all of that. As such, changing one item's price, or a few words of text (which takes less than 5 minutes to do), will leave you with a bill for one hour's worth of labour - and it isn't the cheapest labour on the block.

2. You just paid for an endless money pit:

Many web designers rely on fancy design elements to "sell" their websites. Moving slideshows in the header, revolving testimonials, awesome layouts, amazing detailing, fancy forms, etc...

Well, guess what?

All of those "amazing-looking elements" come at a premium. The design company choose to pay annual (developer's) licensing fees so that they can use those elements on every website.

Unfortunately for YOU...

A. It means that, very much like a fancy European car, you won't be able to fix (update) it yourself. Because once the license expires, there are no more updates and no support for those elements.

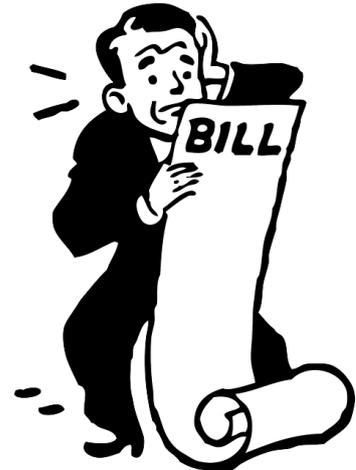
B. If you decide to move your website away from your original designer/developer, YOU will have to pay those licensing fees every year - or, over time, as the website's core platform evolves, those elements will not be compatible any more, and things on your website stop working...

Suddenly your fancy order form stops working. Your slideshow in the header section is suddenly all out of proportion. Your website stops displaying correctly on mobile devices. Etc.

And depending on what your designer used to get the job done, it can cost you a few hundred US dollars per year to keep it going - excluding the labour to do all of the updates, create new backups, and to ensure everything is still working correctly.

(Talking from experience)

So - either you pay up, or you pay up. Your choice.



3. Most of your website visitors won't even notice the fancy gimmicks:

Fair enough, if you run a highly professional company for high ticket clients, your website has to look awesome. But then again I wouldn't be building that website. You would have a BUDGET. A big one.

But for most other websites...

Most of your visitors will be arriving via phones and tablets. The screens are smaller. Suddenly their expectations change:

Is it still easy to read?

Can your visitor easily find his or her way around your website?

Or is it so loaded with gimmicks that it takes forever to load?

Does it even display correctly? The more gimmicks (unnecessary elements) you have on a website, the higher the probability that it might - on some phones - not display correctly.

(Remember that each phone has its own interpretation of what your website should look like. For some of them it isn't possible to display all of the elements correctly.)

4. The elements/tools they use could cause problems down the line:

As is often the case with fancy design elements, their creators eventually move on to bigger and better things.

That means that, in some cases, some of the elements on your website could simply stop working later on because the vendor stopped providing updates. In cases like these, you will have to pay your designer to find and install an alternative.

If you don't...

It's the same as when a crucial part on your car can no longer be replaced or fixed. Some or other time it will grind to a halt.

Unfortunately, when it comes to your website, two things happen when your website "breaks":

A. You lose visitors, leads and sales.

B. It creates a bad brand impression, which is likely to cost you a LOT more before you can restore your brand image.

The bottom line is this:

Unless you are paying a small fortune for your website to have it "coded from the ground up", it is probably built on a platform called Wordpress.

Wordpress is updated regularly. As such, the elements you "plug into it" to make it do what you need (known as plugins and themes), need to evolve to remain compatible.

If not, it eventually gets to a point where they (or even the whole website) no longer function.



5. You may very well be paying for "only the design":

In many cases, web design companies do only that - design. As such, your website is likely to be missing some critical components "under the hood".

You can have them done, of course, but at additional costs...

The bottom line is that you may THINK you are paying for a working website, but in fact you are paying for an empty shell.

From experience, the following comes to mind:

A. No SEO - search engine optimisation - the steps you need to take to make search engines consider your website to be of value to visitors. The better you do this, the higher your website is likely to appear in the search results.

Granted, some of this can become very technical - but in many cases, not even basic SEO is included in what you pay for.

B. No SMO - social media optimisation - this relates to (i) people being able to share your content via social sharing buttons, (ii) links to your social profiles, and - importantly - (iii) Open Graph tags. When in place, these allow you to select the image that will display upon sharing on Facebook or Twitter, and the image & extract will then display as one big clickable block - known as a "social card".

C. No security measures - Wordpress is a complex system. It is - for designers and developers - relatively easy to work with, but in itself it is highly complex. Hackers are constantly finding new ways of hacking or hijacking websites, and they use automated software to do so.

As such, not installing any security measures is like living in the bad part of a city, and not bothering to fit burglar bars, safety gates, or an alarm system. It's just a matter of time before someone gets in.

D. No Google Analytics - GA is a free system from Google that helps you track your website visitors. It tells you a boatload of things - including how visitors arrived at your site, where they come from, which pages they visited, how long they stayed, which devices they used, whether they arrived by paid advertising or not, etc.

E. Webmaster tools - Both Google and Bing have webmaster consoles. In both cases, they offer insights not only into which pages are indexed, but also on how well the website performs. In addition to that, it tells you if anything is wrong with your website from an SEO or usability point of view.

6. All of the gimmicks make the website slower - and it costs you:

For every additional element (plugin or theme modification) that you add to Wordpress, it becomes slower. Wordpress is controlled by its "brain" - the MySQL database. The database knows exactly what should be displayed, and how, when you request any page.

Any additional elements require communicating with the database in order to function. Some require less, and some require more resources (computing power on the server where the website resides).



As such, the more elements you add, the slower your website becomes. The biggest culprit - in most cases - is the header slideshow, which people seem to love nowadays.

Keep in mind that every additional image you add also makes the website slower. So...

If you have a fancy slideshow with a few large rotating images, plus text fading in, and fancy transition effects...

It adds up.

But ok, so what's the big deal if the website is slow?

A. If it loads too slowly, some people leave before it is fully loaded. The internet has turned people into impatient, unreasonable beings.

According to Google, a well-designed website loads in 1.5 SECONDS or less.

So - if you want to add fancy elements, get faster hosting. it will cost you, but it will cost you less than losing visitors.

B. If it loads too slowly, Google considers it a poor user experience. As such, they rank your website lower in the search results, sending you fewer visitors.

In fact, they even take it into consideration if you run Google Adwords advertisements. If your website is slow, you pay more for the same advertising spot than a faster website.

7. Not optimised for user actions:

It may sound simple, but...

Does your website make it easy for people to connect with you? Simple things - like a call to action at the bottom of each page, leading to your contact page (or shop, if you have one), a "call now" button for mobile visitors, and a quick contact button at the top.

In addition to that, there should - ideally - be strategic links in the content text, pointing people to specific information they may want to read.

Many designers don't understand what it takes to make sales from a website. To them, a website is just a website. It's a "display case" (unless it is an online shop) for information.

So...

What do we do differently at Practical Websites?

Well, firstly, we don't assume that you have bottomless pockets. Instead, we assume that, for the price you are willing to pay, you expect a fully functional website, as good as one can expect for the price.

As such, when we deliver your website, there is nothing else that needs to be done to it. Yes, you may have some ideas for improvements or additions later on - but those will be YOUR choice, and not because we only did half the job.



Secondly, for the fee you pay, we try to offer the best combination/balance of what your website needs:

A. Clean but neat design. Something that will load quickly on all devices, and display correctly on as many devices as possible.

B. Basic search engine optimisation - basic SEO settings for every page your website, including the titles and excerpts what will display in the Google search results. Tags for images to tell Google what they're about. An XML sitemap to tell Google which pages on your website it should pay attention to.

Note: Some pages like the website disclaimer and privacy policy are generic. As such, they carry an instruction for Google not to index them (search engines don't appreciate duplicate content).

C. Your website will be submitted to Google's Webmaster Console - which, besides making for fast indexing, allows you to keep track of many things relating to how Google sees your website.

D. Basic social media optimisation - setup of social sharing buttons of your choice, social follow buttons if required, and setup of social cards (when shared on Facebook or Twitter, a selected image displays along with the title and extract of the page, framed in light grey, and all of it clickable. Clicking anywhere on the social card will take the visitor to the shared page.

E. Google Analytics - setting up GA is as simple as creating a website account, doing a few settings, and adding a snippet of code to the website. However, once set up, it offers amazing insights about your visitors, how they got there, what they were searching for, what they did on your website, and much more.

Used properly, it can offer insights into your website audience - which you can use to improve your website and your offer/s to your visitors.

F. Website security - let's face it: Nothing is hacker-proof in these days. And there are many, many hackers out there. Many of them are kids having fun, trying to extort money from unsuspecting website owners. Most hackers are no match for a well prepared website. In addition to setting up a proven security system, we also create backups of your website when we complete it, and at any time you request updates/changes to the Wordpress platform or the content.

As such, your website can be restored quickly - usually less than an hour - if it is hacked beyond repair, or if something simply "breaks" inside its brain.

G. SSL certificates - to protect your visitors against phishing attempts. Secure Socket Layer encryption is shown as a lock icon in the address bar of your browser. If it is not in place, many web browsers will block visitors coming to your website, and show them a warning message. For basic informational websites, a free SSL certificate is adequate.

We generate and install free certificates from Let's Encrypt.

Note: Some hosting companies disable the mechanisms you need to install your own SSL certificate - in order to charge you for it. Most don't block it, so if your host allows it, we will install it.

H. Calls to action - if required, we will add a "quick contact" button in the header section, just above the content. IN addition to that, we can add a call to action underneath each page, and a "call now" button for mobile users.

I. Email addresses - as requested, we will create up to 5 email addresses on your own domain.

Note: We do not provide support with setting up email clients like MS Outlook. We create the email address, and send you the setup information.

J. Generic privacy policy and website disclaimer. Both pages are legally required, and both need to be there to protect you/your business.

Thirdly, we do things in a way that won't waste your money:

A. No paid plugins, unless requested. Unlike mainstream web designers, we avoid using paid plugins. As such, you never have to worry about licensing fees in the future.

Most of the plugins we use do have premium options - but the basic versions provide all the functionality most people require.

B. All plugins and themes we use are popular items with established track records - and as such it is unlikely that any of them will stop providing updates any time soon.

C. No gimmicks - we don't add elements to your website "just to make it look good" (at the cost of slowing it down). Every single item in your website is there for a reason. If it doesn't play its part in making you money, attracting visitors, or keeping your website safe, it has no place in your website.

D. By keeping the design (and behind-the-scenes) elements to a bare minimum, we don't cause your website to slow down.

Next, a few things you need to know:

A. Any Wordpress website (or blog) does need to be maintained - but if it is out of your budget, you don't need to pay a set monthly fee to do it. (There are frequent updates available for Wordpress, its plugins and themes/templates).

If you don't want to pay the monthly fee, you can choose to run the updates yourself - BUT please be advised that your site can "break" during the core update (unlikely but possible). If that happens, it will have to be restored from your last backups. That's not something the average person can do. It doesn't take too long, but it is somewhat technical.

Alternatively you can pay someone to do it say, once every three months or so, and have new backups made before and after every core update.

If you don't run those updates, your website becomes vulnerable to hackers (most updates are made available because of vulnerabilities shown by hacking attempts).

B. SSL certificate renewals - if you use the free SSL certificates from Let's Encrypt, you may have to renew it every 90 days. On some hosts, the updates run automatically - on others they don't. And unlike Wordpress updates, it isn't something you can do yourself (not without learning how to do it first).



C. Lastly - what we DON'T do:

i. Email client (Outlook) setup - we will create email addresses as required. At most hosting companies, you will also be able to read/reply to emails online in case of emergency. However, setting it up on your computer is beyond our scope. If you get stuck, we suggest you contact your local computer shop.

ii. Logo design, graphic design or photography. We work with what you give us. We will use - if you have any available - photos to create your header image, or alternatively we will use stock images.

Finally...

YOU have control

Once the website has been completed, it is transferred to your hosting. Upon final payment, you are provided with the login details to your website.

This means that you can employ anyone to work on your website, or even choose to work on it yourself if you have the knowledge.

As such, nobody except you has any control over your website after delivery. You can manage it the way you see fit.

After all, you paid for it. It's yours.

So...

What would you like to do next?

If you feel that the way we do things will work for you, please visit our website to read more about our services, as well as standard- and optional website features. You can also see our most recent work.

[Click Here to visit Practical Websites](#)

To YOUR Success

Peter Prins

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