

25 Good Interview Questions to Ask Your Web Designer...

...and why you're asking them

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How to Use These Questions

Half the battle of interviewing potential designers is knowing what questions to ask. And the other half of the battle is knowing what answers to look for.

Here is a list of 25 important questions that you should ask your web designer before you hire them along with the reasons why you should be asking the question and the answers that you will be looking for.

Review this list right before you meet with your web design candidate. Take notes of the answers you get during the interview and be sure to review this list again when looking over your notes. If there are any terms that you don't understand in this list of questions, be sure to look them up before your interview. If you have any questions or comments, feel free to forward them to ask@howtohireawebdesigner.com.

1. How long have you been building web sites?

Why you're asking: You'll want to get someone who's been building web sites for more than a couple of months. Try to shoot for someone who's had at least a year's worth experience. If the ink is still wet on their certificate from their weekend course in web building, think about looking for someone else.

2. How long have you been in business?

Why you're asking: Technical expertise is always good, but you also want someone who knows the ropes business-wise and can act professionally as well. The longer your web designer has been in business, the more likely it is that they know how to run a successful business and the more likely it will be that they will still be around by the end of your project.

3. How many web sites have you done professionally?

Why you're asking: If someone had been building web sites for three years that might be impressive. If they've only built 2 in the last three years, that's not so impressive, and building a MySpace page for their friend's band doesn't count. The Internet is always changing and web designers need to be designing and building web sites on a regular

basis in order to keep up with the technology. As a full-time designer I personally averaged anywhere from 8 to 15 small to medium sized sites per year. Part time freelancers will average less than that. One exception to this is if the designer was working on a website that was very large or complex or if they were involved in a project that lasted more than 6 months.

4. Do you do this full time or part-time?

Why you're asking: If your designer also has another full time job outside of their freelance work, this can affect when you can contact them and how much time they have to devote to your site. There are lots of good part time freelance designers who are also very professional and talented as well, but you should also be aware of any time constraints they may have.

5. What sized websites have you worked on in the past?

Why you're asking: You'll want a designer who has experience in working with web sites that are similar in size to yours. Building a large, complex site requires a different mindset than one required for a small to medium site. You'll want to make sure that your designer will have the experience to handle a project of your size.

6. What software and technologies are you comfortable working with?

Why you're asking: You're getting a feel for this person's expertise. You can also ask about specific technologies if you know that you'll be using them on your site. If they stumble around this question, beware. All designers should definitely know *HTML* and should be familiar with *CSS* and some *Javascript*. If they are also familiar with Flash and *AJAX* consider that a bonus. If you are hiring a programmer, they should be familiar with one or more of the listed programming languages and with one of the listed database technologies.

- **Hypertext Markup Language (HTML)**- the basic language for building web pages
- **Cascading Style Sheets (CSS)**- a stylesheet language that is used to format *HTML* pages
- **Dynamic HTML (DHTML)**- a combination of *HTML* and

Javascript used to create interactive web pages

- **Javascript**- a scripting language for creating interactive web pages
- **AJAX**- a mixture of *Javascript*, *HTML*, and *CSS* used to create interactive web pages
- **Flash**- animation program
- **Perl**- programming language
- **PHP**- programming language
- **Java**- programming language
- **Active Server Pages (ASP)**- programming language
- **Ruby on Rails**- programming language
- **C#** (pronounced C “sharp”)- programming language
- **MySQL**- database language
- **SQL**- database language

7. Do you have specific examples of sites in which you've used these technologies?

Why you're asking: A potential designer should be happy to show off their handiwork especially if they claim to be proficient in certain techniques. While looking at screen shots of completed sites is a good start...nothing can beat being able to actually going to the site and testing it out. Your designer should have a list of active websites for you to look at so you can see not only the design, but also how fast it loads up, how well the web site works, and if the site is easy to get around. If the candidate seems to be vague about specific projects or don't seem to have live examples on hand...watch out.

8. Do you have a list of references I can contact?

Why you're asking: The best designers have past clients who'll be more than happy to talk your ear off about how wonderful their work is. You should be able to get a list of clients you can contact if you request it. If they can't come up with a list of people that you can contact directly or at least a list of past clients that's a big red flag.

9. What web browser do you use?

Why you're asking: Designers may have a preference when surfing personally, but the right answer should be that they're familiar with all of them. Because each browser shows web pages a little differently, designers need to be familiar with these differences and know how to work around them.

10. What types of clients have you worked with before?

Why you're asking: You want to know if your designer is familiar with working with people and business like yours. If you're a solo entrepreneur your needs will differ from those of a Fortune 500 company. Look for a designer that have experience with others in your situation.

11. What is your development process?

Why you're asking: It's useful to know what to expect if you hire this designer. When answering this question, they should be able to tell you step by step the entire process from start to finish, they should be able to tell you what they need from you, and they should be able to give you a ballpark figure of the time frame. Most experienced designers have a solid process that they use from project to project and they should have a good idea of how long a site like yours will take to develop. If they seem a bit vague on the process or shaky about the time frame, it may be a sign of an inexperienced designer.

12. What web building software do you use?

Why you're asking: Again, this is to get a feel for how much expertise they have. Industry standard software for most designers include the following:

- Photoshop
- Illustrator
- Flash
- Fireworks
- Dreamweaver
- Expression Web
- FrontPage

13. How much do you charge? Do you charge by the hour or by the project?

Why you're asking: It's a no-brainer why you're asking this question. You'll need to know how your designer will charge you for your project. Some designers will use an hourly rate while others charge a set amount for specific tasks or services. Some designers may have a different schedule of fees depending on the type of work, for example design work might be charged at a higher rate per hour than straight *HTML* coding work. Clarify this during your interview. They should also be able to give you a ballpark estimate of what your project will cost depending on your requirements. If your designer can't give you numbers or fee schedule, beware.

14. Will you be available to answer questions and address concerns after the site is done? If so, for how long?

Why you're asking: Customer service after the site is done is usually most important after the site is done. You'll need to know how much help you can expect to get. You'll also need to know if your designer will charge for providing service after the site is complete, how much, and how long they typically provide it for.

15. How much do you charge for consultation or updates to finished web sites?

Why you're asking: After your site is done and live your designer may be happy to answer all the questions and make all the updates you want, but you may be charged for it. Get these figures up front.

16. Is there a particular hosting service that you use or recommend?

Why you're asking: Not all hosting is the same. If you don't have a host yet, using one that your designer is familiar with can save time and you can be sure that it will have all the requirements your designer will need to get your site up and running. But be sure to check it out yourself before you commit your web site.

17. Are you familiar with SEO friendly design?

Why you're asking: SEO stands for Search Engine Optimization. In other words, does your designer know how to design your site so that it's easy for search engines like Google to find and index it? This is important because people often find websites through search engines and if your designer is not familiar with SEO friendly design they might end up making a website that looks pretty but **repels** search engines. Ask them if they are familiar with the concept and ask about some of the techniques they are familiar with. Some of the things that that go into SEO friendly design includes:

- Proper keyword research (keywords are the words people type into search engines to find websites)
- Minimal use of Flash animation, especially for navigation
- Minimal use of frames
- Not using images to display text
- Keywords in the site addresses (URL)
- Keywords in anchor text (links)
- Keywords in image ALT tags
- CSS drop down menus instead of Javascript and Flash
- Keywords in headings

18. How easy will it be to update my site when it's finished? Do you have any examples?

Why you're asking: A good designer can make a site that's easy to expand on and easy for someone with limited web experience to make minor updates using a web page editor. Ask for specific examples of how they design such sites.

19. Do you have a guarantee?

Why you're asking: The last thing you want is a designer to make something that you hate and then ride off into the sunset with your money. Most reputable designers have a section in their contracts that deals with this issue; ask them how they handle this in the initial interview.

20. Do you work with subcontractors? How much work do you subcontract and is there a markup?

Why you're asking: A lot of independent designers work closely with others who has skills they are not as proficient in. So a designer might subcontract in depth programming work out to a programmer and vice versa. While there isn't anything wrong with this in most cases, you should begin to get a little suspicious if your designer is subcontracting more than 25% of your web work out to others. This is a sign of someone who really doesn't have the skills required to do your site properly. And be sure to determine if you designer applies a markup to any service they subcontract and how much.

21. Will you supply source files?

Why you're asking: There's more to a web site than just the *HTML* files. There are usually a graphics files, fonts, and Flash files that you will need if you have to switch designers or if something happens to your original designer. Be sure to ask if there are provisions for the transferal of these files in your contract. The exception of this is usually in the case of a programmer or web developer who creates a specific program for your website. In this case most programmers do not give out source files for actual programs because they may wish to resell it sometime in the future.

22. Will you offer maintenance training?

Why you're asking: All sites require some kind of ongoing maintenance and depending on how your designer sets up your site, it can be a fairly easy process or one that takes a bit of training to figure out. Any competent web designer should be happy to teach you how to use and maintain the site that they've built for you, especially if you've stated at the beginning that you wish to do your own maintenance. You should also ask if there is an additional charge for this training.

23. Do you make custom designs or use pre-made templates?

Why you're asking: A lot of designers don't have anything particularly good to say about pre-made web templates...and no wonder. If you buy a template it cuts into their design fee. As a designer I personally don't have a problem with templates as they can be a good way to get your site up quickly for less than a few hundred dollars. You just want to make sure that if your designer is using pre-made templates to assist in the building of your site that they charge you accordingly.

24. What do you need from me to get started?

Why you're asking: Your designer should have a list of things that they need from you in order to get started. Most ask if you have examples of what you like, if you already have a domain name, images or a logo to use on the website, what kind of colors you prefer, etc. If they don't have at least a verbal list of these things, or they just say, "Don't worry, I'll contact you when I need something", watch out. This may be a sign of someone who doesn't have much experience designing for others or the type of designer who will build the web site to *their* satisfaction instead of one that *you* really want and need.

25. Have you've worked with open source software?

Why you're asking: Open source software is a good way to add functionality to your website for a minimum of cost since some open source software free. If you're planning on adding some functionality to your website such as a blog, a shopping cart, or a content management system, ask your web designer if they have installed or customized open source versions of this software before. Be aware that some designers have their own proprietary software that they prefer to sell to you instead of using free open source software. Some designers may try to discourage you from using open source by saying that it is not as good as commercial software. Don't believe it...there are a lot of large scale websites that make use of open source software and they are doing quite well.

Popular Open Source Software

E-commerce

- Zen Cart
<http://www.zen-cart.com>
- OsCommerce
<http://oscommerce.com>

Image Galleries

- Coppermine
<http://coppermine.sourceforge.net>
- Gallery2
<http://gallery.menalto.com>

Blogging

- Wordpress
<http://wordpress.org>

Mailing List Management

- PHPList
<http://www.tincan.co.uk>

Online Learning Management

- Moodle
<http://moodle.org>

Discussion Boards & Community

- PhpBB2
<http://www.phpbb.com>

Content Management

- Drupal
<http://drupal.org>
- Joomla
<http://www.joomla.org>

Polls and Surveys

- Advanced Poll
<http://www.proxy2.de/scripts.php>
- PHPSurveyor
<http://www.phpsurveyor.org>

Directory of Open Source Software

- Source Forge
<http://sourceforge.net>