

What Does a Website Cost?

This is a question that we field all day, every day.

If ***you're a business owner*** looking for information on the cost of developing your own site (either using a service, or hiring a developer) you need to understand the many levels of answers that can come from such a broad question.

In both cases – it's important to remember that although a website is a “digitized” item, a website is still a product, but it's also a service.

Except there are two problems – they're nothing like conventional products, and “service” is a four letter word in this industry.

There's a whole relationship (between you and your client, or you and the company you hire to do your website) that crops up through the process of web development, and this relationship, as well as the ongoing support that continues AFTER the site has launched is what separates this “product” from others.

If I had to make a comparison, I'd say **pricing (and building) a website is a lot like pricing (and building) a new home.**

Whether you buy a home from a new development, or have one custom built. The process is very much like (and sometimes as complicated and as costly) as building a home.

Website Pricing

The reason it's so hard to simply give one a price for a website is there are so many factors involved – even outside of the technology (which matters A LOT!).

Here's a short list:

1. Client Server/Hosting Requirements – Who is hosting? Email? Who is setting that up? What if something happens to email? What kind of server will it be hosted on? Does the client have access? Do YOU have access? Hosting problems alone take 2 – 10 hours initially to address on EVERY project – and problem account for about 10 – 20 hours of support during any given year for a client.
2. Scope – What does the client want? What does the client NEED? Two very different things.
3. Who is the Client – I’m going to quick address business owners here – who are you? Are you picky? Are you easy to deal with? A good web development company will do one of two things – either read you well, or structure their contract for it not to matter (ie hourly). However, in either case the easier you make it to work with you, the less expensive a site will tend to be.
4. Client’s Technical Knowledge – More highly technical clients don’t have to learn how to maximize their web browsers or, and this one still gets me!, understand why there are “bars” on the side of their website (the background of a site in a fixed width design is called “bars” here). The more hand holding a client needs (or the less IT staff they have) the more time it will take to complete the project and have them satisfied.
5. These are just a few items that impact the overall cost, and they don’t even begin to touch upon budget, or design/back forth.
6. But, as they hinted at – websites, be it coding, or communicating, take time.
7. Time is precious; time is valuable. As a freelancer you must value your time. As a business owner you have to understand the time it takes you to “figure out how to build” a website, takes away from other items that lead to making money and a living.
8. “Do you want to specialize in HTML, CSS, JavaScript, etc. or do you want to be running, growing, and profiting at your business?”

9. I have a quick side story. A friend of mine, a highly technical friend mind you, studied and literally took 6 weeks straight to build his company's website (he was managing the company at the time and has since graduated to president). At the time he was paid \$25/hour. Much less than your average web developer. However, factor in ALL of his time and he spent nearly \$6000 of his company's time. All for a static site that wasn't even search engine optimized and frankly looked pretty bad! (Okay... I did help out a bit).
10. Point is, it almost never pays to have some "figure out" how to build a website within a company. It doesn't make time, or financial sense. – Now learning how to edit/update a CMS on the other hand – does – and we'll get back to this in a moment.
11. And then there's everything that comes AFTER a website is launched (and the things you or your team should be looking at during development...) THE MARKETING!
12. You also need to evaluate the best ways to market your clients' website, once you've launched. If you design a website that doesn't get found, then your client will not appreciate the fact that you charged him or her ANYTHING to build their site. Knowing how to market for your client takes experience.
13. Real World Website Pricing Breakdown
14. First, there are services (and for the majority of this article I'll ignore these). There are a ton of services out there that can get you up and running quickly, easily, and in some cases freely. I'm a huge fan of "WordPress.com" for anyone looking to simply build a blog and get their voice on the web. Although Tumblr does have such nice templates, many of them you have to pay for, and I find the traffic from WordPress.com much better. In future posts we may highlight many of the free and inexpensive web services available.
15. Okay, here we are.
16. Basic Website – \$1000 – \$2000

17. After spending a significant amount of time (over a decade in this industry), we've determined that the market average for a baseline website is \$1000 – \$2,000. I've seen much, much higher. And, I don't recommend going with anyone who charges less because the quality of the work will negatively (and directly) correlate to the price decrease.
18. With a basic website, you'll have a simple online brochure made out of a boilerplate template (or format) where your customers and clients can review your products and services. The basic website may be your best salesperson, working 24 hours a day by just showing up. It's your marketing tool to get your message out to the world. It provides a digital launch pad, where you can showcase your products or services. Most web developers will install Google Analytics too.
19. Custom Website – \$2500-\$7500
20. If you can think it, it can be designed in this price range. They may not be as fully functional, but they will be beautiful. At this spending level, you will find a website that is custom-tailored to meet your specific market needs.
21. At this price point, you can expect the beginning of the "wow-factor" from your web design team. You will not typically find features of audience interactivity, ecommerce, or content management.
22. Going back to the Basic Website, the website pricing is calculated at the same rate. These websites take much more time to build since they will include custom CSS and XHTML coding so that the website will show up the same on virtually every interface. Again these websites will be optimized for Google, Yahoo, and Bing so that they will rank better in organic keyword searches.
23. Content Management System (CMS) – \$3000- \$8,500
24. A website designed and built with full CMS integration will typically run from \$3,000 to \$8,500 with an average of \$5,750, depending on your specific needs and the extent of the customization requested. These websites will be designed

with both functionality and appearance in mind. Custom art design and mid-level functionality will be included. You will be able to manage and update all of your content through the installed CMS interface. You can have an infinite number of pages (depending on the amount you want to spend for the time it takes to create them). With CMS you can manipulate, upload and change the pictures, content, and blog all day long. (You'll soon discover, if you don't already know, that updating your website can quickly become consuming).

25. This is our most popular product package at Atilus

26. By enabling a CMS interface, these websites are designed to be user-friendly (as user-friendly as possible for a non-tech inspired individual). You won't be billed for the time that it takes to make the minor changes and small adjustments that may become costly.

27. These sites will be laced with the ability to get "social". You will be able to build a reputation through your BLOG. Depending upon the specifics of the agreement, you should be able to expect some keyword research to help you get started.

28. Aside from Flash Art creation, these sites will remain in the ballpark I've outlined above. And, as always, you can expect SEO and Analytics Tracking for these types of web properties.

29. The Grand Slam Package— \$15,000- \$100,000+

30. Highly complex websites can be very expensive to create. Social Networking, Advanced Blogging, and Web Application Development will raise the price tag. There are a limited number of companies that can perform well in this arena, and most of them will charge you a consulting fee (the initial consultation with Atilus is free).

31. These websites aren't some of the really good sites we've visited. Falling in this price range are sites like Facebook.com, Orkut.com, and BestBuy.com. These sites will have been coded from scratch, along with the applicable application

programming. Websites in this price range require an extreme investment in time to research, develop and implement the software necessary to integrate the entire website in one seamless design.

32. It's more expensive to build a website when you consider the actual cost in terms of hours. There is a distinct difference between amateur websites and the work of a professional development team. While it may cost more money to build the website in the first place, by hiring a professional you will realize a return on your investment (assuming that whatever you're selling isn't garbage).