

The Smart Innkeeper Series - Part 1 Web Site Investment: Site Design

New Site Design RFP (Request for Proposal) Check List:

<http://www.acorn-is.com/pdf/part-1-rfp-checklist.pdf>

The Smart Innkeeper Series Video Access

Part 1 - Site Design: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kktzOUmwS0>

Part 2 - On Page SEO: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rA2SYGes0fY>

Part 3 - Ongoing SEO and Marketing Plans: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7i6jGoq8ugY>

Tags: Bed and Breakfast Marketing, Bed and Breakfast Design, SEO, Search Engine Optimization, Ongoing Marketing Plans

Video Transcript

Web site design has become a very complicated business. With so many different companies to choose from, the question of how does one choose the best company for their needs, can be overwhelming.

This video is designed to help you understand, in the most basic of terms, all the things you need to consider when hiring a Web site Design Company.

In the description area located below this video, we are including an RFP (Request for Proposal) checklist to help you organize your quest to search out the best design company for your new Web site needs.

Let's face it, Web site design becomes more and more complicated with each passing year. Google changes their algorithms, Facebook changes their rules and Technology changes at the speed of light. A Quality Web developer must constantly stay on top of these changes and adjust their processes to keep up.

For example, back in 2002 when Acorn Internet Services was established, most all designers built Web sites using the standard HTML "Table Format" coding process. Table designs allowed for a pretty display, basic content editing of text and images and quality indexing in the search engines. Also, at that time, Macro Media Flash for photo rotation was the best choice of technology. Today Macro Media Flash is now owned by Adobe.

But as we all know, technology changes over time.
And to stay current, we all must change with it.

Enter Design Technology 1: The cascading style sheet -- also known as CSS

As HTML Web site Technology grew and evolved, "Table Format" designs became more and more outdated, and were replaced with "CSS" which stands for the Cascading Style Sheet. Around this same time, Adobe Flash for photo Rotation also became a less viable solution as that these images would not display on most mobile devices or tablets.

Designers began using CSS and JavaScript rotations for better visibility on cross-market devices. CSS designs also provide the perfect framework for integrating a Custom Content Editor to allow the Web site owner to update their Web site content and photos without having to contact the programmer every time a change is needed.

Advantages of designing in CSS:

- Faster loading of pages

- Efficient and easy
- Provides Consistency
- SEO Friendly
- Easily Accessibility
- Easily Maintained
- Increased Usability
- Allows Sophisticated Layouts and Designs
- Provides Bandwidth Efficiency

An Important Note: IF you currently have a site developed in HTML “Table Format”, even though it might be considered an older technology, there is NO difference in how the search engines index your site.

Watch the video provided by Google’s Matt Cutts for more information.

<http://bit.ly/rqyk4o>

Enter Design Technology 2: CMS Solutions such as Wordpress, Drupal or Joomla

CMS stands for: Content Management System

These types of solutions flooded the market as an easier way to build and maintain a Web site. Instead of hiring a skilled developer to build your site from scratch using standard CSS Web technology, these products provide existing Themes, Templates and Editing Tools to build and maintain Web site content. And though the Themes are based on CSS technology, it is important to understand there is additional overhead and cost to upkeep the underlying systems that enable the quick, easy design and maintenance of your Web site. Each of these systems includes hundreds of files that make the system function. These files have to be continually updated with ongoing releases for bug fixes, new functionality and protection from hackers.

Finally, Enter Design Technology 3: “Plug and Play” Web Site Design Systems

You will find a handful of companies out there that will provide you a Plug and Play option where you upload your content and photos into their existing custom database system. Companies such as these will simply “lease” you the use of their system, and if you ever choose to move on, you are not able to take your Web site with you, as it’s a part of their database system, and not a stand alone Web Site design.

As you choose a company for your new design, we encourage you take the time to weigh the pros and cons carefully when interviewing Web site Design companies.

The more time you invest to understand your options, the more likely you will choose the best solution for your needs, thus reducing wasted expenditures.

And remember to print out and use the attached RFP (Request for Proposal) checklist to help you organize your thoughts as you begin your search for the “best fit” design company for your new Web site needs.

1st - You will need to choose a Technology that will best suit your needs

Technology 1: CSS Custom Design

Technology 2: CMS Solution such as Wordpress, Drupal or Joomla

Technology 3: Plug and Play Database System

Also, before you fully decide on the technology for your new design, we suggest you test drive or learn more about the Content Editor or Content Management System Editor being provided with your new

design. You need to see if it is suitable for your needs and is skill-level appropriate. It's important to remember that all Editors are NOT created equal.

2nd - You will need to choose a company that will provide you the visual appeal and “bells and whistles” functionality you want depicted in your new design

You should consider things like:

- How will the company accommodate your Artistic Needs?
- How involved do you want to be? Do you want to have Full Creative License? Or do you wish to be Hands off as much as possible throughout the design process?
- Will they integrate your current Reservation System Software? Or do they require you move to their Reservation software?
- Will they help you set up and integrate Social Media services such as Facebook and Twitter
- Do they offer a choice of Blogging platforms, and will they integrate your choice seamlessly into your new design.
- Do they offer Professional Photography Services?
- Do they offer a Photo Gallery option where you are able to update photos easily?
- Do they offer Static and / or Interactive Maps?
- Do they offer Tracking and Statistic Software Integration?
- Do they offer a Mobi Compliant Mobile Site Option?
- Will they integrate Video into your design and assist you to set up a YouTube Channel and teach you how to maintain it into the future.
- Do they provide Press Assistance and Suggestions for a Press Page on the Site?
- Will they integrate a Newsletter or E-Mail Gathering system of your choice and assist you on creating a Newsletter program?
- Do they use a Domain Registration account where they move, store and control your Domain Name (www.yoururl.com) in their companies bulk account? Or do they allow you to maintain administrative rights to your own Domain Name. Keeping ownership is the safest way to retain control of your online entity. Remember: Your Domain name is to your business as your Social Security Number is to you!

These are just a few things that you might want to consider as you search for a new design company. We recommend that you create a wish list of what you want to be included as part of your design, make sure to and discuss it in detail during the bid process.

3rd - You will need to choose a company that will provide integrated, on-page Search engine optimization, also know as SEO, into your new design

1: Some companies say they provide integrated on-page SEO (but then you find out: not so much)

2: Some companies say they provide integrated on-page SEO, and they can prove it.

3: Some companies will tell you they DO NOT provide integrated on-page SEO and that you'll need to hire an additional firm to handle this part of the project.

Understanding integrated on-page SEO is probably THE hardest thing you will do as part of your new design. Integrated on-page SEO ensures your new Web site design is going to be found in the search engines both locally and organically. We have received sales calls from innkeepers who have spent their money on a new, pretty design, only to find that after a few weeks after going live, they have slipped from their original Google placement to “NOT being FOUND”

So, not unlike design technology, SEO technology has also changed. Back 10 years ago, you could build a Web site, add some content, include proper meta tags, secure a few quality links, and like magic, you'd be on Page 1 for most any search.

Today the complexities of SEO include those basic items from 10 years ago, but now there is SO MUCH MORE that has to be done to achieve on-going, quality search engine placement, both on and off your site.

To better understand the impact that SEO has to your bottom line, please take time to watch Part 2 of our Smart Innkeeper Series ... Web Site Investment: On-Page SEO.

A good rule of thumb is to expect to see 20%-30% of the overall new site design cost apply to the integrated SEO portion of the design. If it's not in the bid, then more than likely, it's not going to be part of your live design.

A final word of Caution Regarding Search Engine Optimization:

Choosing NOT to understand the need for SEO on a new design is a highly risky decision. Placement drives traffic, traffic drives guest bookings. If you lose your placement, you lose your traffic, and you lose guest bookings.

4th - Clarify the difference between upfront costs and ongoing costs.

- How will you be billed for the new design?
- Will you be asked to pay for the full cost upfront?
- Will you make monthly payments as the site is being built?
- Will you pay a deposit, then pay the final balance when the site is completed?
- Is acceptable payment by Credit Card, Check or ACH Payment?
- What is the billing Cycle for ongoing Charges?

5th - Understand ongoing charges after the site is completed and loaded LIVE

- How will you be billed for ongoing hosting and email costs?
- How is ongoing support of a CMS system, or other Support items charged?
- If you are looking at a Plug and Play Monthly charge, do make sure to take the time to do the math regarding your investment over a 2-3 year period and compare it to what it would cost to pay for the design up front.
- Are there other ongoing costs in addition to hosting and email such as ongoing Marketing and SEO services, and if so what is covered as part of that fee?

Important Note: Ongoing SEO and Marketing is a topic that every innkeeper should thoroughly evaluate before choosing to pay for such a service. Ongoing Marketing has specific tasks that should be accomplished, along with the ability to report and evaluate the results of those tasks.

It is NEVER a good idea to pay an ongoing fee without fully understanding exactly what you will receive from the service.

To learn more about the topic of Ongoing Marketing we recommend you watch the third video of our Smart Innkeeper Series – Web Site Marketing Maintenance: Ongoing SEO and Marketing Plans.

6th - Determine the ownership of the Design

Should you choose, do you have the authority move the site, easily and in its entirety, to a new hosting company, or are you tied to the company who built your site.

Consider this Analogy: You decide it's time to go car shopping. You have a few options. You can purchase it outright, finance or lease it. If you choose to purchase it outright or finance it, once you have fully paid for the new car, it's yours to do as you see fit. If you choose to lease the car, once the lease is over, you are required to return it and have nothing more to show for your investment other than the service of the car while it was in your possession.

Ownership should be thoroughly discussed with the design company you are considering. If you want to have possession of your new site, make sure they provide that option before you sign on the dotted line.

7th – Due Diligence is the Key to your Success

You should never invest in any company without taking the time for due diligence. You should check at least 3 references. Look online for any praise, comments and or complaints. Take time to review the Blog, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube accounts of the company you are considering. A little up front time can save a lot of headaches down the road.

We encourage you to watch Part 2 and Part 3 of The Smart Innkeeper Series to learn more about Integrated On-Page SEO and Ongoing SEO and Marketing Plans.

”Nothing is more difficult, and therefore more precious, than to be able to decide.” Napoleon Bonaparte

If you have any questions about this or other Smart Innkeeper Series videos, or would like to learn more about how Acorn Internet Services can help you to improve your online presence, please contact us at 877-226-7699 or email us at sales@acorn-is.com.

Website: <http://www.acorn-is.com>

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