

8 Tips

FOR

HIRING YOUR NEXT WEB

DEVELOPER!



8 TIPS FOR HIRING YOUR NEXT WEB DEVELOPER...

Building a brand-new website, or doing a major overhaul of your current one, can be a daunting task. For one thing, custom-made websites aren't like cars or houses—they don't have price tags on them.

When you're shopping for a car, you generally know your price range and can tailor your search based on what you want versus what you can afford. With websites, you may want the Rolls-Royce, but chances are it will cost more than you are willing to pay. So how do you know how much you should spend?

You'll find the answer to this question, and many more, in our guide to easing the process of hiring a web developer.

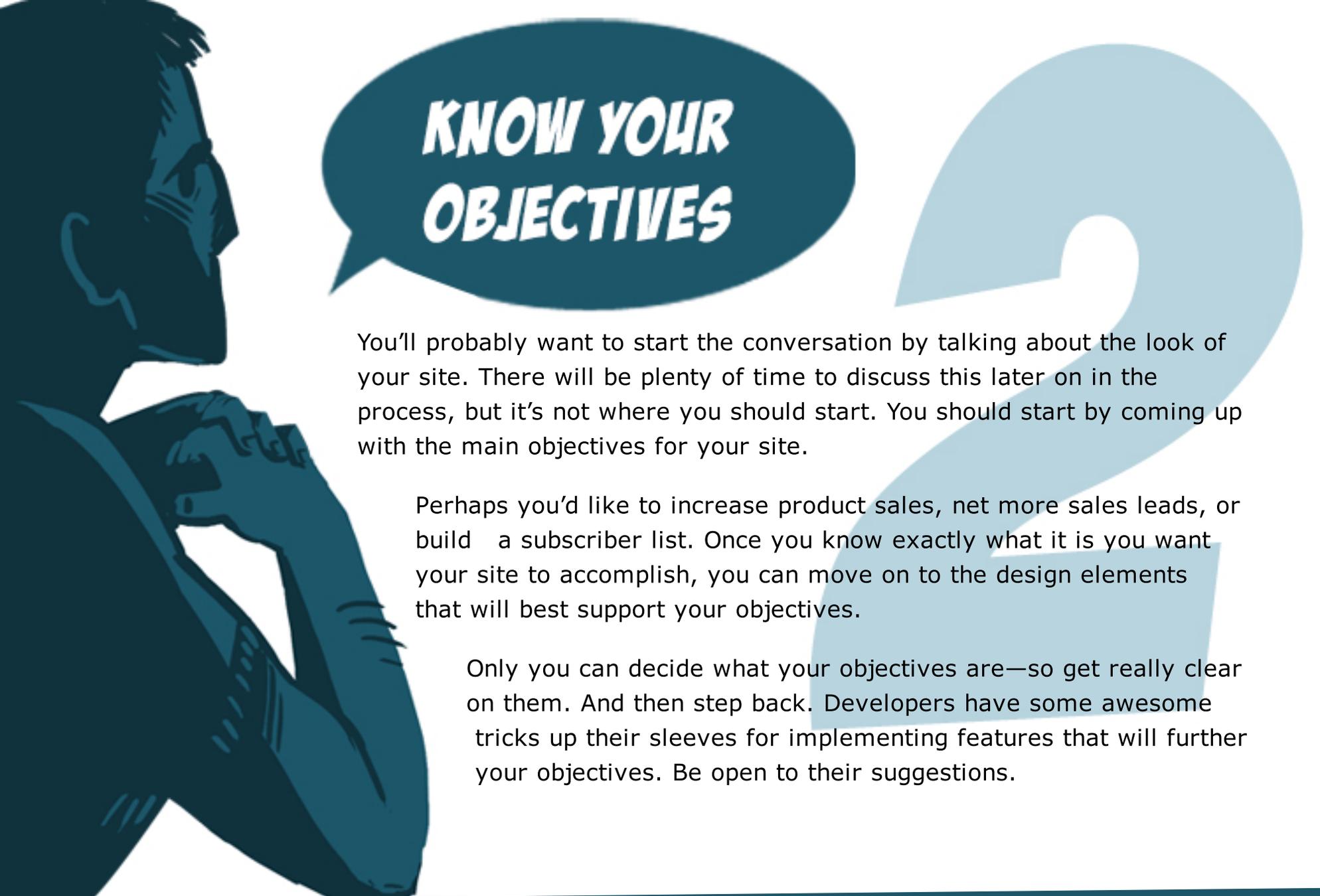


CREATE A BUDGET

Everyone wants to spend as little money as possible when it comes to their website. But consider this: if you were looking to rent a storefront for a retail location, you wouldn't just look for the cheapest option. You'd pick your ideal location, and then you'd find out the going rate and decide if you could afford it. Sure, you can get lower rental prices, but in parts of town that won't get you the customers you want. So what do you do? You figure out what you can afford, and then go from there.

Same thing goes for your website—your online storefront. It's up to you, not your developer, to know how much you can spend. That should be a line item in your business plan.

If you don't have a website budget, crunch some numbers and come up with one. It will help you zero in on web developers in your price range; plus, developers will thank you for having a clear sense of what you can spend, regardless of the amount.

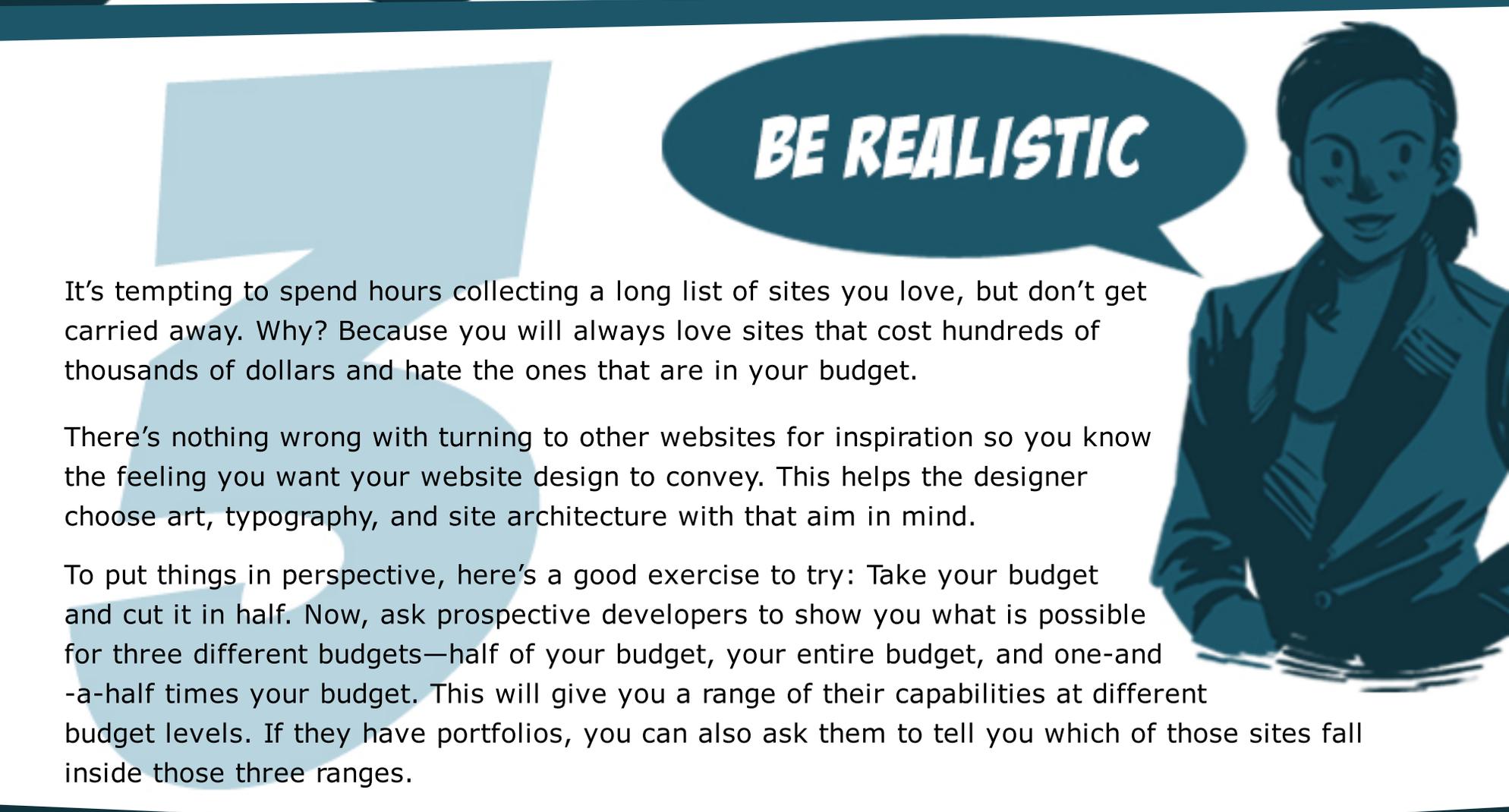


KNOW YOUR OBJECTIVES

You'll probably want to start the conversation by talking about the look of your site. There will be plenty of time to discuss this later on in the process, but it's not where you should start. You should start by coming up with the main objectives for your site.

Perhaps you'd like to increase product sales, net more sales leads, or build a subscriber list. Once you know exactly what it is you want your site to accomplish, you can move on to the design elements that will best support your objectives.

Only you can decide what your objectives are—so get really clear on them. And then step back. Developers have some awesome tricks up their sleeves for implementing features that will further your objectives. Be open to their suggestions.



BE REALISTIC

It's tempting to spend hours collecting a long list of sites you love, but don't get carried away. Why? Because you will always love sites that cost hundreds of thousands of dollars and hate the ones that are in your budget.

There's nothing wrong with turning to other websites for inspiration so you know the feeling you want your website design to convey. This helps the designer choose art, typography, and site architecture with that aim in mind.

To put things in perspective, here's a good exercise to try: Take your budget and cut it in half. Now, ask prospective developers to show you what is possible for three different budgets—half of your budget, your entire budget, and one-and-a-half times your budget. This will give you a range of their capabilities at different budget levels. If they have portfolios, you can also ask them to tell you which of those sites fall inside those three ranges.

ASK AROUND

It's always best to hire a contractor based on a recommendation from someone you trust, and hiring a web developer is no different. Ask friends, family members, and fellow business owners if they know of any dependable developers in your area. It's ideal to hire a local developer so you'll have plenty of face-to-face time (hopefully you hire someone you can stand...see #5 below). And if you are happy with your developer, well, see #8.

If you end up finding a developer without a trusted referral, you can always ask them to provide a list of references before signing an agreement. It never hurts to see what others have to say about a prospective developer.



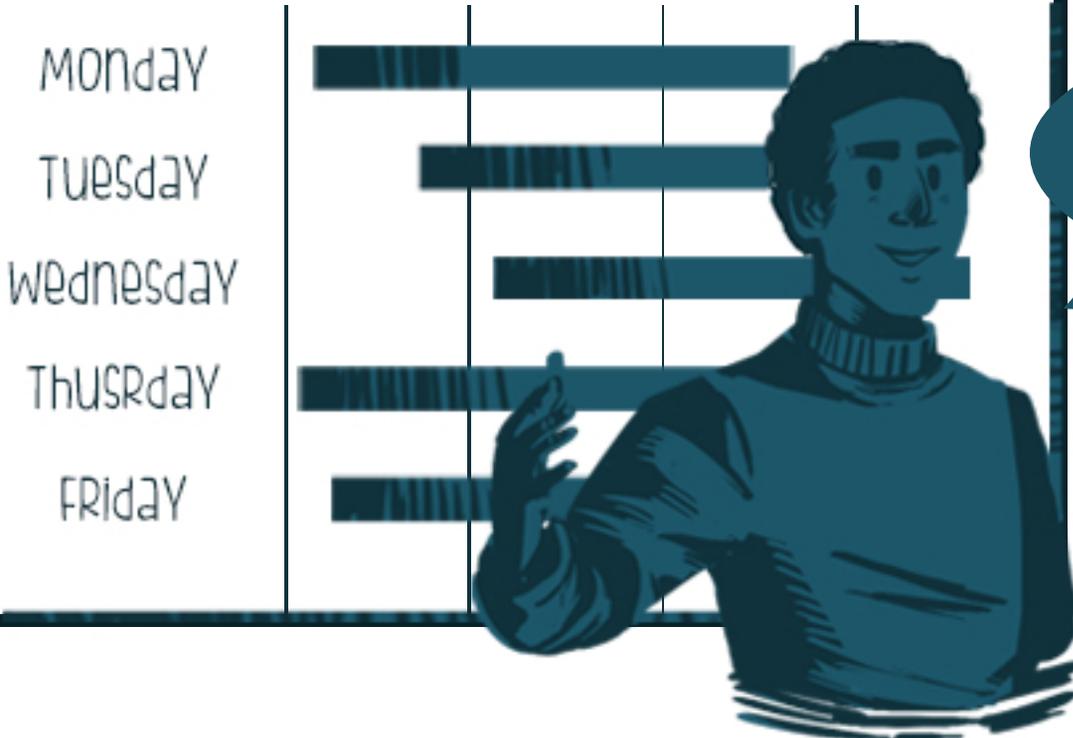
DON'T HIRE A POOR COMMUNICATOR

It's no secret—techies aren't known for their people skills. But if you start interacting with someone who is rude or doesn't want to communicate with you in a way that you're comfortable with, walk away. Creating a website is a partnership between client and developer and if the lines of communication aren't flowing, your website will suffer.

For this reason, it's best to hold off on signing an agreement until you've had a couple of interactions. Don't make your decision based on price alone. Make sure you're working with a professional who you're comfortable with.

That said, just as construction workers are most comfortable on site, wearing hard hats, so are web developers generally most comfortable in front of a computer, writing code. Developers may not love phone calls and in-person meetings. Know this and try to work with them in a way that lets them flourish in their own context.





DEVELOP A SCHEDULE OF KEY MILESTONES

Once you've made your decision and hired a developer, remember that you will likely be the project manager of your own project. At the end of the day, it's your business investment, and it's your job to make sure progress is happening.

Take some time at the beginning of the process to collaborate with your developer and come up with agreeable milestones where you can check on progress. Maybe you want to do a weekly check-in, or perhaps monthly makes more sense. You can also plan to touch base at the 25 percent, 50 percent, and 75 percent completion marks. But whatever it is, make sure you're tracking progress.

CREATE A PARTNERSHIP

Invite your developer to be a partner in your success, not just a hired hand. Instead of giving directives, or even suggesting that you know how to do something better than them, work collaboratively with your developer and know when to say, "This is not my area of expertise—it's yours!"

Some developers offer subscription services for clients who want not just a new website, but a managed web presence. This type of partnership can be extremely beneficial to small organizations that don't have dedicated staff members to devote to website maintenance. With a subscription service, your developer will more than likely be happy to work proactively with you rather than perform web triage a couple of times a year.



RECOMMEND YOUR DEVELOPER TO OTHERS

If you are happy with your developer's work, praise them to others and become a lead generator for them. Word of mouth is more powerful than any other kind of marketing, and your developer will be grateful for your help.

But try to avoid talking numbers. If you tell someone how much you spent on your site, they're likely to think theirs will cost the same. So when you're telling someone about your developer and the subject of cost comes up, say something like, "What I loved about my developer was that they worked with me to figure out a solution within my budget. I'm sure they'll do the same for you." In this way you're being honest and not getting your friends stuck on a fixed budget that may be incorrect.