

Special Report:

Don't hire a web developer until you ask these questions!

By Brandon Eley

1. Do you comply with web standards such as XHTML and CSS?

Standards are becoming a very important part of web development. In the past websites could easily get by with ignoring standards, but as new browsers and technologies emerge standards will be strictly enforced. Websites not coded to standards will not display properly on all browsers and devices and may not display at all.

2. Do you optimize the website for search engines? Do you submit to search engines? Do you use doorway pages or other methods to get search engine rankings?

Optimizing and submitting your website to search engines is an integral part of the development process. Without proper exposure your website will never be seen. However, many companies use tactics and methods that are banned by search engines because they try to circumvent the search engine's process to gain better results. This can lead to inaccurate search results.

Some techniques you should avoid at all cost are:

- automatically generated doorway pages
- cloaking and false redirects
- keyword stuffing
- hidden text or hidden links
- pages loaded with irrelevant words
- duplicated content on multiple pages
- misspelling of well-known web sites
- unrelated and centralized link farms
- other methods that try to trick search engines

These techniques can get your website excluded from searches or banned from search engines altogether.

3. Do you offer usability testing?

Usability is one of the most important aspects of a website's design and layout. If the site is not easy to navigate and find the information your visitor is looking for, they will leave the site. Usability testing involves selecting a few of your target customers to use your website to determine what issues visitors might face while navigating your website.

4. **Do you test for browser and platform compatibility?**

Testing your website on different Internet browsers (Internet Explorer, Mozilla, Netscape, FireFox, Opera, etc.) and operating system platforms (Windows 98, 2000, XP; Mac OS; Linux) is essential to ensure your visitors can view your site without errors or formatting problems.

5. **Do you test download speed?**

Testing download speed is very important because most Internet users are still using dial-up connections that are very slow. Most visitors will not wait more than 15 seconds for a page to load. If your website is not optimized for fast download times you could be losing visitors.

6. **Can you build a website that I can update?**

If you require frequent updates, make sure your web developer can build a website that you can update yourself, without paying high maintenance fees. This could range from updating one section, such as a news page or press releases, to updating an entire database of products.

7. **Can you assist in marketing and promoting my website?**

Building a website is only the first step in a successful online presence. You must also promote your website, both online and off. In addition to adding your website address to business cards, print advertising and other offline media, you should explore different ways to market your website online. Some ways include search engines, Pay-Per-Click advertisements, directories, online communities and more.

8. **Can you design our website to use a consistent look across all pages?**

Your website design should use a style and use guide to determine how all headings, fonts, colors, pictures, text and layout is formatted across all pages of your site. This should also coordinate with any print materials or corporate branding you already have to create a consistent look across all of your advertising media.

About the Author:

Brandon Eley has been developing websites for over 5 years and owns EleyTech, an e-commerce and web development firm in LaGrange, Georgia. Brandon has written articles and reviews on e-commerce, website development and eBusiness for **SitePoint** (www.sitepoint.com), **Ecommerce Resources** (www.ecommerce-resources.com), **Website Publisher** (www.websitepublisher.net), and **WebDev Reviews** (www.webdevreviews.com).

EleyTech offers a complete solution for companies needing more than just a website. EleyTech offers e-commerce and website development, database integration, search engine optimization and submission, and online marketing and promotion.