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The smart way to design a website

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There is web design and there is graphic design. These are two completely different disciplines! Avoid melding the two.

Consider the definitions of the word, design:

1. to prepare the preliminary sketch or the plans for (a work to be executed), especially to plan the form and structure of,
2. to plan and fashion artistically or skillfully,
3. to intend for a definite purpose,
4. to form or conceive in the mind; contrive; plan.

If you're thinking about or are in the process of getting a new website designed, you need to focus on definitions 1, 3 and 4!

Many business owners end up with websites they first accept and later hate after seeing well designed websites in their industry. What often happens is the person in charge of designing a new website knows a "web designer" or graphic designer who does websites. It might be a friend, family member or referral from a friend. They place their trust in the person to do a good job because they mistakenly think: "We just need a decent web presence and word of mouth will take care of business."

Website user experience - UX - is a science for which major universities offer PhD degrees. It is a field of study that shapes not only the way people use websites, but how business is accomplished.

When you and I have a good experience, whether it's on a website, in the form of an email or social share, we're delighted and we remember it. If, for example, you need an online management tool or client portal to integrate with your business, you crave simplicity and ease of use. You want to go there and intuitively find what you need and just start working efficiently.

You want your website to deliver your brand experience, make clear your message and call the visitors to do business with you, right? This requires strategic planning. It often requires guidance from a senior marketing professional to get it right.

There are lots of artistic "designers" who can make a website look nice but that should be a given, whoever designs your site. The differentiating factor of great web designers is they know exactly who the target audiences are and they plan for their user experiences. They understand such factors as user cogitation, navigation paths, interactive features, backend programming, branding and calls to action.

As an executive or manager, you must bring your specific business expertise to the design table. After that you should expect the design work to flow smoothly and efficiently according to your strategic direction, having had the best consultation right up front.

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