



Web Developer Comparison Checklist

Selecting the best solution for website design and development is one of the most complex tasks a business must undertake. There are literally thousands of options from free-lance designers, to large national ad agencies and IT consultancies. Development processes range from a few hours putting together sites of amateur quality to projects by an organization with a proven and refined process for crafting a world-class web presence. Costs range from virtually free to millions of dollars - and every web developer is marketing their offering as a complete “results driven” solution.

So how can you determine who should create your next online brand or application?

This checklist will help you cut through the marketing smoke and mirrors that some companies use to over charge and hide deficiencies. It will arm you with the questions that will separate the real result getters from the rest. In the end it will provide a true apples-to-apples comparison so you can make the right choice the first time.

The Checklist

The Business

1. Question - How long have you been in business?

Our Answer - Since December of 2001.

2. Question - Are you financially stable and debt free?

Our Answer – We have survived the post dot-com recession with no debt and have shown high, continued growth for the past 2 years. (Our revenues tripled in 2005). We attribute our resiliency to our efficient process-driven operation that keeps costs low yet delivers world-class results. Our extraordinary growth comes from a balance of existing loyal customers that want to build on their success and new clients who are committed to “doing things right.”

3. Question - How large is your company?

Our answer – As of June 2005, TechWyse is a team of nine web consultants, creative designers, account managers, programmers, and search engine marketing experts. Our team has been carefully selected to achieve optimum balance of skill sets and cost for most mid-sized web projects (\$10,000 to \$200,000). Our close-knit team provides a high level of responsiveness and client attention not found in large agencies, and still provides superior diversity of experience over smaller firms and free lancers.

We also have several strategic partnerships with various specialized creative agencies and IT consultancies that expand our internal skill sets and offer expanded production, when needed.

4. Question - Are you local or national?

Our answer – We are a world wide international company with clients ranging from USA to Europe. We do accept local jobs based out of Toronto. We work with many clients virtually (all telephone and digital communications).

Experience

5. Question - How many years have you building websites?

Our Answer - TechWyse Design was founded in 2001 specifically to research web best practices and build best-of-breed websites. The managing director of the agency created his first website in 1998. Our account managers, senior creative designers and programmers average 6 years of experience building websites.

6. Question - How many online solutions have you developed?

Our Answer – The TechWyse team has built over 75 websites in its history. We have also completed 40 graphic design projects (logos, brochures, mailers, trade show displays, etc.)

We currently average completing 2 to 3 websites a month. Enough to provide a broad range of experience and still allow us to treat every project with the attention you deserve.

7. Question – Who are the largest companies you have done work for?

Our Answer – TechWyse has built a world-class design and development team that has proven itself repeatedly by delivering projects for some of the world's most prestigious companies. Fortune 100/500 companies have all trusted TechWyse as a high-quality, cost effective alternative to large ad agencies and IT consultancies.

While we have the capabilities to do Fortune 100 level work, our focus is progressive small to mid-size businesses (SMBs - \$500K to \$50MM). Our quality, price points, breadth of experience and level of personal attention is a perfect match for SMB's that are seeking a full service e-media agency.

8. Question - What are your core competencies?

Our Answer - Our core expertise is integrating the marketing savvy of ad agencies with the technical expertise of IT consultancies. Our competencies are divided into two disciplines: strategic and development.

TechWyse is a firm committed to researching and implementing web best practices. As such we have developed unique strategic insight into what produces online results and what doesn't. We offer strategic planning, metrics analysis, industry and technical research and usability testing.

We also have a full web development and support staff. Services include: website/graphics design, multimedia, application development, online and traditional marketing.

9. Question - Where can I see samples of your previous work?

Our Answer - You can view many of our projects through our online portfolio at: <http://www.techwyse.com/portfolio.php>

10. Question - For what industries have you created web solutions?

Our Answer - TechWyse does not specialize by industry. We have experience with a broad range of industries and class of businesses. Most of our clients are business-to-business (B2B) services or products providers. We also have several business-to-consumer (B2C) clients.

We have experience with numerous business sectors including:

- HR/employment
- Sales & Marketing
- Bio Tech
- Business Consulting
- IT Consulting
- Consumer Products
- E-commerce
- Software
- Real Estate/Architecture
- Financial Services/Banking
- Construction
- Legal
- Aerospace

TechWyse's focus is differentiating companies from their competition. To create differentiation you typically must break industry paradigms that are often perpetuated by industry focused agencies. We work with a broad range of industries to assure that our ability to innovate is not limited by our experience. This exposure allows us to infuse the best strategies and tactics from numerous business sectors to create a uniquely differential advantage for your company.

11. Question – How do you measure the success of your websites?

Our Answer – We take great pride in the success we have had meeting the goals of our clients and web users. 94% of websites never achieve a positive return on investment. For small and mid-size businesses (SMBs) the percentage is significantly higher because typically web developers either do not know how or do not care about making your website a business success.

Our philosophy is different; we want you to be satisfied with a site that is in the 6% minority that produces positive returns. To this end we have developed three mechanisms to measure success.

- Satisfaction Reviews – At the end of each project, we will do a satisfaction review. You will be given an opportunity to tell us how we did. While the Satisfaction Review does not directly evaluate the profitability of your site, often a highly satisfied client is a good early indicator that the site will be profitable.
- Goal Evaluation – During the early stages of a project we will work with you to help you set measurable goals for your site. After the site has been launched and adequate time has been given to achieve the goals, usually 6 months to a year, we will evaluate the success of your site in meeting those goals.
- Web Metrics – We have developed advanced web metrics software that scores your site by placing a monetary value on every action visitors take on your site. We work with you to determine how your site should be scored. By analyzing this data we can determine the value produced by your site over time.

Development Philosophy

12. Question – Do you have a formal process that all projects go through?

Our answer – Yes, we do. Our process has evolved through years of experience with dozens of diverse web projects. Our process borrows principles from project management for software development and marketing production. Each project at its inception has phases, deliverables, tasks and timelines defined. Each phase works to refine a deliverable that will be presented to the client for approval before commencement of the next phase.

We use an advanced online project management system to track all projects.

13. Question – What is the client role in the development process?

Our answer – We strive to work with our clients as a seamless team. As such our process is flexible enough to let you determine what level of involvement you want. Some clients want heavy, daily involvement in particular aspects of development, others want to let us handle everything. Your input to the project will be defined at the beginning of the project based on your project needs and your preferences.

14. Question – How will you provide constant communication to me on the status of my project throughout development?

Our answer – TechWyse knows that client-vendor communication is critical to a long-term successful relationship. As such we go above and beyond in our communications efforts with clients.

All clients have a dedicated account manager that acts as a single point of contact for project needs. Your account manager will facilitate communications via three primary mechanisms:

1. Review Points – every project has multiple review points where your TechWyse account manager will meet in person or via teleconference review discussion points and define requirements.
2. Weekly Status Reports – Your account manager will provide a status update at the end of each week
3. The TechWyse Online Project Management System (LOMPS) – TechWyse uses a sophisticated system to manage the progress of all projects. You will be given login access to the system so that at any time you can review the progress of your project.

15. Question - Do I own the code used to create my website?

Our Answer - After we have received final payment for your project, you will own all the end files used to create your site. We normally protect proprietary source files that may contain trade secrets such as Flash “.fla” files, Photoshop “.psd” files. Clients generally don't need these files, if you do, we can negotiate special terms for you to license the rights to the source files.

16. Question – Will I be able to make changes to my site myself?

Our Answer – Yes – All our standard web pages are tested to work with Macromedia Contribute. Contribute is a WYSIWYG website content management system (CMS) that allows you to edit your site's content much like using Microsoft Word. If you have in-house experience with HTML you can also edit your directly via FTP access.

We have also worked with several browser based CMS. While most clients find Contribute is much easier to use then browser based CMS systems, if you already have or prefer an alternative solution we can support it.

Note: On e-commerce shopping cart pages and other types of application driven web pages standard content management systems cannot be used. In these situations the application (e.g. the shopping cart administrator interface) will provide an interface for editing content.

If you have further questions about content management for your site, feel free to contact a TechWyse account manager.

17. Question - After I decide I want you to build my website what happens next?

Our Answer - You will receive a work order contract that will map out TechWyse and your deliverables, prices/payment schedule, timelines and project parameters. Once the work order is signed and sent back to us and the retainer is paid, your account manager will send set up a conference call to begin formalizing detailed project requirements and specifications. A online project management login will be provided to you at that time.

18. Question - Who will be assigned to my project team and what are their skill sets?

Our Answer - World-class web development is very complex and demands more skill sets than any one person can practically have. The task requires a blend of strategic, creative, technical, and marketing expertise. Each TechWyse web development team incorporates multiple specialist to assure your project will produce maximum results.

Your account manager will hand pick the team of specialist according to your needs. For a typical web site the following experts are used:

- Web Strategist (Account/Project Manager)
- Multiple Creative designers (Graphics and Multimedia Designers) - To assure you a diverse selection of creative designs we assign a different creative designer to develop each comp (theme/look and feel design).
- Web Page Coder (HTML/XML, CSS, JavaScript Expert)
- Technical Lead (Hosting setup, e-commerce, site programming, etc.)
- Online Marketing Expert

If the project has significant application development, an application development lead, programmers and testers will also be assigned to your project.

What background does your account management/sales staff have?

Our Answer - TechWyse does not use tradition web salesman who have little experience actually building websites themselves. Every TechWyse account manager has years of experience in multiple phases of web development. Each was promoted to the position because of their acumen for web strategy, ability to manage projects and work with clients.

Every web development project is unique with complex technical and marketing challenges. TechWyse believes that only people with “in the trenches” experience have the insight to craft superior solutions. With TechWyse you don’t have salesperson making promises then handing off for someone else to deliver. Your account manager will be with you every step of the way. They will provide an informed proposal during the sales process, manage your project during development and stand by the results when it is done.

19. Question - What are an account manager’s primary duties during development?

Our Answer - Assuring the project stays within budget and on schedule, facilitate communication, and achieve complete client satisfaction.

20. Question – How long will it take to develop my site?

Our Answer - Site development, of course, depends on the type of site. We typically recommend allowing 8-12 weeks for standard custom sites. Advanced sites particularly those with extensive programming can take 6 months or more. If you need a custom site faster we offer rush services for an additional fee.

Webscape Studio websites take 2-4 weeks from the time we have your site information, add 1-2 weeks for the e-commerce version.

21. Question - Will I be required to provide materials based on a schedule you provide for me?

Our Answer - Yes. In order to meet the required finish date, we will need any materials you are providing for the site by a certain date. If a client does miss a client deliverable deadline, the website delivery date will be delayed. Note: if a client deliverable is missed you will not be charged for developer down time. We will re-task personnel to other projects and we will put them back on your project as soon as they are available again after the client deliverable is provided to us.

22. Question - Will I have a single point-of-contact for any questions or issues I might have during the project?

Our Answer – Yes. You will be assigned an account manager who will be happy to assist you every step of the way.

The Cost

23. Question - How much can I expect to pay for a complete website?

Our Answer – Our primary goal for your website to be in the 6% minority that does produce positive returns on your investment. To that end we offer two classes of websites, high-end custom sites and budget conscious Templated sites.

Custom site solutions are ideal for companies that can realize \$20,000 or more in added profitability from their website. Sites that produce tens of thousands or more per year need to be highly professional. Typically, marketing-type custom sites run \$10,000 to \$25,000. Custom sites that are exceptionally large, complex, or have extensive programming will be more, even running into 6 figures for highly advanced projects.

For those on a tight budget that need a solid, productive website they can be proud of, Webscapestudio.com is the perfect answer. Webscape Studio is a streamlined development process that uses premium templates to produce high-end looking websites for a fraction of the price for custom design. Webscape Studio typically ranges from \$500 - \$1000 for design & development of your personal site, or you can build your own website for free and pay our monthly hosting fee of \$40. This includes access to all our online tools, stock photos, payment gateway and much more.

For more information on what is included in a Webscape Studio or custom site, please visit our website at www.TechWyse.com

24. Question - Are there any other support costs associated with a website?

Our Answer – Maintenance costs for typical websites are minimal. Generally the only cost is hosting and any changes you may need us to make. Hosting typically runs \$200 - \$400 per year. Webscape Studio websites include a free month of hosting.

Opposed to the industry trends, we enable you to maintain your own website if you wish by building you a simple backend to your website you can edit content on all your pages without ever having to deal with programmers. This can prove to be a significant cost reduction. Of course if you prefer, we will be available to make changes on an hourly or project basis. Our fees are \$100 for graphics and text changes and \$125 for programming modifications.

More advanced sites may have other on-going cost such as:

- service fees for e-commerce transactions – typically around \$50/month
- banner and pay-per-performance search engine marketing
- licensing of online services, e.g. news/content feeds, industry specific services It is always at your discretion whether you want to subscribe to these advanced for-fee services.

While not technically a website support cost, TechWyse recommends determining a marketing budget for your site before development. Some clients choose not to do any extra marketing, while others spend considerable amounts on online and offline campaigns that drive large volumes of traffic. Most of our clients have found it beneficial to invest at least \$5,000 to \$15,000 per year in site marketing. A good starting point for a website marketing budget is 0.1% of total company sales.

25. Question - What payment structure is offered for websites?

Our Answer – Sites under \$15,000 are usually 50% down to start and 50% at project completion. Larger projects will usually require a smaller percentage down (30% typically), payments at mid-project milestones and a final payment on completion (30%-40% typically).

Webscape Studio sites are free for the first month and billed on your credit card after that down with the remainder due upon completion.

26. Question – How can I be assured I won't be hit with hidden charges?

Our Answer - We have a proven contract system to assure you always know exactly what you are getting and how much it will be, no surprises ever.

We create Work Orders for each significant project that itemize our deliverables, how much it will cost and how long it will take. If more time is required to complete the Work Order deliverables, we will eat the cost ourselves. In addition, the TechWyse Project Management System tracks the time spent by project, phase, task and subtask, significantly assuring budgets are met.

Creative & Web Page Development

27. Question – What creative and web page development software do you use?

Our Answer – We use Adobe Photoshop CS, Illustrator CS, Acrobat Pro CS, InDesign CS (print), After Effects (video), Macromedia Dreamweaver MX, Homesite MX, Flash MX Pro, and Fireworks MX, Sonic Foundry Sound Forge (audio editing), Sorenson Squeeze/Spark Pro (video compression), Real Media (video compression) and more.

28. Question – Is your code optimized using open standards?

Our Answer – Yes, we adhere to the W3C standards for HTML/XML, CSS Standards and Web Content Accessibility Guidelines. Remarkably, less than 5% of high-end websites are W3C standards compliant. While many web developers rely on WYSIWYG web page development software as a shortcut crutch, we have trained our designers to follow coding best practices.

We optimize each page's code and elements to assure quick loading and proper display across all major browsers and OS's, and compliance with accessibility standards. In addition W3C complaint code will provide a boost in your search engine rankings. TechWyse takes great prides on being one of the very few companies in the world that provides clients 100% open source compliant code.

29. Question – In what browsers do you design and test your sites to view correctly?

Our Answer – We have a test lab with multiple operating systems and browsers. Your site will be tested to work properly on the most widely used browsers:

- Windows IE 6
- Windows IE 6 High Security Mode
- Windows Netscape 7.2/Firefox 1.0
- Windows Opera
- Macintosh Safari
- Macintosh Netscape/FireFox

The above browsers represent 99% of all browsers currently used. If you have special needs, we can develop for additional browsers at your request.

Note: Coding using W3C compliant HTML/XML and CSS standards does not fully guarantee your site will work properly with each browser. You still have to test the code in each one.

Cross-browser coding has experienced a resurgence in importance. During 2004, the U.S. Government's Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT) as well as many industry experts issued warnings about security flaws in Internet Security and recommended people switch to other browsers or use IE in high security mode. During 2004, the FireFox browser was released, which many consider to be superior to IE. In addition, Microsoft discontinued development of IE for Macintosh computers.

In response to the steady rise of alternative browser use, TechWyse implemented new cross browser coding standards in July of 2004. TechWyse is one of only a few companies that build and test sites for more than 99% of all browsers used today.

30. Question - Are your websites compliant with IE high security mode?

Our Answer – Yes. TechWyse is one of only a very small number of companies that build and test websites to comply with the U.S. Government’s Computer Emergency Response Team’s recommendation of using IE only in high security mode. This recommendation is particularly important for e-commerce sites, online financial transactions, security and online applications where potentially sensitive information is transmitted.

31. Question – Do your websites follow the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines?

Our Answer – Yes. Less than 10% of websites can be properly accessed/read by the visually impaired, including many who have a stigmatism or are moderately to severely far sighted (estimated at 15% of people over the age of 40 and 35% over the age of 55). Additionally, many non-best practices trained web builders design navigation, images, and content that can cause problems with those that are colorblind (10% of all men are red/green color blind).

While only a few lawsuits have been filed against websites that are not properly accessible, TechWyse believes in being proactive about accessibility to give equal access to everyone. All TechWyse websites feature user definable text sizes, useful alternative image descriptions, alternative indicators in colorblind trouble spots and printable pages.

32. Question - Do you build your websites to be search engine friendly?

Our Answer - Yes. TechWyse has unique page coder training and standards that assures your website will maximize its search engine ranking potential.

We train our coders to avoid the common mistakes that destroy search engine rankings:

- Spiderable Pages - The search engines first must be able to find your pages. Many linking styles popular with today's designers cannot be followed by spiders or do not properly emphasize vital pages and keywords. We have taught our coders how to avoid or work around those problems so the search engines will index your entire site.
- Accessible Content - Search engines rank sites based on page content. Often sites are designed using excessive graphics or Flash that prevent a site from ranking in the search engines. All our marketing sites are designed from the beginning to assure that adequate content is provided to search engine spiders.
- Page Optimization - Targeted keywords must be strategically placed on a web page to rank well in a search engine. We have trained our programmers in keyword placement techniques.

Note: While building a search engine friendly site is critical requirement, other factors must be implemented to achieve top organic search engine rankings. Link popularity, age of site, level of competition and dozens of other factors also play an important role.

33. Question - Are you able to provide Flash animation?

Our Answer – Yes, we have experienced Flash programmers on staff that can create basically any kind of animation you desire.

34. Question - Are you able to integrate streaming audio and video into your websites?

Our Answer - Yes. We have specialists trained in audio/video editing and compression.

35. Question – Are you able to develop advanced Rich Media Applications in Flash.

Our Answer – Yes, we were one of the early pioneers in Rich Media Application development. Flash can provide advanced web application interfaces that are user-friendlier and offer superior features than standard HTML based web apps. We were one of the early adopters of using Flash for advanced, desktop like apps. We have deployed many advanced, desktop style Flash apps and continue to be an innovative leader in the art.

36. Question - What other digital mediums are you proficient in?

Our Answer - We are highly proficient in multimedia CD-ROM production, pay per click ad campaigns, email marketing campaigns, banner ad creation and management, search engine optimization, and technology consulting.

37. Question - Are you able to create interactive CD-ROM presentations?

Our Answer – Yes, we have created several interactive CD-ROM presentations, which are especially effective as product demos and instructional applications.

Application/Technical Development

38. Question – What web application development environment and servers do you use?

Our Answer – Over the years our developers have worked with all major web enabled languages (Perl/CGI, C++/CGI, PHP, Java/J2EE, ASP/.net and Cold Fusion), most popular databases (MySQL, MS SQL Server, Access, Oracle, DB2) and even several legacy systems (IBM mainframes, AS400, Lotus Notes/Domino and HPUnix). We have developed on Windows and Unix/Linux platforms including; LAMP (Linux/Apache/PHP/MySQL), Windows/IIS and IBM WebSphere servers.

This very diverse background gives us unique insight into the practicality of each technology. For each new project, we will review your requirements, current technical environment and expertise and provide a recommended development environment.

39. Question - What sets application development apart from other development companies?

Our Answer – There are many items but the two most important is efficiency and ability to handle enterprise class applications.

We have built an advanced framework to streamline development of most web applications. While most developers have to start from scratch, we have a large system of pre-programmed, pre-tested modules that gives us a significant head start.

What many business owners do not realize is that almost any person can pick up a book and start hacking web scripts – and there is a world of difference between a hacker and an enterprise class developer. While anyone can get your web form working, it takes years of education and experience to build scalable, secure, mission critical applications such as financial services, advanced online stores, and vertical market software.

We were entrusted by one of the world’s largest banks to build their online banking. While your application may not be large in scale or complexity, it is assuring to know your project will not be limited or suffer performance issues because of the developer’s inexperience.

Hosting

40. Question - Do you provide hosting? Is it in-house or do you outsource to another company and if so why them?

Our answer – We provide dedicated and shared hosting on both Linux and Windows platforms. We own servers that are managed 24x7 in a world-class hosting facilities in Orlando, Florida and Montreal Quebec.

41. Question – Do I have to host with you?

Our answer – No. Typically, we recommend that most of our client’s host with us because we have standardized our servers to have all the services that may be needed for development. Over 50% of our clients do host with us. Some clients chose to keep their existing hosting companies and some host on-site. We can work with any scenario.

42. Does your hosting offer a control panel to allow me to manage all my web services.

Our answer – All our shared hosting plans come with cPanel. cPanel is a browser based system that integrates web hosting services. It will allow you to manage e-mail configuration, databases, several popular web applications, server statistics and much more.

43. Question - How much space and/or bandwidth do I get with my hosting account?

Our answer – Our standard business plan comes with 300MB of space and 10GB of monthly transfer, more than enough for most business websites. You can increase these for a nominal charge. To learn more about our web hosting package, [click here](#).

44. Question - Do you handle my domain name registration or transfer? Do you charge extra for this?

Our answer – Yes, we take care of your domain name registration at no extra cost.

45. Question - Do I own the domain name used for my site?

Our Answer - If we acquire the domain name for you, ownership will be transferred to you upon final payment for your website.

46. Question – What steps do you take to prevent loss of my site due to server failure?

Our Answer - All of our servers are in a state-of-the-art hosting facility where they are continuously monitored for problems. If there is ever a problem with a server, techs are available 24 hours a day to respond and correct the problem.

Our shared servers all come equipped with RAID1 mirrored hard drives. This means that there are two hard drives that provide real-time backup of each other's data. If one drive fails, the other keeps the server running normally. The failed hard drive is then replaced by a tech without having to reboot the server (called "hot swapping").

Our servers are backed up every 24 hours so that if something catastrophic happens to the server that destroys the data on both RAID drives, we can rebuild the server and restore the data from the backup.

47. Question - What is the guaranteed uptime for your hosting service?

Our Answer – 99.9% guaranteed uptime.

E-Commerce

48. Question – In what types of e-commerce are you proficient.

Our Answer – We have provided solutions for all levels of e-commerce including:

- Simple one-click purchases through Pay-Pal and other credit card gateways
- Economical off-the-shelf shopping cart software
- Advanced custom e-commerce solutions

49. Question – If my needs can be fulfilled with a standard off-the-shelf shopping cart which ones do you recommend/have experience with?

Our Answer – We have worked with many of the webs most popular shopping carts such as Miva Merchant, MonsterCommerce, osCommerce and others. If you have an existing shopping cart or have a strong preference for one, we will most likely be able to support it.

For most applications we recommend our enhanced version of osCommerce. osCommerce is the most popular open source shopping cart on the web. We have created an enhanced version that adds many features not found in a standard installation. Its' primary advantages are:

- It is free, licensed as open source software
- We have the rights and experience to modify the source code to add custom features. With many other shopping carts you can't modify the source code so you are limited to only the standard feature of the software.
- It's proven. osCommerce powers more than an estimated 5,000,000 web pages.

50. Question - Do you provide seamless credit card processing with SSL security?

Our Answer – Yes.

51. Question - Does your merchant account service provide direct deposit of funds into my bank account?

Our Answer – Yes, it does.

52. Question - How secure is the transaction process provided?

Our Answer - The entire transaction process is secured with 28-bit SSL (Secure Socket Layer), the strongest commercially available encryption.

53. Question - Does the card processing system provide address and CCV2 verification?

Our Answer – Yes. Address verification and CCV2 reduces the chance of fraud and charge-backs.

54. Question - Does your shopping cart provide a secure administration system where I can change prices, add, and delete products?

Our Answer – Yes, it does.

55. Question - Is your shopping cart search engine friendly?

Our Answer – Yes. We have modified osCommerce to be one of the most search engine friendly solutions currently available. Our e-commerce specialists are also trained in how to tune the cart to achieve optimum results.

If you require a custom built e-commerce solution we will integrate all search engine friendly requirements.

Marketing

56. Question - Do you have a proven history of success with search engine marketing (SEM)?

Our Answer - Yes, we not only have a history of success, we have achieved uniquely superior results. Techwyse.com is ranked one of the most visited design business services website in the world!

Techwyse.com's success is the culmination of more than 5 years of research and hundreds of hours of work. While most of our clients choose a more modest SEM campaign, our SEM clients consistently receive more traffic than virtually all competitors in their industry.

Tip: Alexa.com, by Amazon.com, is an invaluable tool to determine the popularity of any website. While Alexa has limited accuracy, it is considered the de-facto standard for determining a site's reach (number of visitors) and page hits.

A good exercise when selecting an online marketing company is to review the Alexa rank of websites in their portfolio. For example to determine the traffic for Techwyse.com you can use the link:

http://www.alexa.com/data/details/traffic_details?q=&url=http://www.techwyse.com

You can change the URL at the end of the link to analyze specific sites. By looking at the Alexa "reach" rankings of a SEM provider's client websites, you can get a general idea of their level of success.

A few things to keep in mind with this exercise:

- It is best to review 5 to 10 sites to take into account new or modestly budgeted SEM campaigns causing low traffic rankings.
- Try to compare similar types of sites. For example a national job board has a much larger audience than a local staffing agency and therefore would naturally have significantly more traffic.
- The reported 3-month averages are generally the most telling statistic. However one-week averages can be important indicators for new sites and campaigns. The one day numbers are not very useful since they don't represent a significant sample size and can vary widely on a daily basis.
- Also try to take into account that many websites get traffic from places other than search such as yellow pages, word of mouth, direct mail and other traditional marketing.

If you need help reading Alexa rankings, TechWyse account managers are available to help you.

57. Question - How many websites have you done SEM for?

Our Answer – Virtually all the website we have built since 1999 have had some level of SEM. We have also done campaigns for sites we did not create. All together we have done search engine marketing for over 100 sites.

58. Question - In what kind of search engine marketing do you have expertise?

Our Answer – We have expertise with all phases of both organic search and sponsored PPC listings including:

- Keyword Analysis
- On Page Optimization
- Link Building
- Directory Registrations
- Sponsored link copy writing
- PPC bid management
- ROI analysis

The search engines offer a diverse mix of tools to help market your site. It is important that your SEM consultant understand all in order to optimize your traffic. We often recommend blended campaigns that leverage the strenghts of multiple search offerings.

59. Question - Are you able to guarantee a high ranking in the search engines with your search engine optimization strategy?

Our Answer – We do not offer a guarantee for placement. Often “Money Back Guaranteed Placement” is a sign of a scam. The search engine marketing industry is full of scams and false promises, we recommend everybody read Google’s guide whenever you are selecting a search engine optimizer. Read Google’s guide [here](#)

We do offer our clients traffic guarantees, which are superior to placement guarantees, for selected types of campaigns. Inquire with an account manager about traffic guarantees.

60. Question – Will you explain to how you are optimizing our site and what our money is paying for?

Our Answer – We are always open about our techniques and whether we are using organic (free) optimization or if we are paying for sponsored links.

Many consultants want to keep their clients in the dark how they do SEM either to maintain the clients reliance on them or to hide the fact they don't really know what they are doing. Our approach is very different, we want educated client because the more you know about SEM the more successful our projects will be together. In fact for many of our more "hands on" clients, we work as a team with them handling certain aspects and us implement others.

61. Question – Do you strictly adhere to each search engine guidelines to assure my site does not get penalized for spamming?

Our Answer – Yes. We always follow established search engine guidelines to assure we do not damage the value our clients have built into their domain names.

Many other firms like to push the ethical limits of SEO or even blazingly break them. These techniques can work in the short term, but will eventually result in your domain being penalized or removed completely from the search engines. Make sure you know how your site is being optimized. Read Google's Ethical SEO Guidelines [here](#)

62. Question – Will your website search engine optimization harm the usability or professionalism of our site?

Our Answer – TechWyse prides itself on being one of only a few optimization companies that can achieve quality results without diminishing the integrity of the site.

Many optimization firms are all too willing to sacrifice the professionalism (human factors) of your site for the sake of making machine (search engine) readable pages. We do not resort to over used optimization tactics such as keyword stuffing that leads to grammatically incorrect and unnatural sounding page copy or redesigning pages for the sake of keyword placement that often compromises the sites creative design.

We always take a big picture approach. We have built a loyal client base by maximizing the total success of our client's sites. While keyword stuffing tactics can generate considerable search traffic, it significantly harms the site's ability to convert searchers to customers. Our unique approach to SEM generates solid search traffic while maintaining the professionalism needed to convert customers.

63. Question – What other ways can you help me market my website?

Our Answer – We have experience with an array of alternative online marketing channels such as banners ads, affiliate programs, online press releases, community building, newsletters, and more.

What sets us apart from most web design companies is that TechWyse features a full service ad agency offering. We have experienced logo/corporate identity, print (brochures, mailers, presentation materials, print ads), large graphics (banners, tradeshow booths & displays) designers in house.

We have also developed strategic alliances with other best-of-bread marketing firms to meet virtually any marketing need; media buying, outdoor/billboards, broadcast (TV and radio), telemarketing, sales training and more.

Maintenance

64. Question – How will my site be maintained?

Our Answer – We plan site maintenance around your needs. Contrary to industry trends, we will enable you to maintain your own website if you wish. For a typical website, modifying content is the primary maintenance need. To enable you to manage your own content, all of our sites are built using PHP to manage the text and select graphical images on your site, without having to worry about ruining the design of the site.

Often we co-manage sites with our clients. The client typically does their own copy changes and request we do more advance changes. We will be available to make changes on an hourly or project basis. Our hourly fees are \$100 for graphics and text changes and \$125 for programming modifications. We also offer priority maintenance contracts if you anticipate more than 2 hours of update work a month.

If you host with us, you will have access to a comprehensive control panel, cPanel. cPanel will allow you to manage your e-mail, databases, applications and much more.

65. Question - Do you provide 1-800 and email support?

Our Answer – Yes, we do. **1.866.410.7090**

Hints for successful web developer selection

1. Understand your budget and seek out developers in your price range.

If your website is for a business, there should be some expectation of increased profitability generated by the site. Often the financial gain of a site comes from multiple areas including: lead generation, higher sales close ratio, increased up sale/cross sale opportunities, higher customer retention, cost savings via customer self-service and even long term brand building.

Preparing an estimate of the impact the right website will have on profitability will guide you towards the right site. In general look for a one-year return on investment (most well designed websites have a functional lifespan of 3 to 6 years so a one year return makes for a superior ROI).

Once you have an estimate, look for providers that build in that price range.

Examples:

- **Local B2C service (e.g. hair salon):**
You might estimate that you can benefit from increased exposure from web search and online coupons. Additionally, an online map would save some of your staff's time giving directions over the phone. In all, profitability might only increase \$750 a year. So seek out free-lancers and budget design shops that deliver \$750 sites.
- **Local B2B Services (e.g. staffing agency):**
With a professional website and solid online marketing campaign an established staffing agency in a large metro area can increase profitability by \$25,000 to \$50,000 (or more) a year. (see Staffing Article 1 & Staffing Article 2) However, you will need something more than the \$750 hair salon site. Seek out companies that provide that level of site.
- **World Wide Advanced Online Service (e.g. large e-tailers):**
There are thousands of portals for products and services such as: books/movie/CDs, online actions, financial services. While many smaller entrepreneurial efforts are started for just a few thousand dollars, to compete with companies like Amazon.com, e-Bay, and e-Trade, you have to match the millions of dollars they invest in strategy, design, infrastructure and marketing. Only a limited number of web development agencies, worldwide, have the resources for projects of this size.

2. Review a developer's portfolio to make sure their quality level and style is a match.

Image is everything in marketing. If you want to be successful you must dress the part; the same is true on the web. While some businesses can “get away” with an average online look, many companies such as B2B, professional services, technology, and financial services demand a highly professional world-class image.

In addition to quality level, style is important. Your website should create an emotional brand for your company. Sites designed for teenagers should have a different feel than one targeting persons over forty. A site targeting financial investors should be different from those selling video games. Each demographic/psychographic has a look and feel that appeals to them. Think about your company's culture and the demographics of your target audience and seek out web developers that demonstrate in their portfolio they can match the required emotional branding.

One other thing to look for in a company's portfolio is range of design. Some firms have a distinct style, which is fine if it matches your needs. Other firms have multiple designers capable of a diversity of styles.

3. Check references.

A few short quotes on a website is not enough. Ask all web developers you are targeting for a list of client references and call as many as possible.