



D BNONN TENNANT

## THE LITTLE-KNOWN SECRET OF **HOW TO ACTUALLY CHOOSE A WEB DESIGNER** (IN 5 EASY STEPS)

If you're thinking of designing—or redesigning—a website, then picking a designer is obviously a very important decision. It can also be a sizable investment.

Sadly, nearly all the advice you'll read about it is complete garbage—all about finding someone experienced who has the right style or process. These issues are trivial compared to the important stuff. They're questions to ask the designer himself, after you've identified him (or her) as a likely candidate.

So here, in five simple steps, is how to actually choose a web designer:–

1. Draw a line down a piece of paper to create two columns. Label one *Good* and the other *Bad*.
2. Go to the designer's homepage.
3. Read the page. Put a tick in the *Good* column every time you see a term like "business objectives", "return on investment", "your revenue goals", "lead generation", "increase sales" etc. Award six million bonus points if the designer overtly talks about working with a copywriter to make your site a worthwhile investment. Award 12 million points if he argues the case or draws some kind of useful analogy, like how trying to convert customers using a pretty site with lousy copy is similar to getting a date by dressing well but babbling like a retard.
4. Put a cross in the *Bad* column every time you see a term like "branding", "beautiful", "passion", "making a difference", "modern", "clean", or any other puff phrase that doesn't convey a clear benefit to you.
5. Tally up your ticks and crosses. Hire anyone with more of the former than the latter. Good luck! (You can turn the page for an explanation.)

## THE CHECKLIST EXPLAINED

**D**esigners who don't understand that websites are business assets—assets which must achieve specific business objectives, which in turn are tied to revenue goals—are not actually *designers* at all. They are *artists*. Giving them your money is not an investment in creating a business asset; it's a divestment of capital that is never going to come back (let alone with friends attached).

### *Warning signs*

Beware “designers” who use industry buzz-words and faddish terms they obviously believe convey benefits, but which you can't connect to any discernible value. How does your designer's “passion for branding”, for example, correlate to a return on investment for you? If anything, it just indicates one of two things:—

- ★ He knows so little about his field that he thinks calling attention to the importance of branding makes him sound knowledgeable. But of course your website should reflect your brand.
- ★ He knows so little about his field that he believes brand recognition is important for companies not competing in a broad consumer market, where recognition is everything. But if you're a small B2B company with a limited audience—smaller than Amazon and Google and Apple—brand recognition is of little to no

consequence. And focusing on branding, instead of on real, measurable customer-generation strategies, will drive your business into the ground.

Some designers have taken umbrage at these comments. They say these are issues of *marketing*; not *design*. It is not their business to know the intricacies of how branding works, for example. Their job is simply to cater to a perceived need and create a great brand.

I think this is singularly insulting both to their customers and to real designers. If they do not understand the channel in which the design is to be used, or the objective it is supposed to achieve, then in what sense are they qualified to be on the job in the first place? They are not doing design at all. They are doing art. **In design, aesthetics are a means to a greater end. In art, aesthetics are the end.** It is very much the business of a brand designer—for example—to understand the end for which his design will be used.

#### *Further examples*

Similarly, if a designer talks about creating “clean” or “usable” websites, leave immediately and look elsewhere. Imagine if a caterer advertised like that:

“We provide clean, edible food.”

Some designers haven't liked it when I've said this, either. They've suggested that since so many websites have poor design, it is perfectly reasonable to advertise clean and usable design. If most caterers provided rotten food, wouldn't it be reasonable to advertise clean and edible meals?

But the fact that most websites are neither clean nor usable can be chalked up to two factors: Firstly, that most websites are not professionally designed. Secondly, that the rest *are*.

Those that are, are typically at least "clean". Many designers don't have the firmest grasp of aesthetics, but even the mediocre ones know enough to create clean designs—just as even mediocre caterers provide clean food.

On the other hand, amazingly few designers provide *usable* websites—even the ones who advertise that they do. For example, the majority set body text at a size of 12 or 13 pixels. Usability research shows that nearly everyone finds this too small to read. In a survey of web design problems conducted by usability expert Jakob Nielsen, bad fonts got nearly twice as many votes as the next contender—with two thirds of voters complaining about small font sizes. 99.9% of designers don't know this. They think whatever looks good to them is good web design.

But then, what *is* good web design?

## GOOD WEB DESIGN DEFINED

To understand what makes a web design good—which will tell us what makes a web designer good—we have to know the purpose of the site being designed.

And the primary purpose of a business website is not to be pretty, or clean, or even usable. It is to *sell*. It must capture the reader's attention, engage him, and elicit a direct response of some kind. The web is a direct-response medium.

Thus, the purpose of a web designer is to create a website that will elicit a direct response from its visitors, so as to achieve certain revenue goals.

The problem should be obvious: *virtually no web designers know the first thing about this process*. They don't know what captures readers' attentions. They don't know how to set text, images, and other elements to ensure maximum readership. They don't even think to answer the question on visitors' minds, "Why should I pick you instead of your competitors?" And they don't know what elicits a response—let alone the correct response.

Look no further than their own websites for proof. I don't believe I have seen even a single designer's website that follows *half* the basic tenets of direct-response selling. Things like having a compelling headline, conversational copy, and value-laden call to action. Creat-

ing a logical sequence of thought. Using a secondary CTA with diminished weighting to gradualize. Setting body copy in a single column. Only including images that convey value more forcibly than copy can. Offering a “monkey’s fist” to ensure maximum long-term sales. Presenting a differentiating value proposition or motif.

In fact, in a survey I did of around 200 freelance web designers’ sites, 7 in 20 used exactly the same formula for their “headlines”—what I call a Big Generic Welcome. Here’s an actual example:–

Hello! I’m a graphic designer who is passionate for creating modern & functional design that provokes feelings.

Not only is this obviously an artist speaking—**design is about achieving objectives; art is about provoking feelings**—but 35% of his competitors are saying almost exactly the same thing on their home-pages. Anyone who advertises his services in this way understands nothing of importance about marketing or business.

*The proof is in the pudding*

He, like most, does not understand setting his own business apart—that most basic element of selling. He does not understand direct-response design in general. And so he certainly does not understand the things that matter to *your* business on the web. He is just an amateur for whom the low barrier of entry online has presented a unique

opportunity. As Renaissance swordsmanship instructor George Silver warned, the world is full of dangerous amateurs.

Sadly, most designers don't realize they're amateurs. A lot of them have been in business for years, surviving off witless business owners who believe, as they do, that aesthetics are the key to profits. The world's foremost expert on direct-response marketing, Drayton Bird, observes: **some people have 20 years of experience...and some have one year of experience, repeated 20 times.**

Since your website is a marketing platform and a business tool, why would you hire an amateur with no understanding of marketing or business to create it?

#### ALTERNATIVES

**F**ortunately you do have options. If you need more than a couple of webpages (or if you find my style too brusque) there are design firms that employ direct-response experts. And there are optimization firms that can improve an existing design.

But believe me: in the long term you'll spot—and be able to exploit—far more opportunities **only if you understand the principles of direct-response web design**. That's why I've created a free micro-course on some of the most effective ways to improve your site. It is called “5 Sales-Spiking Website Tweaks Web Designers & Gurus Don't Know”. You can get it at no cost by going to:–

**[www.attentionhievery.com](http://www.attentionhievery.com)**