

Agency or web shop: Where do you turn to upgrade your site?

Answer usually depends upon the type of work you need done



It's important your website align with your other marketing materials, including print. But it's equally important to provide visitors with easy-to-navigate links and hierarchical site structure so they don't get lost in information overload.

Have you ever visited a website that works fine from a technical standpoint—the pages open quickly and load flawlessly—yet you can't find the information you're looking for?

How does that happen?

One likely possibility: The company behind the website handed all responsibility to a web shop (or web programmers) and did not involve anyone in marketing communications in the planning of the site. That's like turning to a bricklayer instead of an architect to design your house. You need the bricklayer—eventually. But you need the architect first.

Remember, if website visitors don't quickly find what they want, they'll go somewhere else.

That's why it's important to build or update your website using sound marketing discipline. Your website will be far more effective if it reflects your audience, incorporates your strategy, conveys your message and clearly defines your position in the market.

Involving a marketing communications agency can help you achieve those objectives in a creative and compelling way. Then, you'll be ready to involve a web shop to help with the technical issues.

So, when do you use a marketing agency, and when do you use a web shop? Turn to the back page for a few helpful tips.

Executive Summary

- Deciding where to turn for website improvements (marketing agency or web shop) usually depends upon the type of work you want done.
- A good marketing communications agency knows your brand and core messaging, so it's often better to consult an agency for creative content, such as imagery, site organization and overall strategy.
- Technical expertise puts a web shop in a better position to ensure the functionality of your website, provide guidance on hardware and software, and help you create needed applications.

Strengths of agencies and web shops

Good marketing communications agencies know how to connect with your audience and how to use content to illicit emotional responses. A good agency, for example, can answer questions like, “What does trust look like for your company?” So you’re likely to derive the greatest benefit from working with a marketing agency on abstract and creative elements—like strategy, presentation, messaging and market position.

Web developers/programmers, on the other hand, know the ins and outs of hardware and software. They know how to ensure pages load effectively and links function correctly. They possess more technical expertise and can help you with decisions such as platform selection and bandwidth. So you’re better off working with web shops on technical elements.

Marketing agency	Web shop
<p>Strategic planning What do you want your site to do: Generate sales? Build your brand? Provide information?</p>	<p>Site hosting & domain management Who will manage your server? Is the software you need compatible with the available servers? Are there additional charges for software hosting?</p>
<p>Message development What core facts and emotions do you want to convey about your brand, your product or service?</p>	<p>Formatting Which systems or platforms should you use—Windows® or Linux? SharePoint® or Java®? Etc.</p>
<p>Audience selection Who are you trying to reach? What are their demographics? What will you do to attract them specifically?</p>	<p>Content management Do you have on-site IT staff, or do you need a system that requires little or no technical expertise? Can you manage a wide range of different software packages?</p>
<p>Brand image What does your brand look like? Is it formal or relaxed? Is it traditional or edgy? What emotions do people assign to it?</p>	<p>Database development Do you need database development or related applications? Do you need web-based applications—or desktop-based applications?</p>
<p>Site organization What main navigation topics should you use? Do you organize by product? Service? Geography? Category?</p>	<p>Mobile web development Is your site compatible with mobile phones and tablet applications? Do you require a mobile-ready version of your website or something more complex?</p>
<p>Creative presentation What kind of photos, graphics, color schemes and typography do you use?</p>	<p>Support & maintenance What type of security and maintenance programs do you need? Who will implement content updates and additions?</p>
<p>Quality control Does your website support and align with your other marketing initiatives? Does your website reflect the standards you’ve established for your brand?</p>	
<p>Electronic media storage/archiving How and where do you store your marketing materials and approved content? Where do you store videos?</p>	
<p>Site analytics Who’s visiting your site—and why? What can you learn from your total page views, or the navigation paths? Where is your audience coming from?</p>	

As you can see, both agencies and web shops are equally specialized, but with very different skill sets. A few elements (site analytics, for example) overlap. And for some highly specific issues such as search-engine optimization (SEO), you might be best served by consulting a specialist in that area. Overall, though, by working with both a marketing agency and a web developer, you’re more likely to get the right message to the right audience using the right tools.

