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## Articles

### How Can I Effectively Compare Different Proposals For My Website Project?

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As a business owner or manager planning a new website, it is likely that you will request proposals from several web design companies.

The “competitive tender” process is common in this situation and each web design company will usually provide a quote which includes details of the work they will undertake, its associated costs and timescales.

If all other things are equal, you could compare your proposals on cost, choose the cheapest and notify the successful bidder that they can start work on the project.

Unfortunately, it's rarely this straight forward!

From your perspective, the ideal web design company is the one that will complete your website:

- for the lowest cost
- in the fastest time and
- to the highest level of quality

However, certain issues are bound to arise that make it difficult to work out which supplier represents your best choice:

- The cheapest supplier might also be the slowest – is cost more important to you than speed or is it the other way around?
- “Cost” and “speed” are tangible factors that can be measured relatively easily but how do you measure “quality”? How will you recognise good quality from poor quality? Is a low cost / low quality solution better than high cost / high quality?
- A supplier's proposal may read well on paper but what if your website project doesn't run smoothly? How will this impact your business?
- What if your requirements change during the project? How will your supplier manage this?

It is issues such as these that make comparing one website proposal against another both difficult and frustrating!

In terms of assessing the three key aspects of a proposal – cost, time and quality – you should consider a number of specific factors:

## Cost Factors

- What is the up-front cost?
- What is the on-going cost?
- What is the payment schedule?
- What are the invoicing terms?
- Is VAT included in the price?
- Are the costs fixed or estimated?
- Is everything itemised in the proposal or are some costs hidden?

## Time Factors

- Are specific timescales provided in the proposal?
- Have these timescales been planned carefully or are they “finger in the air” timings?
- What will the web design company do to ensure that it sticks to the timescales?
- What is the impact to you if the project is delivered late (or even early)? Are other projects in your business dependent upon your website being delivered on time?

## Quality Factors

- Has the supplier understood completely what you require from your website?
- Does the proposal deliver exactly what you need in terms of functional requirements?
- Has the supplier previously designed websites with requirements similar to yours?
- How long has the web design company been in business? What do their other clients say about their work?
- Is the web design company up-to-date with topical web design issues? Does it make you feel confident in its expertise?

By considering these points in detail, you will gain a good indication of how to assess the three key factors. Beyond this, you should also look at other practical project management considerations:

### Right First Time

What are the chances of the web design company getting your website “right first time”?

A supplier with a strong track record and relevant project experience will be sufficiently familiar with your type of project to make realistic estimates in terms of costs and timescales. Therefore, it is more likely that your project will complete as planned, on time and within budget.

### Broad Expertise

Does the supplier have the all round expertise to be able to handle all aspects of your project successfully?

A modern website project might involve graphic design, software programming, database development, content management and search engine marketing and a supplier with skills and knowledge in all areas will serve you better than a specialist with a niche skillset.

## Strong Attitude

How do you feel when you meet the designer?

Your website project may take several months to complete and you will be working closely with your supplier during this time. You want this working relationship to be effective and comfortable and “getting on” with the design company is going to be as important as any technical skills it possesses.

## Overall Assessment

You are trying to assess which supplier will be the best fit for your overall requirements and it doesn't necessarily follow that this will be the supplier with the lowest prices.

After all, a supplier that quotes a low price initially but then completes your project to a low standard, either because of poor planning or limited technical skills, is bound to cost you more in the long run!

### Comparing Different Proposals – A Useful Tool

A grid similar to that shown below may prove useful.

Draw up a list of the key factors that you want to use to assess your proposals and put the list in the first column. Then, indicate the importance of each factor by allocating a weighting between 1 and 5.

For example, if timing is critical because your website has to be completed by a specific date, give Timescales a weighting of 5. If the functionality of your website is important to you and you're prepared to allocate the necessary budget, give Quality a higher weighting than Cost.

Once you have set up your grid, you can give each proposal a score between 1 and 10 for each of your factors, with 1 being a bad score (i.e. very high cost, very poor quality) and 10 being a good score (i.e. very low cost, very high quality).

Factor	Weighting (1 – 5)	Proposal A (1 – 10)	Total	Proposal B (1 – 10)	Total
Up-Front Costs	3	3	9	6	18
On-Going Costs	4	4	16	7	28
Timescales	5	6	30	3	15

Quality	5	8	40	4	20
Project Management	4	8	32	2	8
Experience	2	7	14	5	10
Attitude	3	8	24	5	15
<b>Totals</b>			<b>165</b>		<b>114</b>

Simply multiply the weighting by the score for each factor and you can add up an overall total for the proposal.

Comparing one proposal against another is now much easier.

In the example above, Proposal A is the more expensive but is the better overall choice as its higher score shows that it matches your overall requirements more closely.

Business owners and managers often assess proposals on price alone and this seems to be the obvious approach if saving money is the primary consideration for the business.

However, non-financial factors also carry an implicit cost and failing to consider these in conjunction with price could mean that a business chooses an inappropriate supplier.

In such circumstances, the overall cost to the business is higher than would have been the case had a more suitable supplier been chosen, so think carefully when making your decision!

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