20 Questions to Ask a Web Designer

Ask these before you sign anything

Understanding your business

What would you want to understand about our business before recommending a website?

Why it matters: A provider who prescribes a template answer before asking about your business is optimizing for their process, not your results.

Good answer clarifies: They ask about your customers, competitors, how people currently find you, and what the site needs to accomplish.

How do you decide the sitemap and page structure?

Why it matters: Page count should follow customer needs and distinct topics, not a template package.

Good answer clarifies: They explain a process based on your services, audience and search intent, not a fixed number of pages.

Relevant experience

Can you show projects with a similar level of complexity to ours, and which parts did your team actually do?

Why it matters: Portfolio pieces are sometimes a mix of subcontracted design, development and copy.

Good answer clarifies: A specific answer about who did what, plus a willingness to share references.

Red flag: Vague answers about "the team" with no clarity on who actually builds the site.

Content

Who writes the website copy, and what happens if our content is late?

Why it matters: Content is consistently the biggest cause of project delays.

Good answer clarifies: A clear answer on whether copywriting is included, and a realistic plan for what happens if you're not ready.

Are photography, stock imagery or licensing costs included in this quote?

Why it matters: Stock and photography costs are often quoted separately and missed during comparison.

Good answer clarifies: A specific yes/no with the cost named if it's extra.

Design

Is the design custom, template-based, or a mix, and how many revision rounds are included?

Why it matters: "Custom" is used loosely. You want to know exactly what you're paying for and where the goalposts are for feedback.

Good answer clarifies: A precise description of the design approach and a defined number of revision rounds with a definition of what counts as a revision.

Technology

Why are you recommending this platform for our requirements, and what are the tradeoffs?

Why it matters: Provider choice (who builds it) and technology choice (what it's built on) are separate decisions. A good provider explains both.

Good answer clarifies: A reasoned explanation tied to your actual requirements, not just "this is what we use for everyone."

Can our content and data be exported, and can we change hosting later if we need to?

Why it matters: Platform portability varies significantly. Some hosted builders keep your site tied to their infrastructure.

Good answer clarifies: A specific, honest answer about what can and can't be exported for the platform being proposed.

SEO

What SEO work is included, and what's explicitly excluded?

Why it matters: "SEO included" can mean anything from basic technical setup to nothing at all.

Good answer clarifies: A specific list: titles, headings, crawlable structure, sitemap, and what ongoing SEO work costs separately.

If this is a redesign, who creates the redirect map for our existing URLs?

Why it matters: Changing URLs without redirects can lose existing search visibility and break links people already have saved.

Good answer clarifies: A clear owner for auditing current URLs and mapping old to new with proper redirects.

Red flag: No mention of migration or redirects at all for an existing site.

Do you guarantee search rankings?

Why it matters: No legitimate provider can guarantee a specific Google ranking.

Good answer clarifies: A clear "no" with an honest explanation of what does and doesn't influence rankings.

Red flag: Any guarantee of a #1 ranking or a claimed special relationship with Google.

Performance

What performance target do you test against, and do you test after real content, fonts and scripts are added?

Why it matters: A fast staging demo can slow down significantly once real images, fonts and third-party scripts are installed.

Good answer clarifies: A specific target and confirmation that testing happens on the finished, populated site.

Accessibility

How do you approach accessibility, and what's actually tested?

Why it matters: Accessibility is good practice regardless of whether a specific legal threshold applies to your business.

Good answer clarifies: Specifics: keyboard navigation, colour contrast, form labels and semantic headings, not just "we follow best practices."

Privacy & security

Who decides which trackers and scripts get installed, and who patches software after launch?

Why it matters: Every tracker is a privacy and security consideration, and someone needs to own updates after launch.

Good answer clarifies: A named process for approving tracking tools and a clear owner for post-launch security updates.

Analytics

Is analytics setup included, and who owns the account?

Why it matters: Analytics access should sit with the business, with the provider granted appropriate access to do their work.

Good answer clarifies: The business is the account owner/administrator, with the provider added as a user.

Ownership

Who will control the domain, hosting and Google accounts?

Why it matters: These are long-term business assets, not implementation details.

Good answer clarifies: The client retains owner/admin control while the provider receives the access needed to do the work.

Red flag: The provider insists that critical accounts can only exist under their own login, with no stated reason.

What copyright is assigned to us, what remains licensed, and do we receive source files?

Why it matters: Paying the invoice doesn't automatically transfer every right in every asset. Contract wording decides this.

Good answer clarifies: Specific language about what's assigned, what's licensed, and what source or design files you'll receive.

What happens if we stop working together, and is there a documented handover process?

Why it matters: This question tells you whether the relationship is designed around your independence or their retention.

Good answer clarifies: A described handover process and confidence that another competent provider could take over.

Cost & timeline

What is the exact price, which parts are estimates, and what recurring fees should we expect?

Why it matters: Recurring app, plugin and licence fees are the most commonly missed cost in a first quote.

Good answer clarifies: A clear one-time price, a list of recurring costs, and clarity on what triggers a change order.

What assumptions is the timeline based on, and what do you need from us by which dates?

Why it matters: Most delays come from content and feedback, not the provider's build time.

Good answer clarifies: A timeline tied to specific content and feedback deadlines, not just a total number of weeks.

No legitimate provider guarantees search rankings. See vortio.com/resources/website-toolkit/questions-to-ask for the full write-up of each question.