

Every consultation is different.

Irish start-up business (SME, importer and reseller to trade)

John O'Neill is in the early stages of running a small importing business. He imports a unique type of cleaning product into Ireland which he sells to the trade market, typically hospitals, schools, factories, etc. He came to Website Doctor because his web presence was very limited and he wanted to put up a website which better reflected the professionalism and quality of his company and the product he offers.

John had two quotes from Irish web design companies to develop his website and he brought both to the meeting. One of these quotes was for €800 and the other was for €3,800. He didn't know how to tell the difference between the two or which one to choose. This is a very typical situation for SME owners.

Focus on outcomes

At the start of the meeting we agreed that the two outcomes we wanted to achieve were:

1. Decide what the goals of his website were;
2. Make a decision on how to proceed with the Website proposals he had received.

The first thing we needed to do was understand what the goals of his website were. To do this we needed to understand the business a bit more. John imports a unique cleaning product which has a broad appeal to certain types of businesses. The product is already packaged in trays of 6 units each. He sells directly to his customers by phone and ships the product to in minimum orders of 6 units. An average sale is 12-24 units.

Making a decision about my website is so much easier now thanks to the Website Doctor. Alastair took the time to work with me to figure out exactly what I wanted out of my website. He's also managed to help me in saving money.

John O'Neill

The goal of the site

John told us he thought his site goals were a) to convey a professional image, and b) have an e-commerce section to sell products directly off the site. We discussed the informational and educational potential of websites – specifically that they can provide valuable information to your customers and prospects 24/7/365. The website sells indirectly by giving information on the products, helping the customer make an informed decision, and having a call-to-action directly on the site encouraging the prospect to make a sales enquiry by phone or email. The next thing we talked about was e-commerce...

E-commerce: unnecessary expense for trade suppliers?

As we discussed the e-commerce aspect with him, it appeared an e-commerce facility might be an unnecessary expense because he is selling directly to trade, typically larger organisations, and it is standard practice for them to bulk-buy on things like cleaning products. More importantly, they prefer to do these transactions with Purchase Orders, credit terms etc. His typical customer does not buy bulk amounts of cleaning products directly over the web with a credit card.

However, we discussed the possibility of providing an e-commerce facility to appeal directly to a consumer audience who would pay for the products with their credit card. We discussed this option in some detail, including shipping and packaging issues. The conclusion was this might be an option for the future but was unnecessary at the moment and might actually detract from his core business.

Repackaging and shipping

One of the packaging and shipping issues we discussed was his re-boxing of the product before sending it on to customers. Website Doctor felt this was not needed and resulted in extra work and packaging expenses with minimal gain. Trade customers don't care too much how their cleaning products are packaged. Sending the product on directly as shipped could have enormous savings, as well as a positive environmental impact. This change alone could save huge amounts of time and money.

Regarding the ecommerce-for-trade issue, John asked whether these kinds of businesses typically bought online. This is not an issue we have experienced before, so we told him we would have to do some research and get back to him with more information. We emailed the results of this research two days later. The results confirmed our gut reaction that in this situation e-commerce is not the way to go.

Deciding between Web design quotations

After deciding that the ecommerce facility was probably unnecessary, we moved to an analysis of the quotes he had received. One was for €800 and the other €3,800, a significant difference, particularly to the small business owner. The tendency in this situation is to hope the lower priced service is of high enough quality to save the €3,000 for investment in other marketing efforts etc.

Website Doctor helps a lot of small businesses decide between web design proposals. In John's case we did the same thing we normally do in this situation: we walked through the steps necessary to create a quality website.

To summarise briefly, the web development process normally includes the following steps (note times are estimates based on our experience):

- Meeting the customer to find out what the needs are (1-2 hours of a project manager or web designer's time)
- Create 1-4 design mock-ups and send to customer to choose preferred design (1-4 hours of a graphic designer's time)
- Revision of design based on customer feedback (0.5-4 hours of a graphic designer's time)
- Convert the chosen design into HTML code and images (2-8 hours of a web developer's time)
- Project management of the design process (1-4 hours of a project manager's time)
- Optional: convert to a content management system template (3-12 hours of a web developer's time)
- Optional: add e-commerce section (1-40 hours of a web developers time – this varies widely depending on the amount of customisation and level of quality of service provided)

- Optional: optimise the site for search engines (2-20 hours – note this should NEVER be optional and should be done at the convert-to-HTML stage, unfortunately many web design companies do not provide this service as standard)

When we review a proposal for web design we ask a couple of questions:

- Could the web design company create a well designed high-quality, unique, optimised website (optionally with a CMS and/or e-commerce section) for this amount of money?
- If not, where are they cutting costs? Is it on quality, uniqueness of design, optimisation, etc?

John's choice

In John's case, we were concerned that a web design company could be offering a full-fledged ecommerce solution and a unique design for €800. It's difficult to figure out how this could be a high-quality solution.

However, it could be that through very efficient systems and outsourced development and design, this might be achievable. We recommended John ask the company to provide more information on exactly what they would be providing, specifically mentioning the areas of uniqueness of design, number of initial mock-ups he could choose from, and number of design revisions and details of the ecommerce solution they would provide. We also recommended asking for details of several similar sites they had created recently, and the contact information for 3-5 reference customers.

John's second quote was for €3,800 which on the surface sounds more realistic for a simple but unique and high quality Web design and simple e-commerce solution. We recommended that John also ask this second company for the detailed information as mentioned above, and also for a quotation for development of the site without the ecommerce module (with a view to possibly adding it at a later date).

Outcomes

At the end of the meeting we reviewed the desired outcomes, which were to (1) decide on the goals of the site, and (2) to decide how to proceed with the proposals he had received.

1. John now had clear goals for the site – to provide information about his unique products, to have a clear call to action to trigger sales enquiries, and NOT to have an e-commerce section as we felt it was not necessary at this time.
2. John now had a clear picture of the web development process and with that knowledge he felt a lot more comfortable about considering the more expensive quote as a realistic option. He had a plan of action to further investigate and make a decision on the less expensive quotation. His next step was to approach the more expensive company about a quote for the website without the ecommerce section.

This Website Doctor consultation lasted 2 hours.