

Every consultation is different.

Irish Pre-start-up – Urfavrit.com (global e-commerce site)

Joanne and her partner have ambitious plans for a global web-based service. Joanne has marketing and design experience and her partner has a software engineering background. Their business idea was well-received by her friends and business mentors and has fantastic potential for growth. Joanne requested a Website Doctor consultancy in the very early stages of pre-start-up to discuss a web development quote they received for \$1 Million USD (*Editor's note: please be aware, all Website Doctor case studies are 100% true and factual. This, as unbelievable as it might sound, was the actual proposed figure*).

Working with Alastair has given me a better understanding of my business and what I want to achieve. The outcomes for the website he helped to define is going to greatly assist me in making sure this project is exactly what I want and need. He got straight to the core of the business about 5 minutes into the meeting.

Alastair's probing yet friendly style forced me to think through issues and snags that my website may have, issues that I might otherwise gloss over or miss completely. Moreover, he gave me highly intelligent and knowledgeable feedback and some solutions, his help has enabled me to move forward and put the foundations in place for my business. I would highly recommend website doctor if you need to get your business off the ground.

Joanne O'Reilly, Urfavrit.com

Focus on outcomes

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

1. Find out if the \$1M quote was reasonable and if the site could be created for less;
2. Move the Web development forward from "initial concept" to the "planning" stage where we have a specific and achievable action plan.

The first thing we needed to do for (1) was understand what the Website was all about and if it really was big and complex enough to justify such a huge price-tag. This led us nicely into (2) which was to move the project forward: we decided as the next step Joanne needed to create a Website "specification" (blueprint) which detailed all component parts of the site and exactly how each worked. A massive job, but very achievable and essential to progressing the project.

After deciding on the outcomes we wanted to achieve from the meeting, the next thing we needed to do was understand the Website and business concept.

First, understand the business

To gain a better understanding of the business, we started by sketching out the important elements of the homepage design on paper. This led to a realisation there were five categories of suppliers (or "merchants"). Managing the logistical side of the business (particularly obtaining large numbers of each type of supplier) sounded like a very difficult part of the business. Website Doctor suggested alliances in each category with businesses who already manage large numbers of suppliers. The business ramification is that the net margin on each transaction may be slightly lower, but the benefit is with only 5 to 10 suppliers they have more time to concentrate on the core business instead of managing tens of thousands of supplier relationships. This is a business decision Joanne and her partner need to analyze further.

Example customer interactions

Two example customer interactions on the Website were then story-boarded, again on paper. Going through each interaction helped us understand the business and also the scope of the Website. During the story-boarding session, we uncovered several technical and business issues that we flagged as needing special attention, e.g. “what if”.

Examples of these included:

- What if the merchant has no internet connection?
- What if the customer has a land-line but no mobile phone?
- What if the customer loses their mobile phone and gets a new number?

Obviously these are very specific to Joanne’s business but it was great to be able to flag these potential challenges at such an early stage of the business. We were able to come up with some solutions on the spot (e.g. if the merchant has no internet connection they can provide a backup number which will allow the merchant to do the interaction by phone).

After storyboarding the interactions, both Joanne and Website Doctor had a better understanding of the scale of the Website development and the business issues involved. We had a long list of business ideas, what-ifs, and the start of a Website blueprint.

Back to the outcomes

We said at the start of the meeting the outcomes we wanted were (1) to discover if the \$1M price tag was reasonable and (2) to move the project from “initial concept” to planning.

1. From our analysis it was obvious this was a very large Website development project with a lot of interesting business and technical issues to overcome. Therefore we can understand how a development company could consider the cost to be this high – particularly if they were involved in all aspects of planning and design including working with Joanne to create the specification from scratch. However, it is clear to us it would be possible to develop this Website for an estimated cost of €100,000 to €200,000 (approx 15-25% of the original quote) if Joanne and her partner do the heavy lifting on creating the Website specifications. This leads onto ...
2. Moving the Web development project forward requires a detailed blueprint (“specification”) be created. This requires several steps which we outlined with Joanne, including storyboarding all five types of customer interaction with the Website in detail, first on paper and later electronically e.g. in PowerPoint etc. After that, a plain English language summary of the site blueprint needs to be created. These steps require a lot of time and detailed knowledge of the business. The final step, which requires technical knowledge, is to turn the plain English site blueprint into a detailed technical specification.

A big job, but very interesting! Joanne now has a specific action plan on how to move forward with the Website development and reassurance that while development will be costly, at least it should not be seven figures!

This Website Doctor consultation lasted 2 hours.