

# How to Choose A Web Site Design Expert

By Sam Vigil Jr.  
Strategic Communications Consultant

*Once your organization has decided to hire someone to create and design your web site, how do you determine whether the consultant in front of you is the right one for you?*

When you think about web design, the first thing most of us think of is a graphic designer.

But web site design is more than the graphics, the art work.

You also need communication design, the flow of the web site – “its architecture” – as you would see it on a site map. Web site design includes things like how easy the site is to use, called “usability.”

Because the web is a communications medium, I hold that the best individual to lead the creation of your web site is a communications professional. (See my white paper: “Why Communications Professionals Should Lead Web Site Design and Development”, at [www.BrassTacks.net](http://www.BrassTacks.net).)

So among the qualifications of a web site design consultant you’ll want to see is evidence of an understanding of communication.

When you’ve decided to hire someone who claims to be a web design specialist, usability guru Jakob Nielsen in his Alertbox column “Who Should You Hire to Design Your Web Site?” (<http://www.useit.com/alertbox/9510.html>) offered steps to follow. Although this column was written when the Internet was relatively new to most of us, the principles still apply.

One of the first things you’ll want to do is view sites the consultant has created.

Before letting the consultant guide you, Nielsen says to go to the sites on your own. Besides, you don’t usually have someone standing over your shoulder, do you, when you’re surfing the web? The sites have to stand on their own.

Evaluate how well the design communicates. Is it obvious what you can do on each page? Is each page designed to go where you want to go?

Then Nielsen suggests a couple of exercises:

First, follow the most interesting set of links. Where do they take you? Then determine where you are on the site, and whether you can find related information.

Second, go back to the home page and then try to find some specific information that you expect is on the site someplace. Can you find it? If not, how long did it take you searching through the site to feel confident you’d looked everywhere on the site?

The bottom line: if you’re comfortable and at ease using sites designed by a particular consultant or company, it’s likely they’ll deliver on a site that will work for you.

For more on effective web communications, contact:

*Sam Vigil Jr.*  
*Strategic Communications Consultant*  
2870-E NE Hogan Rd., Gresham, OR 97030  
503.661.2585 • [samvjr@BrassTacks.net](mailto:samvjr@BrassTacks.net)  
[www.BrassTacks.net](http://www.BrassTacks.net)