

The difference between a design firm and a development firm

When it's time to hire an agency to build or repair your website, which type of firm should you trust and how can you tell them apart?

There are three main types of agencies which are producing websites today. There are outliers outside of these three main types, but let's focus on just those three:

1. Marketing firms
2. Design firms
3. Development firms

Each of these three types of firms have members who are able to successfully deliver a website from start to finish but also amateur companies who either have no idea what they are doing or have to rely on sub-contracting to deliver their projects.

So, this whitepaper aims to answer three important questions:

- What is the difference between these 3 types of firms,?
- How can you tell them apart?
- Which one should you hire to complete your project?

What are marketing firms and how can you tell a company is one?

A marketing firm is a company that is able to manage the entirety of the marketing for its clients.

Not only can they produce a website for each of the clients, but they can also write effective powerful marketing savvy content, create powerful advertising and position their clients in an effective place to find new customers.

When you contact a marketing firm to get a website, they don't just offer you a website, they offer a full package deal with flyers, banner campaigns and perhaps even radio or television adverts.

If the website firm offers to write a press release to help launch your website, it's a marketing firm...

Some marketing firms also employ designers and even developers, so if you feel a firm could fit in any of the 3 categories, you are most likely dealing with a marketing firm.

What is a design firm and how can you tell a company is one?

A design firm is an agency that focuses on making pretty websites for its clients. Sometimes, they will offer logo design and banners for advertising the new website, but it's not their main focus.

A design firm, of the 3 categories, is the best choice if your priority is a good looking website. They focus on only one task and many of them have become experts in their trade. They know the latest trends and what is in fashion and what's not.

You can tell a firm is a design firm when they have a portfolio filled with pretty designs or if they won design awards, but they don't talk much about marketing (which might make them a marketing firm) or about functionalities (which might make them a development firm).

If the website of the firm looks like a piece of art but doesn't have much content, it's probably a design firm...

What is a development firm and how can you tell a company is one?

A development firm is an agency which focuses on building the functionalities of the website of its clients. They might have a designer on staff and they might offer some marketing tips, but the majority of their revenue comes from writing code for their client's website.

If you need specific functionalities for your website, the development firm is your best choice: their entire agency is built around learning the newest coding techniques and if they are good, they know how to deliver the functionalities you need.

You can tell a development firm from the other types because their website talks about tools like content management systems and plug-ins or extensions. They talk about functionalities more than they talk about looks or marketing.

Their case studies (often given in private) are filled with exciting development projects for which they possibly didn't even design the look.

Their own website might look dated, but will often have a lot of pages talking about various services.

if they openly offer development help to design firms, you've found a development firm.

Should you hire a marketing firm?

Marketing firms are the most expensive and offer the most services, but in reality, many of them outsource their design and their development to sub-contractors, often specialized design and development firms, respectively.

As our development firm, we've been the go-to sub-contractor for dozens of marketing firms who would send us all of their development tasks at our full price, while charging their customer double or triple of our own rate.

We've delivered for a marketing firm a project for a little less under \$4,000 CAD which we later learned they received over \$50,000 CAD for.

Should you hire a design firm?

Design firms usually produce the best designs, but they are not always well suited for the development you need.

Hiring a design firm first might let them create a perfectly attractive website which might not be well suited for all of the work you need to put in it:

- Is it scalable to show more articles than their planned?
- Will you be able to add a login box somewhere in the design?
- Did they create a template for your user area?
- Is the HTML/CSS code even possible to put inside a content management system?

Often, a design firm is a good first step, to get your website started, but even if they have developers on staff, are they really able to deliver your special functionalities?

Should you hire a development firm?

Development firms, like their name implies, offer the best development value. When you hire a development firm directly, you do not pay the premium that a marketing or design firm might charge for subcontracting your functionalities to a development firm.

You also get to directly talk about your needs with the people in charge of fulfilling them. Many marketing firms and even design firms will say yes to any project requirements without thinking about how to implement them: they just hope to find the right sub-contractor to deliver in their place.

While they might not be the best suited to give you a great design, you can easily hire a design firm to work with them to deliver the best code with the best look.

Conclusion

On a complex project, the development is often the most expensive tasks in man-hour and often, in hard currency.

Development firms such as ours have learned over the years to not only provide accurate estimates but also to reduce development time to a minimum by re-using libraries, code and tools specialized to our trade.

Only a development focused firm can reliably deliver complex development projects, because they have years of experience to back their work. Many, like ours, even do a large portion of their work for Marketing and Design firms who charge a premium for our code.



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