

Homegrown Websites by Mary Masterilli

Some websites scream *FrontPage*: navigation is confusing, readability is poor, pages are rife with cheesy clipart, bloated graphics and warring colors. You can tell at a glance the site was created by someone internally, maybe a secretary or administrative assistant. Someone who probably didn't want the job in the first place and doesn't know the first thing about Web design. It's a site with serious usability and design problems - not to mention ugliness. The kind of site regularly featured on the pages of WebPagesThatSuck.com.

The problem with homemade websites is, they rarely make a good impression. Often, they leave you wondering about the company behind the website. Are they legitimate? How professional can they be? If they care so little about their Internet presence, how will they treat me as a customer?

Homemade websites do nothing to encourage people to do business with you. At best, they stand out as humorous examples of bad design. At worst, they drive potential customers away.

If you think this problem is confined to the ranks of small businesses, such as your local mom and pop, then think again. We've seen it time after time from companies both large and small, companies that should know better.

Before you decide to save a few bucks on Web design, consider this:

According to a study prepared by Stanford University for Consumer WebWatch, the design look of websites is the most prominent issue people look at when evaluating website credibility. Almost 50 percent of comments about Web credibility contained something about the look of the site, such as its layout or colors. When it comes to judging a company's trustworthiness and reliability, users put more stock in the site design than the author's credentials or even the company's reputation. The more professional the design, the more credible the source was perceived to be. True or not, looking good is often interpreted as *being good* - and credible.

Homegrown websites are fine for hobbyists and grandparents, but they cannot project the image and professionalism your business needs. Simple, professionally designed sites are much preferred to those with confusing menus and cheesy animation. The best solution to a great website is to devote a good portion of your budget to have it professionally designed and implemented.