What should a content-managed website cost?

By Chemory Gunko   20 Mar 2013

The R40-million Free State CMS website debacle raises an interesting question - what should you expect to pay for a content managed website and where is your money actually going?

Content managed websites have exploded onto the digital marketing scene in a massive way, and it's not difficult to see why: they can be hugely cost-saving for clients who need to do ongoing site maintenance in a cost-effective way, and they offer fantastic functionalities that can make even the smallest company's website look large, impressive and established.

So, if the costs are so low, and they're so easy to use, why should you fork over any money to have your CMS website built professionally?

Templates

Pretty much every article about the Free State website debacle has included one key takeaway - the template only cost US$40.

Likewise, pretty much every web designer opposed to CMS systems will fall back on that same argument: these so-called developers are just using a template that they've downloaded from the internet!

While that is true... it's very far from the whole truth.

A template is a starting point - and what you're paying for in this case is the web developer and designer's html coding knowledge.

That ability to hand code a website is what makes the developer able to completely customise the template to your brand's look and feel, in a way that ensures that it is stable and will stay intact through platform updates and web browser iterations over the coming years.

This way, not only can even the most overused CMS template look completely unique to your needs, but it will be stable, and able to weather the changes that happen so quickly and often in the world of web standards. Without these safeguards in place, the first update you run could literally see your entire website fall over.

Likewise, the time taken to make these kinds of changes is often hugely underestimated.

What looks like a simple change from the outside can literally take days to fix - in fact, I've seen a simple background change take 8 hours to implement.

So, in addition to expertise, what you're also paying for is time spent effecting changes - and the grey hairs that often go along with making client requests a reality.

Practice makes perfect

It takes 10,000 hours to reach mastery - and here's hoping that you don't reach that on your first website build!

Regardless of the ease and efficacy of the system you're using, it takes time, practice and repetition to get to know the ins and outs, what you can and can't do and what will and won't be stable. You won't reach this level of knowledge with one, five or even ten website developments.

A huge part of what you're paying for is the amount of practice and knowledge the web designers and developers have gained working on the CMS platform - and template integration - that they use.

Each team of developers has a unique way of structuring the work they do, and repeated exposure makes the elements you're trying to implement easier to effect.

So while you may be paying more for the skills, you'll also gain an inestimable amount of time by using a professional who knows what they are doing.

SEO, copywriting and technical build

Without the right content, laid out in the right way, your website means nothing. And content is so much more than just the copywriting on each page.

The longer you work with websites as a whole - and the more you know about them - the more you'll see that SEO, copywriting and technical aspects are inextricably linked - if you treat them as separate elements, you won't get the kind of traction you want or deserve.

Do you know how to structure your copywriting and SEO? Do you know what kinds of sitemaps are required and where to submit them? Do you know how to set your SEO up to avoid duplications - and do you even know the effect that duplications have on sites indexed by search engines?

Or do you simply think that putting a website online is enough to make it easy to find?

Whether you build a hand-coded or content managed website, you need great copy and SEO to make it findable and to get the results you want.

You also need the technical expertise that goes along with building hand coded websites because exactly the same technical rules apply to content managed and hand coded websites. And if you don't know them, your website won't do the job it's meant to.

There's no doubt that the R40-million spent by the Free State Government is a ridiculous amount of money to spend on any piece of marketing collateral.

The key thing to remember though is that the CMS platform is about making it easier for you - as the client - to manage and update the website afterwards.

In the beginning though, you're still paying for the same level of skill and knowledge you were paying for previously to have

it set up and implemented properly - so that it can be the effective 24-hour selling tool it needs to be.

ABOUT CHEMORY GUNKO

Chemory Gunko is a seasoned Creative Director, a certified NLP Practitioner, Ericksonian Hypnotherapy Practitioner, Energy ReSourcing Practitioner & Life Coach, among others. She works as a marketing consultant and provides copywriting, SEO, graphic design and Joomla! website services.

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