WEB DESIGNER

The Internet has created a whole new segment of artists that didn't exist 20 years ago. They are web designers, and they merge creativity with marketing, merchandising, technology, and business. Web design goes beyond artistry and imagination, by putting ideas to use for companies and individuals.

To compete in today's saturated market, websites must be flashy, professional, and effective. Most users only spend a few seconds on any one site. In those few seconds, you must grab their attention and convince them to stick around. If you want to pursue a career in web design, you'll need to study consumer marketing, color psychology, and graphic art in addition to Flash, HTML, and basic programming. In addition, marketing and public relations will become integral parts of your studies.

Personal Skills/ Characteristics

- Technologically savvy
- Strong verbal and visual communications skills
- Ability to work well under constraints of budget, time, ability, resources, and message
- Strong problem-solving skills
- Commitment to constantly updating skills. Staying at the forefront of new design programs and coding is imperative for a web designer to remain relevant.

Description

Web designers create the look and feel of a client's website. This involves developing a graphic design that effectively communicates the ideas being promoted by the site. A web designer may take part in the initial planning of a website, meeting with the client to discuss ideas for the layout and organization of the site, the colors and images to use, and other matters concerning overall graphic design.

Once the basic concept is agreed upon, the web designer converts the text documents and images that will appear on the page into a form in which they can be viewed. This requires mastery of HTML (hypertext markup language), the computer language used to create web pages. Designers must also have knowledge of the most current HTML extensions—programs that make it possible to add special features such as animations and interactive surveys. Because a website may incorporate a variety of different functions, including clickable email contacts or the ability to download files, designers must have knowledge of FTP (file transfer protocol) and programs that enable these functions to work. Of recent importance is website accessibility—creating web pages that are accessible to anyone, no matter what device they are using.

Training
High School

- Graphic arts/communications courses
- Computer science
- English
- Technology education

Postsecondary

Web designers typically have a background in fine arts, graphic design, or publishing combined with college courses in computer science and hands-on computer experience. A web designer may have a four-year college degree, a two-year associate's degree, or perhaps no advanced schooling at all. Many web designers teach themselves HTML and acquire other necessary computer skills on their own.

All designers must have training in computer graphics packages such as Dreamweaver, Photoshop, Adobe Illustrator, and Paint Shop Pro, as well as knowledge of Flash, and XML-based web applications and programming. Designers should also be comfortable working with a variety of operating systems such as Windows, Macintosh, and Unix.

The essentials employers want to see in candidates include knowledge of graphic design, project management, information architecture, human/computer interaction, writing, and programming. "Get the fundamentals down, and then worry about the tools," say web-design experts.

Still, skills do matter, and for web design, the essential ones include knowledge of HTML, Photoshop, and scripting languages such as JavaScript, CSS, or PHP. Experience with print design also helps, as many organizations require their designers to work on both print and web projects. You will also need to study color psychology, search engine optimization, and marketing.

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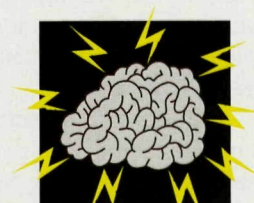
Wages

Web design salaries vary widely, especially among independent contractors. The annual AIGA/Aquent Survey of Design Salaries cites a median total compensation of $58,500 for web designers in 2010, an increase of 6.4% over the previous year. Front-end or interface Web developers earned $60,000 in 2010. web designers promoted into management roles command six-figure salaries; creative directors, for example, brought home a median base salary of $100,000 in 2010.

Getting the Job

The ticket to entering the field is to build a website. Countless numbers of web designers have gotten noticed by building websites for nonprofits or community groups, or by creating a personal website or one for, say, your friend's band. Then, promote your site and get people to use it—there's no better marketing than that.

Working Conditions

Web designers usually work in a modern office environment. Much of the work requires hours of solitary effort, although designers must also meet with clients and supervisors to discuss projects in progress. Freelance web designers work mainly out of a home office but may perform some work at the client's place of business. Web design takes place in a fast-paced, creative atmosphere in which one must constantly develop new ideas and respond quickly to changing needs. This could involve working long and irregular hours to meet tight deadlines or making last-minute changes to an existing design.

Advancement Possibilities

Several different career paths are available in the field of web design. The entry-level position of assistant designer involves designing certain elements of a web page or website. Project managers are in charge of the design or redesign of entire websites. The project manager may work with freelance artists and writers who supply materials to be incorporated into the website. Design directors oversee the work of a number of web designers, reviewing and correcting it and making suggestions to improve the design. A design director is usually the person who meets most often with the client to discuss ideas and make sure a project meets the client's expectations.

Web Design Careers

Web designers can find job opportunities in a number of industries including Internet service providers, Internet consulting firms, and specialized web design companies. Advertising firms and graphic design shops also hire web designers. Major corporations, or companies that are entirely Internet based–like Facebook–employ several full-time web designers to help them keep up the images of their company via their websites. Companies that sell things over the Web need web designers to help them keep track of major traffic and to update format and content. Those with a bachelor's degree in web design will be more likely to be considered for these lucrative and steady positions.

There are extraordinary self-employment opportunities to be had in web design. In fact, 30% of web designers are self-employed, according to the *Guide to College Majors*. In a small community, a web designer may be hired to create and maintain websites for several local businesses, with the ability to charge one's own price and select which projects one wants to work on. These are some of the highest earning professionals in web design, and they can typically work with only a certificate.

Job Outlook

The world's growing dependence on Internet technology basically guarantees future demand for web designers. According to Google, there are over four billion websites, each one with multiple subpages. And this number is growing at a fantastic rate. This means that there is and will be ample opportunities for careers in web design and maintenance.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts a 13% growth rate for graphic designers as a whole, with particular demand for designers with website and animation design experience.

Professional Organizations

AIGA.org
The professional association for design
212-807-1990

Web Professionals.org
This organization offers several levels of certification

nasad.arts-accredit.org
National Association of Schools of Art and Design