

Start your own web design business!

FabJob Guide to
**Become a
Web Designer**



BARBARA LIGHTNER

Visit www.FabJob.com

Contents

About the Author	8
1. Introduction.....	11
1.1 A Career in Web Design	12
1.1.1 Development of the Industry	12
1.1.2 Web Designer, Graphic Designer, Web Developer	16
1.1.3 Benefits of Being a Web Designer.....	20
1.2 Inside This Guide	22
2. What a Web Designer Does	24
2.1 Services Provided by a Web Designer	24
2.1.1 Complete Website Design Services	25
2.1.2 Partial Website Design Services.....	26
2.1.3 Specialized Website Design Services	26
2.1.4 Additional Services	26
2.2 Web Design Specializations and Niches	26
2.2.1 Types of Services.....	27
2.2.2 Types of Websites	27
2.2.3 Types of Clients.....	29
2.3 Tools of the Trade	30
2.3.1 Equipment and Supplies	30
2.3.2 Designing Software	33
2.4 The Web Design Process.....	36
2.4.1 Input	36
2.4.2 Proposal	39
2.4.3 Design.....	39
2.4.4 Production	40

- 2.5 Working with Strategic Partners 41
 - 2.5.1 Finding Strategic Partners 41
 - 2.5.2 Choosing Strategic Partners 43
 - 2.5.3 Financial Arrangements..... 47
- 3. Getting Ready..... 49**
 - 3.1 Skills You Will Need 49
 - 3.1.1 Web Design and Development Skills..... 50
 - 3.1.2 Interpersonal Skills..... 55
 - 3.1.3 Business Skills 58
 - 3.2 Learning by Doing 59
 - 3.2.1 Start Designing..... 61
 - 3.2.2 Enter a Contest..... 62
 - 3.2.3 Volunteer Your Skills..... 62
 - 3.2.4 Internships..... 66
 - 3.2.5 Part-Time Jobs 70
 - 3.2.6 Portfolio and Review Websites 76
 - 3.3 Learn from Other Web Design Professionals 80
 - 3.3.1 Online Communities..... 81
 - 3.3.2 Information Interviews..... 82
 - 3.3.3 Mentoring 84
 - 3.3.4 Associations..... 87
 - 3.4 Educational Programs 89
 - 3.4.1 Degree Programs 90
 - 3.4.2 Certificate Programs..... 92
 - 3.4.3 Continuing Education Courses 93
 - 3.4.4 Distance Learning Courses 94
 - 3.4.5 Business Courses 95

3.5	Resources for Self-Study.....	96
3.5.1	Books	97
3.5.2	Websites	98
3.5.3	Online Tutorials	100
3.5.4	Online Magazines.....	102
3.5.5	Blogs	103
3.5.6	Forums	104
3.5.7	Podcasts.....	105
3.5.8	Social Media	106
4.	Starting Your Own Business.....	108
4.1	Getting Started	111
4.1.1	Creating a Business Plan	111
4.1.2	Choosing a Business Legal Structure.....	118
4.1.3	Choosing a Business Name	124
4.1.4	Choosing Your Location	126
4.2	Financial Matters	129
4.2.1	Start-Up and Operating Expenses.....	129
4.2.2	Start-Up Financing	133
4.2.3	Taxes	138
4.2.4	Insurance.....	140
4.2.5	Setting Your Fees.....	143
4.2.6	Getting Paid	154
4.3	Working with Support Staff.....	159
4.3.1	Employees versus Contractors	160
4.3.2	Finding Support Staff.....	161
4.3.3	The Interview Process	162
4.3.4	References.....	164

- 5. Getting Clients166**
 - 5.1 Choose Your Target Markets..... 167
 - 5.2 Marketing Tools..... 171
 - 5.2.1 Printed Materials 171
 - 5.2.2 Your Portfolios 176
 - 5.2.3 Your Own Website..... 181
 - 5.2.4 Your Elevator Pitch..... 185
 - 5.3 Marketing Techniques 189
 - 5.3.1 Freelance Marketplaces 189
 - 5.3.2 Advertising..... 193
 - 5.3.3 Free Media Publicity 196
 - 5.3.4 Networking 200
 - 5.3.5 Promotional Events 206
 - 5.4 Selling Your Services..... 209
 - 5.4.1 Responding to Inquiries 209
 - 5.4.2 Contacting Corporate Clients 210
 - 5.4.3 Meeting with Prospective Clients 215
 - 5.4.4 Preparing a Proposal..... 218
 - 5.5 Client Contracts 222

- 6. Some Final Words of Advice 228**



1. Introduction

“Who knew what the web would be like when we started in 1995,” web designer Chad Moreno wrote when asked to describe his experiences starting out in this career. “I was excited and glad to be getting started at what I considered an early stage of the Internet buzz.” His enthusiasm is echoed by all of the web designers and industry experts I interviewed for this book, no matter when they first got involved with the web or web design or what stage of their careers they are currently in.

Being a web designer opens the door to endless possibilities. It allows for creativity, versatility, and the realization of technological marvels that once lived only in the imagination. As a web designer, you will create designs and websites that help people optimize their online presence and allow them to engage in new activities, and you’ll make it possible for people to interact with others in the web environment.

As a web designer, your career will never be static. As new technologies evolve, so too will your skills and opportunities. In order to keep

up with the changes in this rapidly growing field, you will continue to learn new techniques and technologies to create innovative designs, and you'll find new ways to use the web to communicate and connect with others.

You will discover how to get started and succeed in this fabulous job in this guide, the *FabJob Guide to Become a Web Designer*. In the pages that follow, you will read more about what web designers do, learn about the many benefits of this career, and discover the steps you'll need to take to get started.

1.1 A Career in Web Design

This is a wonderful time to become a web designer. It is a relatively new field, having emerged only in the 1990s. Now, opportunities abound for anyone who has the skill, tenacity and willingness to learn web design and keep learning throughout their career.

As you read this guide, you will hear from many web designers. Some of these people entered the web design field at its onset, others only recently. None of these people grew up expecting to be web designers, but all of them are glad to be a part of the industry.

1.1.1 Development of the Industry

During the late 1990s and early 2000s, many companies did not see the need for a website. Today, that has changed. A growing number of companies — one-person operations and large corporations alike — now have websites. While some companies design and maintain their own websites, most recognize the importance of having a professional on-line presence. In addition, companies are realizing the importance of keeping their websites fresh, with current content and up-to-date information. Thus, there is a growing need for web designers to both create and redesign and maintain websites.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics expects employment of web designers to experience rapid growth through 2018. The greatest demand will be for people who keep up with changes in technology.

Evolution of Web Design

The Internet was originally used as a communications network between universities. It wasn't until the 1990s that it came into public use with the development of the World Wide Web. In the early years, web designers often had to sell people on the benefits of the Internet. Sometimes web designers even had to explain what the Internet was! But with the development of web browsers, people around the world became fascinated with the web, and usage quickly took off.

Because early users accessed the Internet through slow dial-up connections, web pages had to be kept simple. Early websites looked unsophisticated, and had relatively few, if any, features other than text and a few pictures. Some resembled little more than print pieces with oversized text. Over time, web designers improved the aesthetics of websites, added new elements, and worked with developers to add features such as videos, interactive tools, and social media.

How have these changes affected the business of being a web designer? Here's a look comparing what web design was like in its early years to what it's like now.

Web Design Then

In the beginning, web designers often had to spell out the benefits of the Internet. Chad Moreno, web designer/director, Killerwebsites.com, says, "First you needed to show the client the benefits of the Internet and how it could help their business."

Cindy Penchina, adjunct web design professor, Pace University, and executive e-services director of Hudson Fusion LLC, says, "When I first started my web design business, my sales pitch to small and mid-sized companies sounded something like 'There's this really cool thing called the Internet. You should really go check out what's going on there. It's going to be the next wave of marketing your business.' That was back in 1996."

Web Design Now

Fortunately, most people today are familiar with the Internet, and explaining what it is no longer is the role of a web designer. Penchina says,

“Now you don’t have to explain what the web is... businesses see a web presence as a necessity. I don’t have to sell people on the concept anymore. But, I still need to sell them on my company’s capabilities.”

Web Design Then

The look was basic. Patrick Ortman, writer/film director and CEO of PatrickOrtman, Inc., says, “In the early days, it was a big deal to have anything more than a few pictures and some text on a website.” Greg Summers, owner of web design/development company Exxacta, adds, “In the past, simply adding a shadow to your text illustrated a ‘classier’ website.”

Web Design Now

Summers describes how things have changed. “Today, you need bevels, gradients, layover textures, and a variety of other aspects just on the fonts to achieve the same perception of quality.”

Scott Brenner, web designer and president, Radiant Webscapes, states, “The ‘expectations’ bar has been raised and website owners and website users expect professional looking sites that load quickly, are easy to navigate and search, provide the services they’re interested in, and never go down.”

Web Design Then

Courtney Darling, creative director and owner of Darling Design, Inc., points out that “web designers sometimes had to create multiple versions of their websites so they could work on the different browsers.”

Web Design Now

Today, there is standards-compliant coding, yet browsers are still a concern. Darling describes one of her biggest challenges as “making sure that the websites I create function and look as they should on ALL web browsers. I use standards-compliant code, but some older browsers require some extra attention to make sure it’s right.”

Alan K’necht, web designer/developer and president of K’nechtology Inc., explains: “We once had to worry only about testing sites in Netscape and Internet Explorer on the PC and the Mac. Now the brows-

er wars are back (but to a small degree with IE, FireFox, Safari and Opera), but platforms include not only Macs and PC, but wireless devices like Blackberries, iPhones and other cell phones." Today, screen sizes can be smaller than a few inches or larger than a yard.

Web Design Then

Websites had few features. Moreno comments, "The site designs were static pages, not a lot of interactivity, animation, or database options." Having a web presence was enough.

Web Design Now

Now, Ortman, reports, "a routine project includes video, web applications, twitter feeds, ecommerce, and blogs." Allon Bloch, co-CEO of Wix.com, comments, "Making websites is much more complex today. A designer needs not only to understand how to integrate this all together in a way that makes sense but also the impact this has on the speed/performance of the site."

Today there is also growing demand for search engine optimization (SEO). "Every client wants to appear #1 on Google and other search engines, and companies spend many thousands of dollars per year to get there," says Darling. "Capturing end-user data also has become an essential aspect of any site, regardless of the intent or industry," says Summers.

Web Design Then

Web designers were "webmasters" or "masters" of the web. "Back in the 90s, the job title of 'Web Master' was born. We all had to have a huge set of diverse skills, including graphic design, HTML, CGI programming, web server configuration, etc. All web masters had to be 'jacks of all trades,' says K'necht.

Web Design Now

Today, K'necht continues, the industry has shifted its expectation of a web designers'/developers' skill set away from all skills to "areas of specialization. You have web development teams consisting of web usability, visual design, site coding (using a variety of technologies), network administrators, search engine optimization, web analytics integrators,

and more. It is extremely difficult today for a single individual to master all of the skills now required to produce an effective website.”

1.1.2 Web Designer, Graphic Designer, Web Developer

If you have been searching for information about web design as a career, you almost certainly have come across the terms *graphic designer* and *web developer*. Both graphic designers and web developers are closely related to web designers. Although the terms *graphic designer* and *web designer* are sometimes used interchangeably, as are *web designer* and *web developer*, each is a distinct career with its own set of skills and functions.

While there are some similarities between these careers, there also are some significant differences. It is important to know these differences because they have a direct impact on the types of jobs you can apply for. Following is a basic overview of how these careers are different.

Graphic Designer vs. Web Designer

Both graphic designers and web designers design, but the mediums they work in are different. Graphic designers work in print, and design artwork for magazines, posters, billboards, t-shirts, packaging, greeting cards, logos and other print-based materials. Web designers design for websites and other electronic media, such as PDAs and mobile phones.

Although they work in different mediums, the skills they use to perform their jobs are very similar. Both graphic designers and web designers use design elements to create a visual image. These design elements include color, typography, images, layout and other visual elements. Both types of designers may create design sketches, arrange images in a layout, select fonts and colors and produce copy layouts.

The tools they use to perform their jobs vary. Traditionally, graphic designers produced paper-based sketches and mockups, but most now use computers and graphic software to create their designs. However, they are designing for a final product that is print-based, or a tangible object in the real world, such as a banner, coffee mug or promotional catalog.

Web designers may use traditional paper-based sketches to create designs, but they are creating for websites and electronic products that have different properties than print-based mediums and related objects. They need to have an understanding of pixels as well as fonts. They need to design for computers and other electronic products that have less static properties than paper and that vary from one another. For example, they need to design websites that will look the same on both a small screen and a larger one or a website that will retain all of its properties and functions on a Windows-based PC or an Apple computer. They do this by incorporating graphic user interface features and other techniques.

Because they are so closely aligned, there is much overlap between the two careers. Some graphic designers do web design, and some web designers do graphic design. In general, it is more common for graphic designers to also be web designers than vice versa. Many graphic designers who learned the profession before the field of web design emerged have cross-trained to become web designers. Depending upon where they work, they may do both graphic design and web design.

As you explore this career, you will notice the connection between graphic design and web design. For example, throughout this guide, you will find references to magazines, social communities, and other resources that use the term *graphic design*. Don't bypass a resource because of its use of this term. Many of the excellent resources for web designers were founded to serve the needs of graphic designers and later expanded to include the needs of web designers once that field developed. If it's listed in this guide, it's because it also serves the needs of web designers.

Web Designer vs. Web Developer

Web designers and web developers are two distinct professions, although the lines between them are blurring. In general, a web designer is responsible for creating the look and feel of a website and the web developer is responsible for the underlying structures that support the website. That being said, there is little consensus among design professionals and the markets they serve on what a web designer is and what a web developer is. If you ask ten people, you will likely receive ten different definitions.

Many people will use the term *web designer* to mean a person who builds an entire website—both the images you see when you visit a website and everything that makes it possible for those images and features to function. Others will use the term *web designer* to mean a person who only designs an element used on a web page, such as a button, icon or background. And others will use the term *web designer* for a variety of individuals in between.

To further complicate things, many web designers also do varying levels of web development, but call themselves web designers. And some web developers do web design. Because there is no uniform consensus on how people define each of these professions, it often can be difficult to tell these two careers apart. You may spend a significant amount of time researching one career only to discover it's the wrong one.

Or, you may discover in the middle of an informational interview that you and the interviewer are discussing two different careers. To save yourself time and embarrassment, it's generally a good idea to clarify how a person is using the terms *web designer* and *web developer* to make sure your understanding of each term matches (or at least comes close). Likewise, many job postings asking for web designers are actually looking for web developers.

Following is a brief summary of the job skills for each career. In the next chapter, you'll learn more about these skills and the types of software tools web designers and web developers use.

Web Designers

- Design the look and feel of websites and web pages
- Enhance and modify existing websites and web pages
- Use color, font and images to design websites and web pages
- Use graphics tools to improve a website's look
- Create the layout of a website's design
- Produce mockups of websites and web pages
- Maintain website content and images

Web Developers

- Use programming software
- Use programming codes and languages, such as HTML and JavaScript
- Build a website's information architecture
- Determine a website's navigation structure
- Understand browser technology
- Use authoring tools such as text editors
- Use animation tools
- Use tools to improve a site's usability and navigation
- Maintain hypertext links
- Perform search engine optimization tasks
- Analyze website traffic statistics
- Test websites on multiple platforms

The careers of web designers and web developers are similar, yet different. If the lines are blurring between web designers and web developers, you may be wondering, "What is the job market for web designers in comparison to the market for web designers who also do web development?" I asked several web designers and industry experts to comment on how they perceive the roles of each of these careers and the market for web designers.

"There is a market for web designers. Design and development are different skill sets, though they're closely related. The best designers don't have to be web developers, but they do need to have a sense of how a website will be assembled, so that their designs can be fully realized when developed. Generally a designer will work closely with a developer, providing mockups for development, and in the best scenarios remaining a member of the team to proof and tweak the final live site."

— *Amber Wallace, web design instructor, UCSB Extension; web development counselor, Web Marketing Therapy; and owner of Dowitcher Designs*

“There may be disagreements in the field, but to me, a web designer is someone concerned with the *look* of a website, including overall layout, colors, fonts, images, etc. A web developer is someone concerned with the *coding* of a website, responsible for the (x)HTML, CSS, and any other technology required to render the site in a browser. Some people (like me) wear both hats. But there are plenty of people who are fantastic at design but couldn’t code a line of HTML if their life depended on it. Likewise, there are HTML jockeys who don’t know what color hex codes are. The interaction between the two is similar to the interaction between an architect and a builder. They both need each other; one cannot do a good job without the work the other produces.”

— *Scott Brenner,*
Radiant Webscapes

“There absolutely is a market for a web designer who does design only. Believe me, the last thing I want to do is spend hours trying to make fancy looking icons or buttons in Photoshop. In fact, people who do nothing but design buttons, icons, and other little graphics are making a pretty penny these days. My favorite projects are the ones where I am given a bunch of rough page sketches by a designer and we work together to flesh out a mockup of the site. Once we get to that point, the designer can go off and produce any graphics that need to be done, and I can start wiring up the database behind the pages.”

— *Jonathan Stark, author and software consultant,*
Jonathan Stark Consulting

Most of the web designers and industry experts I interviewed believe there is a market for web designers who do design only and have no web development skills, although many mentioned the importance of understanding web development. Some also suggested learning at least some web development skills. In chapter 3 you will find a variety of resources to help you develop your skills in both web design and development.

1.1.3 Benefits of Being a Web Designer

Greater Work Flexibility and Freedom

One of the greatest benefits cited by many independent web designers is getting to leave the world of cubicles, dress codes, commutes, time clocks and rigid schedules behind. Being their own boss means they

can create their own work hours, take breaks when they want and wear what they want. But more importantly, they can let their creativity flow, unhampered by the constraints of a traditional work environment.

Freedom to Choose Clients and Projects

Another important benefit is the freedom to choose clients and/or projects that you enjoy. Web designers who have developed a reputation for quality work often can pick and choose the clients they want to work for. These web designers often have more demands for their services than they can possibly fulfill, allowing them to select assignments based on personal interest, schedule, price, project nature or relationship with a client. In contrast, a beginning web designer often has to accept every assignment offered, which might mean working on challenging projects for low pay or working for hard-to-please clients.

Client Satisfaction

For many web designers, the work is all about meeting their clients' needs and creating something of value.

“I like solving problems for people in ways they didn't know existed. Many clients come to me and say, 'I need a logo/website/brochure, but I have no idea what I want it to look like.' After finding out more about their business and discussing their key messages, it becomes my personal goal to make them say, 'I didn't know that's what I wanted, but that's it. You nailed it.' I love to make my clients look good.”

— *Kasey Kelly, web designer, owner of KKellyDesign.com, and art director/co-owner of Servee*

Personal Satisfaction and Sense of Achievement

Many web designers find great personal satisfaction in using their skills to create something of value and seeing the end results of their work. Several web designers also described the satisfaction they felt upon completing a project, and getting to see instant results.

“The most rewarding aspect is seeing a project completed and watching the client gain business, branding and marketing from the website. Basically the success of my clients is the biggest reward.”

— *Teajai Kimsey, web designer, Internet marketing strategist, and owner of Ideas That Work*

Greater Work Variety

Being able to work with a variety of people on different types of projects, all while using a multitude of skills, helps to make the web design field stimulating and challenging.

“I love working with a variety of people. I think in the end, it’s all about people, whether it’s the end-user or the client. It’s great to be a part of a small business right from the beginning, or watch a non-profit receive donations through a new website.”

— Amber Wallace, *Dowitcher Designs*
and *Web Design Instructor, UCSB*

1.2 Inside This Guide

The *FabJob Guide to Become a Web Designer* is arranged to take you in a step-by-step manner through getting started and succeeding as a web designer. These steps, and the chapters they appear in, are as follows:

Chapter 2, *What a Web Designer Does*, explains the different services web designers provide and covers specializations and niches. In this chapter you will learn what the tools of the trade are, which software programs web designers use, and the steps involved in the design process.

Once you know what the job involves, Chapter 3, *Getting Ready*, will give you helpful information on developing your skills so you can succeed in this career. You will find resources for enhancing your interpersonal skills, organizational ability and creativity. This chapter also covers the best resources for learning web design and explains how to get experience.

In Chapter 4, you will find good advice for *Starting Your Own Business*. Here you will find practical information, such as the best resources for setting up your business. You will also learn vital information about how to determine operating expenses, setting your fees and working with support staff.

Chapter 5 discusses *Getting Clients* and teaches you how to work with them to grow your business. It includes tips on best practices, social networking, and some of the most effective marketing strategies used by successful web designers.

The guide concludes with chapter 6, *Some Final Words of Advice*, in which web designers and industry experts share their most important tips for aspiring web designers.

When you're finished with this guide you will know what step to take next and where to go from there. By applying what you learn here, it's just a matter of time before you'll be where you want to be... in an exciting career as a web designer!