

# What Should A Web Site Cost?

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# Overview for This Call

- ▶ Shameless Hearsay and Pricing Gossip
  - Rates, site costs, anonymized nightmare stories
- ▶ Sweeping Generalizations and Arm Waving
  - Wherein I share my non-objective perspectives
- ▶ Practical Process Suggestions and Guidelines
  - You **can** retain control of your destiny!
- ▶ Shameless Shout-Outs to Our Ecosystem
- ▶ Questions

# About Aspiration

- ▶ Our Mission: Better Software for Nonprofits
  - We work with all stakeholders in the process
- ▶ In our work, we:
  - Provide strategic consulting for software products
  - Coach orgs on sustainable technology processes
  - Train and mentor orgs in effective use of tools
  - Track available tools: [socialsourcecommons.org](http://socialsourcecommons.org)
  - Run events where developers *listen* to users
- ▶ [www.aspirationtech.org](http://www.aspirationtech.org)

# Assertion #1

“Web sites are not pizzas”

# Assertion #2

**“Web sites are like  
vegetable gardens”**

# Assertion #3

“Which kind of sucks” :^)

# What Should a Web Site Cost?

- ▶ Consider “typical” entry-level nonprofit site:
  - FOSS Content Management System (CSM)
  - Update-able by organization staff
  - 1 or 2 page templates
  - 25-50 pages
  - Email signup
  - Online donations
- ▶ AKA “Brochure-ware with a growth path”

# What Should a Web Site Cost?

## ► Cost components

- System architecture - not needed w/"typical" sites
- Creative design (largest cost variant at low end)
- Implementation and deployment
- Content placement and/or migration
- Training and support

# Who Charges What?

## ▶ Implementors we work with:

- \$75 to \$150/hour
- \$85-\$100/hr is what we'll pay
- \$125-\$150 is for custom/"special" development
- Above \$150/hour, you're often paying for style

## ▶ Obvious considerations

- The mystery number: total hours required for job
- Check references, check references, check...
- Beware the very low hourly rate

# What Should a Web Site Cost?

- ▶ Answer as of 4/7/09: \$500 to \$10,000
  - \$500 is ultra-simple Wordpress/pre-fab template
  - \$2000-\$5000 is ""typical"" Drupal/Joomla site
  - Design can push budgets closer to \$10K
  - Budgetary red flags should fire above \$10K
- ▶ Additional costs
  - Hosting (at most, \$50/month; \$10-20 average)
  - Hosted tools (CRM, newsletters, action tools, ...)

# Cost Escalators

- ▶ Integration, integration, integration
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> party and custom applications
- ▶ Legacy databases
  - Older sites and systems
- ▶ Additional features
  - CRM (e.g. connect to DIA, Salesforce, CiviCRM)
  - Forums, chat, events, Google, ...
- ▶ Budgetary red flags should fire above \$20K

# Sweeping (Clumsy) Generalizations

- ▶ Nonprofits get developers involved too early in the process
  - Go to them with a vision (see next slide)
- ▶ Nonprofits should not pay implementors for group therapy/organizational development
  - Web projects surface process and control issues
- ▶ Good design is critical; expensive design not
  - Learn to tell the difference

# Web Process: Readers' Digest Ver.

- ▶ Don't EVEN THINK about engaging implementers before you've agreed on:
  - Your specific and concrete goals for the site
  - The audiences you're designing the site to serve
  - What value you want to deliver to each audience
  - What take-aways you want visitors to leave with
  - Content required for all the above
- ▶ Mantra to repeat during this phase:
  - "Technology Last"\*
  - \*exceptions apply

# Web Process: Readers' Digest Ver.

- ▶ Engage target users, verify assumptions
  - Does your vision match how they want to be served?
- ▶ Design in Photoshop before you code
  - It's cheaper and faster than code-otyping
- ▶ “Finalize” design before you code
  - Avoid chasing your tail
- ▶ Put site in front of target users early & often
  - Identify issues before they ossify

# Cost Control

- ▶ Don't build what they ain't asking for
  - Use traffic tools to see what folks are actually looking at and where they're coming from
  - Google Analytics rocks – if you don't care about your privacy or 4<sup>th</sup> amendment protections
- ▶ Don't write custom code if at all possible
  - Each line of code you pay to write is a stone around your organizational ankle
  - Learn to use off-the-shelf features
  - Maintenance does cost

# Technology Selection

- ▶ Know your technology stacks
  - PHP/MySQL (aka "LAMP") is usually cheapest
  - For other stacks, less implementors=higher costs
- ▶ Be curious and nosy
  - Ask orgs/allies what they're using, what they like
- ▶ Consider WordPress
  - Simple, powerful CMS with a migration path
  - Defer spendy site until you know what you want

# Implementor Selection

- ▶ Select relationships, not platforms
  - Let implementor define platform, not vice versa
- ▶ Select organizations, not individuals
  - Teams offer sustainability and accountability
- ▶ Don't be a first date
  - Experience with NPOs **and** orgs 'like you': Critical
- ▶ Insist on someone who talks your language
  - You are not obligated to indulge techno-babble

# Process Schtuff

- ▶ When in doubt, leave it out
  - Resist the urge to suggest “enhancements”
  - Moving targets always drive up costs
- ▶ Know the difference between template and content
  - Distinguish between code and data
  - Implementors should focus on templates (code)
  - Org staff should focus on content (data)
  - Don't assign content changes to implementors (That's what the CMS is for)

# Financial Schtuff

- ▶ Follow a well-defined change order process
  - “Verbal” is not such a one
  - Get time and cost estimates on new features
- ▶ Do Ask, Do Tell
  - Ask for estimates first on any “new” features
- ▶ Request granular billing and invoicing
  - Know what you're getting charged for as it's happening, not at the end

# Implementors We (Heart)

- ▶ **Radical Designs ([radicaldesigns.org](http://radicaldesigns.org))**
  - Best-of-breed campaign, event & social media
  - SF Bay Area
- ▶ **FloatLeft ([floatleft.org](http://floatleft.org))**
  - Consummate Drupal professionals
  - DC
- ▶ **PICNet ([picnet.net](http://picnet.net))**
  - Best nonprofit Joomla! sites, Nonprofit Soapbox
  - SF and DC

# Implementors We (Heart)

- ▶ Happy Snowman ([happysnowmantech.com](http://happysnowmantech.com))
  - Drupal
  - SF Bay Area
- ▶ OpenFlows ([www.openflows.org](http://www.openflows.org))
  - Drupal and CiviCRM
  - NYC
- ▶ Chicago Tech Cooperative ([chicagotech.org](http://chicagotech.org))
  - Drupal and CiviCRM
  - Chicago

# Summary

- ▶ You CAN control your web destiny, and costs
- ▶ Know what you want before implementing
- ▶ Process, process, process: have a plan
- ▶ Less is more: when in doubt, leave it out
- ▶ Avoid moving targets
- ▶ Use existing code, avoid writing new
- ▶ Talk to folks about what you're doing

# And...

- ▶ **Come to Penguin Day San Francisco!**
  - April 25th, 7<sup>th</sup> and Market Streets
  - Learn about Free/Open Source web publishing
  - Meet lots of great implementors
  - [www.penguinday.org](http://www.penguinday.org)

# That's All!

- ▶ Questions?
- ▶ Comments?

# Thank You!

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