What Should A Web Site Cost?

Allen Gunn
Executive Director, Aspiration

These materials have been prepared by Aspiration

These materials are distributed under a Creative Commons license: Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0
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
  ▪ Run events where developers *listen* to users

► 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, ...)

© Aspirktion
Cost Escalators

- Integration, integration, integration
  - 3rd 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
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 4th 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)
   ▪ Best-of-breed campaign, event & social media
   ▪ SF Bay Area

➤ FloatLeft (floatleft.org)
   ▪ Consummate Drupal professionals
   ▪ DC

➤ PICNet (picnet.net)
   ▪ Best nonprofit Joomla! sites, Nonprofit Soapbox
   ▪ SF and DC
Implementors We (Heart)

► Happy Snowman (happysnowmantech.com)
  ▪ Drupal
  ▪ SF Bay Area

► OpenFlows (www.openflows.org)
  ▪ Drupal and CiviCRM
  ▪ NYC

► Chicago Tech Cooperative (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, 7th and Market Streets
  ▪ Learn about Free/Open Source web publishing
  ▪ Meet lots of great implementors
  ▪ www.penguinday.org
That's All!

► Questions?
► Comments?

Thank You!

These materials have been prepared by Aspiration

These materials are distributed under a Creative Commons license: Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0