

Should You Really Be Using Web Templates for Your Site?

Whether you are a new or veteran web master, using a web page template as the basis for your website may, at first, seem very attractive. After all, here's an opportunity to cut your development time and have an attractive page designed by a professional. For those of us that are "graphically challenged" using a web page template offers a great looking alternative to what we might otherwise produce ourselves.

However, there are some serious pitfalls that you must beware of if you choose to use a web page template. By making yourself aware of these important points you can avoid a disastrous experience for both you and your visitors.

One of the biggest mistakes I see when using a web template is made mostly by new web masters. Many web designers pick the first good looking template that catches their eye with little consideration to what it takes to actually use the template.

Many first-time template purchasers assume that all templates are easy to edit and require little work or special tools on their part. Take the designer that purchases a template with a flash introduction and navigation controls. Without the proper software these controls may be impossible to edit, leaving the webmaster with a near worthless template.

Some templates may be more than simple HTML and therefore difficult for the first-time webmaster to edit. Be certain to choose a template that suits the tools you use to edit your web site. As in the flash example above, a web site designed heavily with Cascading Style Sheets may prove confusing and a real challenge to someone without CSS experience or a web editor that does not properly support these features.

Many templates are designed with a specific web editor in mind. The original creator may have used Dreamweaver or Front Page and may have used technology specific to that editor. Front Page extensions are a perfect example. Not only must you have Front Page to properly work with the template, but your web host must also support them.

Most web template designers use Photoshop to create their graphics. Therefore, if you want to edit the template's graphics you will need a basic understanding and own a copy of Photoshop.

In addition to the technical aspects of using web templates, there are other issues that you will want to consider before laying down your hard-earned cash for one. Templates usually cost under \$100 each. In order to sell them for such a low price each template is sold to as many customers as will purchase it. If you look at any good template reseller you will notice a price for "exclusive" rights to a template. Exclusive rights means that the template will not be sold to anyone else.

What does this mean for you? It means that if you purchase a template and use it "as is" your site will not have a unique look to it. Is this a real issue? That depends on your site, your goals, and your pocketbook. In many cases templates can serve as the basis for an entirely different looking site. By simply changing the color scheme and graphics you can give your template a look that is unique enough to suit your needs.

Using a web page template can be a tremendous shortcut in developing a new site. It can also serve as a way to present yourself professionally without spending a fortune on graphic development. However, you should take care to choose your template carefully based on your own skill level and the software you may need to alter it to your needs.

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