

Apples and Oranges (or Not All Web Site Vendors Are Equal)

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Back in high school, my algebra teacher would caution my classmates and me against "comparing apples to oranges." The lesson? It can't be done; one does not equal the other.

Throughout life, my teacher's lesson has served me (and, I suspect, several people) quite well. You don't compare things that are inherently different because it's just a waste of time. In fact, it becomes more a lesson in differences rather than similarities.

Why the reference to an age-old algebra lesson? Because it's a good lesson to keep in mind as you're shopping for a web site provider. If you're asking more than one company to provide a price quote on either developing a new web site or redesigning your existing site, you want to be sure that you are comparing prices for the same products and services...that you're comparing apples to apples.

After all, your web site is as important to your members who visit you on the Internet as your physical branch is to those members who come to your lobby. You and the rest of the staff should be as comfortable going through it as you are in your office. Your web site can cost you thousands of dollars to design and build; can you afford not to get exactly what you want?

There are many things to consider: First and foremost, you should compare potential and current vendors/business partners. There are many companies that provide web site services to credit unions who claim to be credit union system providers of technology products and services. But what does that mean? To help whittle down the list, you will want to compare vendors using the same criteria. Asking the following questions might help:

- Do they want to be a vendor or true business partner?
- Do they have a history of working within the credit union industry or do they just sell to credit unions?
- Who are their business partners?
- Are web sites their core business or just an add-on product?
- Will they take the time to understand your credit union and your members to build a site unique to your credit union's and members' needs?
- Do they offer a complete line of web site services (or will you have to go to a different vendor for content, graphic design, flash animation, and streaming capabilities)?
- Do they offer a variety of options, such as custom sites, templates, and remote access?
- Do you have to go to them for all maintenance or can you do some yourself?

Once you have your short list of vendors that you'd consider doing business with, it's time to dissect their products. This is not as easy as it sounds. There are common terms thrown around in web development, but while the same terms may be used, meanings can change from vendor to vendor. For instance:

Remote access - Simply put, it means you will have access to some or all of your web site to make your own changes, and updates, as you wish, without having to contact your web development/hosting company. The difference usually lies in how it is done. Remote access can be accomplished in a variety of ways. It can be built into your site using FrontPage with the HTML language, or it can be developed

using a template format so that you can use the English language when changing your site. This is vitally important to know before you sign on the dotted line. Having access to make your own updates won't do you any good if you don't know how to write in HTML codes. If your IT person is the only one who knows HTML language, how will anyone else ever be able to update the information? What if he/she goes on vacation or leaves the credit union? Then you have paid extra for remote access that no one knows how to access. Keep in mind, both options are fine as long as you know what you are paying for.

Hosting - A web site won't be of any use without either a company to host it for you or the capability to host it yourself. But you don't always get the same thing from every vendor. For example, some companies include a lot with their hosting package while others just give you space on their server. In some cases, your web site and the hosting agreement come as a package that can't be separated. So, if you decide you want to switch vendors, or want to bring the hosting in-house, you may not be able to take your web site with you. Vendors should offer a variety of options depending on your current and future needs.

Free web site - Many vendors advertise free web sites—and a free site you will get. But since a site without a host is useless, be sure to ask if the hosting is also free. It probably isn't. And you will usually find that the hosting will cost you the same as the development of an entire site with other vendors.

Apples and Oranges (or Not All Web Site Vendors Are Equal) (continued)

Security - This is a term that many vendors throw around because it scares a lot of people. While it is probably the most important aspect of your web site, it needn't scare you. There are different levels of security that are required for the various types of Internet services. For example, a web site needs to have a certain level of security, while a home banking & bill payment feature needs to have a higher level of security because it contains member account and transaction information. Many companies tout their level of security like a badge to scare you into thinking any company that does not have the same level is not sufficiently securing your site. In actuality, the only area of your site that may need that high level of security might be your home banking/bill payment area. Home banking providers should incorporate that level of security into their products.

The list of differences is almost endless based on the complexity of the site you are hoping to create. The most important thing to remember to do is to ask questions, so you know exactly what you are looking at in every proposal and ultimately so you know exactly what you are buying. A good way to get a list of questions and answers is to ask each vendor what you should ask the other vendors that you are considering. Each vendor will usually end up giving you a list of questions to ask that will point out their strongest points and usually their competitors' weakest areas.

And you will end up with a list that allows you to ask the same questions of everyone. You'll also have a list of strongest and weakest areas to compare, so you can determine which product offers the features and functionality that are most important to you. And in the end, you'll compare apples to apples.



Marketing Calendar

May

Promote auto loans, vacation loans, and real estate

Members' Marketplace Theme:
Cruisin' through Spring!

June

Promote vacation loans, family finances and convenient services (drive-through, web, ATM, phone teller)

Members' Marketplace Theme:
School's Out!

July

Promote vacation loans, skip a payment, debit, and ATM.

Members' Marketplace Theme:
Summer Activities (How your credit union can help you have fun in the summer!)

May Promotions

With May's pleasant change of weather, many credit union members begin planning vacations and home improvement projects. Others begin dreaming of a brand new car. So, it's only logical that many credit unions promote auto loans, vacation loans, and real estate loans (including mortgages and home equity loans) during May.



If you're using Members' Marketplace Content Management Service, you can direct your members to these channels for additional information:

- Auto Buying for articles and links about locating and financing a new or used vehicle—and a Car Loan Calculator to help them determine what vehicle they can afford.
- Travel for articles and links to help them plan, finance, and enjoy a vacation or business trip—and a Loan Calculator to help them determine what they can afford to spend on their dream vacation (with a loan from your credit union)!
- House & Home for articles and links to help them buy, sell, and improve their homes—with three calculators (Fixed Mortgage, Refinance, and Variable Rate Mortgage) to help them determine their best financing option!

If you're also using our content streaming services, these informative articles are automatically placed on the designated areas on your credit union's Web site.

To learn more about our Web development services, including content management and content streaming, call **(800) 262-6285**, and ask to speak with a CU Village Business Consultant.

Visit us at the Michigan AC&E!

CU Village.com will be exhibiting at the Michigan Credit Union League's Annual Convention & Exposition (AC&E). This fun, informative event will be held May 30 through June 1 at the Grand Rapids Convention Center in Grand Rapids, Michigan. (If you need more information about the AC&E, call **(800) 262-6285, ext. 806**.) We look forward to talking with you at our booth!

CU Village.com® Products and Services:

- Web Development
- Content Management
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