E-3 DESIGN

A free checklist from E-3 Design

Before you hire a web designer

The questions to ask any web company, what a good answer sounds like, and the red flags.

Last updated October 31, 2026
The latest version is always at e-3design.com/downloads

e-3design.com
814-399-4655

Last updated October 31, 2026. Each item links to the page on e-3design.com that explains it.

Ask every web company the same questions and get the answers in writing. Who will own the domain, site and accounts? What exactly is included, and what costs extra later? Who does the work and checks it, and how do you approve changes? Who handles updates, backups and security? And how do you leave?

The short version

- **Ownership:** the domain, site, content and accounts should be yours, in your name.
- **Scope:** get a written list of what's included and how extras are priced.
- **Process:** know who does the work, who checks it, and how you approve changes.
- **After launch:** know who handles updates, backups, security and support, and how fast they reply.
- **Leaving:** a good company makes it easy. Ask how before you sign.

Before the first call

- [ ] **Write a one-page brief** so every company quotes on the same job.
  e-3design.com/learn/planning-a-website/write-a-website-brief
- [ ] **Open three of their recent, live sites on your phone.** Are they quick, easy to use and up to date? Screenshots tell you less.
  e-3design.com/answers/choose-web-company
- [ ] **Talk to a current client** if you can. Ask how changes and problems get handled, not just how the launch went.
  e-3design.com/answers/choose-web-company
- [ ] **Meet two or three companies** and compare written quotes side by side.
  e-3design.com/answers/choose-web-company

The questions to ask

Take these into each conversation, and get the answers in writing. The checklist at the end sums them up on one page.

Who will own the domain, site and accounts?

1. **Whose name will the domain be registered in?**
   A good answer: "Yours, in a registrar account you can sign in to. We can manage it for you, but you hold it."
2. **Who owns the website itself?** If you part ways, do you get a full copy of the site, its files and its database? Is any theme, plugin, code or image licensed to you only while you're a customer?
3. **Who owns the words and photos?** What you paid for should be yours. Stock images are licensed, so ask whether the license stays with you.

4. **Who will control my Google Business Profile, analytics and Search Console?**
   A good answer: "You're the primary owner. We're added as a manager or user."

Ask these first: they're the hardest to fix later. More: e-3design.com/answers/who-owns-domain and e-3design.com/articles/own-your-digital-assets

What exactly will I get, and what costs extra?

5. **What's included?** How many pages and who writes them, rounds of design changes, search setup and redirects from your old site, forms, booking or payments, hosting, and care after launch.
6. **What costs extra later?** Small edits, new pages, plugin licenses, email, renewals and emergency fixes. A good company says how each is priced up front.
7. **How long will it take, and what slows it down?** The biggest delay is often waiting on content and decisions. Be wary of very exact promises made before they've seen your current site.

More: e-3design.com/answers/website-cost and e-3design.com/answers/redesign-timeline

Who does the work, and how do I approve it?

8. **Who will actually do the work?** The person you met, or someone else? Is any of it outsourced? Who's your contact after launch?
9. **How are changes checked and approved?** Are they built on a private copy first? Will you approve them before they go live? Can a change be undone? Who checks for mistakes?
10. **How do you use AI?** Who reviews AI-written content and code before it reaches your site, and do you approve it? Mass-produced, unchecked pages are a real risk to your search results.
11. **How fast do you reply, and how do I reach you?** A normal reply time, how to report something urgent like the site being down, and what happens outside business hours.

More: e-3design.com/answers/staging-site and e-3design.com/articles/questions-to-ask-a-web-company

How will you handle my content and search?

12. **Who writes the words, and how do you make pages useful?** Will pages answer the questions your customers actually ask? How are facts like hours, service areas and licenses checked?
13. **How will you protect what my current site already does well?** Will they list your existing pages, map old addresses to new ones and set up permanent redirects?

More: e-3design.com/articles/website-redesign-without-losing-seo

Who looks after the site after launch?

14. **Who handles updates, backups and security?** How often are updates done, and are they tested first? Where are backups kept, and has a restore been tested? What happens if the site is hacked? Who watches for it going down?
15. **Where will the site be hosted, and can I move it?** You should know where your site lives and be able to move it whenever you choose.

More: e-3design.com/articles/website-care-checklist and e-3design.com/answers/website-maintenance

What results will you promise, and what if I leave?

16. **What do you guarantee?**
    A good answer: "Not rankings." Google says there's no way to request or pay for a better local ranking, and nobody controls what search engines or AI tools show.

17. **Can I talk to a current client?** One whose business is like yours. Ask about communication, and what happened when something went wrong.
18. **How does the handover work?** Will you hand over the domain, site files, database and all logins? Is there a notice period or a fee? How long does it take? Will you help the next company get set up? This question tells you the most.

More: e-3design.com/answers/logins-you-should-have and e-3design.com/answers/move-to-new-host

The red flags

You hear	Why it matters
"We'll register the domain under our account"	You may struggle to get it back later
"We guarantee page one" or "We'll get you into ChatGPT"	Nobody controls that
"You don't need to see changes before they go live"	Mistakes reach customers first
"The site can't be moved"	You're tied to them for good
No written list of what's included	Extra costs arrive after launch
"We'll publish 100 AI pages for you"	Unchecked mass pages can harm search results
Pressure to decide today	A good company gives you time to compare

Take this into every conversation

- [ ] Domain in my business's name, in an account I control
  e-3design.com/answers/who-owns-domain
- [ ] A full copy of the site if I leave
  e-3design.com/articles/questions-to-ask-a-web-company
- [ ] I own the content and the photos I paid for
  e-3design.com/articles/questions-to-ask-a-web-company
- [ ] I'm primary owner of my Google profile and other accounts
  e-3design.com/articles/own-your-digital-assets
- [ ] Written list of what's included and what costs extra
  e-3design.com/answers/website-cost
- [ ] Realistic timeline, and what they need from me
  e-3design.com/answers/redesign-timeline
- [ ] I know who does the work and who checks it
  e-3design.com/articles/questions-to-ask-a-web-company
- [ ] Changes are tested first, and I approve before they go live
  e-3design.com/answers/staging-site
- [ ] Clear answer on how AI is used and reviewed
  e-3design.com/articles/questions-to-ask-a-web-company
- [ ] Normal reply time, and how to report an emergency
  e-3design.com/articles/questions-to-ask-a-web-company
- [ ] Updates, backups and security covered, in writing
  e-3design.com/answers/website-maintenance
- [ ] No guaranteed rankings or AI placement
  e-3design.com/articles/questions-to-ask-a-web-company
- [ ] A reference I can call
  e-3design.com/answers/choose-web-company
- [ ] A clear, fair way to leave
  e-3design.com/answers/logins-you-should-have

Sources

1. FAQs for registrants: transferring your domain name (ICANN)
2. Manage your Business Profile owners & managers (Google Business Profile Help)
3. Spam policies for Google web search (Google Search Central)
4. Tips to improve your local ranking on Google (Google Business Profile Help)
5. Do you need an SEO? (Google Search Central)

DESIGN

About E-3 Design

E-3 Design builds, hosts and looks after websites for small businesses. Larry Davis has been building on the web since 2000. Most of our clients are around Dayton, Ohio and Somerset and Johnstown, Pennsylvania, and we work with businesses anywhere.

What we do

- Websites and redesigns
- Website care: uptime monitoring, tested updates, daily backups and security alerts
- Hosting, with SSL included
- SEO and AI search, including Google Business Profiles
- Leads and follow-up

How we work

- Accounts we set up are in your business's name, with E-3 added as a user
- Domains we manage are registered to you
- Redesigns and speed fixes are tested on a staging copy first
- For redesigns and site moves, you approve the plan and the preview before launch
- We save your DNS records before changing them

Our answers to these questions

Ask us the same questions. Your domain and accounts stay in your name; if we set something up, it's under your business, with E-3 added as a user. E-3 is a small studio, and you'll know who's working on your site. People at E-3 make the changes, updates and bigger changes are tested on a staging copy first, and for a redesign you approve the plan and the preview before launch. We usually reply within one business day. We quote after a short call, in writing, and we won't promise rankings or AI placement.

Rather we did it for you?

Call E-3 on 814-399-4655, email support@e3help.me, or start with a free website check at e-3design.com/free-website-check. More free guides: e-3design.com/learn

This guide is general information, checked against the sources listed, not legal or financial advice. Services and screens change; the latest version of this document is at e-3design.com/downloads/before-you-hire-a-web-designer. © 2026 E-3 Design.