

The Trends Trap

An article on a difference between “Web Designer” and “Web Developer” in the fabulous [Website Magazine](#) today got me thinking about the many ways this industry scams the public. Wanna know how to avoid the pitfall of getting charged double for fancy words?

Every industry depends on pushing new trends and creating hypes in order to keep the money flowing and the Internet development is not exempt. A couple of the more recent ones in my field are simply relabeling of what any web designer worth your money should know from day one.

- “**Responsive**”? Yeah, way back in 1998 we considered it a cornerstone of good web design. It simply means that your website should function and be nice looking on all platforms and screen sizes, from desktop to mobile and tablet. *Any* web designer who IS a web designer should know how to do this, though it’s not easy. That’s why you pay a professional.
- “**Ajax**”? It’s simply Javascript talking to whatever the backend language you use (often PHP). Both have been around since the ’90s, and the only new element is an emphasis on dynamic interaction between the two.

WEB DESIGNER VS. WEB DEVELOPER – IS THERE A REAL DIFFERENCE?

In one sense, yes. While many programmers (this is what we used to call them, you know) are not necessarily versed in design, being a *good* web designer by necessity includes aspects of programming, SEO, UI development etc. Creating a pretty site without any knowledge of how design elements and structure effect search engine optimization, including loading speed and “freshness”, what a website can technically *do*, or the viewer interaction with the site gets you a nice web postcard and nothing else. That’s how you end up with an unusable site.

A **web designer** doesn’t have to be master of it all (though it certainly helps), but knowing what’s out there and what is possible certainly helps. I’ve been designing/developing websites for about 18 years, and while my degrees are in Graphic Design & Photography, I had to learn a whole lot of other things in order to call myself a web designer. On top of HTML & CSS (*every* designer must know those), I now have great SEO skills, and can find my way around Javascript, PHP, Mysql etc as needed, as well as knowing some marketing-focused psychology and having an understanding of user interaction. I wouldn’t consider myself a Web Designer without those skills, even though I can create a fabulous looking website layout.

I graduated as an Applied Artist, from a college of Applied Arts. The first thing

that was drummed up into our heads was the difference between Applied and Fine Art: for Fine Art, it's enough that it just sits there. Applied Art must *DO* things. *A website is a *dynamic* entity and a networked entity as opposed to a piece of paper with an ad on it. If all you know is to create a layout, you're NOT a web designer.*

About half the time I get hired to do SEO, for example, I end up having to redesign the basic website functionality and layout too, because someone hired a designer who was capable of designing a website pretty enough to get your money, but with elements that spell search engine disaster. A "real" web designer will know enough not to sabotage your findability.

TIP:

If you're shopping for a web designer, be wary of people who are using a lot of buzzwords, and always ask a prospective designer what their experience and knowledge is in both creative/artistic field AND in SEO, user interface development and website functionality development. While large companies often have these roles split, you can still find a single person versed in all of the above, even a reasonably priced one. They don't have to be a Renaissance Jack-of-all-trades, but do need to know enough to be able to predict your needs in each of these fields, and coordinate with any specialists you might hire down the line.