

Website build: 16 questions to ask before you pay

Not every question applies to every project: the right questions depend on what you are aiming for as an end result. Pick the ones that directly relate to the final product or the goal you want to achieve. Asking all of them without relevant judgement is more likely to confuse the person on the other side.

W1

Who writes the copy, and how do you decide what to write about?

WHY YOU ASK

This is the most commonly skipped part of an offer and the most common reason a finished site sits empty for months.

A GOOD ANSWER

Names a specific person, states how many pages the price covers, and explains where the topics come from: your customers, search demand, the questions you get on the phone.

A BAD ANSWER

"You will send us the texts", mentioned at the last minute. Or "we will generate the content", with nothing about how topics are chosen.

HOW TO CHECK

Ask to see one finished page with real copy from another of their projects. If they all read like the same text with words swapped, you know what you are getting.

W2

What platform will the site run on, and can I move it to another provider?

WHY YOU ASK

Some providers build on their own in-house system, which does not exist outside their company. That is not theft, but it means you can never change provider without paying for a new site.

A GOOD ANSWER

Names a platform that exists publicly, and confirms that on termination you receive the files and the database.

A BAD ANSWER

"Our own system, faster than anything on the market." It may even be true. The problem is that you are locked in.

HOW TO CHECK

Ask directly: if we stop working tomorrow, what exactly do you hand me and in what format. The answer should be specific, not "we will sort it out".

W3

Whose name will the domain and hosting be registered under?

WHY YOU ASK

The domain is the one thing you cannot recover if the relationship breaks down. Everything else can be rebuilt.

A GOOD ANSWER

The domain is in your name and your account, with technical access for the provider. Hosting may sit with them, as long as you get access on request.

A BAD ANSWER

"We will take care of everything", with no mention of whose name. Check this before payment, not after.

HOW TO CHECK

Domain registration is public. Search for "whois" and your domain: the registrant field should point to you or your company.

W4

How will we know whether the site works, and who sets up the measurement?

WHY YOU ASK

A site without measurement is a site nobody can say anything about six months later. Including you.

A GOOD ANSWER

Says they will track the specific actions you care about: form submitted, phone tapped, quote downloaded. Not just visits.

A BAD ANSWER

"We will install Google Analytics." That is installation, not measurement. The code alone does not know which action matters to you.

HOW TO CHECK

After launch, submit a form yourself from your phone. If that does not show up anywhere as an event, the measurement was not done.

W5

What does support include, and what does a change cost after launch?

WHY YOU ASK

This is where the difference between the quote and the real first-year cost hides. A €900 site with changes at €80 an hour is not a €900 site.

A GOOD ANSWER

Clearly separates maintenance from development: updates and security monthly, versus an hourly or package rate for new work, with example prices.

A BAD ANSWER

No mention of support at all. It means the first conversation about it happens when something breaks.

HOW TO CHECK

Ask for a price on three specific tasks: change a text, add a page, add a new form. Three numbers are more useful than a page of terms.

W6

How many rounds of design revisions does the price include, and what happens after them?

WHY YOU ASK

Without a written number of rounds the project either stalls at the design stage, or every further change becomes a dispute and an extra invoice.

A GOOD ANSWER

Names a number, usually two or three rounds, explains what counts as a round, and states the price of changes beyond them.

A BAD ANSWER

"We will keep working until you are happy." Sounds generous, and commits to neither a timeframe nor a scope.

HOW TO CHECK

Ask to see how this process is written into their contract before you sign. If it is not there, add it in writing.

W7

Who prepares the mandatory legal texts: terms, privacy, cookies?

WHY YOU ASK

These pages are a legal requirement, not decoration, and they are almost never included in the price without that being said.

A GOOD ANSWER

States clearly that the legal texts come from a lawyer, yours or a recommended one, and that the site will have working cookie consent if data is collected.

A BAD ANSWER

"We will add standard texts." A standard text copied from someone else's site describes someone else's practices and does not protect you.

HOW TO CHECK

Open three sites the provider built and read the privacy page. If it is the same word for word, that is what you will get.

W8

Which devices and browsers will the site be tested on before launch?

WHY YOU ASK

Most of your visitors will arrive on a phone, and testing at one desk in one browser misses exactly them.

A GOOD ANSWER

Lists specific devices and browsers, including an older phone, and says who runs the tests and when.

A BAD ANSWER

"The site is responsive, it works everywhere." The technology allows it to work everywhere. Whether it actually does is only known after a test.

HOW TO CHECK

At handover, open the site on your phone and on a phone of a different brand. Five minutes that save months.

W9

How fast will the site load, and who is responsible if it is slow?

WHY YOU ASK

A slow site loses visitors before they see anything, and speed is decided during the build, not after it.

A GOOD ANSWER

Commits to a measurable value, for example a score in Google's free test, and says what they do if it is not reached.

A BAD ANSWER

"That depends on the hosting." Partly it does. More often it depends on heavy images and unnecessary code, which are the builder's work.

HOW TO CHECK

Search for PageSpeed Insights, run the finished site's address and look at the mobile score. The test is free and takes a minute.

W10

What does the post-launch warranty cover, and how long does it last?

WHY YOU ASK

Bugs appear after handover too, and without an agreement every one of them is a new invoice.

A GOOD ANSWER

Gives a period, usually one to three months, in which discovered defects are fixed for free, and distinguishes a defect from a new request.

A BAD ANSWER

The topic is absent from the offer entirely. Then by default there is no warranty.

HOW TO CHECK

Ask directly: if the form breaks two weeks after launch, do I pay for the fix. The answer should be one sentence.

W11

Who will actually do the work: you or subcontractors?

WHY YOU ASK

There is nothing wrong with subcontractors, but the person in the meeting and the person writing the code are often different people with different quality.

A GOOD ANSWER

Answers honestly who does what and who your contact is when there is a problem.

A BAD ANSWER

Evades or takes offence at the question. An honest working model has nothing to hide.

HOW TO CHECK

Ask to meet, even online, the person who will do the work. A refusal is information.

W12

What are all the first-year costs beyond the build itself?

WHY YOU ASK

Hosting, domain, theme and plugin licences, email service: the small amounts add up and nobody has stated them in one place.

A GOOD ANSWER

Gives a list of the yearly costs in numbers, and says which are paid to them and which directly to the vendors.

A BAD ANSWER

"Just the build, the rest is minor." The minor part is sometimes a few hundred euro a year, forever.

HOW TO CHECK

Ask for a table with every item and its cost in year one and year two. Compare the two columns.

W13

Whose are the photos and illustrations, and are the rights cleared?

WHY YOU ASK

An image taken from the internet without a licence can bring a claim years later, and it arrives at your door, not the builder's.

A GOOD ANSWER

Says where the images come from and under what licence, and that the list of sources stays with you.

A BAD ANSWER

"We will find pictures online." That exact sentence precedes most copyright letters from lawyers.

HOW TO CHECK

Ask for a list of the images used, with source and licence, at handover. Keep it.

W14

Will I see a working version during the build?

WHY YOU ASK

A project shown only at the end gets reworked at the end, when changes are most expensive.

A GOOD ANSWER

Gives you the address of a staging version and interim points where you approve what is done.

A BAD ANSWER

"We want to surprise you with the finished result." Surprises in this service are rarely pleasant.

HOW TO CHECK

Agree at the start on the date you will see the first working page, and write it down.

W15

What do you need from me and by when, so the project does not stall?

WHY YOU ASK

A large share of late projects are waiting on the client: texts, photos, access, approvals, without anyone having said so in time.

A GOOD ANSWER

Gives you a list of your tasks with deadlines before the start, and says what happens to the end date if you are late.

A BAD ANSWER

Asks nothing of you. Later everything will turn out to be needed at once, urgently.

HOW TO CHECK

Ask for the list in writing. If it does not exist, the delay will later be declared your fault.

W16

If we are redesigning an existing site, what happens to the old page addresses?

WHY YOU ASK

Even an ordinary site accumulates search presence over the years, and a new face with changed addresses erases it overnight.

A GOOD ANSWER

Asks what pages exist now, which of them get visits, and plans a redirect from every old address to its new equivalent.

A BAD ANSWER

"The new site is better, the old one does not matter." It matters: it is the reason anyone finds you today.

HOW TO CHECK

Before launch, save the addresses of your five most visited pages. After launch, open them one by one.

