

HOW TO FIND THE RIGHT FINANCIAL ADVISOR WEBSITE DESIGN COMPANY



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Financial advisor websites come in one of four flavors of readiness:

1. You have a perfectly fine financial advisor website – it looks good, attracts prospects and provides leads (in which case you need not read any further)
2. Your website is “okay” but something isn’t right as it isn’t creating any leads
3. Your website needs a full makeover – it looks “old” and simply isn’t engaging
4. You either don’t have a website or you know it’s time to start over with a new one

Unless you are in #1 above, you’re in good company. Many advisors and RIAs aren’t happy with the website design company they’ve selected or been forced to use.

Let’s get to the purpose of this article then: to give you tools and processes to help you find the right financial advisor website design company.

First, you need to understand the various Types of Website Design Talent:

- Website Designers help determine the layout, navigation, as well as the functional requirements (graphics, text, content, offers) of your website.
- Website Developers help implement the website designers plans for your website – coding, hosting, domain name configuration, internet security and plugin/extension/component management.
- Graphic Designers create the graphic elements needed for your website. Designers can also be helpful packaging your expert content for digital marketing purposes. It's best to give them specific graphic requirements/needs versus carte blanche design.
 - Digital Marketers help you attract visitors to your site and then capture their interest. There are subsets to this talent/role:
 - Online Marketers can have expertise in Search Engine Marketing, Search Engine Optimization, Social Media and Social Media to name a few popular attraction mechanisms.
 - Content Marketers focus on developing and promoting your expertise via relevant content. Their goal/role is to build your credibility and ability to intrigue and influence specific demographic or psychographic prospects..
 - Copy Writers and/or Branding Experts help you articulate your business. They play a critical role in helping you define your uniqueness, your services and in a way that resonates with your ideal audience on their terms. Often times, copywriters are also the best people to help you discover and define your unique story.

Second, you need to know

What Questions to Ask & What to Look For:

1. Does the company you are interviewing ask a lot of questions to understand your business and your website goals and expectations?
2. Review their website portfolio and make sure their websites are live, work well and have a style that reflects your professionalism.
3. Look for relevant experience. That is, they've worked with other financial advisors or RIAs and professional services companies. A word of caution: even a great retail website design company is unlikely to understand the RIA marketing business and the industry specific needs of your website. Ask if they've developed financial advisor websites or RIA websites. What did they learn working with these firms?
4. Make sure they understand the compliance implications that come with building an RIA website.
5. Verify what skills they have – refer to Types of Website Design Talent above. The basic questions here are: do they do the coding, layout and/or graphic design? If they don't do everything do they have alliances with competent people and do they provide a comprehensive proposal for all involved parties?
6. What website platform do they use and why? Should be one of
 - a. Wordpress – good but easy for rookies to fake
 - b. Joomla/Drupal – more flexible – more likely seasoned developer.
 - c. Proprietary – be very careful with these guys – they can own your site and your “forever” relationship.
 - d. Template Advisor Website Providers – typically have limited design and marketing options but have many other advisor specific features the above ones don't have – it's worth exploring the value of the top template advisor website provider
7. Do they have a clear and documented website development process for your RIA website? There should be clear accountabilities and timelines for your advisor website design project.
8. What coding approach do they use to satisfy both mobile and desktop readiness? Answer should be, 1) responsive, or 2), responsive/adaptive. If they answer a desktop and mobile site, 2, that may be a problem if you have a small to medium website build at hand.
9. Do they charge by the hour or by the project? Go with project only.
10. Ask how changes and improvements will be made to the site? Do they expect you to make the changes, or do they insist on them being the only ones who can do so, or will they train your staff to handle the small changes while they're available for the more complicated ones. Ask how much they charge for changes.

Second, you need to know

What Questions to Ask & What to Look For:

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11. How long have they been in this exact business? Answer should be minimum five years. If they just left a career for freelance, they might not be around to service/guarantee your website for long. Everyone wants a website design business because Wordpress makes everyone think they can be website designers and developers. (My 13 year can design websites but...)
12. How often do they go outside of budget when building RIA websites? More than 20% of the time should raise flag. Designers aren't responsible for scope creep, you are but they should make sure they minimize the possibility of scope creep. Scope creep is a major issue with advisor website designs.
13. Ask for three references and actually call them. Ask if they delivered what they expected, on time, were easy to work with, followed the process and if they were there to support.
14. Do they host the websites internally or use a professional website hosting service? DO NOT use internal hosting. Do your due diligence on their webhost if you're concerned it's a small server company.
15. Get a written agreement on who owns your website, the artwork, code, domain name, etc? The answer must be, "you own everything" and you'll have full ownership, control and accessibility.
16. Use your own due diligence attributes such as: are they friendly, timely, inquisitive, dedicated, easy to speak to, focused on the task at hand, salesy or consultative.
17. Can they meet your deadlines?
18. If the main contact is sick or too busy, whom can you contact to get answers or move the project forward?
19. Do they have a good balance of marketing, design and website technology? The process becomes more difficult when more people are involved and it's becomes increasingly difficult for you, the RIA, to find who's accountable for what. With websites, it's easy to say, "It was the _____."
20. Did they ever ask if there are any business obstacles you'd like to solve with your website? I've rarely heard from RIA website design companies but the question can provide powerful insights.

Third, here are some thoughts on How to Find/Source RIA Website Designers:

The Basics

Let's touch on a few basics first.

- **Know or Find?**

It's almost always a safer bet to work with someone who's worked for someone you respect and trust. The trouble here is that if you could have found someone better, this is a limiting process, although a safe and efficient one to be sure. It's often a question of personal preference whether you source experts from scratch or rely in trusted friends or advisors. More on "how to find talent" below.

- **Onshore or Offshore?**

Either onshore or offshore can provide satisfying experiences or horror stories. Offshore requires a more intense commitment to project management and detailed instructions. If you have that capacity/strength, it's a good option. If you don't have time or the inclination to spoon-feed what you need, a safer option is to stay onshore.

- **Local or Remote?**

Remote or local are likely no different when it comes to sourcing an advisor website design company except that remote significantly increases the talent pool. Low-overhead providers may be preferred simply because there is little need this day and age with the technical capabilities of website designers to require a loft office in a posh area of their suburban town. These days, remote is local. But that doesn't hold quite true for onshore versus offshore to be clear. There's way more at play there to make it that simple of a decision.

- **All-Inclusive or Website General Contractor (WGC)?**

There's some give and take on this one. All-Inclusive is the most efficient but also the hardest to find. It's most difficult to find website designers that are highly competent in all areas. I'd focus on getting a website design company that can deliver the following roles: website design, development, graphic design and copy writing. The other roles are easy to find outside of this core skillset. On the other hand, using a WGC can be great if you don't have time but want to knock it out of the park. This is the one of the few cases where it may be worth using a WGC. The other case is when you know or have met someone who really gets the entire RIA marketing needs and process and who you'd like to manage the design and ongoing implementation process for you. A good marketer with great project management and implementation skills is a really good formula for success. Much more likely than with a great marketer that has poor project management and implementation skills.

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- **Industry Experience or Not?**

Industry experience is almost always a MUST HAVE attribute for your website design company. Although it is possible to find good financial advisor websites designed by generalist marketing agencies. One of two things likely occur to make that less practical, 1) it probably cost \$25,000+ just for the website, and 2) the RIA will need to be significantly involved in the website design process and also be really passionate about the marketing process. Try finding a marketing firm that specializes in RIA marketing and more specifically RIA website design. If you're not blown away with any of these candidates, search for a firm that has experience with professional services marketing.

- **Freelancers or Agency?**

Until recently, Advisors often discussed the prospect of hiring low-cost designers for their marketing. With the introduction of Wordpress and the DIY marketing movement, "cheap marketing" was all the rage. That trend has faded. Most of this can be attributed to how much more work, change and stress has been placed on this industry. Additionally, advisors are weary of freelancer's ability to deliver ongoing support. It can still be a worthwhile risk to if you can find a talented freelancer to get your marketing designed and implemented. Hiring an agency however is not in most firms' budgets. Many advisors have chosen to instead reach out to "do-it-for-me" mass service providers – most notably advisor template website providers or turnkey marketing programs. The quality of financial marketing has consequently taken a step back and there is less authentic, fresh marketing as a result. This is a huge opportunity for content and brand driven RIAs.

Hiring an agency with a financial marketing focus and access to diverse and deep talent still seems the surest bet for any RIA wanting to pursue great marketing that separates their RIA from other RIAs and financial companies. The reality for most RIAs is, "compete in a red sea" or look for "blue ocean opportunities" – as per the Blue Ocean Strategy book.

On a final note, How to Find Talent:

1. Ask other advisors.
2. Ask your broker-dealer, custodian, coach or mentor.
3. Ask financial planning associations.
4. Search online: best RIA website designs, or RIA website design company.
5. Leverage online freelancer and project matching tools such as eLance, Freelancer, Upwork, Guru, or Freelancify. Stay away from Fiverr.
6. Research great website design user interfaces at Dribbble, Sortfolio or Folyo.
7. Leverage template advisor website design platforms such as: Advisor Websites, Paladin Digital Marketing, FMG Suites, AltaStreet, MIAGD, and Advisor Launchpad.