Q&A with Webillism founder Derek Steyn on creating beautiful useful websites

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Webillism founder Derek Steyn shares insight into how the web design industry has evolved, what it takes to create stand-out designs and how Covid-19 has accelerated the growth of the online space.

1. Let's start at the beginning, how was Webillism founded, and what is your current role within the company?

I started out as a freelance web designer and worked as Derek Steyn Web Design since 1998. With a background in fine art, programming, advertising, and consulting that spans over 22 years I officially founded and started Webillism in 2018.

2. What's changed since the company was formed? How has the company grown?

Webillism's purpose is to build beautiful functional websites. The company is growing in the international and local markets with roughly 80% of the business focussed on e-commerce from local and international SME companies. In a time that content management systems became increasingly popular, I saw an opportunity to provide custom-designed websites.

I changed the ways of a typical web-design company and based my business on the core fundamentals of clear deliverables, and long-term client relationships. I found that the only way you can really deliver a good service is to specialise in a few key areas - in this case being beautiful websites. This goes hand-in-hand with client education, consulting, general advice and good service.

Globally speaking the web design industry is made up of design freelancers, developer freelancers, advertising agencies,

web design firms and a few agents that outsource projects between clients and one of the above-mentioned resources. These companies all have a lot of staff and subsequently have to offer a lot of services to cover a ton of expenses.

My model comprises fewer services which in turn allows me to keep a small team, offer quick turnaround time and give clients what they need. Additionally, I have created an environment to supply white-label services to freelances, developers, agencies and agents all around the world. This bridges numerous gaps and provides peace-of-mind services for designers who do not have all the technical abilities, developers that don't always know how to design, and agencies that needs specific custom projects with no in-house resources.

3. Tell us a bit about your previous work experience and positions you've held?

Previous positions as a web designer/developer ranged between designing high-volume small business websites, creating web-based platforms and support channels. As a digital marketing specialist my roles included email marketing and deliverability specialist, acquisition specialist and head of marketing at some of the most popular companies in the industry.

4. What is one area that many businesses can improve on when it comes to web design?

Planning and content, and the overall understanding of the what a website is supposed to be. Most companies understand that they need a website without realising the true function and immense impact of a website, be it a business brochure website, a shop or a simple campaign landing page. Businesses seem to be confused about the goal and easily completely miss the point. They either think/overdo and over pay, or simply try to save a few rand and do more harm to their brand than not having a website. It's a fine line. Businesses or individuals that lose track of their goal or what the main function of their website/shop/campaign actually should offer have the hardest time with their websites because they don't know where to start. This is where I am able to assess their BIG IDEA and translate it into a website idea.

5. What are some of your favourite projects you've worked on?

One of my all-time favourites must be Fixed Mobile. What a great team. From our first meeting they knew exactly what they wanted. They knew what they wanted to say to their clients and trusted us to give them what they asked for.

6. Where would you say you get the best inspiration from to create stand-out web designs?

Because I work with so many industries in so many countries around the world, I would say my main inspiration is the project content. Again, this is the reason why content is so crucial. I have a different approach to other companies in the sense that I take a step back and look at the overall goal. I take into account the idea of the client, the current state of the brand, the available content and the overall function of the website/shop/campaign page. I plan and custom-create a website/shop/campaign page that clearly covers the goals and supports future growth. No matter how competitive the industry there is always a way to stand out. Cookie-cutter recipes simply do not work. Inspiration comes from the project itself.

7. Do you offer any training services for those who are interested in creating/maintaining their own websites?

We do offer training for staff, especially on how to use, manage and maintain a website. These training sessions are online these days and mostly for content management systems.

8. How has the Covid-19 pandemic impacted your business?

Since March 2020 the requests for brick-and-mortar shops going online has increased. There is also an influx of requests for online teaching, restaurant online ordering solutions, and general e-commerce solutions. With this, a lot of consultations

and education that goes with it. So many customers just do not have any idea what a website is, how it works, how to sell or even market their businesses online.

On the other hand, the requests for SEO services also increased. A lot of companies that have been online for some time realise the value of a good online presence. I've also seen a massive influx of startup companies and sole traders getting into the online game. Most of these startups don't really have budgets to build a website so I'm accommodating new small businesses with simpler solutions. This gives them a very professional online presence that they can build on as they grow. I try to help these smaller companies as much as I can by giving training on how to manage their own website and how to think about a website and what it means for their business not only as a tool but as an official "first thing people see" "brand face".

9. What are your future goals?

To always grow with the available web design and development solutions, to keep building good long-term relationships with new and old clients and become a household name for good looking, practical website solutions for any industry and any company anywhere in the world.

10. What advice do you have for individuals that would like to pursue a career in web design?

Keep at it, and think about what you want to offer. Build a good reputation. Go back to good clear business practises. Offer value to clients and they will come back or refer you to others. Steer clear from too many offers. Do what you absolutely love. There are clients whether you feel you want to focus on a niche or if you want to focus on specialised or general services. Do the best you can for yourself and you will have fun. The more fun you have the less your work will feel like work and you will grow without restriction. Set yourself up for success and it will be a pleasure.

For more information, head to https://webillism.com.

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Webillism

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