



Doing the web stuff right since 2000

How to choose a web agency

Including the questions they hope you will not ask

By Shaun Carvill, MD at Clickingmad Ltd • 2026 edition



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We are a web agency, so you can be forgiven for reading this guide with one eyebrow raised. Read it anyway. Everything below applies to us as much as to anyone you might hire instead of us, and we would rather you chose well than chose us badly.

THE CLICKINGMAD TEST

If an agency cannot explain things clearly before you are a client, imagine the explanations when something goes wrong.

Ask these questions of every agency on your shortlist

- **Who will actually do the work?** Ask to meet them, not the salesperson. If the people in the pitch will never touch your project, that tells you how the relationship will run.
- **Who owns the site when it is finished?** The only acceptable answer is you: code, content, domain, hosting, analytics, all of it. Anything else is a lock-in dressed up as a service.
- **What happens if we leave?** A confident agency describes a clean handover. A defensive answer here is the single most reliable red flag in the industry.
- **Can we speak to a client you have worked with for more than three years?** Anyone can produce a happy client from last month. Longevity is much harder to fake.
- **What is the fixed price, and what makes it move?** You are listening for a straight number and a plain description of how scope changes are handled.
- **What will you need from us, and by when?** A good agency has a clear answer, because client-side delays sink more projects than agency-side ones.
- **How will we know it is working?** The answer should involve enquiries, rankings and revenue, not visits and dwell time.

The red flags

A guaranteed first-page Google ranking is a guarantee nobody can honestly make. A price that is dramatically below every other quote means something has been left out, and you will meet it later. A portfolio with no live links suggests sites that no longer exist or clients that would not want to be named. Pressure to sign a long tie-in before any work has been done tells you how confident they are of keeping you on merit. And an agency whose own website is slow, dated or inaccessible is showing you its actual standards, whatever the proposal says. And turn every proposal into the same checklist before comparing totals, because the cheapest quote is often simply the one with the shortest list of responsibilities.

What a good decision looks like

Speak to three agencies. Ask all of them the same questions. Weight the answers about ownership, longevity and fixed pricing above the answers about design awards. Then pick the one whose explanations you understood, because the agency that explains things clearly before you are a client is the one that will explain things clearly when something goes wrong.

Happy to be one of the three

Book a fifteen-minute call and ask us the lot.

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