

## How Much is a Website?

[Web Smart Newsletter](#) originally published May 2003 - Updated July 2006. By Eric Holter.

### How Much is a Website?

A website costs as much as a car. The range of options and costs associated with buying a car are actually a very good comparison to the cost of a website. It's possible to buy a decent used car for under \$5,000 that should be perfectly adequate to get you where you need to go. Similarly, buying a new car can run the gamut from a bare bones Kia Rio for under \$10,000 to a high end Porsche 911 for \$80,000 plus. Beyond the desired car's look and style, there are many other considerations that will affect its cost like how many people fit in, how fast it goes, what options are included, etc. This month's newsletter is intended to provide a rough framework of how Newfangled approaches [project pricing](#). It looks at the major factors that we consider when creating a budget.

"How much is a typical website?" A quick answer to that question is "a website costs as much as a car" (see the side bar - "How much does a website cost"). The following items can all have influence on a project's budget, just to name a few: Visual design (what are the look and feel requirements?)

Site size (how many pages will the site contain?)

Project scope (what type of information will the site pages contain?)

Special functionality (are there any unusual services that the site will provide?)

Site traffic volume (how many visitors is the site expected to handle?)

Custom business logic (will there be the need for programming special new features specifically for this project?)

Development timetable (what is the site's expected launch date?)

Project team (will the client guide the project by a committee or a single point of contact?)

Integration (will the site need to connect to any other pieces of software?) We have five pricing ranges that our projects fall within. We're happy to quote these ranges to help potential clients determine the right budget ballpark for the work they are requesting. Additionally, we're usually able to propose alternative solutions when a discrepancy between needs and budget create a budget gap. Less complex alternatives or phased projects can often bring needs and budgets together.

### Website Budget Ranges

#### Range #1: Under \$5,000 - See [SelectEdit](#)

#### Range #2: \$5,000 - \$10,000

Website conversions: An existing HTML website can be converted to use the NewfangledCMS to gain control over all site content or utilize certain [website applications](#). This is like replacing the engine of an existing vehicle. The site would still look the same, but the owner can get a lot more mileage out of it.

#### Range #2: \$10,000 to \$30,000

Our standard project range represents a starting point for most web projects. Projects in this range include Newfangled visual design work. If we receive layouts from a partner agency or design firm the project may fall in the lower end of the range. Designs that are adapted from existing print materials

#### Websites cost as much as a car

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Rio for just under \$10,000 to a high end Porsche 911 for \$80,000 plus. The same range holds true for websites.

### **Under \$5,000 - used cars**

(See [SelectEdit](#).)

### **\$5,000 - \$10,000 - replace the engine**

From time to time Newfangled will convert an existing site to the NewfangledCMS enabling a client to get control of their site's content without having to shell out for a newly designed site. This is akin to replacing the engine of an older car.

### **\$10,000 - \$30,000 - brand new car**

Our starting project range will get you into a new site, where you can pick your design, options, and accessories - a respectable, dependable, clean, worry free site that gets good mileage.

### **\$30,000 - \$50,000 - loaded vehicle**

Sometimes you want your site to do more than get you where you need to go. Sometimes you want style, added comfort, and cool features. An auto starter is real nice for those cold winter mornings, and leather seats can add a touch of comfort and style. Perhaps performance is more important and it's worth paying more for the turbo charged engine and sports suspension. Translating the metaphor the web, a site that needs brand new visual design, flash animation or presentations, e-commerce, significant custom business logic (see side bar "custom business logic"), or advanced NewfangledCMS applications might fall into this range.

### **\$50,000+ - luxury performance cars**

The sky's the limit. There are plenty of options out there for you. Sometimes when style counts it's worth paying for a Bentley or Rolls-Royce. Perhaps style isn't worth paying for, but customization is. Some people want a tweaked out sound system, or maybe convert their engine to run on vegetable oil! websites enter this range when they are either enormous in terms of the number of pages, extremely complex in terms of custom business logic, or when they require custom applications to be built (see the rest of the newsletter for further definitions of these terms).

(brochures, catalogs, etc) may also fall to the low to middle of the range.

Sites in this range might contain some NewfangledCMS applications like bulletin boards, calendars, or password-protected extranets. In this range, sites may also contain some custom business logic (see sidebar) but would probably not contain complex website application implementations (such as e-commerce, individual account manager systems and the like). Due to our database driven approach to web development a site's page count has a minimal effect on budget. The complexity of a site's pages has a greater impact on the budget than merely the overall page count. Our development approach of including the [NewfangledCMS](#) allows us to retool existing website applications which address significant needs yet still fall within the standard budget range.

Limiting factors in this range tend to be advanced visual design requirements, vast site size, or the need for advanced custom business logic or multiple or customized applications.

## Range #2: \$30,000 to \$50,000

The second range opens up the project scope significantly. With a budget in this range we can address much larger sites, with greater page complexity. We can also incorporate complex component implementations (multi-faceted extranets, intranets, or e-commerce sites) and some significant amounts of custom business logic (see sidebar). Projects only push beyond this range when requirements include a number of the following items: advanced visual design which might include branding or identity work, complex custom business logic, multiple complex website application implementations, or a substantial page count that have many complex structures and relationships.

## Range #3: \$50,000 +

Projects in this range typically contain most of the elements described in the previous ranges along with some complex custom business logic (see sidebar). Projects in this range may contain "custom applications" that addresses unique requirements. For instance, [Merlyn's Pen](#) contains an application for managing specialized online coupons. Such customization is not likely to be reused the same way on other websites. Our core capabilities can be expanded to meet just about any need using custom application development. An example of a project in this range would be a large corporate intranet with individual employee logins and personalized information.

A little later in the newsletter we'll go into some more detail about the finer distinctions of NewfangledCMS applications and custom applications, but these three ranges provide a basic framework for determining a project's cost.

## Website Budget Examples

### Two Illustrations

In web development there are always many ways to solve any given problem. Usually solutions can range from the very simple to the extremely complex. Often a subtle change in requirements can result in an enormous difference in project scope and price. Given the large amount of functionality already built into the [NewfangledCMS](#) and its various applications, many highly customized requirements can be adjusted to fit within existing functionality. Subtle changes can spell the difference between a simple implementation of an existing component and the need to create a new and highly customized application. For this reason, when it comes to areas of custom business logic and custom functionality or applications, it is important to probe a client's needs in order to carefully understand the underlying goals and desires behind those "requirements." Often, when a client requests an extremely complex and un-maintainable piece of functionality, we can suggest something much more appropriate for their needs that will be less expensive, easier to administer, and more maintainable. But, we need to understand the client's reasons for their initial request so that we can educate them on their options.

As mentioned above, there is sometimes only a slight distinction between a simple site element and a complex piece of custom business logic or a custom application. It might be helpful for you to see some examples of similar needs that have resulted in a wide variety of complexity levels.

The FACSS website ([www.facss.org](http://www.facss.org)) provides a good example of the distinctions between these levels of complexity. FACSS hosts a yearly science conference and initially approached us to build for them a site that would help in the collection of information regarding the roughly 1000 papers and abstracts that make up the yearly event. Initially, FACSS requested that we create a system that would allow them to collect, organize, and publish the paper abstracts online. We advised them that the downside of such a system would be that it would be complex to build and expensive to maintain. It required a whole host of custom tools to be built that would allow administrators to receive papers, sort through them in large groupings, organize them into logical symposia, assign presentation times and locations, and then publish the finished program to the public as website content. The FACSS staff soon discovered that whenever they wanted to change the way that they organized the papers, it required modification to the highly custom website code. Seemingly small modifications required a large amount of work and testing, because of how dependent each piece of the system was on all the other pieces. Eventually FACSS decided to convert the system to a structure that still collects paper information online and, from a user's perspective, functions exactly like the old system. However, FACSS administrators now download all of the paper content and organize it offline, using appropriate tools like Excel to sift through the data. The organized data is then uploaded back into the site in bulk to be made available to the public as an online conference program. This seemingly small change of moving the paper sorting process offline drastically reduced the complexity of the site and custom business logic it contains. The change not only focused the site to harness the strengths of the web while relying on more appropriate tools for conference management, but it also removed the need for a huge custom application, allowing for the site to function more simply with a limited amount of custom business logic.

Usually the differences between sites that rely on large amounts of custom business logic and simple sites are imperceptible to users. For instance, the [New England Gas Company](#) site, a large and impressive site, is actually a very simple site from a structural perspective. Although it contains many pages, all of the pages are very simple in their structure and use almost no custom business logic with very few exceptions. By contrast, if you visit the [LiteControl website](#), almost every page includes some custom elements. Most pages will display additional information if you are logged in as a sales rep or customer, so each page needs to be constantly checking a particular visitor's level of access before determining what content to display.

In order to appropriately identify custom business logic, it is important to be sensitive to instances when functionality extends beyond the basic display of content. To get a grasp of what NewfangledCMS applications are readily available check out the [applications section](#) of our website. Existing applications can greatly reduce or even eliminate the need for custom business logic or custom applications. For instance, if a client were to approach us to build a tool for them to create ad hoc online surveys from scratch, it might require hundreds of hours of planning and development time. However, since we have already built a powerful [online survey manager](#), the time involved in implementing that component for a particular client would be minimal. Wherever possible, to maximize each client's budget, we steer clients to existing applications and away from custom business logic or custom applications.

## Custom Website Programming Pricing

### NewfangledCMS applications vs. Custom Applications

Our philosophy has always been to develop the [NewfangledCMS](#) in such a way that its code can be reused across many sites. As a result, every site that we create gives us the opportunity to further develop the NewfangledCMS functionality and applications. When we are developing a site that requires a new feature or piece of custom programming, we will always stop to consider the new feature's potential usefulness to other clients. If we determine that the feature has the potential for broad application, we will typically invest a significant amount of our own research and development time into the project. Our R&D allows us to create new applications that will address the needs not only of that particular client, but of other future clients as well. For example, let's say that a client comes to us and asks us to create a mechanism that will allow them to upload financial data from an excel file to the NewfangledCMS so that they can make it available to partners on their website. We would have two options. We could build a customized tool specifically for that client to upload the data file. Alternately, we could invest some of our own time to build a more generic data upload mechanism that could then be used to upload other types of excel data for a variety of website applications. This has proven to be a very efficient method of development. The approach benefits our clients by expanding the available base of NewfangledCMS functionality and by limiting the extent to which they are responsible for the high costs of custom programming. In short, our new and existing clients benefit from work that we have done for past clients. We have built many useful applications that are available to all of our NewfangledCMS clients. Once built, these applications can be installed into a website for a fraction of the cost of creating the functionality from scratch.

But sometimes a customer's needs are highly specialized and would require the creation of an entirely new NewfangledCMS application. In these cases it is still necessary for us to build a custom application to meet those needs. We always educate the client about the higher maintenance costs for custom code. Custom code will always have more bugs, since it hasn't been tested over time and in a variety of sites. Additionally, when changes need to be made to custom software, they are always more expensive because of the complex and individually customized nature of the code. For this reason, wherever possible, we try to steer clients away from highly customized code and attempt to modify their requirements to fit within something an existing NewfangledCMS application or modified NewfangledCMS application would solve.

### Budgeting Questionnaire

When pricing a project, the following questions can help to hone in on the scope of a project and its appropriate budget range.

What are the visual design requirements for the project? Who will be providing the design? Are there existing corporate design standards and logo?

Roughly how large is the site in terms of page count and how complex are the pages?

Will the site use any NewfangledCMS applications?

Does the site require complex component functionality, such as password protection (extranets and intranets) or e-commerce?

Does the site have any unusual needs that extend beyond the basic display of content and existing component functionality?

Will the site need to integrate with any other existing systems?

## Budgeting for Website Maintenance

### Ongoing Maintenance Costs

Another pricing related concern for clients is typically the long term cost of ownership of a website. Through the [NewfangledCMS](#), most typical maintenance items can be addressed directly by clients without ongoing expense. Changing text, uploading documents and images, creating new sub pages (such as product pages, press releases, etc.) can all be done through the NewfangledCMS. As a result, any ongoing financial investment that a client makes in their website will result in tangible site improvements, making it a better and more effective business and communication tool.

While the NewfangledCMS does allow clients to maintain virtually all of their site content, there are other kinds of changes that require Newfangled's ongoing help. For example, adding a new main category to a navigation system might require us to make adjustments to site templates. Adding additional NewfangledCMS applications or making database structure changes will also require our help.

## Budgeting for Website Design and Programming

### Custom Business Logic

Custom business logic is a term that we define in our proposals with the following text:

"Not all web pages are created equal. Some pages simply display content like text, pictures, captions, and links. Other pages need to "make decisions" about what information to display and how to display it. For example, a product page might simply display the content associated to a particular product, this would not require any custom business logic. However, a similar page might need to "decide" what price to display based on the user, or provide links to PDF tech sheets only if there are any associated to that product. When pages need to "make decisions" we need to program in custom business logic. We estimate custom business logic on case-by-case basis."

Depending on the particular needs of a website, custom business logic can add a tremendous amount of complexity and cost to a web project. For instance, consider a typical website page that contains some text, an image, and a few documents. A standard page will display the same content to anyone that visits the page. Now contrast that to the typical extranet or intranet page where, depending on what user is accessing the page and their level of authorization, the page will display completely different (personalized) content. If a sales representative visits the page, they might see vastly different information than a CEO visiting the exact same page. Custom business logic is required in these instances to enable a web page to "make decisions" about what information to display to a particular user. The needs and uses for custom business logic are limitless. When multiplied out over an entire site, custom business logic can easily turn a very small site into a very large project. For this reason, a raw site page count will typically have less impact on a project budget than the complexity of the site's pages. We have built some very large sites for relatively small budgets, because their pages were all relatively simple in their structure. By contrast, we have built some relatively small sites that have required large budgets to account for the complexity of all the relationships between content and users on the site. The degree of custom business logic is always an individual line item that affects the final cost.