
Doreen Jeffers

Doreen Jeffers is a creative and successful custom web site designer targeting small businesses in the Denver area. Her innovative and functional web sites consistently meet and exceed her customer's expectations. Her attention to detail and focus on the flavor and individuality of her clientele has led to an exceptional portfolio of work to date.

"I think it is important to create an emotional connection between the web site visitor and the business. This even applies to the more objective businesses, such as technology, courier, and mortgage services. How many television commercials do you know that don't seek to engage the viewer emotionally?"

--Doreen Jeffers

Rhyiming Planet asks ...

iMarks Web Solutions stated purpose is to provide, high quality, affordable, custom web sites for small businesses. Tell us how you do this.

DJ: The first and most important step is to get to know the client business, and its target market. iMarks web sites are most effective when we can identify with the target audience. We ask questions like "Why would I want this product or service? What does the web site have to tell me in order to make the product or service impossible to resist?"

With small businesses, we usually work with the business owner and founder. There is often a very personal relationship between the person who owns the business and the business itself. So, we also get to know the person, mostly in terms of their color and style preferences, and in terms of principles and philosophies that are important to them. These always come through in the web site. This relationship greatly reduces the overhead associated with developing the web site.

The next step is to collect content for the web site. In addition to the initial interview with the client, we collect business cards, letterhead, brochures, photos, anything we can get our hands on. We also take digital photos.

Then we recommend a site map and draw up the contract.

Every site is custom designed. We do not use templates. We use a graphics program such as Photoshop to lay out the home page design with no restrictions. If the client has a professionally designed logo, we try to incorporate the style of the logo into the site as much as possible to reinforce their branding.

Upon approval of the home page, we design and program the rest of the site. Because we take the time up front to get to know the client, there are rarely extensive time-consuming revisions.

Do you focus on any particular segment of small businesses? If so, which ones and why?

DJ: iMarks enjoys the challenge of creating diverse sites. However, I do think it is important to be able to identify with the target market. Fortunately, we have years of experience in the corporate world and in the consumer world, which makes us a potential customer of many types of products and services. We have even been asked to do sites for products that we have no experience in, and those actually turned out quite well, due to the extra effort invested.

Because of our emphasis on the visual, we are partial to sites that use images heavily. I think it is important to create an emotional connection between the web site visitor and the business. This even applies to the more objective businesses, such as technology, courier, and mortgage services. How many television commercials do you know that don't seek to engage the viewer emotionally?

That being said, you will find a lot of sites in our portfolio for art and design, real estate, and home improvement. You'll also find technology sites because we have more than 20 years of experience in information technology. And you'll find sites for mortgage brokers and coaches simply because there are a lot of mortgage brokers and coaches out there who want a high quality web presence at an affordable rate.

What specific services does iMarks provide to its clientele?

DJ: Our focus is on web site development for small businesses. Usually, a small business will start out with a brochure site, perhaps with a contact form that is emailed to the business.

When they are ready to grow their site, iMarks can add custom programming and light database features. With a database, artists can put their complete works on their web site with very little expense. Caterers can input their menus. We often build "site updaters" that allow clients to update the text on the site themselves. We can build e-cards, guest books, configurators, e-magazines, and catalogs. We'll password-protect areas of the site. A small database and a little dynamic web page programming can go a long way for a small business site.

iMarks implements e-commerce storefronts and secure encryption for clients needing that functionality. We have a network of search engine optimization companies and web hosting companies so that we can recommend the best value for our clients.

Business consulting and advertising strategies are an integral part of our business. Many start-ups are not aware of what a web site can do for their business, so infrastructure questions will come up. These can be addressed with a combination of process definition, web site adjustments, and technology.

What types of web site projects are you currently working on?

DJ: We are designing some beautiful web sites for Caribbean vacations and a wedding planner. We are also developing a recruiting site and resource center for my

business leads group. That site will take full advantage of database capabilities and will have a member login section. We just finished a site for an Avaya Business Partner in Colorado Springs, which provided an opportunity to become familiar with the new "Voice over IP" technology.

Describe a typical client and the process you go through to determine their specific needs and preferences.

DJ: A typical client is a small business owner. For larger businesses, it may be their marketing representative.

The initial interview is the most important part of the web site development process. This is where most of the brainstorming occurs. I have a list of about 10 questions that I ask the client covering the range of the business and what they have in mind for the web site. These questions are, of course, expanded upon during the course of the interview. The last question asks about their preferences for tone, colors, and images for the web site. I'll have them look through the iMarks portfolio and a graphic design book for ideas. Sometimes I'll also show them web sites designed by other developers to narrow down their likes and dislikes. As I mentioned before, I collect stationery, business cards, brochures, and photos.

Can you tell us about your most successful project to date? How did you measure its success?

DJ: We take pride in all of our projects, and we have some very happy customers. I measure success by customer satisfaction, a powerful message, and visual interest. There are many other aspects to consider, but these three are the biggest challenges for iMarks.

We recently developed a recruiting site for a new real estate company called Home Real Estate (www.homerealestateco.com). This site really stretched our graphic design capabilities, and we were given some incredible copy from the client. The result was a highly energetic and friendly site that effectively recruited new agents with a minimal investment.

What is your message to our readers regarding the definition and deployment of their corporate web site?

DJ: I can only speak to small businesses, as large businesses have a different set of issues to deal with. There are so many aspects to consider. First, find one or more web sites that you like. They don't have to be for the same industry as yours. Set your sights high. If you can't find a good site for your industry, take a look at some award winning sites, or sites for businesses that do expensive television commercials, or sites for movies. You may have to look at a lot of sites. Don't worry about money just yet.

Next, choose your web site design firm carefully. Look at several sites in their portfolio. Make sure that you can visualize your site being designed in the style they typically produce.

iMarks does an excellent job of defining site maps and key messages for small businesses. Typically, our requirements gathering interview does a good job of defining the site. A small business with a business plan usually knows what they

want to communicate, but may have trouble expressing it in terms of a web site. We can fill in the gaps. Not everything has to be defined before you engage the web site developer.

Regarding deployment, I suggest it be done in stages for a small business. Give the first version of the site some time for visitors to react to it. This will help you decide what the next step should be for your overall business development plan.

What made you decide to step out on your own and start your own company?

DJ: I think everyone has a dream to own his or her own business. I spent nearly 17 years in the corporate world as a specialist of one sort or another. It is such a pleasure to be a generalist and do the marketing, process development, creative design, and programming for iMarks.

How can interested parties get in touch with you to learn more about what's up with Doreen Jeffers?

DJ: Visit the iMarks web site (www.iMarksWeb.com), and check out the new web sites that we are adding to the portfolio. Or call (303) 979-0873 or email me at djeffers@iMarksWeb.com.