

Web and app design



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This leaflet focuses on careers in designing websites and apps. The work calls for creative and technical skills. Although it's possible to start this sort of career without any particular qualifications, many of those employed in this area have studied at higher education level.

Developments in digital technology

Web and mobile technology are now part of our everyday lives. We use **websites** to shop, find a job, choose where to study, manage our bank accounts, keep in touch with friends, download music and videos, search for information, play games, book holidays and catch up on our favourite TV programmes!

We also use **apps (i.e. applications)** - self-contained programs available at the touch of a button - on our computers, smartphones and tablets. The UK is a leading nation for the development of apps. They are used for specific purposes, from those that can tell us when the next bus is coming, to instant messaging services. Some apps come already loaded on our devices, others are available to download. Many apps make use of the various in-built features of our devices, such as the GPS or calendar. More organisations are making their web content suitable for viewing on smartphones and tablets, and/or to be accessible as an app.

Websites and apps can involve text, graphics, data, music and special features such as interactive functions and animation; some are technically complex, e.g. they may have to be designed to handle enquiries, sales and payments (with appropriate security), discussion forums and other user-generated content.

N.B. '**Digital designer**' is a general term given for people who do create work on websites, apps and other digital platforms. For information on careers in this area, see the leaflet on [Creative and user-focused digital careers](#).

The work of web and app designers

The job titles of people working in web and app design vary and are often used interchangeably; roles and responsibilities also overlap. Generally speaking:

- **web and app designers** create the look of websites and apps; they need to be particularly creative but also need technical skills and understanding
- **web and app developers** are concerned with the more technical aspects of design, including the programming or coding behind the website or app. For details on this area of work, view the leaflet on [Software design and development](#).

The scope of a web and app designer's role often depends on the nature of the projects they work on, their employer or client and the budget available.

On a large project, where the website or app being designed is complex, web and app designers may work alongside a whole team of people - for example, an **account manager** (who liaises with the client who has commissioned the work), a **creative director**, **web and app developers** (as mentioned above), **copywriters**, **graphic designers**, **photographers** and **user experience (UX) specialists**. Look at the Related Leaflets sections for more information about these different career areas.

Sometimes web and app designers have a much broader job, with responsibility for (or involvement in) some of the roles mentioned above and for:

- ongoing **website or app management/maintenance** - addressing any functionality problems, technical updating etc; this role is sometimes called a '**webmaster**'
- **web content** (i.e. the text, images, videos and other features) - perhaps setting and maintaining quality standards, using analytics to research traffic, ensuring search engine optimisation (SEO), developing social media platforms, dealing with copyright issues, planning future content and so on
- **web editing** - updating existing text and writing new copy.

More information on some of the above areas of work can be found in the leaflets on *Digital marketing* and *Writing for a living*.

The design process

- Designers meet with their clients (or colleagues) to discuss the purpose of their website or app, how they would like it to look, who will use it, what information it should contain and the interactive features required. The designer receives a brief that they must follow.
- The designer then uses the brief to create samples. The designer has to bear in mind costs, and must ensure that the website or app can be accessed quickly and easily, especially for people with specific needs, e.g. for those with visual impairment. They also need to consider the front end and back end of the website or app; i.e. how it looks to a user, and how it actually works.
- When an outline design has been produced and the client (or colleague) has given the go-ahead, further discussions may be held to fine-tune details, such as the navigation/menus, graphics, moving images, sound, colour scheme, typography and layout.
- Those with the necessary technical skills are involved in the development of more complex features, such as interactive functions dealing with payments, reservations etc. The use of specialist AI tools within digital design is likely to increase, see *AI and machine learning* for more information on this career area.

Where do web and app designers work?

All sorts of organisations require the services of web and app designers - from commercial and industrial businesses, to charities and educational institutions. In addition to websites and apps that serve external users, many organisations also operate **intranet sites**, which are accessible only to people within that organisation (a company or a school, for example) and are a means of communicating relevant news and information across the organisation.

- Many web and app designers work for digital design companies that are contracted by organisations to set up and then, possibly, manage and maintain their websites or apps.
- Some designers work for one employer (as a member of staff), for example a large corporation, charity or university that is continually creating and maintaining its own websites and apps.
- Some web and app designers work on a freelance, contract basis. As well as designing websites and apps, they need to be prepared to spend time promoting and running their business.

What it takes

Web and app designers require a balance of design and technical skills. Depending on their exact role, they may need:

- to keep up to date with technological developments, adapt to change and be prepared to learn new skills; both the technology and people's expectations are changing rapidly
- creativity, imagination and presentation skills
- an eye for composition, colour and layout
- the ability to analyse design problems and come up with solutions
- programming skills and software knowledge
- good communication and teamworking skills
- to be able to pay attention to detail
- to be able to work to deadlines.

Entry, education and training

There are no set entry requirements for web and app design work - enthusiasm and a feel for design can get you started. Web and app designers can come from both design and computing backgrounds. Even without relevant qualifications it's possible to create a website or app using existing specialist software packages. However, most professional designers have qualifications and, as in any other job, the better education and training you have, the more opportunities are open to you.

You will need to build up a **portfolio** of work to show potential employers. You will also need a knowledge of relevant software and programming languages. Those working in web/app development roles usually have computing-related qualifications and expertise.

At higher education level there are some specialist **degree, HNC/D** and **foundation degree** courses in subjects such as web design and development, digital design and web development, and app development. Some of these courses are design orientated, and others more technical. Broader-based higher education courses (e.g. those in interactive media, computing, graphic design, and visual communication) can also provide a starting point before developing more specialist skills. Research the content of courses carefully to make sure they meet your interests. **Sandwich courses** are offered at certain institutions - these (along with internships, work placements etc) can provide valuable **work experience** and an opportunity to work on your portfolio.

Specialist **postgraduate courses** are also available on a full- or part-time basis.

Part-time and short college courses can provide a taster for the interested amateur or offer continuing professional development opportunities for those already working in web or app design. You may also come across courses - often online or via distance learning - in web and/or apps design offered by private training providers. If considering such courses, research what they offer and how well recognised by employers the resulting qualifications would be.

For information on the range of courses and qualifications available in computing and art and design at different levels (including entry requirements), refer to the leaflets *Digital careers - an introduction to the work and training* and *Art and design - an introduction*.

N.B. The **T level** in digital production, design and development is available in certain schools and colleges in England, and is relevant to web design and development roles.

Some employers offer **in-house training schemes**, mainly aimed at graduates. Otherwise, **Apprenticeships** can offer structured training with an employer. In England, there is a Degree Apprenticeship for creative digital design professionals. In Wales, Apprenticeships at levels 2 and 3 in digital application support offer training routes for web content developers, website technicians, website designers and app developers. A range of other Apprenticeships (at various levels) can provide training in certain aspects of the work, such as UX, digital marketing, software development and digital content. To find out more about Apprenticeships, view:

www.apprenticeships.gov.uk

www.careerswales.gov.wales

Prospects and pay

It's possible to start at a junior level and work your way up to web or app designer. With experience, you can specialise in particular areas of web or app design or move into more senior roles.

There are no set pay scales. As a guide, graduates entering a career in web and app design may start at around £20,000, but pay can rise to £45,000+ for those with experience and a wide range of skills. If you're self-employed, what you earn will depend on the success of your business.

Adults: It may be possible to move sideways into web and app design if you show interest and aptitude.

Further Information

Developers Alliance - a global organisation for software developers.

www.developersalliance.org

BIMA (British Interactive Media Association):

www.bima.co.uk

The Institution of Analysts and Programmers (IAP):

www.iap.org.uk

For other organisations and websites that may be useful, refer to the leaflets *Digital careers - an introduction to the work and training* and *Art and design - an introduction*.

Related Leaflets

D 01 Digital careers - an introduction to the work and training
D 05 Data analysis and management
D 06 Software design and development
D 07 Games design and development
D 09 Tech and digital management
D 11 Creative and user-focused digital careers (includes UX careers)
D 12 AI and machine learning
E 01 Art and design - an introduction
E 09 Graphic design
O 11 Digital marketing
PB 02 Writing for a living
PC 01 Photography

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