



Reading a development quote

What the lines mean, and the four questions that separate two quotes that look alike.

Who it is for: You have several quotes in hand and the spread in prices looks inexplicable.

Why two quotes can differ threefold

Most often they do not describe the same work. One delivers a site you will be able to change yourself; the other delivers a site you will have to go back and ask them to change. The second is cheaper to order and dearer after two years.

The gap rarely comes from talent, and almost never from the number of pages. It comes from what is included and does not show: tests, migrating existing content, compliance work, training, what happens the day something breaks.

A quote markedly cheaper than the others is not suspect in itself. It becomes informative as soon as you ask it the same questions as the rest: either it includes less, or it has understood something the others overestimated. Both are worth knowing.

Fixed price or time and materials

On a fixed price, the provider commits to a price for a described scope. They carry the risk of a bad estimate, and they charge for it — which is normal, and is the price of predictability. The trade-off is that a mid-project change has to be renegotiated.

On time and materials, you pay for the hours spent. That suits a need that will evolve as you discover it, and it assumes someone on your side genuinely follows the work. Without that follow-up, it becomes a bottomless budget.

Neither is better. What should alert you is a fixed-price quote on a vague scope: it announces a renegotiation that simply has not happened yet.

The four questions

Asked of every provider consulted, they make quotes comparable — which reading the totals alone never does.

- ✓ Who owns the code at the end, and in what form is it handed over? The answer should be written down, not cordial.
- ✓ What happens if I change provider in two years? A project nobody else can pick up is expensive to leave.
- ✓ What is not included? The question surprises, which is what makes it useful.
- ✓ What exactly does the warranty cover, and for how long? “Fixing bugs” means nothing until you have defined what counts as a bug.

Hosting and maintenance

These are recurring costs, and they often appear at the bottom of the page as a note. They deserve the same scrutiny as the rest: over five years they frequently exceed the build cost.

Above all, check whose name the accounts are in — domain, hosting, third-party services. If they are in the provider's name, changing provider requires their cooperation. That administrative detail, settled in ten minutes at the start, becomes leverage later.