A full-time digital manager can cost $120K–$150K+ annually before benefits, payroll taxes, and overhead. Yet most small-to-mid-sized businesses don't have 40 hours per week of website-level work. A fractional web manager delivers executive-level oversight, optimization, and strategy — without the overhead, the downtime, or the long-term payroll commitment. This isn't about cutting corners. It's about operational efficiency.

The Full-Time Hire: What It Actually Costs

When a company decides they need someone managing their website, the default instinct is to hire a full-time employee. It makes sense on paper — dedicated resource, always available, fully committed to your business.

Then you run the numbers.

A qualified web manager — someone with the experience to handle CMS administration, security, performance optimization, SEO, vendor coordination, analytics, and content strategy — commands a real salary. In the U.S., that's typically $100K–$150K+ depending on market and experience level. But salary is only the beginning.

- **Base salary:** $100K–$150K+
- **Payroll taxes:** 7.65% employer share (FICA) plus state unemployment
- **Health insurance:** $7K–$15K+ annually for employer contribution
- **Paid time off:** 15–20 days of vacation, sick days, and holidays — paid but unproductive
- **Retirement contributions:** 401(k) match, typically 3–6% of salary
- **Equipment, software, and training:** $3K–$8K annually
- **Recruiting and onboarding:** $10K–$25K if you factor in recruiter fees, lost productivity, and ramp-up time

The **fully loaded cost** of a qualified full-time web manager is typically **$140K–$200K+ per year** when you account for everything. And that's assuming you find the right person on the first try.

The Utilization Problem

Here's the uncomfortable truth: most businesses don't have 160 hours a month of website management work.

They need someone checking on the site regularly. Applying updates. Monitoring performance. Reviewing analytics. Coordinating with vendors. Handling occasional content changes. Troubleshooting issues when they arise. Running SEO health checks. Making sure backups work.

That's real, important work. But it's **10–30 hours a month**, not 160. When you hire a full-time employee for 30 hours of actual work, you're paying full-time rates for part-time utilization. The other 130 hours have to be filled with *something* — and that something is often low-value make-work, unnecessary projects, or idle time.

Phoca PDF

You’re not paying for expertise. You’re paying for a seat. And most of the time, the seat is empty.

The Fractional Model: Pay for Work, Not a Seat

A fractional web manager is exactly what it sounds like: senior-level website oversight delivered on a recurring, part-time basis. You get the same caliber of expertise you’d expect from a full-time hire — without paying for 160 hours when you only need 20.

Full-Time Hire

- $140K–$200K+ fully loaded
- 160 hours/month committed
- Benefits, PTO, payroll overhead
- Recruiting and onboarding risk
- Single point of failure if they leave
- Fixed cost regardless of workload

Fractional Web Manager

- Pay only for hours worked
- 10–30 hours/month typical
- No benefits or payroll overhead
- Immediate expertise, no ramp-up
- Team-backed, not a single individual
- Scales with your actual needs

The math is straightforward. If you need 20 hours a month of senior web management, a fractional engagement costs a **fraction** of a full-time hire — while delivering the same (or higher) level of expertise.

Phoca PDF

What You Actually Get

A fractional web manager isn't a freelancer you call when something breaks. It's an **ongoing operational relationship** with structured accountability:

- **Proactive monitoring:** Performance, uptime, security, and SEO health — reviewed on a recurring schedule, not just when problems surface
- **CMS and extension management:** Updates tested and applied regularly, not deferred until something breaks
- **Strategic guidance:** Recommendations aligned with your business goals — not just technical maintenance, but decisions about what to invest in next
- **Vendor coordination:** Managing hosting providers, third-party tool vendors, and integration partners on your behalf
- **Content and SEO support:** Ensuring your site's content remains current, optimized, and aligned with search trends
- **Accountability:** A named professional who knows your site, your stack, and your goals — not a rotating ticket queue

This is operational oversight, not reactive troubleshooting. The difference is preventative care vs. emergency repairs — and the cost difference between the two is enormous.

The Hidden Cost of Doing Nothing

The most expensive decision isn't hiring. It's not hiring. Unmanaged websites accumulate technical debt silently:

- **Security breaches:** The average cost of a small business data breach is $120K–$200K+ including remediation, legal liability, and lost customer trust
- **Performance degradation:** Every second of added load time reduces conversions by an estimated 7% — silently bleeding revenue
- **SEO erosion:** Rankings don't hold steady when nobody's maintaining them. Competitors who invest will outrank you
- **Emergency repair costs:** A hacked site, a crashed server, or a catastrophic update failure costs 5–10x what preventative management would have
- **Lost leads:** A broken contact form, a dead CTA, or an outdated phone number silently costs you business every day it goes unfixed

The question isn't whether you can afford a fractional web manager. It's whether you can afford to go without one.

Not a Freelancer. Not a Contractor. An Operations Partner.

Freelancers are project-based. You hire them for a task, they deliver, they disappear. If something goes wrong next month, you're starting from scratch with someone who doesn't know your system.

Phoca PDF

Contractors are slightly better — but you're still managing them. Assigning tasks, reviewing work, providing context. You've reduced your payroll, but you haven't reduced your management burden.

A fractional digital operations partner is different:

- They know your site, your infrastructure, and your business context
- They bring their own tools, processes, and institutional knowledge
- They identify problems proactively, not just respond to tickets
- They're backed by a team — development, design, and operational expertise — not a single person
- They're accountable for outcomes, not just deliverables

This is the distinction that matters most. You're not outsourcing tasks. You're gaining a **strategic partner** who treats your website as their responsibility — because it is.

Who This Model Is Built For

The fractional model isn't right for everyone. It's specifically designed for businesses that:

- Have an existing website that needs ongoing management, not just a one-time build
- Need senior-level oversight but can't justify (or fill) a full-time position
- Want proactive care, not just break-fix support
- Value strategic alignment — not just "keeping the lights on"
- Understand that their website is an operational asset, not a finished project

If that sounds like your business, the fractional model isn't a compromise. It's the **right-sized solution** for the work that actually needs to be done.

You don't need a full-time employee to get full-time results. You need the right expertise, applied at the right scale, with real accountability. That's the fractional model.

Find Out What Your Website Needs

Phoca PDF