



Website design tips and tricks

Content:

Make it easy on the reader

Bulleted lists break content up and make reading easier for visitor. Break up content with bulleted lists and subheads.

The “offline” world primarily uses "Times New Roman". This works well in print but not online. Sans Serif fonts, such as Arial, **Verdana** and Helvetica are the best fonts for easy online scanning. Use the fonts that are available in the pull down menu in Contribute.

Font colors: the best colors for reading online are black text on a white or off-white background. If you want to use multiple colors only use a maximum of 3. Too many text colors on a web page make it hard on the eyes and spell inexperience. To emphasize text you can use bold or italics.

Limit page length to 2 screenfuls, or 6-7 screenfuls for articles

While you should put a lot of info on each page to minimize clicking, don't go too far in the other direction by putting too much info on a page. You should normally limit a page to no more than two screenfuls of info. Articles (like this one) are exceptions, because articles are longer by nature. But even so, very long articles (more than about 6-7 screenfuls) should usually be chunked into separate pages.

Don't type more than a few words in ALL CAPS

Words that are in ALL CAPS draw attention to themselves because they seem different from the small letters around them. But if you type *everything* in all caps, then you completely lose the effect, since everything looks the same, so *none* of it looks important. If you want to draw readers' attention to something, make the *headline* stand out -- bold, bright color, maybe a little larger -- but keep the text that follows it normal.

Never use more than one exclamation point!

Typing several (or worse, a gazillion) exclamation points does not make your text seem any more important than just one. In fact, rather than conveying urgency, what multiple exclamation marks really scream is "Amateurish!". Actually, what they really scream is "Desperate!" The writer is desperate to get the reader to believe something. But think about it: Do exclamation marks really impress you when you read them? Are you more likely to believe something because it has a screaming mark at the end? It's probably the opposite: You're used to desperate marketers trying to sell you something with their exclamation marks, so when you see lots of them you sense that desperation and tend to discount what they're trying to convince you of. So when you switch hats and you're the one giving the message, don't let your desperation show by using lots of exclamation marks. Play hard to get.

Use a spelling checker

Spell check and recheck.... Here's an ironic blog titled: The 5 Deadly Ways to Lose Your Visitors in 10 Seconds: <http://www.website-tips.net/the-5-deadly-ways-to-lose-your-visitors-in-10-seconds/>. People who spell poorly may not notice or care that your site is badly misspelled, but literate people may notice and care, and they're in the majority.

Design elements / Images:

Reduce images in photo editor before uploading to server

Keep page size manageable to ensure speedy downloads.

Online visitors' patience is measured in milliseconds and not everyone has hi-speed or broadband Internet connections. So, keep page sizes within reasonable limits to ensure that they download quickly. Optimize graphic size and avoid putting an image on a page unless it adds something for the visitor.

When do you use a gif and when a jpg?

Use a gif for a simple logo, something that doesn't have a lot of colors. A jpg is best for photos and images with many colors and gradients. And again, be sure to resize your images BEFORE adding them to your webpage.

Don't use animated gifs unless it is necessary.

Animated gifs take a long time to load and can also be very irritating. But since they catch your attention you could use small animated gifs to draw a visitor's attention to a particular section of your site.

Use Flash sparingly – or not at all

There seems to be a lot of hype about Flash but I recommend that you minimize the use of Flash on a site. Don't make entire sites using Flash. It may look great but it takes hours to load and can really put off visitors. If you do want to use Flash use it within an HTML site and make sure it loads fast.

Use photos, not clip art

Photos allow connection, especially to people who process visually. Clip art gets them to pay attention; however, it doesn't create much of a connection. Personal photos connect within reason. Keep them less than three to a page. One photo always needs to be in the top portion of the screen on the first page. It doesn't need to be large, but attractive.

Don't distract your visitors with blinking or scrolling text, animated GIFs, or auto-loading sound.

Another problem with scrolling text is that the reader can't read it at their own pace. They're forced to read it at whatever speed you deliver it. They might have preferred to read those two sentences quickly and then move on, but because it's scrolling they have to sit there and wait for the text to slowly appear.

Choose simplicity over complexity

Unless you are a design company showcasing its skills, keep things simple. Visitors (especially frequent ones) may not be impressed by your complex animated graphics especially if they serve no apparent useful purpose. Make it simple for visitors to get to the content - that is what most of them are coming to your site for anyway.

White space is OK

The layout of your web page should include plenty of white space. Don't lean text hard up against your graphics. Include white space between headings, sub headings and paragraphs.

Links:

Don't underline words if they're not links.

On the web, something that's underlined is supposed to be a link. If you underline gratuitously, readers will be annoyed when they try to click those underlined words only to discover that they're not really links. If you want to emphasize something, use *italics* instead (or **boldface**, or another color).

Use descriptive link text.

The text of a link should describe what's being linked to. **You should never, ever use words like "link" or "here" or "click here" as the link text.** Readers prefer to scan web pages rather than read every word, and you make that impossible if you use generic, non-descriptive words as the link text. Compare the following:

Right way

Check out our [product specials](#), [best sellers](#), and [gift ideas](#).

Wrong way

For product specials click [here](#). For best sellers click [here](#). For gift ideas click [here](#).

Test your links

Make sure your site works! Load your site in a browser *from the Internet* (not from your hard disk), make sure all the images appear correctly, and click on all the links. This may seem obvious, but if it's so obvious, then why do I constantly find sites whose images and internal links don't work right? If you're using a link checker that's built in to your web editor and your site is framed, then you *can't* depend on the link checker, because it can't check for framing problems (e.g., pages load into wrong frames, clicking a link results in frames within a frame, etc.). Check it yourself.

Check regularly for broken links.

Using a link checker or checking the list of 404 errors (File not found) in your website logs (or stats) will help maintain site links. Maintenance of links to external sites can be centralized using link tracking tools

Tools:

Firebug

- Plugin for Firefox
- Allows you to inspect pages in the browser
- Free and open source
- <http://getfirebug.com>

WebKit Web Inspector

- Free, open source inspector from WebKit
- Similar features to Firebug
- Works in multiple browsers
- Powerful visual resource panel allows you to track page performance
- <http://trac.webkit.org/wiki/WebInspector>

Google Analytics

- Allows you to analyze your site's performance
- Deep feature set allows for granular level analysis
- Allows you to analyze how visitors use your site
- Allows you to track multimedia usage
- <http://www.google.com/analytics> username: webmaster@messiah.edu / pw: ybreeches

Hex Color Finder

- This is a color finder that allows you to choose custom colors and save, load, and retrieve specific colors from any area on your screen.
- Freeware, install to your PC
- <http://www.tucows.com/preview/240092>

Accessibility:

Section 508 of ADA: requires access to electronic and information technology. We must ensure that this technology is accessible to employees and members of the public with disabilities

<http://www.section508.gov>

Design with accessibility in mind:

- Make sure your initial focus is on content, not design
- Make sure all images have alt text or alternate content (also aids in Search Engine Optimization)
- Make form elements accessible
- Provide closed captioning for videos

Search Engine Optimization:

Optimized Title, Description & Keyword Tags

Each page of your website should be individually optimized in terms of the message you want it to carry. Every page is different and there for a specific reason. If the page info and page tags do not match in terms of keywords, the page will not show up in search engine results. Search engines want to give searchers relevant results, and by not applying this principle, your site will not rank well. For more on search engine optimization, visit the Web Weavers site in Sakai and take a look at the Resources section regarding Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

Misc Best Practices

Design for cross-browser compatibility.

Although Internet Explorer dominates, do not overlook those people who use alternatives such as Mozilla, Opera and Netscape. Make sure your site can be viewed in other browsers; that way you will not unintentionally reduce the number of visitors to your site.

Avoid using spaces in file names for documents you are linking to

Spaces in file names can cause problems on a web server, and just makes an ugly URL in general. Some web content management tools may automatically rename files to use underscores or dashes rather than spaces. Using dashes in your file names also provides better SEO results.

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