

WEB DESIGN BASICS

Designing for the Web is a bit different than designing for print publications. For example:

- a printed text, like a book or magazine, is bound together while a Web site contains many free standing Web pages that are loosely hyperlinked together.
- a print text has a title page with author & publication information while a Web site lacks a title page. Instead this information must be included on every Web page.
- a print text has a single table of contents that guides the reader through the text. A Web site lacks a table of contents, instead every page must contain a navigation menu.
- a printed text has a singular identity. Within a Web site Web pages are free standing and can lack a singular identity. Designers must use design consistency as a clue that the user is still on the same Web site.

When planning and designing a Web site it is important to keep the following questions and tips in mind:

TARGET AUDIENCE

A designer must keep the target audience in mind when designing a site. You should keep the following questions in the back of your mind when selecting content for your site:

- What population(s) is the site targeting?
- What are their needs?
- What level of computer / Web sophistication do they have?

PURPOSE

Every site needs a purpose or else its just another Web site using up server space. When planning your site ask yourself:

- What is the purpose of the site? (Examples: to convey information, sell products, generate membership in an organization, foster community, etc.)
- How does this purpose relate back to the needs of your target audience?

LOADING TIME

Users of your Web site will connect at a wide range of speeds. It's important to keep the slower connection speeds in mind. Graphics & multimedia content are slow to load, so if your target audience connects at a slow speed minimize your use of them. In general, users get frustrated if a page takes more than **5 - 10 seconds to load**.

NAVIGATION

Navigation is the most important element in a Web site. A site can be beautiful, but if a user can't find what they are looking for the Web site is useless.

Each page on your Web site needs to include a navigation menu that includes links to all the major sections of your Web site, including your home page.

When planning your Web site think of it like a newspaper with the content, or stories, divided into major sections. The navigation menu should include a link to each major section (for example: International News, Regional News, Sports, etc) but should not include links to individual stories.

Keep your target audience and purpose in mind when creating the major sections. For example, does each section fulfill a need of your target audience? How does the section fit with the site's purpose?

READABILITY

It's important to remember that your Web site content will be viewed on a computer screen, not on paper. As such, it's vital that you make the content, especially text, readable on a computer screen.

Here are a few tips for improving Web site readability:

- Fonts need to be clear and readable. Sans-serif fonts are preferred, but not required.
- Avoid italics, cursive, or small point size fonts.
- Include white space and margins.
- Avoid scrolling left to right.
- Text should be divided into "chunks" to improve scanability (see Web Writing Tips)
- Font colors should not conflict with background colors.
- Do not use background images behind text.

COLOR

Color is a quick and easy way to add dimension to your Web page. For example:

- Bright colors (red, yellow, orange) appear in the foreground
- Warm colors (blue, green) appear in the background
- Dark colors come forward, light colors recede to the back

Color can also highlight an area, but be careful as too much color can be a distraction.

Finally, be sure to use "Web safe" colors - 216 colors that will appear on any Windows or Mac computer.

“ABOVE THE FOLD”

Like in a newspaper, there is some content you want to appear “above the fold” or near the top of a Web site. This content should be visible to users without having to scroll down.

Content you may want to put above the fold includes:

- Name of site, company, organization, individual, etc
- Marketing message
- Indication of what the site is about
- Navigation menu
- Other important information (contact info, etc)

THE UNKNOWNNS

One of the true frustrations of Web design is the fact that you have no real control over how your Web site will appear on another person’s computer. This is because we all use different types of computers, operating systems, and browsers.

As such, you have no control over the following:

- **Browsers:** While the majority of users view Web pages through Microsoft Internet Explorer, a growing number of people use alternative browsers. To insure full accessibility, a Web site should be designed to be viewable in all browsers - there is nothing more frustrating to a visitor than to receive a message saying “you must use Internet Explorer to access this site.”
- **Platform:** Remember Windows is not the only operating system out there. People also use Mac and Linux operating systems. Plus handheld devices, like cell phones, now have Internet access and use a variety of operating systems.
- **Window Size:** Window sizes now vary from small handheld devices to large, wide-screen computer screens. While it’s impossible to design for all sizes keep in mind that, among traditional computer screens, the smallest average size is 800 pixels X 600 pixels.
- **Connnection Speed:** While a growing number of people have high speed Internet access it’s important to keep dial-up users in mind, especially if you know your target audience is more likely to use slower connection speeds.
- **Colors:** Every computer displays color in a slightly different way. It’s best to stick with “Web safe” colors - these are colors that are compatible with both Windows and Mac computers.
- **Fonts:** Every computer comes loaded with a different set of default fonts. In Web design we try to use basic fonts that are available on a wide range of computers. These fonts include: Arial, Courier, Georgia, and Times or Times New Roman.
- **User Preferences:** Finally, users can set their browsers to display Web content following their own preferences.

GENERAL DON'TS OF WEB DESIGN

Here are a few final don'ts of Web design to keep in mind.

Do not:

- Use "click to enter" or splash pages as home pages - its a waste of a click
- Link to Web page you are already on
- User poorly worded navigation links
- Use different types of navigation menus on pages contained in the same site
- Use pictures or images in place of text
- Put too much information on one page
- Use design elements (like Flash movies) that get in the way of your visitors.
- Forget about your users and their needs - its about them, not you

WEB DESIGN RESOURCES

Web Pages That Suck - Learn what not to do when designing your Web page.
(www.webpagesthatsuck.com/)

Color Contrast Analyser - Make sure that the contrast between your page's background color and your text color is great enough for easy reading.
(juicystudio.com/services/colourcontrast.php)

What Colors Mean - Ever wondered what emotions a color evokes? Want people to leave your Web site happy, relaxed, or maybe hungry? This Web site explains the hidden meaning behind colors. (www.newark1.com/color/000055.html)

Web Color Schemes - Having trouble deciding on a color scheme or combination of colors for your Web site. This site can help you out.
(wellstyled.com/tools/colorscheme2/index-en.html)

Grabbing Colors From A Web Site - Love the colors used on a Web site? Want to know what they are so you can use them on your Web site? You can use the "Grab Website Colors" tool on this site to find out. The site also provides you with color combinations currently used by other Web designers. (www.colorcombos.com/)