



Guidelines to Good Web Site Design

It would appear that anyone thinks that they can build a web site, but can anyone build a successful website? No. Only look at the web and you will find many sites that quite frankly are worse than useless. So what are the key aspects to building a successful web site? You'll find a few listed here to get started with:-

Checklist 1 - First Impressions

1. Target audience: The site has been designed to meet our needs instead of meeting the needs of our visitors. Who is the site really intended for, you, your employees, or your potential customers?
2. Purpose: The purpose and theme of the site is not instantly identifiable, what is the site all about? If the theme of the site is no identifiable the audience will move on to another site.
3. Professionalism: Does the site convey the message that we are a professional organisation that our clients can trust? A professional approach to the site is essential.

Checklist 2 - Display Times

1. Long Load Times: The average user will only wait a few seconds for a page to download. Typically if the download time exceeds 20 seconds you will have already lost the user. In these days of faster ADSL connections, each page should load much faster than 10 seconds, 5 seconds is probably more realistic target.
2. Large Graphics: Large graphics may look nice but these are the biggest contributors to large download times. Use only GIF, JPG, or PNG formats, as these are compressed formats. If at all possible use an optimiser to remove unnecessary code from the graphic itself. The graphic should be optimised to size displayed within the web page, you should not need to resize large graphics within the page. Similarly do not overindulge in large numbers of graphic.

Checklist 3 - Appearance

1. Blinking Text: Someone once thought it would be fun to add the <blink> tag into Netscape's capabilities, thereby enabling HTML writers to switch text on and off. It becomes very irritating - never use it.
2. Clashing Colours: Select a few colours that go well together and use these consistently throughout your site. Avoid the temptation to use every colour in the palette just because its there, it may have worked well for Van Gough, he was an artist not a web designer in the 21st century
3. Animated GIFs: Animated graphics are good for attracting attention, but use these selectively. Animated GIFs are these little looping graphics often seen on web pages, and to excess on bad web pages. Some can be particularly irritating, this could be because of their speed, their content, or even simply the colours chosen. They take time to load, and often distract from the actual page content. Use with caution, if at all.

4. Lots of different fonts: as with colours, choose a couple of fonts and use these consistently throughout the site. Also select fonts from the most commonly used fonts so that the web page may be faithfully recreated on almost any machine, such as Arial, Verdana, and Times New Roman. Avoid fonts such as Copperplate, Comic Sans, and so on, as they may look good, other users may not have these fonts which could adversely affect the display of your web pages.
5. Hideous background images: Background images can be used with effect, but don't let the background image take over, you may make your text unreadable. The background image should be subtle and unobtrusive. Never use an animated background image.
6. Underlining text that is not a link: Links are usually underlined, don't cause confusion by underlining to emphasise text, instead use a bold or italic style. This is an easy one to avoid.
7. Graphics quality: Does your logo does not look like it was professionally made? Is the logo is a bad scan of a business card, or headed paper? Think again, this is what many people will associate with you.
8. Navigation: It's not clear how to move from one page to another. If the navigation isn't clear the users may not find their way around the website. Navigation should be clear and not complicated.

Checklist 4 - General

1. MIDI samples: Music constantly playing in the background, another irritation, even worse is the use of MIDI files for audio. These are not particularly compact, and as a result are slow to load. This also makes pages the equivalent of a musical Christmas card (enough to drive anyone insane).
2. Lots of adverts: One of the latest crazes is to put adverts and banners on pages. These are often put there by writers who wish to become rich overnight, don't expect this with these adverts as you need large amounts of traffic to receive any feedback. Don't put more than a couple of adverts on each page, you'll end up with your own content being upstaged.
3. Too much text on one page: Too much text can be a lot for a visitor to take in all at once. Don't be afraid to break the text across several pages, but keep it simple so that visitors can find their way around.
4. Never updated sites: Once written and uploaded many sites become abandoned on the web, for months, even years. A large number of visitors repeatedly visit the same site time after time for new or updated information or services. If these visitors lose interest in you will have lost frequent visitors, and word spreads, new visitors will not come either. If the site is not maintained, delete the site, or make it clear there will be no new content added. Even small changes to look, format, or content are welcome.
5. Spelling errors and poor grammar: Typos on web pages are very public, and may erode the confidence of visitors in your abilities. In these days of spellcheckers there is very little excuse.

Checklist 5 - Technical

1. Not using of title bar and meta tags: Meta tags and descriptive titles give the user a much clearer idea what to expect from the page when found using

search engines. A number of web developers ignore these as Google and other search engines do not use these.

2. Broken Links: possibly the most annoying syndrome on the web. These are pages that don't work, perhaps the destination URL on the page has been wrongly spelt, or the destination page no longer exists.
3. Unnecessary use of web technologies: Shockwave, Flash, Java, Real Audio, movie clips – all advances bringing multimedia into the web page, but again no fun if they are forced onto the audience. They take time to download. Use these only if you must.
4. Screen resolution woes: Check the site will work at different resolutions, the most common are 640x480, 800x600, and 1024x768. Otherwise visitors will have to scroll horizontally as well as vertically to see the content, which isn't good.
5. Frames: Frames are useful in specific circumstances, otherwise they are a disaster area. Frames cause problems for search engines and book marking, avoid these if at all possible.
6. Cross browser incompatibility: Avoid using HTML that works with one particular browser, such as the use of Internet Explorer <marquee> tag. Make sure that the page will work in the major browsers.

Where to find Pages NOT to Copy

Pages that are poorly designed can be found all over the web. The following sites highlight some of these and the faults that go along with them. Uses these as examples of what NOT to do.

- Web Pages that Suck (www.webpagesthatsuck.com)
- Worst of the Web (www.worstoftheweb.com)

Where to find good advice

There are a number of sites that specialise in good web advice, here are just a few:

- Webmonkey (www.webmonkey.com)
- Useit (www.useit.com)
- HTML Goodies (www.htmlgoodies.com)

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