

The New Web Design Guide



"The New Web Design Report Reveals The Practise Of Good Design Principles To Make Sure Your Site Reaches Out To The Maximum Number Of Visitors And Sells To As Many People As Possible"



From The Desk Of Mats Lonnstrom:

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5 Important Rules in Website Design

When it comes to your website, extra attention should be paid to every minute detail to make sure it performs optimally to serve its purpose. Here are seven important rules of thumb to observe to make sure your website performs well.

1) Do not use splash pages

Splash pages are the first pages you see when you arrive at a website. They normally have a very beautiful image with words like "welcome" or "click here to enter". In fact, they are just that -- pretty vases with no real purpose. Do not let your visitors have a reason to click on the "back" button! Give them the value of your site up front without the splash page.

2) Do not use excessive banner advertisements

Even the least net savvy people have trained themselves to ignore banner advertisements so you will be wasting valuable website real estate. Instead, provide more valueable content and weave relevant affiliate links into your content, and let your visitors feel that they want to buy instead of being pushed to buy.

3) Have a simple and clear navigation

You have to provide a simple and very straightforward navigation menu so that even a young child will know how to use it. Stay away from complicated Flash based menus or multi-tiered dropdown menus. If your visitors don't know how to navigate, they will leave your site.

4) Have a clear indication of where the user is

When visitors are deeply engrossed in browsing your site, you will want to make sure they know which part of the site they are in at that moment. That way, they will be able to browse relevant information or navigate to any section of the site easily. Don't confuse your visitors because confusion means "abandon ship"!

5) Avoid using audio on your site

If your visitor is going to stay a long time at your site, reading your content, you will

want to make sure they're not annoyed by some audio looping on and on on your website. If you insist on adding audio, make sure they have some control over it -- volume or muting controls would work fine.

5 Ways to Keep Visitors Coming Back

A lot of successful websites depend on returning visitors to account for a major part of their traffic. Returning visitors are easier to convert into paying customers because the more often they return to a site, the more trust they have in that site. The credibility issue just melts away. Hence, keep your visitors coming back to your site with the following methods:

1) Start a forum, chatroom or shoutbox

When you start a forum, chatroom or shoutbox, you are providing your visitors a place to voice their opinions and interact with their peers -- all of them are visitors of your site. As conversations build up, a sense of community will also follow and your visitors will come back to your site almost religiously every day.

2) Start a web log (blog)

Keep an online journal, or more commonly known as a blog, on your site and keep it updated with latest news about yourself. Human beings are curious creatures and they will keep their eyes glued to the monitor if you post fresh news frequently. You will also build up your credibility as you are proving to them that there is also a real life person behind the website.

3) Carry out polls or surveys

Polls and surveys are other forms of interaction that you should definitely consider adding to your site. They provide a quick way for visitors to voice their opinions and to get involved in your website. Be sure to publish polls or surveys that are strongly relevant to the target market of your website to keep them interested to find out about the results.

4) Hold puzzles, quizzes and games

Just imagine how many office workers procrastinate at work every day, and you will

be able to gauge how many people will keep visiting your site if you provide a very interesting or addicting way of entertainment. You can also hold competitions to award the high score winner to keep people trying continuously to earn the prize.

5) Update frequently with fresh content

Update your site frequently with fresh content so that every time your visitors come back, they will have something to read on your site. This is the most widely known and most effective method of attracting returning visitors, but this is also the least carried out one because of the laziness of webmasters. No one will want to browse a site that looks the same over ten years, so keep your site updated with fresh bites!

Generating Revenue with Good Planning

For anything to work well, care must be taken to make firm, workable plans to execute it and the same goes for website designs. With a well thought out website design, you will be able to create a site that generates multiple streams of revenue for you. In fact, many websites turn into online wasteland because they are not well planned and do not get a single visitor. Gradually, the webmaster will not be motivated to update it anymore and it turns into wasted cyberspace.

The crucial point of planning your site is optimizing it for revenue if you want to gain any income from the site. Divide your site into major blocks, ordered by themes, and start building new pages and subsections in those blocks. For example, you might have a "food" section, an "accommodation" section and an "entertainment" section for a tourism site. You can then write and publish relevant articles in the respective sections to attract a stream of traffic that comes looking for further information.

When you have a broader, better-defined scope of themes for your website, you can sell space on your pages to people interested in advertising on your page. You can also earn from programs like Google's AdSense and Yahoo! Search Marketing if people surf to those themed pages and click on the ads. For this very reason, the advertisement blocks on your pages need to be relevant to the content, so a themed page fits that criteria perfectly.

As Internet becomes more widespread, advertising on the Internet will bear more results than on magazines or offline media. Hence, start tapping in on this lucrative stream of profit right away!

Good Design Practices

Your website is where your business resides -- it's like the headquarter of an offline company. Hence, it is important to practise good design principles to make sure your site reaches out to the maximum number of visitors and sells to as many people as possible.

Make sure you have clear directions on the navigation of your website. The navigation menu should be uncluttered and concise so that visitors know how to navigate around your website without confusion.

Reduce the number of images on your website. They make your site load very slowly and more often than not they are very unnecessary. If you think any image is essential on your site, make sure you optimize them using image editing programs so that they have a minimum file size.

Keep your text paragraphs at a reasonable length. If a paragraph is too long, you should split it into separate paragraphs so that the text blocks will not be too big. This is important because a block of text that is too large will deter visitors from reading your content.

Make sure your website complies to web standards at www.w3.org and make sure they are cross-browser compatible. If your website looks great in Internet Explorer but breaks horribly in Firefox and Opera, you will lose out on a lot of prospective visitors.

Avoid using scripting languages on your site unless it is absolutely necessary. Use scripting languages to handle or manipulate data, not to create visual effects on your website. Heavy scripts will slow down the loading time of your site and even crash some browsers. Also, scripts are not supported across all browsers, so some visitors might miss important information because of that.

Use CSS to style your page content because they save a lot of work by styling all elements on your website in one go.

How To Have Websites Built For You The Cheap Way

Normally, if you want to have professional designers custom build your site, you must be prepared to dish out at least a few hundred dollars. All this can change if you know where to find the best deals, the best designs for the lowest price. Here's a rough guide:

First, you must understand that it is a rip off to get companies to design websites for you. Have you ever seen those advertisements in newspaper classified ad sections that offer a 5-page website at \$500? These companies are established companies with physical locations, therefore they have to increase the amount they charge to pay off some overheads: office rent, designer's wages, advertising costs and so on.

Therefore, it would be wise to find freelance designers who work from home. These people are often working from home so they do not have a high operation cost like that of a company. On the other hand, they will be able to design images with quality similar to those of designers from big companies, so it's a "no-brainer" choice.

However, choose freelancers with care. The best way to do this would be to go to elance.com. There, you can post the abstract of your project and get thousands of freelancers to bid on your project, so you will surely get the best deal. On top of that, you will be able to choose the designers based on their experience, past transactions and ratings, so your value for money is secured.

Another route you can take is to design your website yourself. Think about it, if you only need 5 simple pages to present some simple information, why waste hundreds of dollars for it? Just spend a little time to sit down and do it yourself. You'll be able to design your own sites even if you do not know a single line of HTML code with the help of WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get) programs such as Microsoft Frontpage, Macromedia Dreamweaver and so on.

The Importance of a Sitemap

A sitemap is often considered redundant in the process of building a website, and that is indeed the fact if you made a sitemap for the sake of having one. By highlighting

the importance of having a well constructed sitemap, you will be able to tailor your own sitemap to suit your own needs.

1) Navigation purposes

A sitemap literally acts as a map of your site. If your visitors browses your site and gets lost between the thousands of pages on your site, they can always refer to your sitemap to see where they are, and navigate through your pages with the utmost ease.

2) Conveying your site's theme

When your visitors load up your sitemap, they will get the gist of your site within a very short amount of time. There is no need to get the "big picture" of your site by reading through each page, and by doing that you will be saving your visitors' time.

3) Site optimization purposes

When you create a sitemap, you are actually creating a single page which contains links to every single page on your site. Imagine what happens when search engine robots hit this page -- they will follow the links on the sitemap and naturally every single page of your site gets indexed by search engines! It is also for this purpose that a link to the sitemap has to be placed prominently on the front page of your website.

4) Organization and relevance

A sitemap enables you to have a complete bird's eye view of your site structure, and whenever you need to add new content or new sections, you will be able to take the existing hierarchy into consideration just by glancing

Improve Usability of Your Website

No matter how brilliant your website design is, if it is hard to reach the content of your site then your site is as useful as an empty shell. Here are some tips to improve the usability of your website to ensure it serves its functions optimally.

The first method is to make sure the typography of your content is suitable. If you have large blocks of text, make sure to use CSS to space out the lines accordingly. The longer a single line of text is, the greater the line-height of each line should be.

Also, make sure the font size of your text is big enough to read easily. Some sites have 10-pixel-tall text in Verdana font; while that may look neat and tidy, you have to really strain your eyes to read the actual text.

Make it easy for visitors to find content that they want on your site. If you have thousands of articles on your site and a certain visitor wants to find one single article from that pile, you have to provide a feasible means to enable visitors to do that without hassle. Be it an SQL-driven database search engine or just a glossary or index of articles that you have, providing such a feature will make sure your visitors can use your site with ease.

Ensure that your site loads fast if you do not want to lose visitors. Most internet users will leave a website if it doesn't load completely within 15 seconds, so make sure the *crème de la crème* of your website is delivered to the visitors as soon as possible to retain their attention.

Last of all, test each and every link on your site before it goes online. There is nothing more effective in tarnishing your professional image than broken links, so be very careful about that.

Improve Usability of Your Website

Building Your Mailing List with Downloads

A mailing list is the lifeblood of your online business. The old adage "the money is in the list" cannot be true enough -- if you had a targeted list of prospects to contact each time you have a new product, you will be able to save a lot of effort by marketing it to your existing list of targeted prospects.

You can actually build up a targeted list of prospects that are interested in your products by offering a relevant download on your website. For example, let's take a look at a very good example -- apple.com. When you download the free iTunes and Quicktime software from their site, they will ask you to fill in an optional name and email form so that they can send you offers on songs that you can purchase via -- guess where -- iTunes!

In reality, you do not need to offer such a "heavyweight" download such as a full-feature software like iTunes. You can attract prospects equally well with some

quality freebies such as a simple report, a free wallpaper, and so on. The important thing is that your download offers enough value for the prospect to be willing to give away his/her own email address to get it.

However, slapping together a simple download and putting a link on your website won't be enough to attract qualified prospects. You will have to do some homework in order for your lead-generating mechanism to work well for you.

First of all, you must place your download form prominently on your website. Preferably, dedicate a page to it and link to that page from every other page of your website. That way, there is no way your visitors cannot find the download page, and when they do, you'll get some of them converted into your prospects!

Also, you have to put a little effort into promoting your download. Explain and elaborate on the values of the download, and why your visitors should download it. You might think why would anyone want to pass on a freebie, but most of your visitors would be too lazy to take the effort to download it because most of their downloads just sit on the hard disk collecting virtual dust. It is hence important to show your visitors why they should download your freebie.

Make It Easy To Buy From Your Site

Convincing your prospects to purchase from you is a hard job, but have you ever thought that you're making the process twice as difficult for both parties if your prospects are convinced but don't know how to buy from you? No matter how good you are at convincing your prospects, they won't buy if they find the process cumbersome.

First, you will want to check that people can find your order form easily and hassle-free. You can write a clear, concise paragraph to direct your prospects to your order form so that you can minimize the chances of them getting lost. You can also reduce the chances of losing prospects by putting a prominent link to your order page from every other page on your site.

Also, do you offer multiple payment options? Some people may feel comfortable paying via Paypal, some may only want to pay with their credit card and others might want to send a cheque. The more options you offer, the better your chances of covering your prospects' desired payment method. After all, it wouldn't make any

sense to sell hard to a prospect only to find that they won't be able to pay you when they want to.

On the other hand, you will want to prove that you are a credible merchant. Is your order form secured using encryption technology? You would want to look into SSL for this. You can also offer a money back guarantee so that people will feel confident about buying from you. How about after sales support? Who do they contact when they have problems after purchasing?

Alternatively, you can add customer testimonials, your contact information, address, and so on to boost your prospects' confidence. Make them feel safe about buying something from you, a total stranger to them on the other end of the Internet.

As a conclusion, it would be very pitiful if you sold hard and sold well to a prospect and something goes wrong when he or she is ready to pay. Eliminate any chances of that to maximize your profits!

Mistakes To Avoid When Using Web Templates

Website templates are very affordable and they save you a lot of effort and time when you want to create a new layout for your website. However, a lot of people make mistakes in the process of choosing and using a web template and end up with something that was unlike the image they had in mind. Here are some guidelines to help you avoid those mistakes.

The first obvious mistake you should be aware of is using a template that is very popular. If many people use the same template, your website will not appear unique at all and your credibility as a solid, different website will be tarnished. In other words, you will appear generic just like your next-door neighbours.

The whole point of using a web template is to save time and effort. You just change the title and appropriate details and you're done. The biggest mistake one makes is to customize the template beyond recognition. While that may be good in the sense that you're creating a unique graphic, you're defying the very purpose of using a web template -- saving time and effort.

However, on the opposite side, if a template you purchase is suitable but some changes must be made to suit your site's theme, then you will have to take some time

to make the changes. For example, you can find a very nice template that suits your hobby site except the original designer has put an image of stamps in the header. You can find images of garden plants and spades to replace the stamps for your gardening hobby site. However, do only make the necessary changes and don't redesign the whole template.

In some circumstances, some people simply make the wrong choice of templates. This is a very subjective issue but you have to be careful in selecting templates to suit your audience. Do not choose templates just because they are pretty, choose them because they serve your purpose.

Pros and Cons of Flash-based Sites

Flash-based sites have been a craze since the past few years, and as Macromedia compiles more and more great features into Flash, we can only predict there will be more and more flash sites around the Internet. However, Flash based sites have been disputed to be bloated and unnecessary. Where exactly do we draw the line? Here's a simple breakdown.

The good:

Interactivity

Flash's Action script opens up a vast field of possibilities. Programmers and designers have used Flash to create interactive features ranging from very lively feedback forms to attractive Flash-based games. This whole new level of interactivity will always leave visitors coming back for more.

A standardized site

With Flash, you do not have to worry about cross-browser compatibility. No more woes over how a certain css code displays differently in Internet Explorer, Firefox and Opera. When you position your site elements in Flash, they will always appear as they are as long as the user has Flash Player installed.

Better expression through animation

In Flash, one can make use of its animating features to convey a message in a much

more efficient and effective way. Flash is a lightweight option for animation because it is vector based (and hence smaller file sizes) as opposed to real "movie files" that are raster based and hence much larger in size.

The bad and the ugly:

The Flash player

People have to download the Flash player in advance before they can view Flash movies, so by using Flash your visitor range will decrease considerably because not everyone will be willing to download the Flash player just to view your site. You'll also have to put in additional work in redirecting the user to the Flash download page if he or she doesn't have the player installed.

Site optimization

If your content was presented in Flash, most search engines wouldn't be able to index your content. Hence, you will not be able to rank well in search engines and there will be less traffic heading to your site.

Loading time

Users have to wait longer than usual to load Flash content compared to regular text and images, and some visitors might just lose their patience and click the Back button. The longer your Flash takes to load, the more you risk losing visitors.

The best way to go is to use Flash only when you absolutely need the interactivity and motion that comes with it. Otherwise, use a mixture of Flash and HTML or use pure text if your site is purely to present simple textual and graphical information.

Reducing Load Time Through Image Optimization

Even though more and more Internet users switch to broadband every year, a large portion of the web's population is still running on good old dialup connections. It is therefore unwise to count them out of the equation when you're designing your website, and a very major consideration we have to make for dialup users is the loading time of your website.

Generally, all the text on your website will be loaded in a very short time even on a dialup connection. The culprit of slow-loading sites is mainly large images on your website, and it is very important to strike a delicate balance between using just enough images to attract your users and not to bog down the overall loading time of your site.

You should also go to a greater length and optimize every image on your site to make sure it loads in the least time possible. What I really mean is to use image editing software to remove unnecessary information on your images, and thereby effectively reducing the file size of your image without affecting its appearance.

If you own Photoshop, it will be obvious to you that when you save an image as a JPEG file, a dialog box appears and lets you choose the "quality" of the JPEG image -- normally a setting of 8 to 10 is good enough as it will preserve the quality of your image while saving it at a small file size. If you do not have Photoshop, there are many free image compressors online that you can download and use to reduce your image's file size.

On the other hand, you can opt to save your images in PNG format to get the best quality at the least file size. You can also save your images in GIF format -- the image editing software clips away all the color information not used in your image, hence giving you the smallest file size possible. However, saving in GIF format will often compromise the appearance of your image, so make your choice wisely!

Search Engine Friendly Pages

There is no point in building a website unless there are visitors coming in. A major source of traffic for most sites on the Internet is search engines like Google, Yahoo!, MSN, Altavista and so on. Hence, by designing a search engine friendly site, you will be able to rank easily in search engines and obtain more visitors.

Major search engines use programs called crawlers or robots to index websites to list on their search result pages. They follow links to a page, reads the content of the page and record it in their own database, pulling up the listing as people search for it.

If you want to make your site indexed easily, you should avoid using frames on your website. Frames will only confuse search engine robots and they might even abandon your site because of that. Moreover, frames make it difficult for users to bookmark a

specific page on your site without using long, complicated scripts.

Do not present important information in Flash movies or in images. Search engine robots can only read text on your source code so if you present important words in Flash movies and images rather than textual form, your search engine ranking will be affected dramatically.

Use meta tags accordingly on each and every page of your site so that search engine robots know at first glance what that particular page is about and whether or not to index it. By using meta tags, you are making the search engine robot's job easier so they will crawl and index your site more frequently.

Stop using wrong HTML tags like `` to style your page. Use CSS (Cascading Style Sheets) instead because they are more effective and efficient. By using CSS, you can eliminate redundant HTML tags and make your pages much lighter and faster to load.

The Importance of A Good Design

Your website is the hub of your online business; it is the virtual representation of your company whether your company exists physically or not. When you are doing business online, people cannot see you physically like how they could if they were dealing with an offline company. Hence, people do judge you by your covers. This is where a good design comes in.

Imagine if you are running an offline company. Would you allow your salespersons to be dressed in shabby or casual clothes when they are dealing with your customers? By making your staff wear professionally, you are telling your customers that you do care about quality. This works simply because first impressions matter.

Similarly, the same case is with your website. If your website is put together shabbily and looks like a 5 minute "quick fix", you are literally shouting to your visitors that you are not professional and you do not care for quality.

On the opposite, if you have a totally professional looking website layout, you are giving your visitors the perception that you have given meticulous attention to every detail and you care about professionalism. You are organized, focused and you really mean business.

On the other hand, you should also have anything related to your company well designed. From business cards to letterheads to promotional brochures, every little bit matters. This is because as you grow your business, these items become the face of your business. Once again, think of the "salesperson dressed shabbily" analogy, and you will get my point.

Ways To Improve Sales Through Your Website

Anyone who has been marketing online knows that the lifeblood of a business is the traffic of a site. More visitors equal more sales. However, here are some ways that you can tweak your sites with to improve sales without the need to get more visitors.

The first method is to weave in your personal touch in your sales message. Nobody wants to be sold to by a total stranger, but many people will buy what their close friends recommend to them. If you can convince your audience that you are a personal friend who has their best interest at heart, they will be convinced to buy your products. Remember to speak to an individual in your salesletter, not to your whole audience.

The second method is to publish testimonials and comments from your customers. A good idea would be to publish both good and bad comments; that way prospects will be really convinced that these testimonials are real. When prospects see testimonials on your website, they will have the confidence to buy from you because human beings follow the herd mentality; when others have bought and proven it authentic, they will jump on the bandwagon and buy too.

Use visual representations for the problems and solutions that your product offers. Not everyone will read your text copy from the head to the tail, but most people will pay attention to images on your website.

Offer quality bonuses to accompany the product. When you offer bonuses that complement your product, your prospects will feel it's a very good deal and it would be stupid to miss it. Be sure to state the monetary value of your bonuses so that people will be even more compelled to grab your good bargain.

Lastly, ask for the sale! Many people entice their prospects with the benefits of their product, sell to them with stories of how it has solved many problems, even offered

killer bonuses but forget to ask for the sale. Give a clear instruction on how to buy your product (e.g. "click the button to buy now!").

Web Design Elements You Should Avoid Having on Your Site

As a web designer, you should design your websites to give your visitors the greatest ease of use, the best impression and most important of all a welcoming experience. It doesn't matter if you had the greatest product in the whole world -- if your website is poorly done you won't be able to sell even one copy of it because visitors will be driven off your website by the lousy design.

When I'm talking about a "good design", I'm not only talking about a good graphical design. A professional web design will be able to point out that there are many components which contribute to a good website design -- accessibility design, interface or layout design, user experience design and of course the most straightforward, which is graphic design.

Hence, I have highlighted some features of the worst web designs I've come across. Hopefully, you will be able to compare that against your own site as a checklist and if anything on your site fits the criteria, you should know it's high time to take serious action!

1) Background music

Unless you are running a site which promotes a band, a CD or anything related to music, I would really advise you to stay away from putting looping background music onto your site. It might sound pleasant to you at first, but imagine if you ran a big site with hundreds of pages and everytime a visitor browses to another page on your site, the background music starts playing again. If I were your visitor, I'd just turn off my speakers or leave your site. Moreover, they just add to the visitors burden when viewing your site -- users on dial up connections will have to wait longer just to view your site as it is meant to be viewed.

2) Extra large/small text size

As I said, there is more to web design than purely graphics -- user accessibility is one

big part of it too! You should design the text on your site to be legible and reasonably sized to enable your visitors to read it without straining their eyes. No matter how good the content of your website or your sales copy is, if it's illegible you won't be selling anything!

3) Popup windows

Popup windows are so blatantly used to display advertisements that in my mind, 90% of popup windows are not worth my attention so I just close them on instinct every time each one manages to pass through my popup blocker (yes, I do have one like many users out there!) and, well, pops up on my screen. Imagine if you had a very important message to convey and you put it in a popup window that gets killed most of the time it appears on a visitor's screen. Your website loses its function immediately!

In concluding this article, let me remind you that as a webmaster your job is to make sure your website does what it's meant to do effectively. Don't let some minor mistakes stop your site from functioning optimally!

When Is the Right Time to Redesign?

If you run a website, chances are you often wonder whether it is the right time to do a total redesign of the layout of your website. Here are some points to consider:

Are you thinking of a redesign just for the sake of it? If you answered yes to that question, it is not yet the right time to do a redesign. Remember, a design serves a specific purpose. If you are not sure whether to do an overhaul of your site, keep in mind that your current design might have a specific purpose that you might not know about. You will lose that function if you do a redesign.

On the other hand, if your website has had the same website design since 1990, perhaps it is high time to do a redesign. The last thing you would ever want to happen to your site is when visitors leave your site without taking a look at your content just because the design is old fashioned. If this is your case, here are some points to ponder before doing a redesign.

Redesigning your website is like performing plastic surgery on it. Your website loses its current identity (for the better or worse) and your regular visitors might not

recognize your new design at first glance. You risk losing them just because they thought they landed on the wrong page. Hence, it is very important that you retain a characteristic feature from your old layout. Perhaps it is the logo of your site; perhaps it is the same text style for the title for your site.

To play it safe, put a poll on your site to let your visitors do the talking. If they think it is necessary for the website to have a fresh look, give it to them!

Who Is Your Audience?

Understanding the type of people who visit your site is a very important task because you can use that information to enhance your site to suit them. As a result, you will gain more loyal returning visitors that come back again and again for more.

What is the age level and what kind of knowledge does your audience have? A layman might linger around a general site on gardening, but a professional botanist might turn his nose at the very same site. Similarly, a regular person will leave a site filled with astronomy abstracts but a well educated university graduate will find that site interesting.

Take your audience's emotional state into consideration when building your site. If a very irritated visitor searches for a solution and comes across your site, you will want to make sure you offer the solution right up front and sell or promote your product to him second. In this way, the visitor will put his trust in you for offering the solution to his problems and is more likely to buy your product when you offer it to him after that.

When you design the layout for your site, you have to take into account the characteristics of your audience. Are they old or young people? Are they looking for trends or are they just looking for information served without any icing on the cake? For example, introducing a new, exciting game with a simple, straightforward black text against white background page will definitely turn prospects away. Make sure your design suits your site's general theme.

Try to sprinkle colloquial language in your sites sparingly where you see fit and you will create a sense that your audience is on common ground with you. This in turn builds a trusting relationship between you and your audience, which will come in useful should you want to market a product to your audience.

Why Hire A Designer?

A lot of online business owners start with no money. They have to do everything themselves -- the preparation of a product, the development of a marketing strategy, the actual building of a website to cater to their product's marketing needs. As their business expands over time, they will find that their simple "homemade" site might not be enough to cover everything, and they will have to take a day or two away to simply dedicate that to the website expansion.

Sounds familiar? Chances are, you're someone who started everything with no money too, so you're pretty skeptical when it comes to giving away your money in exchange for something that you could have done yourself. However, there is a lot more to hiring a designer than just finishing up a job that you don't want to do.

When you hire a web designer to do your job for you, you are doing more than just handing over the "dirty job" to someone else. In fact, by paying a little money, you can let the designer worry about the little annoyances that always evade the main picture and only come haunting when you're halfway through the job. That way, you will be more focused and have more time to spend on your actual business strategy.

On the other hand, the designers you hire are professionals so they are good at what they do. By outsourcing your web design jobs to them, you won't have to worry when problems surface because you can always get them to fix it for you. Again, they will be able to pin point the problem and fix it faster than you probably will be able to.

Also, the work you pay for will turn out more professional than what you can achieve because the designers have been doing it longer than you have. After all, they do it for a living so they have to be good!

So, remember to not just work your business, but grow your business too!

Why You Should Use Graphic Templates

When it comes to graphics, most Internet marketers shy away from using graphic

templates whether it's eBook covers, website layouts or promotional banners because they firmly believe that by using graphic templates, they are tarnishing their own business. They want to own a unique identity and hence will always find a professional graphic designer to do the job. Well, you're in for a big surprise!

When you purchase a graphic template, you will be able to customize it to an extent or even build a totally new design based on it! What's the point of using the template then, you say? Well, it serves as a source of inspiration and ideas for a totally new design. You can't derive anything from a blank canvas, right?

On top of that, you are actually saving a lot of precious time that you can otherwise spend on more important matters like developing new products or market your products. When you buy a pre-made template, you only need to edit a thing or two to give it an identity of your own, and that gives you more time and flexibility to work on other stuff.

Okay, let's say you argue that hiring a designer to do the job is equally fast. That may be true but don't forget, hiring a professional designer to do a custom design for you will cost you a lot of money. Unless you need a totally unique identity that you are aiming to establish firmly in your niche market, you don't need to get a designer to design it for you.

Not all graphic templates are suitable, so you have to be careful when choosing one. Consider quality over the price, and you're on your way to creating a positive image for your business while saving more time for more productive chores!

Is It Easy to Create our own Website? What is HTML?

Creating a website is not so much a feat, if we compare it to the education of other technical skills. Most people tend to give up and pack their bags as soon as they hear the word “programming” and “technical”. They think it's too much of a hassle to actually learn a whole computer “language”. HTML, the most basic computer language in building websites, is actually pretty simple to understand, as long as we have the interest in learning new things.

What is HTML?

HTML is the acronym for Hyper Text Markup Language. For learning purposes, just think of it as a language that the computer understands. For example, as humans, we were taught different languages; i.e. HTML as a language, is mostly and specifically used to create a website. The web browser, such as Microsoft Internet Explorer or Mozilla Firefox, will then decipher and interpret the code or rather, language(HTML), and display it in a way we can understand it, just like in a basic webpage.

Coding.

Coding the HTML language might be a bit tough for some people, so we can actually purchase programmes, such as Macromedia Dreamweaver, or even Microsoft Frontpage. These programmes are solely created to help individuals in designing professional webpages/websites.

Furthermore, one could also gain access to online web-builders, website builders that are inbuilt and can be directly controlled from the net. There are many different and specific builders online.

Books and magazines contain guides that can help in offering tutorials and ways to put up our own websites. Even online tutorials are credible, as in the modern world, information technology is the best and most cost efficient way in retaining knowledge, especially in this particular field.

So, you could start and build one right away. If you enjoy coding, it might even become a favourable past-time.

Should I Create a Website? Do I Need One?

People always want to follow the latest thing, be it in fashion, sports, that kind of thing. Websites have become a necessity to almost everyone. Companies, businesses, individuals, even young adults have created personal websites with their respective purposes, be it for profit, or for entertainment.

What one must consider, however, before creating a website, are the factors in which must be put to thought before doing so, such as the cost, maintenance, use, web host and so forth.

Firstly, associating with the cost, we must always try to find an affordable host, not spending too much, nor too little. A cheap host does not exactly symbolize a credible reliability rating, but we must always look for value for money deals. Also, regarding the efficiency and server/web host reliability, there are many cases of web hosts not providing the service they had assured other people, some had even shut down and were nowhere to be seen. Keep this note in mind, as if you would like a long-lasting website, this would be the first thing to look for.

Next, would hiring a professional be affordable? Is it the best option? For simple websites, we could always pick up the coding, or even use programs, as it is relatively simple. However, when it comes to more complex coding, and when you want it to do a tad more than just providing information, hiring help in doing so would be the best way. Not only in terms of design, but security is also a key factor in assuring a quality website. If the website also acts as a portal for businesses, security would definitely be the issue here.

So, having considered the things to do before building a website, do we actually NEED one? If creating one would boost sales or promote positive implications to oneself, then by all means, go ahead and do what's best. Yet again, planning is the key to success, in everything we do.

The Key to Better Websites

[A] Navigation

Introduction

Importance of the latter :

One of the primary implications of a well-organized / good website, is to keep your visitors in the website. A website is definitely created for a purpose, unless intended for personal use, which is the minority. For example, a portfolio website would want to be visited and it's content viewed. For companies and internet businesses, your website certainly aims to provide product information, to make sales, or somewhat similar. However, most individuals undoubtedly prefer visually captivating designs, so on and so forth. It is undeniable that this causes no harm, but one must put himself/herself in other people's shoes, as to understand how a visitor to the website

might think, do and react.

1) Navigation

As I said, a web designer has to learn how to think the way your visitors think.

Situation A : Website with good navigation (2-3 hyperlinks to target page), well planned in terms of placement, and design.

Situation B : Website with poor navigation (takes forever for the visitor to reach his/her target page), hard-to-read navigation fonts and poor placement of the navigation buttons/bar.

In Situation A, a visitor will always want to be able to access his/her target page. For example, the individual comes across your website, and is interested in the product sold, but wants to find more information. He/she finds the navigation with no trouble, and enters the particular product information page.

As for Situation B, a visitor stumbles into the website, and would also like to find out more information about the product. Unfortunately, due to bad placement and fanciful font-types, the visitor takes forever, or even fails to find the navigation bar. Even when he/she does so, links to the product information are nowhere to be found, (example : home > about > products > product image > etc...[a few more clicks] > product information).

Analysis : In both situations, wouldn't a website with characteristics similar to the Situation A be more rewarding ergo better?

The Key to Better Websites

[Part B] Design

Introduction

Importance of the latter :

Design, design, design. To put the wonders of a good design into perspective, imagine a when we are purchasing a T-Shirt. First of all, what do we look at? The

design of the T-Shirt, of course. Well most people do, other than the material factor. But let's assume the all other factors are constant, wouldn't the design or looks, become the key aspect then?

2) Design

Putting oneself in another individual's shoes, as usual. Here are another two situations.

Situation A : A website with good design and breathtaking graphics. (Good color schemes with matching theme), pictures. (Optimum resolutions and relevant) and proper fonts and word sizes.

Situation B : A website inversely equipped with hideous graphics and pictures in terms of resolution, quality and relevancy. (Red pictures with a bright green background) Fonts used were not matching albeit too fanciful. (Too small, artsy font-types)

Situation A, visitors that enter the website are immediately awestruck by the design and artwork. The well placed pictures and designs will somewhat symbolizes the positive nature of the company/website. As we know, most people DO judge by impression.

As for Situation B, the shabby environment due to severe lack of creativity and badly taken pictures wouldn't exactly help in attracting visitors. Fonts that were hard to be read, let alone comprehended, and mismatching themes in terms of color, isn't exactly welcoming, is it?

Analysis: Now, the main idea here is to always plan your websites, try to get other individuals for feedback and perspectives. Each mindset might differ, but at least you will get room for improvement. Don't get me wrong, even a plain website with proper design would generate plenty of positive implications, but the key idea here is to at least maintain an impressionable website.

Website Customization: What can we do?

Nowadays, in this trendy world, people get very uptight when they do not look entirely presentable. This would also be the case in web designing.

Every individual would definitely want their website to look good, if not, to the best they can. Here are a few things we could look out for when wanting to create a professional looking webpage.

Color Schemes and Themes.

When designing, always choose matching colors. An example of a matching color would be to have a dark background, with visible words and designs. With the dark theme, try not to mix too many bright colors into the design. What we should NEVER do, is to mix two very different colors, such as purple and yellow. Now, of course, it would depend on the purpose of the website, but those two colors are too striking for one who wants it to look more professional.

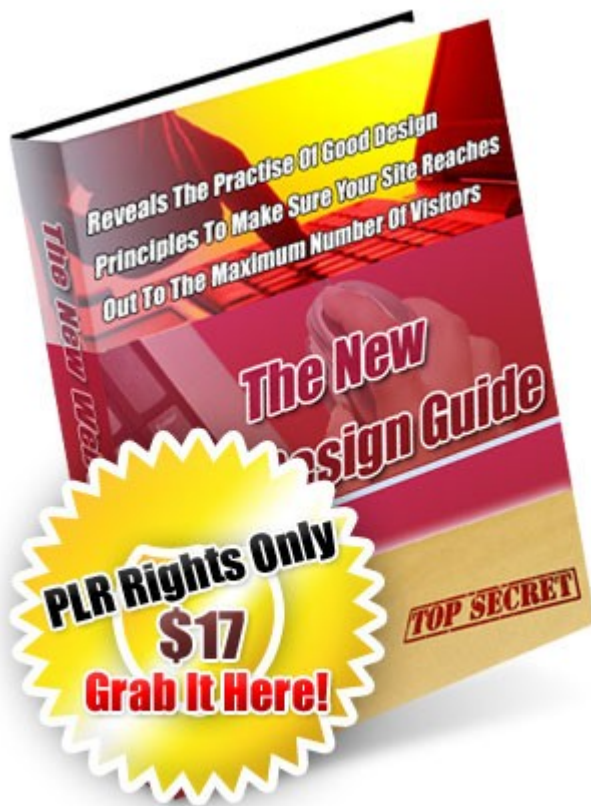
Themes must always suit the company or rather, the organization / etc. If the website was made to cater for a food company, it would be wise to stick to that particular category, rather than to revert to a different theme, such as machinery.

Fonts should be used in regard to the formality of the website. A simple sans-serif font would suffice in most cases. Exceptional cases such as design and art groups might want to use fanciful designs and fonts. Of course, that's only if you know what you're doing.

Finally, we must always try to think of our visitors, see the way they see. The resolutions and file sizes of the pictures must not be too large in terms of size. This is to allow maximum compatibility and cater our visitor's needs.

So, planning is something we should always do, before attempting something.

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