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Web Site Design

Posted on **December 1, 2002** by **Editor**



By **Jesse Snyder** <snyderjw@pacificu.edu>

BS, Computer Science, Pacific University

As I slowly evolve into a teacher, I have to come up with assignments for my students. One class I teach is web design, and I plan on using an “assignment” that I’ve used on faculty when teaching them about websites. Basically, the first day of class or a workshop, I have students search the web for at least three sites that they find appealing. A mentor teacher who is teaching the web design class for whom I’ll take over, tried this assignment out with her students. She was ready to launch into a unit on good design. As it turned out, most of the students went to sites that they had some cultural connection to, like Nike (www.nike.com), or MTV (www.mtv.com). Some liked Yahoo (www.yahoo.com) and Hotmail (www.hotmail.com) since the students use it for email. What the teacher found was that students were going to sites based on content, rather than design. She was frustrated because students weren’t trying that hard to find good sites. I had to remind her that the sites the students are accessing are designed well. In fact, they had better be, since corporations are pouring millions of dollars into them.

So, what makes a good site anyway? When you go out on the web, what sites do you want to spend a lot of time exploring? Which ones make you uncomfortable? Often times, I’ll happen upon a site and leave without really checking the content out because “it doesn’t look creditable.” For instance, if I’m searching for some scientific facts and I come across someone’s personal web site that has “Last updated 1998,” (<http://www.unomaha.edu/~brasile/vita.htm>), odds are I won’t stay there long.

What should come to mind for positive attributes of websites can be applied to any type of design. Good use of space, attractive color schemes, usability, purposeful. However, there are a few extra things that go along with web design that may seem obvious, but that many people over look. For example, quickly loading pages, working links, current content, just to name a few.

If you're the one designing a site, you need to be mindful of who the site is for. That's usually the best place to start: your audience. The issue of audience has always been a contention for Universities. Should University websites be designed for the current students (accessing grades, news and events, finals schedules) or should the site be designed for recruiting new students (campus tours, pretty pictures, lots of content to "show-off" the school, etc.). Hopefully, you won't be building a site that has to cater to many different groups of people. If you're a teacher or professor, you might want to build a site with simple text formatting and simple hyperlinks. Maybe a few pictures. You probably don't want to add super fancy JavaScript cursors, animated gifs, and sound. (<http://www.mrair.net/>). It's over the top, unnecessary, and distracting. Make sure your site serves some useful purpose. This all comes from knowing your audience.

Once you start building your site, be ready to make changes along the way. Not a single site that I've made has ended the way I planned. There's always been at least one minor change that had to be made. Be ready to learn new things along the way. Even though I've been building sites for years, I still learn something new every time.

Anyway, with that said, you're going to want to keep your content recent, unless you're trying to archive some content. You'd be surprised how many people start a site, and then forget about it. This happens most often on free web hosting sites, such as Geocities (<http://www.geocities.com>). People (myself included) build a site, update for a bit, or not at all, then leave it to sink in the Ocean of the Internet. Sometimes, you find the darndest things. However, it's no fun to come across these types of sites when you're doing research. Also, if your audience needs lots of updates, keep them updated. If you run a small business make sure your web site has current dates on it. When I go to a site that runs a business and they haven't updated their site for a few years, I think twice about doing business with them.

Part of keeping your content updated is making sure your links still work. As we all know, the web is constantly in a state of flux. It's one big dynamic clump of information and more often than not, a site working one day might not be working the next. Often you'll find that sites run out of money, get sold to other people, or are simply moved. Sometimes, pages are renamed. If the author is nice, they'll put a page at the location of the old page telling the user where the new site can be found. Sometimes, web authors could care less. It's good practice to point your users in the right direction if you move pages on your site. On the flip side, you may have links in your site that go to other places on the Internet that no longer exist. You can check them by hand if you run a small site with a few pages, or you could download a program that will spider your site and check your pages for you.

By now, your site should have some direction and some purpose. You know what you want to do, and you might have your links in order. Now comes the hard part. Is your site easy to use? It's often easy to overlook major usability issues since you're the one that has made the site. It works for you, but potentially hundreds or thousands of different people will be using your site. Do you think they all think the same as you? Building a useable site is one of the most difficult things to do, and is usually where I spend the most time with web design. Especially since you're not

really sure how it will work until people start using it. The best situation is where you can get some random strangers to test the site for you. Your friends will sugar coat their testing, telling you that “It looks nice,” and what not, as not to hurt your feelings.

You’ll want to test your site for usability in a number of ways. First of all, there are some basic technical guidelines that most websites should follow. For example, you don’t want to use many different font sets, or fonts that aren’t found on all computers. Many students want to use fancy, cursive style fonts on their sites. (<http://www.gearheads.ca/>) They load them onto the web, and of course they see the fancy fonts since the font set is loaded on the machine they are working from. Then they tell a friend about their site, and their friend says something to the effect of “Dude... your site was cool but what was with the font being all messed up?” Then mass confusion ensues and sometimes the problem gets solved, and sometimes it doesn’t. I often use Ariel since it’s a non-serifed font. Serifed fonts, like Times and Courier can be hard on the eyes for massive use. A lot of it depends on the look of your site too.

Color is another issue. You’ll often find pages with 10 different colors, a background that is purple with blue links, etc. (<http://www.geocities.com/howellschool/sandy.html>) Remember, you may really like that picture of your baby in the black and white checkered shirt, but no text is going to look good on that background. It’s simply going to be too hard to read. For backgrounds, stick with simple colors. In general, you’ll want to use no more than three or four colors on any given page. (<http://www.whitehouse.org/>) More colors than that, unless there are special circumstances, can feel cluttered and unprofessional. (<http://www.geocities.com/leander1991/index.html>)

Back to fonts, you’ll want to make sure there aren’t a lot of changes in font size (<http://web.utk.edu/~gwhitney/awful/awful2.html>), or lots of caps, bolds, and blinking text. And absolutely no underlines. Underlines are reserved for hyperlinks, and I hate nothing more than clicking on underlined text that doesn’t respond to my input. Also, across different operating systems and browsers, text, and subsequently the rest of your content is going to look different. It will be rendered differently, and the text you see on your screen isn’t going to look that same as a potential customer in Japan on his Mac using Netscape. Make sure you test on a few different operating systems and browsers before you put your web site out for everyone to use.

I could go on and on. In any event, find a couple of sites that you like. Do they follow general design rules? Why do they appeal to you? Many well done sites that have a lot of money backing them, and you’ll find that those people making these sites are professionals. They don’t usually stray from good design principles, but when they do, they do it for a good reason (such as their boss telling them to). When you build your site, keep in mind some of these basic ideas, and you’ll save yourself a lot of time fixing problems down the road, and your users will love you.

For more resources on good and bad web design, check out:

<http://www.tuxedo.org/~esr/html-hell.html>

<http://www.webpagesthatsuck.com/>
<http://www.ratz.com/featuresgood.html>

<http://www.lcc.gatech.edu/gallery/dzine/>
<http://www.mirrormere.com/authoring/design/bad.shtml>
<http://www.w3c.org>

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21 THOUGHTS ON "WEB SITE DESIGN"

best carry on luggage

on **January 31, 2014 at 10:57 AM** said:

You really make it seem so easy with your presentation but I find this topic to be actually something that I think I would never understand. It seems too complicated and extremely broad for me. I'm looking forward for your next post, I'll try to get the hang of it!

band saw reviews

on **February 3, 2014 at 6:53 PM** said:

My brother suggested I might like this blog. He was totally right. This post actually made my day. You can't imagine simply how much time I had spent for this info!

Thanks!

pressure washer reviews

on **February 3, 2014 at 7:50 PM** said:

Hi Dear, are you in fact visiting this web page regularly, if so after that you will definitely obtain pleasant know-how.

best crossfit shoes

on **February 3, 2014 at 7:53 PM** said:

I got this site from my pal who told me on the topic of this website and at the moment this time I am browsing this website and reading very informative articles at this time.

infrared grill reviews

on **February 3, 2014 at 10:58 PM** said:

Thank you for some other informative blog.

The place else could I get that type of information written in such a perfect way? I have a mission that I'm just now operating on, and I've been at the look out for such info.

robotic pool cleaner reviews

on **February 3, 2014 at 11:04 PM** said:

Terrific article! This is the kind of info that are meant to be shared around the net. Disgrace on Google for no longer positioning this post higher!

Come on over and talk over with my website . Thanks =)

exercise bike reviews

on **February 3, 2014 at 11:54 PM** said:

I do not even understand how I stopped up here, however I assumed this post was good. I do not know who you're but definitely you're going to a famous blogger when you are not already. Cheers!

scroll saw reviews

on **February 4, 2014 at 12:11 AM** said:

It's actually very complicated in this full of activity life to listen news on TV, thus I simply use web for that reason, and get the newest information.

best folding bike

on **February 4, 2014 at 12:11 AM** said:

I've been browsing online more than three hours today, but I by no means found any interesting article like yours. It's pretty value enough for me. In my opinion, if all site owners and bloggers made good content material as you did, the internet shall be a lot more useful than ever before.

best vacuum for hardwood floors

on **February 4, 2014 at 3:06 AM** said:

I know this website offers quality depending content and other stuff, is there any other site which gives these kinds of information in quality?

best home gym

on **February 4, 2014 at 3:11 AM** said:

Hi my loved one! I want to say that this article is amazing, nice written and come with approximately all significant infos.

I'd like to look extra posts like this .

africa

on **February 4, 2014 at 10:17 AM** said:

“Great, thanks for sharing this article post.Appreciate it Again and again. Terrific.”

nigeria entertainment news

on **February 4, 2014 at 10:28 AM** said:

It normally takes about Three many years to total that with.

nigeria entertainment news

on **February 4, 2014 at 10:37 AM** said:

I haven't observed the movie but, given the focus of this site, I observed this quote from an Indiewire article interesting:

Powerful Social Networking, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram Followers, Google, YouTube & Website Traffic. Boost Online Presence and Brand Influence

on **February 4, 2014 at 1:17 PM** said:

Hello my loved one! I want to say that this post is awesome, great written and include almost all important infos. I'd like to see extra posts like this .

rifle scope reviews

on **February 4, 2014 at 8:33 PM** said:

I've been surfing on-line more than three hours lately, but I by no means found any fascinating article like yours.

It's beautiful value enough for me. In my

view, if all site owners and bloggers made just right content material

as you did, the net can be much more useful than ever before.

jig saw reviews

on **February 5, 2014 at 12:10 AM** said:

Hi everyone, it's my first pay a visit at this site, and paragraph is genuinely fruitful designed for me, keep up posting these articles or reviews.

table saw reviews

on **February 5, 2014 at 12:17 AM** said:

After checking out a handful of the articles on your website, I truly like your technique of blogging.

I book marked it to my bookmark site list and will be checking back soon. Please check out my website as well and let me know your opinion.

best electric tea kettle

on **February 5, 2014 at 2:36 AM** said:

Great goods from you, man. I've understand your stuff previous to and you are just extremely excellent.

I really like what you've acquired here, certainly like what you are saying and the way in which you say it. You make it enjoyable and you still care for to keep it smart. I can not wait to read much more from you. This is actually a great web site.

choicest

on **February 5, 2014 at 6:42 AM** said:

I'll right away grab your rss feed as I can not to find your e-mail subscription hyperlink or e-newsletter service. Do you've any? Kindly allow me understand so that I may subscribe. Thanks.

ways to make money fast and legal.

on **February 6, 2014 at 3:18 AM** said:

One of the best tools to determine whether your niche of choice is profitable or not is by doing keyword research.

Well, if you answered yes to these questions, then make today the day that you change your life forever.

You only need to join as a seller and products to sell.