

Web Design Concept

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INTRODUCTION

In 2005, the Internet became available to one billion people worldwide with about 845 million people using it regularly (Emarketer, 2006). The United States has one of the largest Internet populations with 175.4 million online users (Weisman, 2006). It is estimated the Internet is used by 80% of advertisers and it is projected that 90% of them will adopt the Internet for advertising by 2008.

Effective Web site design is essential in online advertising and in attracting and maintaining consumers' interest. Many organizations include a Web site as part of their advertising and media mix (Arens, 2006; Geissler, Zinkham, & Watson, 2006). Web design experts assert that interface features and designs influence a site's traffic and sales. Although there are no definite guidelines for successful Web site designs, some important constructs related to effectiveness are (1) page design, (2) navigation, (3) color usage, (4) graphics and typeface, (5) content, and (6) online advertising (Arens, 2006; Kovarik, 2002; Song & Zahedi, 2005; Van Duyne, Landay, & Hong, 2003).

PAGE DESIGN

An online site's home page creates an initial impression of the company's Web site and of the company itself (Geissler, Zinkhan, & Watson, 2006; Singh, Dalal, & Spears, 2005). It is critical to gain viewers' attention and interest upon entrance to the home page. A home page should communicate "who you are, what you offer, and what's inside (the Web site)" (Geissler, Zinkhan, & Watson, 2006, p. 71). Additionally, first impressions of the site are essential in establishing online relationships. A Web page is unlikely to trigger approach behavior unless it is rich in exploration pos-

sibilities (Singh, Dalal, & Spears, 2005). Furthermore, a company's contact information or a link to a separate contact page is considered an essential element in the home page (Geissler, Zinkhan, & Watson, 2006). Viewers perceive home pages as incomplete if all of the essential information is not provided up front.

Some of the primary elements of a home page should include consideration of content, page length, links, graphics, text, and animation (Geissler, Zinkhan, & Watson, 2006). Experts advocate uncluttered screen design. Designers should keep copy short; cast informative headlines; use headings, highlighting, and color copy as visual cues; make use of white space; and employ interface consistency. The copy for each menu item should be bright, and phrases should be brief and have color.

NAVIGATION

Navigation refers to the hypertext connection of the multimedia content and determines ease of information retrieval and a site's organization (Karayanni & Baltas, 2003). Well organized and easy to navigate pages should be a primary consideration of good Web site design (Kim & Kim, 2006). Search engines, site maps, and indices provide the ability to link pages throughout the Web site and to hyperlink to related information, which enhances the ability of Web site users to navigate the page and identify information quickly. It is important to have a navigation bar and a search engine toward the top of a Web page to ease navigation. North navigation is when the navigation bar runs across the top of a Web page. West navigation is when the navigation bar runs on the far left and vertically on the Web page. Graphic buttons should provide basic navigation links and create a graphic identity that tells users they are within the site domain. Each page should have consistent navigation links and a link back to the home page.

COLOR

Web sites should avoid clashing colors, have limited use of color, use color for visual cues, and use color that evokes intended connotations (Arnston, 2006). Although everyone brings a subjective perspective to the viewing of colors, studies show that some generalizations can be made about the use of color. For example, warm colors (e.g., red and yellow) stimulate and usually appear closer to the viewer than cool colors (e.g., blue and green). The color preferences of an intended audience should be taken into consideration, especially as Web sites reach international audiences. In the Western culture, light colors (e.g., pastels) are generally viewed as being relaxed and cheery, while dark colors usually convey darker emotions (e.g., anger, depression). Other examples of Western color psychology are (1) red: stop, danger, love, passion heat; (2) blue: cold, water, cleanliness, authority sky; and (3) green: go, environmentally friendly.

Background colors can affect visitors' perception of the colors in the foreground. For example, colors can look more intense on a dark background or washed out on a light background. Too many colors can make a screen visually or conceptually overwhelming. Color can be used for creating visual importance and hierarchy (Weinman, 2003). It can be used to differentiate information, signal categories, and highlight information. It should supplement and reinforce. It should not be used to replace, label, or explain.

TYPE FACE AND GRAPHICS USAGE

Font usage in designing Web pages should be limited to two fonts. Left-justified text is one of the most legible type formats for Web page design because the left margin is even and the right one is irregular (Web Style Guide, 2004). The "ragged" right margin invites interest and variety without impeding on legibility. Additionally, blue underlined text should be reserved for links (Van Duyne, Landay, & Hong, 2003).

In the Eyetrack III (2004) study, researchers found that smaller type encouraged a more focused viewing behavior while larger type promoted lighter scanning. For example, when a headline is larger than its accompanying text, users perceive the headline as an important element on the Web site and will often skip the text.

When headlines and text are the same size, however, then both are viewed or read more often.

Images that are at least 210x230 pixels have a tendency to keep viewers engaged (Eyetrack III, 2004). On home pages as well as inside Web pages, users will observe and stay more engaged on the page with large images. When choosing images with people, it is recommended to include faces that are easy to view and are clearly visible. Additionally, it is common for users to click on photos (Eyetrack III, 2004).

CONTENT

Content is a critical component in Web site design and is one of the most important determinants of Web site effectiveness (Kim & Kim, 2006; Laslay, 2005; Van Duyne, Landay, & Hong, 2003). Visitors have seconds to make a judgment about a site and one way to keep it sticky is to provide compelling and timely content. The content can be enticing imagery, news, navigation text or personalization (Van Duyne, Landay, & Hong, 2003). Content should be tailored to visitors' needs through the use of headlines, summaries, and body copy.

INTERACTIVITY

The Internet, unlike traditional media, has the potential for interactivity (Stewart & Pavlou, 2002). Interactivity of the site generally relates to the optimization of hypermedia attributes by providing custom-made solutions. This allows users to customize preferences and enables the organization to provide solutions to users who have provided personal information (Karayanni & Baltas, 2003). Tremayne (2005) asserts that Web structures are seen as necessary conditions for interactivity. In addition, perceived and functional interactivity are related concepts even though they are independent.

Chung and Zhao (2004) posit that user interaction with a Web site indicates users have perceived control over information and communication flow. A Web site should be designed, therefore, with the ability to allow consumers to seek and gain access to information. If users perceive a Web site with difficulty in gaining or accessing information, they may have a lesser degree of perceived interactivity on the Web site. Users with

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