

Visual Identity Design for Responsive Web



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INTRODUCTION

Because the web has moved beyond desktop environments, responsive web design requires reconsideration with regard to the interface design and development workflow (Carver, 2015). It is hard to create the same feeling and look across all devices (Moss, 2015), and maintaining a strong, consistent visual identity in a responsive web design is challenging because of this flexible or liquid layout and navigation. This flexible and dynamic design system is known as responsive web design (Marcotte, 2011). Responsive web design has changed the web eco system. Therefore, fundamental changes in web design are necessary to accommodate this variety in interfaces and platforms.

The first impression of a website is affected by the visual design elements of color, typography, and graphic elements (Park, 2016). If the visual design does not immediately connect with a user the likelihood that they will stay on the site is greatly diminished. Therefore, the website must capitalize on a familiar and trusted brand identity or the site must quickly establish a visual identity that is professional and immediately establishes a sense of trust or familiarity in the user (Kang and Satterfield, 2010).

The purpose of this chapter is to identify design strategies for establishing and managing the visual identity of a responsive web design. This chapter revisits the article, *Design Elements and Principles for Maintaining Visual Identity on*

Websites (Kang and Satterfield, 2010), to reflect the changed Web environments with flexible and dynamic web technologies.

BACKGROUND

Responsive Web Design

To create a successful responsive web design, a layout that can easily be customized for different screen sizes is key (Voutilainen, Salonen, and Mikkonen, 2015). According to Voutilainen, Salonen, and Mikkonen, it is important to consider “proportion-based grids and flexible images, where element sizing takes place using relative units instead of absolute ones, and CSS3 media queries, where different styles can be used for different devices (2015).” Since the web page layout is liquid and flexible, the exact structure of the layout would not be an element that can be used to maintain the web site identity. Using images and design elements that can be modified using CSS media queries and script language while still maintaining the essence of the visual characteristics of the site are essential to a successful responsive web design.

Visual Identity Design

According to Perry and Wisnom, the role of visual identity is to translate a company’s brand positioning and verbal identity into a visible vi-

sual representation (Perry and Wisnom III, 2003, p14). Perry and Winsnom outlined the purpose of visual identity as fourfold: “to bring the brand to life by giving character and personality to the positioning and name,” “to enhance brand recognition and recall,” “to differentiate the brand from competition”, and “to tie all the disparate brand elements together with the same look and feel” (Perry and Wisnom III, 2003, pp95-96).

The visual elements such as logos and colors in the identity system can create an immediate sense of recognition for the company, express its character, and build familiarity and trust (Haig and Haper, 1977, p14). According to Kang and Satterfield (2010), “an identity system can be thought of as a tool that is used to maintain a company’s corporate visual image. This system must be flexible enough for different applications, at the same time, tight enough to maintain visual consistency across media.” The most recognizable elements of corporate visual images are the brand logo, corporate colors and the visual identity (or corporate philosophy) as represented through photos, images and other familiar graphic symbols associated with that brand.

A logo or corporate symbol is the predominant visual cue for a business and it conveys the company’s philosophy and message. The roles of corporate symbols are to create awareness; to trigger recognition of an organization; and to activate a stored image of the organization (Dowling, 2001, p 167). Logos are used as a powerful tool for marketing. Customers often make buying decisions based on the brand recognition rather than on the specific characteristics of the product itself. Apple, Google, Coca-Cola, and McDonald’s logos are examples of these types of familiar and trusted corporate symbols.

Color is another important element in the identity system. Examples of color associations are Coca-Cola red, Kodak yellow, and Barbie pink. Thus, color is an important element in any identity system. According to Dowling (2001), color is easier to read than form or shape and it holds the viewer’s attention longer. Color also has

cultural and psychological associations. Therefore, the same color can be interpreted in different ways depending on the culture and context of the situation.

THE VISUAL ELEMENTS OF RESPONSIVE WEBSITE IDENTITY

Maintaining website identity for a responsive web design can be challenging and requires different design strategies from those used for print or traditional desktop web design. The use of logos, icons, symbols, colors, images, and typography for responsive web design need to maintain the visual identity of a site across a variety of sizes and screen configurations.

Use of Web Site Identifier

A site identifier such as the company name, logo, or sometimes both, and a web address (URL) is a unique feature identifying a website and the role is more important in the responsive web design. These site identifiers mainly logos are generally located in the top left corner with fixed location no matter in the flexible or dynamic layouts. Making the brand easy to see and identify is critical in insuring that a user will quickly identify the site and associate it with other sites on other devices and platforms.

According to Steve Douglas (2015), 93% of logos from the top 100 brands are simple enough to recognize at small size. For example, Apple and Nike’s logo is very simple but yet unique. It can be recognized with very small size even without the company name. In 2005, Google changed its typeface from serif to sanserif. One of reason for this change is for “scalable mark that could convey the feeling of the full logotype in constrained spaces (<https://design.google.com/articles/evolving-the-google-identity/>).”

Therefore, a logo as a site identifier should have a unique appearance to identify the characteristics of a particular web site, easier to recognize and recall, and scalable for different devices.

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