

Top 10 Mistakes in Web Design

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TOP 10 MISTAKES IN WEB DESIGN

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Introduction

Poor web design can prevent your message from being communicated to your audience. You have about 10 seconds to capture the attention of a viewer, so it's important to put your best foot forward. Potential customers come to your site for a specific reason, so appearance and usability are critical to its success.

While content is still the key to an effective and successful website, the presentation of that content is a major factor in holding the attention of your visitors and making sales (of either products or services). The easier the site is to use, the longer people stay.

Finding the right balance between an effective website and a beautiful one can be tricky, and getting it right is often an ongoing process. Nobody wants to lose a sale or a reader, though. The following Top 10 Mistakes in Web Design will help avoid some of the pitfalls of a poorly designed site.



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1. Using Flash intro or "splash" page

A Flash intro or a splash page is a page that first comes up when entering a domain name. It does not have any content and oftentimes says "Enter Here," creating an additional step for the user before getting to any meaningful content.

Most people don't want to wait to enter a site and will move on to another site. In an age of super-fast internet speed, it's simply not acceptable for visitors to be waiting around while your site loads. Flash can also prove incompatible with mobile phone browsing and tablets.

On top of that, search engines can't "read" content embedded in Flash, so it affects your site's visibility on the internet. Since the home page is considered by search engines to be the most important page of your site, why would you want to create a barrier between a potential client and your product or service?

2. Using music with no controls

Do not include automatic background music. This practice was used years ago, but most people find it annoying. There are so many genres of music and while you might enjoy one genre, someone else might find it annoying. Or they may have their sound turned up and they get blasted. You may enjoy listening to music when you work, but it is an unnecessary distraction for someone who is trying to determine if they are in the right place, and what your site is all about. What's the quickest response when you want to turn off sound? Hit the back button or close the screen, and consequently they leave your site, never to return. Best practice, if you MUST include it, is to give

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them the choice of turning it on and off.

3. Using images instead of text

Most people are accustomed to having access to word processors that offer several options for text. But traditionally, that hasn't held true for the internet. The selection of fonts that could be used on a website used to be severely limited to those available by the browser. So many web developers resorted to using images that they created offline.

While images can allow you to use different fonts and colors, it hurts your search results. Why? Because search engines cannot read images, only text. So it is a detriment in ranking your site. In addition, a visually challenged user who uses text-to-speech software will not be able to "hear" the text because the application cannot read an image.

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How do you know if a site was designed using images instead of text? Try highlighting the text, right click and select copy, then open a text editor and try to paste it in. You might get a copy of the image, but not just the words.

Today, web designers have much greater access to a variety of fonts.

4. Color and contrast

You don't want to do anything that makes a visitor leave your site. Eye strain is one thing that will get most visitors to leave quickly. Your site should showcase your content and avoid anything that detracts from the goal of the site.

If your website text does not have sufficient contrast compared to its background, people will have difficulty reading your content, especially people with poor vision or color-blindness.

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Aside from plain readability, color and contrast are important because they can be used to create visual interest and direct the attention of the user. It can equally be effective in organizing and defining the flow and hierarchy of a page, and it's therefore an essential principle to pay attention to during the design process.

The size and spacing of font is important as well since anything that prevents the visitor from reading the content may cause your visitor to leave the site.

5. Underlining text

One of the ways to emphasize text has been to underline it, but that doesn't

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hold true for web pages. On the internet, underlined text is generally associated with a link (hyperlink). Users will try to click on it, thinking it's a link and will get confused, waste time, and be downright irritating.

Every little inconvenience works against you with your online audience. Therefore, use bolding or capitalizing for emphasis and reserve underlining for links. If you make your visitors welcome and comfortable in your web space, they will come back for more (and your rankings will go up).

6. Poor navigation

Navigation helps us find whatever it is we're looking for and it tells us where we are. It can also tell us what is on the site and what our options are.

Most websites and blogs use common navigational techniques that are expected by the average visitor. The pages and sections of the site should be easy and logical for visitors to maneuver. Don't make your visitors think about how to navigate your site; it should be effortless and natural.

Imagine being in a grocery store with no signs on the ends of the aisles, or streets with no signs, or unconventional signs. We expect to look up to see these signs and that they are in a horizontal orientation. If they were on the ground or in a vertical orientation, it would take us longer to find them, confuse and frustrate us, and we could easily feel lost.

Now think about the internet and how we can jump from one site to another and sometimes not even realize it. How do we know where we are or where

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we are going? Having the navigation appear in the same place on every page with a consistent look gives you instant confirmation that you're still in the same site. And keeping it the same throughout the site means that you only have to figure out how it works once.

There are several principles you can follow to create an effective navigation structure:

- Always have a way to get back home. (The header of WordPress sites doubles as a link to take the visitor home.)
- Create logical groups of related links, with the most important links on the top-level navigation bar.
- Provide location information so users know where they are on any given page and how to proceed to another area of the website. This can be achieved by using breadcrumb navigation.
- If the site is large, every page should have a search box.

7. Cramming a lot of information into a small space

(TMI/Clutter/Information Overload)

Your website visitors will be visiting your website for its content. How your content is laid out visually and logically creates a critical 'usability factor' and will impact your website's ultimate success or failure. A common error made by business people is to overload the website visitor with a deluge of information (often needed information) but not visually laid out so it is easy on the eyes.

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Having too many images and ads on a page makes the site unattractive and distracting. Images should be used to illustrate, capture attention and guide the user where required. It makes it difficult to determine what the website is about and how to find what you're looking for if there are too many places to look.

So how do you break it up? Give your pages breathing room. One way is by using “White space” or “negative space,” space that is empty of elements other than your background design. Sufficient white space makes it easier for the visitor to find what they're looking for.

Another way is to break up the content into multiple short pages rather than only a handful of very long ones, especially if those long ones include a ton of unrelated content.

8. Content that is unreadable

Paragraphs should consist of no more than two or three short sentences rather than a block of words. Readers tend to scan the page and this makes it easier for them to do so. Blocks of text are a turn off.

First, no one is going to read all that. Second, by putting so much on one page, you miss out on segmenting that information on several web pages (which means more web pages for Google and more chances to be found). Third, web visitors don't like to scroll. Keep each web page to a single idea. If a web page contains more than one topic, then split it up.

So when focusing on your content, it's best to keep in mind these three tips:

- White space is possibly the most important factor to consider. It will allow the user to focus on the meaningful content within each section.

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- Break up lengthy pieces of information into digestible blocks of text, utilizing headings, sub-headings, bullets, block quotes and paragraphs.
- Readable content is important, so use a good line height that is large enough to make content scannable. Margins and letter spacing also need to be taken into consideration.

When talking about content, spelling and grammar cannot be underestimated. Like it or not, misspelled words send an intelligence message and says that detail is not important to you (so why would your client's success be important?).

9. Not making it clear what the website is about

A visitor should immediately understand what a website is about, and be assured that they are in the right place. If they have to think, they are likely to leave the site.

Remember, you only have a few seconds to communicate to your visitor that you have what they are looking for. Tell them exactly what you have to offer them and why they want it. Give your visitors a reason to stick around and learn more.

Know who your ideal audience is and cater your site specifically to them. Use features they will respond to.

Furthermore, not having a call to action is vital in order to guide your visitors to the next step. It needs to be above the fold (what they see without

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scrolling down) and it should be more than just a "click here." Try to offer an incentive, for instance, a free download, a free trial, or a coupon code. And use strong, active words that tells visitors exactly what you want them to do, like call, buy or download.

10. Failing to drive traffic to your website after it has been launched

If you build a website, visitors WILL NOT beat down the doors to your website! Deploying your new website doesn't automatically mean that potential customers and clients will flock to your site. Part of having a successful internet web presence is actively and persistently promoting your website. It is not that difficult, but it needs a consistent plan of action. Anyone can reap the rewards of a little elbow grease.

What can you do? A website is one piece of a marketing plan, so if you want people to come to your site, you need to let them know it's there. Put it on your business card, include it in your advertisements, promote it on social media.

Organic search engine optimization (SEO) includes many things that you have control over. Doing keyword research to see what words people use to find sites that sell similar products and services as you do. Then using those words in the page titles, headings, description, and content. When someone types a keyword or phrase into the search engine, the database is searched and you as well as your competitors will be found.

Pay-per-click (PPC) advertising works in a very similar manner, except that a certain amount is paid, by you the advertiser, every time someone clicks on your ad.

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To find out how we can help you get found by the search engines (Google, Yahoo, and Bing), drop me an email at info@umpquawebdesign.com and we can set up a time to discuss the needs of your business.

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About the Author

Cheryl Smith, owner of Umpqua Web Design, streamlines the web design process for small businesses and individuals so that their potential clients can easily find what they're looking for and become customers.



Developing websites since 2005, Cheryl founded Umpqua Web Design in 2007. Her retail and office background have prepared her to actively listen to her clients as she guides them through the web design process.

Cheryl learned how to code sites from scratch but when she discovered WordPress in 2011, she found that it freed her up to focus on what's really important to her: finding solutions for small businesses and individuals. WordPress is an open-source Content Management System which makes editing websites as easy as editing a Word document.

Her passion is in working closely with her clients to achieve their vision. She enjoys creating a site that blends the needs of their business with ease of navigation (easily moving through the site and finding what potential clients are seeking). "I love helping my clients discover the possibilities available to them with WordPress."

Born and raised in Oregon, Cheryl and her husband have been rescuing dogs and cats for as long as they can remember. Contact Cheryl at info@umpquawebdesign.com for a FREE consultation.

