

Ten Mistakes Designing your Website

- ZZZZZzzzzzz

Don't be a bore! In 10 seconds you have lost your user of traditional entertainment. On the web, users can endure and accept up to 15 seconds of boredom and nothingness. Bandwidth is getting worse, not better, as the Internet adds users faster than the infrastructure can keep up. Keep it simple-stupid and your visitors will stay for the whole show.

- "THAT IS SO LAST SEASON..."

Maintenance, Maintenance, Maintenance. Out with the old and in with the new. It is important to hire or assign a part of your team to maintain the integrity of your site. Make sure pages stay linked, and weed out any unwanted data. This is a process that can be done weekly, monthly, quarterly, or annually, but it must be done to ensure productivity. Don't let your customers get the same old stale taste.

- SHE BLINDED ME WITH SCIENCE!

Links to pages that have not been seen are blue; links to previously seen pages are purple or red. Don't mess with these colors since the ability to understand what links have been followed is one of the few navigational aides that is standard in most web browsers. Consistency is key to teaching users what the link colors mean.

- "HONEY, GET OUT THE MAP, I THINK WE ARE LOST"

Don't assume that users know as much about your site as you do. They always have difficulty finding information, so they need support in the form of a strong sense of structure and place. Start your design with a good understanding of the structure of the information space and communicate this structure explicitly to the user. Provide a site map and let users know where they are and where they can go. Also, you will need a good search feature since even the best navigation support will never be enough. Don't leave them going around in circles.

- SCROLL WITH IT BABY!

Only 10% of users scroll beyond the information that is visible on the screen when a page comes up. All critical content and navigation options should be on the top part of the page.

- LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE

Make sure that all pages include a clear indication of what web site they belong to since users may access pages directly without coming in through your home page. For the same reason, every page should have a link up to your home page as well as some indication of where they fit within the structure of your information space. "Good ole Sandy!"

- COMPLEXITY

Even though machine-level addressing like the URL should never have been exposed in the user interface, it is there and we have found that users actually try to decode the URLs of pages to infer the structure of web sites. Users do this because of the horrifying lack of support for navigation and sense of location in current web browsers, and they were picked on as children. Thus, a URL should contain human-readable directory and file names that reflect the nature of the information space. Also, users sometimes need to type in a URL, so try to minimize the risk of typos by using short names with all lower-case characters and no special characters (many people don't know how to type a ~).

- BEETLEJUICE, BEETLEJUICE, BEETLEJUICE!

Never include page elements that move incessantly. Moving images have an overpowering effect on the human peripheral vision. A web page should not emulate Times Square in New York City in its constant attack on the human senses: give your user some peace and quiet to actually read the text! Of course, <BLINK> is simply evil. Enough said.

- MAN OVERBOARD!

Some designers delight in using little "tricks," such as input boxes, opening new browser windows or background music. The first time a visitor experiences these, the visitor may be impressed. However, after a few more visits, the viewer will just be annoyed. It is best to stay away from these types of things. Don't go overboard!

- YOUR TRASH IS NOT SOMEONE ELSE'S TREASURE...

One of the biggest threats to the Internet is the amazing number of people beginning to use it. It is starting to become a large entanglement of meaningless information. Many pages say nothing more than "This is my home page," with a collection of links that connect to the same collections of sites as the last page the web visitor just looked at. The real key is content. Before any site is created, its designer should have something to say. The web site should not restate what other web sites have said, and should not attempt to create the ultimate navigational tool for web visitors. A page of only links adds to the clutter and chaos of the web. There are plenty of great search engines out there, like Yahoo and Google that already provide an adequate assortment of links. Just let it go.