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### **7 Basics of Good Web Design** By George Peirson (c) 2009

Whether you are just starting a web design project, looking at revamping an existing site, or just wanting to double check the usability of your current web site you should consider these 7 Basics of Good Web Design.

These basics are aimed at new visitors/customers; your repeat customers will be judging your web site on different values. Just like wearing the appropriate clothes for a job interview, these basics will help you pick out the "look" of your web site so that you make a good first impression.

1. Fast Loading Web Site ♦ Any way you look at it, a fast loading page should be your number 1 concern. The web is all about speed, fast searches, fast purchases, fast information. You can't have any of that with a slow loading page. Ask yourself this question - have you ever been on Google doing a search for something important and a link you clicked on didn't open up immediately? What did you do? Patiently wait for the page to open or move onto the next link on the list? My favorite sites open almost immediately.

So, a few suggestions: Make sure that your images are properly optimized. Don't use very many large images, save those for a different page. Keep any auto-running multimedia to a minimum, offer links to run media instead. Check your code for anything else that could affect your page loading times. Since text loads almost instantly go ahead and use all the text you want, just keep everything else under control.

2. No Meaningless Splash Page ♦ Do you appreciate a fancy animation page that doesn't tell you anything and you have to wait for before the web site will open? Neither do I. The last thing I want once I find an interesting site is to wait through

some animation before getting to the first page. This doesn't mean that I don't want multimedia on a site, I do. I just don't want an animation before the first page that forces me to wait for it to finish before getting onto the site. It's like having to wait for a salesperson to finish their memorized speech before you can ask them a question. No thanks! I like animation, just in the right place and at the right time. Plus, if I am a returning customer, I will have already seen that animation and don't need to see it again.

My recommendation is to use a smaller animation contained in your main landing page which also includes your main message and links to the rest of your site. It will make for a faster loading page (smaller file) and your visitors can go ahead with accessing your site without having to wait for the animation to finish.

One final note, never, ever put your logo as the only content on your landing page with a link that says "Enter Site". This just screams Unprofessional and will drive away potential visitors in droves. The last thing I want to do is to click on another link just to get into the site. This is a total waste of my time. I usually will skip a site if I see this.

3. No Annoying Web Gimmicks ♦ Now that you have your visitor on your site quickly the one thing you don't want to do is to drive them away just as quickly. So, don't put anything annoying on that first page. No loud background music that makes them quickly hit the volume control or the back button on their browser. No flashing animations while they are trying to read your content. No popup, flyout, expanding ads that cover your home page. Basically, leave the gimmicks alone until you are sure that your visitor will stay on your site. Most casual visitors will leave your site in just a few seconds, no sense on driving them away more quickly.

Multimedia is great on a web site, just don't bombard your visitor with it first thing. If you want audio, then put in a nice picture with a link, like a picture of yourself with text saying something like "Let me tell you how to make \$50,000 this month!" If they are interested, they will click on the link and listen to your message; if they are not interested in audio, then you should be using a different pitch anyway.

Also, monitor what advertisers are putting on your site if you sell ad space. I am sure you have seen those ads with the

animated dancing figure, cute the first time you see it. But after seeing it 10,000 times with every imaginable character I have added the company to a list I keep of companies I will never do business with. So their animation has gone from "look at me" to "you annoy me" in my mind. Ads like these will impact your visitor's experience. So even if your site is perfectly designed, one misplaced ad can ruin all of your hard work.

4. Have a Clear Message ♦ Too many web sites are a mish-mash of content. This is especially true of blog pages. Certain types of sites lend themselves to stream of consciousness content, but most don't. Make it easy for your viewer to understand what your web site is about, don't make them guess. Have a clear topic headline, followed by clear and concise text. This is also where a picture is worth a thousand words, but only if the picture directly pertains to your message.

You want your visitor to quickly understand what your message is. If they like your message, they will take the time to read the rest of your page and look around your web site. If they don't like your page, then it won't do you any good having them stay on your site anyway. So, don't make your visitors guess, let them know what you are about quickly and cleanly and you will have happy visitors. And when thinking about a sales page, a happy customer is a buying customer.

5. Coordinated Design ♦ This one should be self evident, but it is surprising how many sites change their design for every page. You want your visitor to be comfortable in your site and one way to achieve that is by having a coordinated web design. Having a consistent logo, using a consistent color scheme, keeping your navigation in the same place. All of these help to create a coordinated design. This does not mean that you can't change colors or the "Look" on different segments of your site, but if you do, the changes should not be so drastic that it feels like you have moved on to a different site.

If you select one place for your logo, one place for your navigation, one look for your buttons or other common graphic elements and stick with those then you will be well on your way to a coordinated design. If you change colors for a different section, but keep the same logo location, the same navigation location, the same button shape, then your visitors will not become lost as they move from page to page.

6. Easy Navigation ♦ Once you have grabbed your visitors attention you want them to be able to easily move around the different areas of your web site. This is done with easy to use navigation. There are three standard, accepted locations for navigation elements on a web page: along the top, on the left side, and at the bottom. I will usually put my main navigation either along the top or along the left side. I will then put text based navigation at the bottom of the page, this text based navigation is more for the search engines than anything else, but it also makes it easy for your visitors to move to the next page when they have reached the bottom of the current page.

Most people start reading a page from the top left and then read towards the bottom right. So navigation at the left or top will be seen as soon as someone enters your page. Also navigation at the left or top will not move or change position if the browser window is adjusted in size. The worst thing you can do is to put your main navigation on the right side of the page and have your page set for a large screen size. Let's say that your page is set for 1024 across with the navigation on the right, and someone views your page at 800 across, they will not see your navigation at all. The left side of your page will show perfectly, but the right side will be hidden outside of their viewing area. Of course by using floating or popup menus you can overcome some of these design limitations and keep your navigation visible at all times.

Unless you know that your audience will enjoy it, don't use Mystery Navigation. This is where your navigation is hidden within images, or spaced around the web page in some mysterious random order. This can be fun on gaming sites, or social networking sites, but in most cases the navigation should be easy to see and easy to use. If you do want to use Mystery Navigation, I would recommend keeping the text based navigation at the bottom of the page, just in case.

7. Have a "Complete" web site ♦ And finally, no one wants to go to a web site only to find that the site is "Under Construction" and the content they are looking for is not there. These are words that you should never use. If a section of your web site is not ready for prime time yet, then simply don't show it yet. It is better to have your site look complete and professional, then to have it look like a work in progress that should not be up on the web yet.

You can easily tell your visitors that you will be having more content in the future without having your site look like it is unfinished. Just use phrases like "Content Updated Weekly" or "New Products Added Monthly". Both of these will tell your visitors that it would be worth their time to come back and visit later, but neither one will make your site look unfinished. So no matter how small your web site is, give the impression that you have taken the time to complete the site before putting it up on the internet, this makes for a more professional presentation and a better visitor experience.

In Closing ♦ By following these simple 7 Basics of Good Web Design you will be well on your way to having an easy to use and successful web presence. Just keep in mind what you look for when you first land on a web page after doing a web search in Google or Yahoo, or other search engine. If you want fast loading pages, make sure your pages load fast. If you want to be able to find what you are looking for quickly and easily, then make sure you have easy navigation. Just keep your first time visitor in mind, put yourself in their web shoes and make your web site an enjoyable place to visit and success should follow.

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