

WHAT MAKES A GOOD WEB SITE?



So you've decided to finally get a web site up for the company or maybe have the old one that cousin Fred did for free a couple of years ago remodeled. Here are some guidelines for getting a great site.

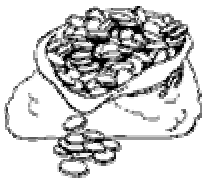
Keep It Simple

This is one of the rules we live by, and it applies to web site design as well. The more complicated your site is to use, the more likely someone will leave before finding anything useful — or worse yet, without buying your product or service.

The Need For Speed

Make sure your site is able to load quickly. If you want five pictures, a scroll bar, flash buttons, java script and sound, no one is going to see your first page because they will be gone after staring at a blank screen for 2 minutes waiting for all this to load. Most people still access the Internet with a 56 Kps modem or less, and the actual connection rates seldom match the top-rated speed of the modem. Here's a good rule of thumb: the total size of the page, including graphics and HTML, should be less than 100 kilobytes. Most people will leave if a page takes longer than 15 to 20 seconds to load. And a page that is 100KB or less will load on almost any modem connection speed within this time limit.

Three Clicks to Gold



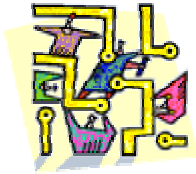
Your site should be designed so that a user is never more than three clicks from the desired end result. Read that last sentence carefully. The emphasis is on what the user wants, not on how you want to lead him or her around your site. Remember, people on your site are probably looking for specific information, so it should be made easy for them to find it.

Never, Never, Never Use Frames!

Period. Never! If you don't know what frames are, don't worry. Just don't ever ask to have your site encased in frames. Search engines balk at frame pages. The frames take up valuable screen real estate that can be put to better use. And your users will have trouble bookmarking a specific page on your site.

At first glance, a framed site might seem to be an interesting blend of static and moving parts, but it doesn't leave much room for content. Have you ever seen a great web site that used frames? Neither have we.

Simple & Intuitive Site Navigation



If you have graphic buttons on your site, be sure they are easy to understand! If one is linked to the products' section on your site, be sure the word "Products" is on the graphic button. Be sure the ALT tag is used. It's there for a reason. If a user has graphics turned off, he or she can still see a text description that says "Products." Also, be sure your users have a couple of ways to navigate your site. For example, have a graphic navigation bar at the top or side of the page and some small text links at the bottom of the page. And make sure your navigation scheme works on ALL of your pages.

Consistency is Key

Your site should have a common look-and-feel across all the pages. You don't want to confuse your reader. Consistency will make it easier for your users to find what they want on your site. This also makes updating and maintaining your site much easier!

Use White Space Effectively

Again, this goes back to the Keep it Simple principle. Have you ever seen one of those sites that tries to cram too much information onto the screen? Do you ever go back to visit those sites? Use your screen real estate effectively. Oh, and notice that we said "white space." Never use a black background on your web site. Have you ever tried to print a web page with a black background and white text?

Don't Use Cool Technology Just Because It's There



Each and every piece of technology you have on your site should be in response to a specific problem or opportunity you encounter. Don't just ask your web designer to put some java code on your site because it looks cool and scrolls a message across the page. And don't ask for technology that requires some other piece of software to run (i.e. browser plugins such as ShockWave) unless this technology is appropriate for your target audience.

Content, Content, Content

If you are not experienced with words, be thankful that you have found a web designer and a technical writer. People who write for a living are familiar with the English language and the intricacies of spelling, grammar, punctuation and word usage. Allow the web designer to take your content and arrange it in a way that best presents you, your service or product to the public. Provide enough content

so that the web site serves as the most valuable source of information about you, your product or service other than direct contact.