



Building a Website

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By

Teddi Deppner
Lead Web Designer
www.PlacerWeb.com

INTRODUCTION

Development Tools

- Internet Service Provider (ISP) for Net access
- Web design software (MS *FrontPage*, Adobe *PageMill* or *GoLive!*, Macromedia *Dreamweaver*, or text editors, etc)
- Graphics software (Adobe *Photoshop*, Corel *PhotoPaint*, *PaintShop Pro*, MS *Image Composer*, etc)
- FTP (File Transfer Protocol) software

Publishing Requirements

- Web hosting (often available from your ISP)
- Domain name (www.yourcompany.com)

Summary of Introduction

Nowadays it isn't some arcane programming knowledge that makes for good website design. There are tools that allow you to create your website with about the same learning curve as any desktop publishing software. That is why there are so many websites on the Internet, and why so many of them are poorly designed. Because *anybody* has the access to do it.

The first decision is whether to handle your website in-house or to hire a professional web developer. But whichever decision you make, the information in this presentation will help you with getting a website that works and avoids the most common pitfalls.

What is a website that works? People come to a website because they want information or entertainment. You need to know *who* you want at your website, *what* they are looking for and then find *the best way* to satisfy them.

IN-HOUSE OR HIRE-OUT?

When To Do It Yourself

- Do you have someone on your staff who has the skills or the time to learn the skills to develop the website? This involves learning web design software, graphics software, and the basics of good web design.
- If you don't have someone on staff, do you have the budget to hire someone (part-time, full-time, whatever) to be your "Web department"?

If you answered yes to the questions above, then you have a chance at doing a successful website with your in-house staff. The primary advantages to in-house staff are that they are more readily available to make frequent updates and they are familiar with your company and its goals, etc. A person with the proper skills and knowledge in web design might spend anywhere from 1-20 hours per week on your website, depending on how much you update it and what tasks you assign them (web design only? or answering and routing email inquiries? developing new content for the website each week, each month? etc...).

When To Hire A Professional

- Are you lacking the resources in-house to do your own website?
- Do you have the budget to hire the designers you want (including a budget for ongoing maintenance)? This will involve getting ballpark quotes for the website you want to build from various design firms whose portfolios and references give you confidence in their abilities (don't forget to ask them about ongoing maintenance costs).

If you answered yes to the questions above, then you should hire a professional. You want to hire someone who has a proven track record, lives and breathes Internet marketing all day long, is skilled at making websites that download fast, are easy to navigate, and who is dedicated to getting to know your company and meeting your ongoing needs. Your website needs to change and grow to succeed, and you need to hire someone willing to change and grow with your company.

DESIGN ESSENTIALS

The Little Known Fact That Makes All The Difference

The most common, tragic and devastating mistakes in web design are made because the designer did not take into account that *all website visitors do not have the same monitor size, operating system, browser and browser version, screen resolution, sound system, modem speed or purpose that the designer (or company behind the design) does*. Don't forget that the key to good design is making it usable for *everyone* (or as close to that ideal as possible).

Simplified Process

1. Determine your website's purpose and "target audience"
2. Make a plan for how you will organize and present the information on the website
3. Create a good, clean interface that you will use consistently throughout the website
4. Put your content into the interface
5. Test it for usability, make adjustments
6. Publish!

30 Mistakes Often Made in Web Design

(source: Jakob Nielsen's *AlertBox* column in *ZDnet.com's DevHead* section)

- Not knowing *why* (websites need a purpose!)
- Designing for your own VPs
- Letting the site structure mirror your organizational chart
- Outsourcing to multiple agencies
- Forgetting to budget for maintenance
- Treating the Web as a secondary medium
- Wasting linking opportunities
- Treating Internet and Intranet sites the same
- Confusing market research and usability engineering
- Underestimating the strategic impact of the Web
- Using frames
- Gratuitous use of bleeding-edge technology
- Scrolling text, marquees, and constantly running animations
- Complex URLs
- Orphan pages
- Long scrolling pages
- Lack of navigation support
- Non-standard link colors
- Outdated information
- Overly long download times
- Breaking or slowing down the *Back* button
- Opening new browser windows
- Non-standard use of GUI widgets (e.g., radio buttons, check boxes, etc)
- Lack of biographies

- Lack of archives
- Moving pages to new URLs
- Headlines that make no sense out of context (e.g., link text should indicate what's on the other side of the link!)
- Jumping at the latest Internet buzzword
- Slow server response times
- Anything that looks like advertising

10 Good Deeds in Web Design

(source: Jakob Nielsen's AlertBox column in ZDnet.com's DevHead section)

- Put your name and logo in the same place on every page and make the logo a link to your home page (except on the home page itself)
- Provide a site search if the site has more than 100 pages
- Write straightforward and simple headlines and page titles
- Structure the pages to facilitate scanning
- Use hypertext to structure the content space (instead of cramming everything on a topic onto one page)
- Use product photos (thumbnails)
- Use relevance-enhanced image reduction (crop your images to just the parts that are important)
- Use link titles so people know where they will end up *before* they click on a link
- Make sure all important pages are accessible for users with disabilities (especially blind users)
- Do the same as everybody else (if most big websites do something a certain way, then people will have become familiar with it and will be comfortable with it)

Usability Testing

For practical design projects, qualitative insight is all that matters. Simply observe a handful of users and see where they run into trouble. Luckily, experience from countless projects shows that this qualitative insight is very cheap to collect: simply study five representative users as they perform representative tasks, and you will have a list of most of the important usability problems in the design. And, it can be done in a single day.

Many people who are used to traditional market research methods are doubtful when faced with so small a number of qualitative test results. They prefer many more users and hard numbers. But with the current state of Web design, it is wasted effort to go much beyond five test users. Most Web sites are so bad that the list of necessary changes will be huge after the first five users. User #6 will always encounter more or less the same usability problems as you have already seen, so why sit and suffer and see the same painful user difficulties over and over again?

-- Jakob Nielsen, 8/25/99, ZDNet.com DevHead

RESOURCES FOR LEARNING MORE

The best resources for learning about the Web are on the Web. Occasionally, you will find websites that give you good advice recommend books that contain good information. But the website was always the point of "first contact."

Websites To Start With

- ZDNet.com – DevHead section
- CNET's Builder.com (click on *Design* for web design tips and info)
- WebDeveloper.com
- WebReference.com
- Web Developer's Virtual Library (wdvl.com)
- SearchEngineWatch.com (information on search engines, how to design for good results)

Each of the websites listed above contain a plethora of good advice, information, and references to *even more websites*. Most of them have articles for skill levels from beginner to advanced web developer.