

## 10 ways to design a good Web Site

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In a previous post, I outlined ways to find the right Web-hosting service for your Web site. Assuming you've secured one, the next step is to physically create your site. A critical part of this process involves deciding how you want your Web site to look. Because I deal in words, not visuals, I asked my former colleague Sean Brown to offer some design dos and don'ts. Mr. Brown is an interaction design director at Condé Nast Digital and oversees the layout of the company's [men.style.com](http://men.style.com) and [style.com](http://style.com) Web sites.

### Do lead by example

You should never assume the user understands your model or the goal behind your Web site. This means that you should know the purpose behind your site so that you can effectively relay it to the reader. A commercial Web site may have different needs — an online shopping cart, for example — from a personal one.

Assuming you are still reading this post, remember also that attention spans are short, all the more so online where leaving a Web site is just a mouse click away. This means you should never make the reader work to understand your Web site. Make sure that your navigation bar is both visible and clearly labeled. Any hyperlinks should also be clearly distinguishable from normal text, as should any visited versus nonaccessed links. Do not use hard-to-read or tiny fonts — Arial and Helvetica are generally good bets. Animated GIF files should also be kept to a minimum. Also make sure to include a smart search box.

### Do make the web site search engine friendly

Whether your Web site is for professional or personal use, you should design it with search engine optimization (SEO) in mind. It's better to use Web-safe fonts, for example, over graphic heavy text.

### Do your research

Look at Web sites you like. Almost all sites have a core layout. Find a template you like and use it as your springboard.

### Do test your web site

Test your site in advance of its launch and regularly thereafter, even if you plan on updating it only infrequently. Make sure your site works on different browsers — especially Internet Explorer and Firefox — as well as across different fonts and screen resolutions. Broken links not only prevent a visitor from getting access to their desired information, but also present you in a less-than-flattering online light.

### Don't get flash drunk

Or for that matter color or graphics drunk. When choosing your color palette, a minimalist approach is best. This is not to say you should avoid all design effects like drop shadows, only that you should ideally use them to communicate your goal and not just because you can.

### Don't eliminate all white space

Some Web sites have a policy of no white space, also known as the blank space between text or other graphics. Here's why yours shouldn't. If used well, white space can help direct a reader's eye to specific information you want highlighted. White space can also cut down on

clutter and create invisible boundaries across texts. A no-white-space policy may result in a disorienting reader-based experience.

Don't make the user wait

Your Web site should load quickly. Don't make the user follow along with a load box. If you insist on having music with your site, give the user the option to mute it. On the home page and elsewhere, keep pop-ups, banner ads and other ad-like content to a minimum, if not nonexistent. If you're a Firefox user, you might try the Yslow add-on (<https://addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addon/5369>), which analyzes the speed of your page. Another useful add-on is Firebug (<https://addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addon/1843>).

Don't bounce around

In other words, keep the look of your Web site consistent throughout. If your logo is on the upper left hand side of your Web site, for example, keep it there across all pages. Also make sure to have a tab on every page that lets users link back to the home page. If the reader has to rely on the browser's back button to navigate around, you didn't do your job. As a test, ask yourself if you'd be able to navigate your site if it were written in another language. Facebook keeps its layout the same irrespective of language so that even though I don't speak Afrikaans, I can still get around Facebook's Afrikaans language site.

Don't clutter the home page

Make sure your home page is clean and not overrun with links. The goal is to provide the reader with enough information to enter your site, not to scare them away.

Don't forget about content

Content is ultimately king. Good Web design highlights the content and adds to it without detracting from the Web site's goal. Still, good design alone doesn't cut it. Text matters, so keep your paragraphs informative but short. Simply put, seek out the fluff and cut it.

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