

Love the Internet

Since its commercial emergence in the mid-1990s, the relationship between the Internet and graphic designers has been an uneasy one. The Net's early promise as a new frontier for graphic design (and an El Dorado of fat fees and limitless work) was soon undermined by the subsequent 'dot-com meltdown', and by the Web's obstinate refusal to accommodate the control-freakery of graphic designers. The HTML page, with its lack of fixity, was anathema to designers who had been raised in print-media and were accustomed to having near-total control over the end result. Many designers were dismissive of the medium's typographic inexactitude and its 72dpi crudeness, and found the so-called democratising nature of the Internet to be intolerable: how could you love a medium that allowed the end user to change the type size to suit themselves?

On the other hand, there were cyber-design-visionaries who evangelically announced a brave new world of graphic communication incorporating motion, sound and interactivity, and which, it was claimed, would sweep away the entropic medium of print. Malcolm Garrett famously predicted the 'death of the book'. He was talking about CD-ROM, another mainstay of the nascent digital culture, but his words became a battle cry for net-heads. Cyber evangelism was to have an unsettling effect on print designers who, if only fleetingly, experienced thoughts of inadequacy and redundancy, as glamorous companies like Razorfish and Deepend rushed towards a sexier, more luminescent and screen-based future.

Today, it is only the most fastidious of print designers who have failed (or chosen) to reach a rapprochement with the Web. Not only are countless graphic designers engaged in Web design, but few design projects of any size are 'print-only'; most commercial communications are now 'cross-platform', and the Internet is as fundamental to the working practices of modern graphic designers as the drawing-board, T-square and mapping pen were to previous generations.

Yet the fact remains that the Internet is the place where graphic design has encountered its greatest challenge since the arrival of computerised design, and that the technical and aesthetic problems associated with Web design are perhaps the most taxing and knotty issues facing the contemporary graphic designer - especially those with metaphorical printer's ink stains on their fingers.

For designers who have grown up and been educated in the Web-era, some of the aesthetic scruples of previous generations are incomprehensible. I was working recently with a young Web designer who cheerfully told me that he liked widows in text. He is a designer who has embraced the online world without any of the hand-wringing of the pre-Web generation; for him, the Web is a place unencumbered with the conventions of graphic design

formalism, and a place to put into practice the multimedia skills that are second nature to him, and many like him. Yet Web design is a messy battlefield with no sign of peace breaking out. The Web-developer blogs and online discussion groups seethe with rancorous debate about the merits and demerits of various competing technologies, and the nature of online design.

The problems presented to the Web designer are different from the ones presented to the print designer,' notes Michele Jannuzzi, of London-based design company Jannuzzi Smith. 'Screen size, colours, monitor manufacturer, the limited ways in which you can display typefaces, the endless combination of results determined by operating systems and browsers, etc., all make Web design different from print design. The main difference is that the point of delivery is no longer controlled by the producer. All books share an identical technology; a Web page is viewed by different technologies at the other end.' However, the practical differences between Web and print design are not the only factors shaping the look of websites. Not only is the technology subject to constant revision, but the demands of both clients and users are evolving at a hyperactive rate. Solutions that seemed sensible last week are rendered out of date the next.

James King is studying Computer Related Design at the Royal College of Art in London. He's a smart thinker, and comfortable with the technical and intellectual rigours of the Internet: 'I don't think its possible to approach Web design now without a practical understanding of the technology that underlies it,' he says, 'and this is where progress is being driven at an exciting rate, primarily by the open-source community and especially by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C). I find it difficult to keep up.'

But accelerating technology is not the only factor. The commercialisation of the Web has now reached warp speed, and with commercialisation comes a demand for greater 'usability'. This is a hot potato in current Web design, and preoccupies the designers and producers of online sites. Another equally hot topic is 'accessibility'; public services use the Web as a primary tool for disseminating information, and they demand universal accessibility. And as if these two factors were not enough for the informed Web designer to contend with, we have now entered an era of multiple-platform publishing, whereby content is designed to be simultaneously distributed across several different media - printed literature, websites, CD-ROMS, mobile phones and hand-held devices.

These developments make great demands on the Web designer. So great are these demands, that Web design is often deemed far too important to leave to mere graphic designers alone. But help is at hand. The usability experts, the accessibility pundits and the 'multi-platform publishing' visionaries have been called in.

The W3C (World Wide Web Consortium) develops interoperable technologies (specifications, guidelines, software, and tools) to lead the Web to its full potential. W3C is a forum for information, commerce, communication, and collective understanding. On this page, you'll find W3C news, links to W3C technologies and ways to get involved. New visitors can find help in [Getting Your Way at W3C](#). We encourage you to read the [Project Note](#) and learn more about W3C.

W3C A to Z

- Accessibility
- Annotations
- Binary XML
- CORBA
- Compound Document Formats
- DTD Validator
- HTTP
- HTML Validator
- HTML
- IMSL
- Internationalization
- JAVA
- JavaBeans
- JavaMail
- Multimedia Interaction
- XML
- Custom Policy
- CGI
- CGI
- Privacy and P3P
- Quality Assurance (QA)
- SGML
- Semantic Web
- SPARQL
- SEARCH
- SMS
- TAG
- Timed Test
- URIDB
- Validators

News

W3C Recommendations Enhance SOAP Performance

2005-01-25. The World Wide Web Consortium today released three W3C Recommendations to improve Web services performance by standardizing the transmission of large binary data. "Web services have just become faster and more usable," said Yves Lafon (W3C). Read the [press release](#) and [testimonials](#) and visit the [Web services home page](#).

Working Group Note: Extending XLink 1.0

2005-01-27. The XML Core Working Group has released [Extending XLink 1.0](#) as a Working Group Note. The document describes changes that could be incorporated into an XLink Version 1.1 specification to address usability, dependence on annotations provided by internal grammars, and interoperability. The Working Group plans no updates to this Note. Visit the [XLink home page](#).

W3C Supports the URI Standard and IRI Proposed Standard

2005-01-26. W3C is pleased to announce its support for two publications that are important for Web addressing and increase the international reach of the Web. The documents are coordinated efforts of the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) and W3C. Read the [press release](#).

Antenna House, Inc.

Antenna House, Inc. is a leading provider of XML processing and transformation products and services to supply the best products and services worldwide customers. Antenna House XML Processor is based on the W3C XML recommendations and is used in hundreds of thousands of websites.

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- W3C Membership Benefits Apply
- Meeting Lists
- Members
- W3C Offices
- W3C Groups
- W3C Groups
- Open Source Software
- Employees
- Participate

Information

Jakob Nielsen's Alertbox, September 13, 2004:

The Need for Web Design Standards

Summary:
Users expect 77% of the simpler Web design elements to behave in a certain way. Unfortunately, confusion reigns for many higher-level design issues.

The entire concept of "Web design" is a misnomer. Individual project teams are not designing the Web any more than individual ants are designing an anthill. Site designers build components of a whole, especially now that users are viewing the [entirety of the Web as a single integrated resource](#).

Unfortunately, much of the Web is like an anthill built by ants on LSD: many sites don't fit into the big picture, and are too difficult to use because they deviate from expected norms.

Several design elements are common enough that users expect them to work in a certain way. Here's my definition of three different standardization levels:

- Standard: 80% or more of websites use the same design approach. Users strongly expect standard elements to work a certain way when they visit a new site because that's how things always work.
- Convention: 50-79% of websites use the same design approach. With a convention, users expect elements to work a certain way when they visit a new site because that's how things usually work.
- Confusion: with these elements, no single design approach dominates, and even the most popular approach is used by at most 49% of websites. For such design elements, users don't know what to expect when they visit a new site.

(These cut-off values are slightly lower than ones I used in 1999, when I thought that a convention required 60% of sites to do something the same way. I now believe that a design becomes the expectation when users see it more than half the time.)

Instead of simply counting the number of websites, it would be better to count the percentage of the total user experience accounted for by each design approach. In other words, those sites that people visit frequently would get a higher weight than those sites that people rarely or never visit. Using weighted scores would slightly change my conclusions, deeming more design elements as standardized because bigger sites tend to stick to the basics in their user interface designs.

How Many Design Elements Are Standardized?

To estimate the extent to which Web design complies with interface standards, I compared two studies: my own study of twenty-four features on [fifty corporate homepages](#), and a University of Washington [master's thesis](#) that studied thirty-three features on seventy-five e-commerce sites.

1. Home page of the W3C (World Wide Web Consortium), the body that 'develops technologies (specifications, guidelines, software, tools) to lead the Web to its full potential.' www.w3.org

2. Alertbox is the online column of usability guru Jakob Nielsen. It resembles the bulletin boards of the embryonic Web. His research

is wide-ranging: 'When using websites,' he says, 'teenagers have a lower success rate than adults and they're also easily bored. To work for teens, sites must be simple – but not childish – and supply plenty of interactive features.' www.useit.com/alertbox

3. Webcredible, which offers advice on usability issues. www.webcredible.co.uk

webcredible
The web credibility and accessibility specialists

Services

Usability
User-centered evaluation
Usability testing
User-centered design
Website optimization

Accessibility
Web accessibility evaluation
Accessible HTML coding
Web accessibility training
Web accessibility certification

Web design
Accessible CSS
Advanced CSS training

Training
Our next hands-on, interactive training course:
HTML accessibility training
20th March

Get an expert free website evaluation

Sign up to our monthly newsletter
 HTML Text
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bwidma
British Library

OPALICS

UK JISC

FUKWDA
Federation of UK Web Design Agencies

White papers

Web accessibility guide
Find out all about web accessibility and your legal obligation
accessible.html
128 checklists for web accessibility, user interface, credibility and SEO

SCIENCE VS. AESTHETICS

The New York Times describes Jakob Nielsen as 'the guru of Web page "usability", a man for whom Web design is not a matter of taste or aesthetics - it's a matter of science.' Nielsen expounds his theories of usability in his influential Alertbox column, published online since 1995. In a recent post titled 'The Need for Web Design Standards', Nielsen writes: 'The entire concept of "Web design" is a misnomer. Individual project teams are not designing the Web any more than individual ants are designing an anthill. Site designers build components of a whole, especially now that users are viewing the entirety of the Web as a single, integrated resource. Unfortunately, much of the Web is like an anthill built by ants on LSD: many sites don't fit into the big picture, and are too difficult to use because they deviate from expected norms. Several design elements are common enough that users expect them to work in a certain way.'

Nielsen postulates a Web future where 'confusing design elements' have been eliminated, and where 'design standards for every important website task' have been established. Nothing wrong with that, you might think. Yet Nielsen's 'scientific' view of Web design is largely focused upon commercial imperatives. He makes his intentions clear when he advises his audience that 'with so little time to convince prospects that you're worthy of their business, you shouldn't waste even a second making them struggle with a deviant user interface'. Unsurprisingly, Nielsen's views find a receptive audience among the marketing people who control commercial websites. They want standardisation - just as marketing people do in other media - and have no time for epicene notions of the Web as an innovative space crying out for new modes of expression.

So, is usability the silver-coated bullet delivered to the heart of innovative Web design? Florian Schmitt is creative partner of UK design studio Hi-Res!, a company with a reputation for ground-breaking Web design. Schmitt discerns a lack of innovation in contemporary Web design: 'The will to discover and experiment with form and structure has waned a bit,' he says. 'I think it's mainly due to the fact that users are impatient, and not willing to find things out for themselves. And that has definitely had an impact on the design of sites. Even at Hi-Res! we've started putting clear signs next to hotspots! But I think the medium is so incredibly young that it's all part of a learning process. We are trying things out all the time, some work, others don't, and the next revolution is always just around the corner.'

In Web design, 'usability' is not necessarily the same thing as good design. It appears that you can have high levels of usability without bothersome

'Many of websites are in breach of the law... the RNIB has considered taking legal action against organisations with regard to their sites' accessibility.'

concepts like 'good design'. Take Amazon: I use this site almost daily for purchases and reference; it is a miracle of functionality, with vast reservoirs of seemingly limitless content and superb search facilities. It is a transactional site used by millions of people, and it is undoubtedly 'easy to use'. Yet that fact remains that the Amazon site lacks graphic finesse. When evaluated on purely graphic design terms, the site is an overheated, hodgepodge of graphic noise. Is this the price we have to pay for usability?

BETTER AND WORSE AT THE SAME TIME

Florian Schmitt identifies 'accessibility' as another factor contributing to the shaping of current Web design. Accessibility is a hot issue in Web design, and graphic design in general. Ensuring universal access to information is a declared aim of most technologically advanced democracies. This intention doesn't just apply to online data, either; it applies equally to signage and printed literature, and is given special prominence in the public sector. In the UK, accessibility is now enshrined in law, and designers are increasingly obliged to adhere to strict guidelines. 'With the DDA (Disability Discrimination Act) coming into effect,' observes Schmitt, 'a lot of big sites have had to re-evaluate their Web standards. While this is an encouraging move, it also changes the palette of the designer radically - at least until software catches up. So one could say Web design is getting better and a little bit worse at the same time.'

On its website, UK usability company Web Credible notes that 'the majority of websites are already in breach of the law', and in answer to the question 'can you be sued?', it speculates: 'Well, probably. The RNIB [Royal National Institute of the Blind] claims that it has considered taking up a number of legal cases against organisations with regard to their websites. When they raised the accessibility issues of the website under the DDA, companies have typically made the necessary changes, rather than facing the prospect of legal action.'

It is hard to argue with legislation designed to help the visually impaired, or with the commercial usability gurus who advocate uniformity - after all, when we visit websites we mostly want efficiency, speed and security. Yet it's also hard to see how these constraints are anything other than a straitjacket placed on Web design. Not so, says Mark Barratt of Text Matters, an information design consultancy he established in 1990 with partner Sue Walker. According to Barratt, accessibility is not to be feared by designers. 'It's what graphic and typographic design is for - making information, ideas and feelings tangible,' he notes. 'Accessibility legislation is a mixed blessing. It focuses both clients and designers on issues they should think about -

The screenshot shows a web page titled 'Lone Parent Helpdesk' with a red header bar containing the logo 'One parent families' and the tagline 'making change happen'. Below the header are links for 'Information search', 'Common questions', 'Useful organisations', 'Benefits finder', and 'Tell us what you think'. The main content area is titled 'Start your search' and contains three sections with checkboxes:

- Events in your life** (checkboxes: Becoming a student, Bereavement, End of employment, Entering employment, Maternity, paternity and adoption, Retirement, Splitting Up, Youngest child reaches 16)
- Problems with...** (checkboxes: Children, Complaints or changing decisions, Education for adults and employment, Housing, illness or disability, Illness/Disability, Immigration and residency, Legal issues, Money issues, Violence in the family, Young mums)
- Benefits and tax credits** (checkboxes: About benefits, My partner has died, I stay at home to look after the children or work less than 16 hours a week, I work 16 or more hours a week, I or my child has an illness or disability, I am having or adopting a baby, I have just split up from my partner)

At the bottom of the page, there is a note about a registered charity number (230750), privacy policy, disclaimer, and a comment section.

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4 and 5. Site designed by Text Matters, a UK-based information design consultancy with skills that range from 'copywriting and editing for clear language', through designing for print and screen, to 'structured documents for parallel publishing.' Much of Text Matters' work is in the public sector. Founding partner Mark Barratt notes:

'Accessibility requirements have made the designer and the coder/programmer/analyst work together more effectively - because it is not just what it looks like or how it interacts that is important - it is also how the code is structured underneath the visual level.'

The screenshot shows a web page titled 'One parent families' with a green header bar containing the logo 'jobcentrefplus' and the tagline 'Lone parent Information for England and Wales'. Below the header are links for 'Search for' and 'only in this chapter' with a 'Submit' button. The main content area features a sidebar with links to various topics and a main article with a title and several sections of text.

How long will I have to wait before I am offered council housing?

Once your application has been accepted, you may have to wait for some time before you receive an offer of a place to live. The council should be able to give you some idea of how long you might have to wait and this will depend on the priority of your housing need and the accommodation that is available.

What you need to ask the council when you make your housing application

You need to know:

- that the council has all the information it needs to assess your needs and give you the appropriate priority;
- what choice of housing you will be offered and how many offers you will be made;
- what size of property you will be offered;
- whether you are likely to be nominated to a housing association (see [Offers from housing associations to council housing applicants](#)), which one(s) and where they have properties;
- how long you are likely to have to wait for an offer;
- a contact name who you can contact regarding your application; and
- details about other options for housing in the area.

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what if the user has a terrible old browser? What if the user is blind? - and that's a good thing. But it does allow a 'tick-the-box' mentality. If your site passes the WAI [Web Accessibility Initiative] or RNIB or Bobby [a software tool designed to encourage compliance with existing accessibility guidelines] tests, you can write off the issue. It is entirely possible to create an incoherent website and still pass such tests. In general, I think the accessibility guidelines have been helpful: you can quibble about some of their "rules", but both the UK rule-makers, RNIB (Royal National Institute for the Blind) and e-GIF (e-Government Interoperability Framework - for public sector sites) have guidance that is largely sensible, flexible and occasionally wise.'

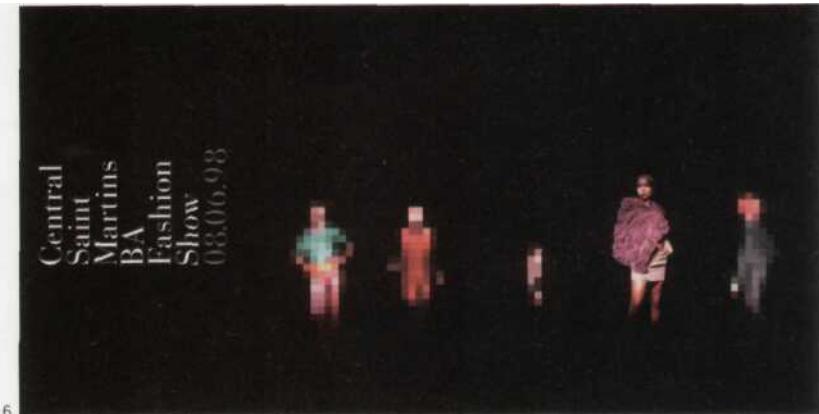
James King shares Barratt's generous view of accessibility: The Internet is a means of making resources accessible to anyone with a computer,' he states. 'Accessibility is therefore the reason for any website to exist, and the argument that accessibility is in some way stifling Web design is based on a misconception of what the Web has become. A misconception common among graphic designers.' Barratt and King are representative of many Web designers, and information designers in particular, who relish the intellectual challenge of combining usability with high design standards. There are some notable success stories. The BBC site - available in over 40 languages - is a triumph of online information design. Elegant, graphically sophisticated and teeming with information, it offers an object lesson in combining 'accessibility' and 'usability' with good design.

Accessibility legislation is defining the graphic appearance of both websites and printed matter, and the inevitable consequence of this seems to be a move towards greater uniformity and a reduction in the scope for experimentation. Nor is it inconceivable that at some point in the future, all graphic design will be subject to accessibility stipulations. You can already see the effects of compliance with accessibility legislation in the bland characterless design of many financial and pharmaceutical communications. In the future it might become illegal to use 6pt type, or use dark grey text on a light grey background.

SEARCHING FOR THE HOLY GRAIL

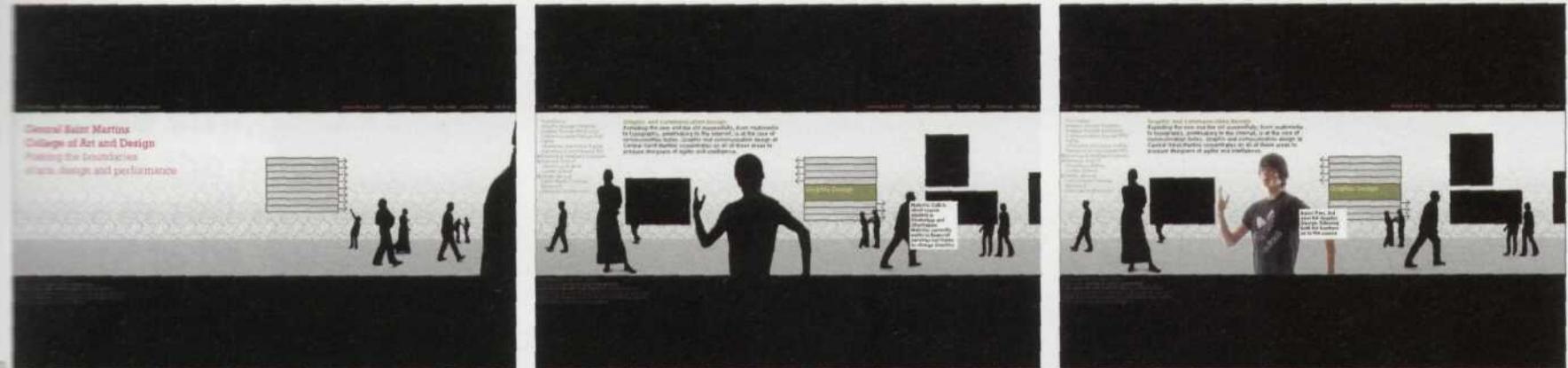
'For clients,' notes Michele Jannuzzi, 'a system able to output from a single pool of data into different media is the "Holy Grail" of publishing.' This may be a goal zealously sought by publishers and media owners, but for the graphic designer it looks suspiciously like a return to the days of 'specifying type' for the typesetter or printer. The only difference is that today your content might have to be read on a Blackberry, delivered to a Web page in a

'All books share an identical technology, whereas a Web page is created at one end but viewed by several different technologies at the other end.'



6 and 7-10 (opposite).
Sites for Central Saint Martins
by digital specialists Jannuzzi
Smith. 6. 'Virtual catwalk'.
7. Home page from the
version of the site that ran
from 1997-2000. 'We decided
to present the CSM name as
large as we could, using our
typeface Mies, which makes
recognisable letterforms from
the smallest number of pixels.'
8-10. Latest version of site

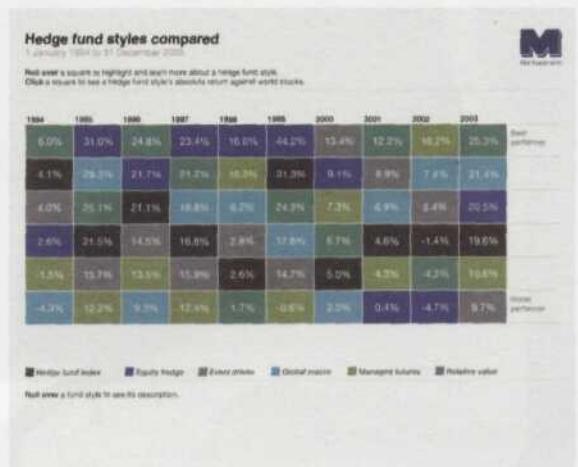
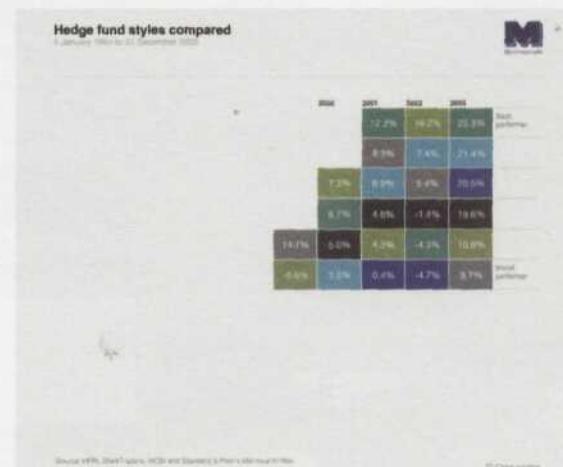
combines horizontal 'scrolling'
of earlier site with more
imagery and detail, 2002-05.
www.csm.arts.ac.uk
11. Home page from the BBC
website, which demonstrates
that clarity, accessibility,
usability and vast amounts of
content-managed data can be
delivered within sophisticated
design standards. It also
offers news in 43 languages.
www.bbc.co.uk



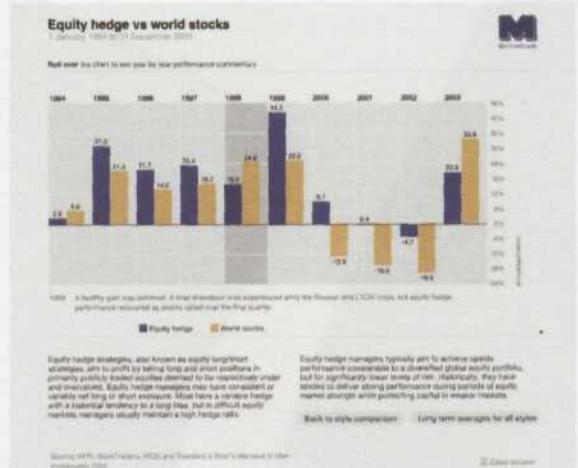
12-17. Interactive diagrams from the financial services website maninvestments.com, demonstrating one of several Web-based tools designed by WDOwen Associates for Man Investments. 'This hedge fund style comparison tool combines information design and user interaction with a demanding technical specification,' explains co-designer William Owen.

'This is one of many interactive diagrams built with the aim of presenting complex and novel financial ideas in an engaging and meaningful way. Using Flash animations and tightly edited rollover text, the diagram distils a large quantity of information about the risk and performance characteristics of different hedge fund styles into a single screen. The text and

diagrams are updated and redrawn automatically when new annual data is entered into XML tables.' Design: William Owen/Isaac Pinnock, WDOwen Associates; Flash programming: Peter Gaborit, Valtech.



12-17



Laboratory Instinct GmbH

18/01/2005 13:43:43 Europe Japan

adv'pu'

Information Location

Distributed by

Neuron (worldwide)
SRD (UK)
La Balleche (France)
Decoder (Spain)
Forced Exposure (USA)
Ultra-Vybe (Japan)

Buy products

Information

Links

Information

DJ / Live Mix / Video

Photo

Laboratory Instinct Media

Links

Information

Photo

Buy products

Information

Links

Information

Photo

Design by
Universal Everything

Thomas Brinkmann AKA SOUL CENTER Thomas Fehlmann

Out now

1. Futurismo Rodriguez
2. Stringvaderz
3. Furbymix

Buy products

18 and 19. Site for record company Laboratory Instinct. Design: Universal Everything, run by Matt Pyke, formerly of The Designers Republic. Hidden areas trigger surprises as you move around a single page. 'I strive for innovation in how content is discovered and delivered,' claims Pyke. 'Information is the priority, and its subject determines how you choreograph it.' www.laboratoryinstinct.com

Despite stringent technical demands, despite the rampant commercialisation, there is still wonderfully expressive design to be found on the Internet.

foreign language or appear on a mobile phone, it might even need to be used in a voice delivery system.

'Doing this kind of work is hard in both design and technical terms,' notes Mark Barratt. Paper books and Web pages require very different layouts and design approaches and this in turn requires a different approach to the business of designing. By and large we in the design community don't have either the skills or the software to do it well. Design for multiple-media is starting to be on the agenda at design schools, but there isn't a cadre of designers who know what they are doing. Neither of the software packages that print designers most use - xpress and InDesign - are currently very useful for importing or exporting print-aligned publications for repurposing, and the structured-text software that will export and import usefully usually has very limited typographic control.'

A future where communications are automatically fed to numerous platforms poses a formidable challenge to graphic designers. It highlights the need for a new sort of graphic designer. It is not enough anymore to slough off the skin of print-centric design formalism. What is required is a new sensibility, a new hybrid mentality, as comfortable with the fibre optic cable, the radio wave and the screen, as previous generations were with the printed document and the printing press. As James King notes: 'It has become more than just a matter of visual design. For example: you can't really design a site without a content management system to keep it updated. There is also a whole layer of semantic mark-up and protocol (complicated by the clumsy implementation of Web-standards by the browser manufacturers) to get to grips with before you can even contemplate the visual design of a site.'

Many designers already occupy this new landscape. Despite the stringent technical demands, despite the rampant commercialisation, despite the restrictive legislation, there is wonderfully expressive design to be found on the Internet. There are sites where you find some of the most compelling and revolutionary graphic design ever produced. These Promethean statements of graphic enterprise are the high water mark of contemporary visual expression - more daring and technically accomplished than most contemporary design and, for that matter, contemporary art. Yet, these sites exist in a rarefied world, a nearly hidden online zone known only to Web cognoscenti zealously exchanging URLs.

Not long ago, it was widely imagined that this realm of experimental Web design - the avant-garde - would have a revivifying effect on graphic design in general. The work of experimentalists such as John Maeda, Joshua Davis and Yugo Nakamura seemed to herald a new and dazzling Web



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20-22. Pages from the stylish website devoted to the work of Czech-born graphic designer Ladislav Sutnar (1897-1976). The site shows many examples of Sutnar's work and is designed in a style that transports the aesthetic rigour of this important figure's work into the digital domain. (See exhibition review in Eye no. 50 vol. 13.)

January 2005

RISKLESS FREE COMPUTING

I'm waiting for the day when I get a spam message with the above subject-line. I think it would be the first spam I would ever respond to in a positive way. However with my luck when it comes to computers, I'd probably end up in some internet cat-fighting site.

Java is a funny evil. You get the promise of a language that runs on all platforms—which it does, but not very reliably. The alternatives do exist, but Java has the widest coverage today and will probably hold that lead for a long time. It's still in the category of making Java look bad. The inconsistency per build of Java script that works and doesn't work seems to multiply each minor increment of a software version number. I cannot count the number of JavaScript programs I've written with the disturbing feeling, "If I code this in the incorrect way, it can run on browser X or Y semi-reliably, but if I code it in the right way it will run on none of them." *"Jacques T" alain of Lithuania reminds me that JavaScript and Java have no relationship except for the coincidence of the name.*

Which brings me to my point, and that is that handle-free computing will be out of reach until there is handle-free software development. The reality of computer programming has shifted greatly over the last decade from a programming manual measuring a quarter of an inch in thickness, to towers of manuals that cumulate in a pile taller than Shaquille O'Neal. People today complain about their cell phone manuals—try looking at an entire suite of Java-related manuals. Programmers have to go consume and interpret more documentation than even lawyers today ... that's truly frightening. Yet mastery of a software development system has become meaningless when the many flavors of operating systems and associated legacy versions of the OS (which are dialects unto themselves) can render your precious work inoperable.

In the SIMPLICITY program here at MIT, we believe that one of the keys towards handle-free computing (and software development) is a move towards highly centralized computing, versus the current trend towards mass decentralization. There is evidence in the more successful strategies by Microsoft, Apple, and Google in those directions that we are on the right track. So our hat is in the ring as well, and you know we can't spell COMPETITION without M-I-T!

Atascadero, CA United States

BEAUTIFUL IS THE BEAUTY

Definitely not simple, but beautiful.

At last year's TED in Monterey, California, I was strolling around when a fellow asked if he could use my mobile phone as his phone's battery was dead. I was hesitant to code



THOUGHTS ON
SIMPLICITY

by jay cross, jaycross media
mit media lab, mit media lab
cambridge, massachusetts, usa

Note: To see an experimental blog in the process that communicates
and transports are not available as a product of this web feature, due to
technical difficulties with incorporating comments automatically generated through the comment field threads. If you're interested in this feature, please let me know.

Send back this article

Search

LINKS

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RECENT

- Handle-Free Computing
- Beautiful is the Beauty
- Book of the Chamberlain
- Letters
- The Art of Black
- Simple Organic Wine
- Kansai 82
- Apple Computer India and
- Indian in Computer
- New Healthy White
- Designing for the Web
- Design for the Web
- Great Translation
- Nokia Electronics
- The Art of the Possible
- Creative Jobs in The Daily Wire
- Complex Systems & Complexity Part II
- Moby-Dick's Secret-Phone Equation
- Simple Cards

CONTACTS | BUSINESS | PERSONAL | SOCIAL

Feedback this article

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syntax. In fact, mainstream website design has gone in exactly the opposite direction, moving towards a bland digital equivalency with such 'real-world' staples as retail design, the more formulaic kinds of corporate design, and advertising at its crassest.

Additionally, in an odd twist, the visual conventions and stylistic tropes of current Web design have become enmeshed in the aesthetic and commercial development of contemporary print design. Print media frequently apes its younger, rowdier sibling. Today, it is not uncommon to see printed pages, especially magazines and other consumerist-focused literature, resembling the 'hot button', hyper-linked appearance of Web pages. Contemporary magazines cram their pages with Web-like menus, scraps of enticing data, pull-quotes and sub-menus, encouraging readers to skate through the publication, flitting about in a way that resembles the butterfly-like way that visitors approach websites.

For some designers, the answer to the limitations of Web design is to go back to basics. Like the musicians and fans who supported Phil Spector's 'back to mono' campaign of the early 1970s, many designers and users relish the simplicity of pioneering 1990s sites. It is fashionable among some design groups to design their sites in HTML, relying on default fonts and primitive layouts. (The site of M/M Paris is a good example of this trend.) Raw-boned 'default' design seems preferable to the homogenised future envisaged by usability experts, who seem intent on turning the online world into a virtual shopping mall, and it seems closer to the Utopian spirit of the early pioneers. Perhaps 'Back to HTML' will become the Web designer's badge of honour. ☺

For some Web designers, the answer is to go back to basics, like the musicians and fans who supported Phil Spector's 'back to mono' campaign.

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P O R T F O L I O

N E W S

041285

Update. A snippet of the videoclip we've created for swedish band the Ark is added to the site. Find it in 'film/music video' in the portfolio section.

041138

Thanks to all students from the

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Founded by Matt Pyke, after 8 years at the internationally renowned studio, The Designers Republic from 1996 - 2004, working on music, retail, fashion, architecture, advertising and investment projects worldwide.
We work as a multidisciplinary creative studio operating an ever-growing international modular team of designers, programmers, CG animators and sound designers. The focus is on open-ended dialogue and collaboration with forward-thinking people from diverse disciplines, from programmers and product designers to architects and artists.

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To explore
To evolve and diversify
To pioneer unique aesthetics
To push all medium
To amplify your world

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Selected media coverage of works created at The Designers Republic
96 - 04

Reinigungen
Multiplex / UK
The Face / UK
Fresne / UK
Creative Review / UK

Feedback this article

23. John Maeda pleads for 'Simplicity' on his MIT blog.

24 and 25. Websites showing the 'back to basics' approach favoured by contemporary designers, a reaction to the increasing sophistication of Web design. 24. Swedish studio RGB6, www.rbg6.se. 25. Universal Everything (see

captions 18 and 19, p.42), www.universaleverything.com.

Matt Pyke notes: 'HTML is akin to the resurgence in craftsmanship – wearing your skills on your sleeve with no gloss. What you want from an HTML site is on the surface of the screen, not buried behind flying preloaders.'

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