



# Website Design Information

by MEGMIND® Web Service

## Website Design Information

Below you will find helpful information pertaining to website design. Please contact us (see contact information at bottom of this page) if we can assist you in any way.

### Content

Creating effective content (meaning text, graphics and other information) for your site requires that you have determined the purpose of your site how you will organize the information.

Organization can help you refine your focus and create content that is more useful for your purpose and enhance the experiences of your site visitors.

### Organization

A sites organization is paramount because it will make it easier (or if omitted more difficult) for your site visitors to find what they are looking for and what you want them to experience.

### Outlines

Put pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard) and organize your thoughts into a site structure outline. Outlines are excellent tools in assisting in the planning of a website and it's content. Most word processing software programs have outlining features that allow one to hide all your text and just see your headings (or sections). Moving around headings reorganizes your document, so changes are easy.

What is your site going to do for your visitor?

A common mistake is for people to know what they want the site to do for them, but not for their site visitors. One must decide what they want the site to accomplish for them, as well as, the site visitors.

Once you know what you want your site to accomplish site planning then will focus on site details to accomplish those goals.

### Look and keep looking

What should my sight look like? Start by looking at your favorite sites and noting what you like about it. One of the best ways to make your site great is to keep looking around the Web and learning from what you see. That does not mean copying but instead determine what you like about the site and how it will complement your site look, feel and purpose. It is also helpful to note site you do not like and why.

### Appearance

Appearance is often the first thing that site visitors notice—how the site looks. The design of your home page is especially important because it communicates the tone of your site, it is your first impression. A site's design should also reflect your identity or corporate brand and purpose.

The visual design of a site has a great effect on the impression your site gives to visitors. Is it formal or casual? Corporate or personal? Modern or traditional? Serious or friendly? Warm or cool? These feelings can be conveyed instantly just through the design of a site.

It is also important that the look of your site is consistent throughout. Backgrounds, colors, navigation buttons all need to present your site visitor with a uniform appearance (aka "seamless"). This also helps to build a "style" so your site is recognizable. Since it is so easy to go anywhere in the world on the Web you want your site visitor to know where they are.

### There's no place like a home page

Most sites start with a home page. Home pages usually are introduction and/or a "table of contents" to your website. Visitors should immediately learn what the site is about and what it is offering the visitor. Home pages also introduce visitors to the organization of your website, sections and pages. All your pages in your site (starting with your home page) should have a "consistent" feel and design.

Home pages always contain links to a site's sections and pages. Home pages can link visitors directly to any information or content you want your visitor to have immediate access to.

Some sites use what is called a "splash screen" (i.e. Flash page). A splash screen is an introductory page that is like a magazine cover or billboard. This page can add style to the site and act as a ceremonial front door, but because they present less information than a less complex home page but are usually more "flashy" and take longer time to load. If you use a splash screen some users will feel that the splash screen is not needed and annoying. Simple is sometime superior. Generally, the more time it takes a site to load the more visitors will be lost.

A splash screen may be a must for your type of business or industry and is best used in an "artsy" type of site or if you know your visitors will wait for the page to load. When using long loading pages it is best to have a "click here to skip the introduction" link.

There are two schools of thought about home page length - short home page verse longer home page:

### Short page

A short home page is one where the entire home page is visible on a single screen. The advantage to a short home page is that visitors do not have to scroll and they can view everything there is to offer on one screen.

The disadvantage is that a short home page cannot present much information or content. The short page forces visitors to click on something, anything, just to get to more information. Sometimes when a visitor is presented too little information the site will run the risk of them not knowing the purpose of the site and/or not seeing something of interest that they may have clicked if more information was available. Additionally, visitors may not be comfortable clicking on an item if they are unsure of where the link will lead to.

### Longer page

The other school of thought is that the more information you provide, within reason, the better. People are use to scrolling in their word processor, spreadsheet, Internet use and other software applications.

Studies have shown that Web visitors do scroll, and that the more information you give them (again, within reason), the better. Rather than being overwhelmed, you make it easier for them not just to find something but to find something that interests them. If people are interested, they will scroll. If they are not, it does not matter how short your home page is. Note: It is advantageous to place your site's most important topics at the top of the page so they are emphasized and not overlooked.

### Sections

Any site more than a few pages long needs sections. You can think of them like chapters in a book, or even file folders. Their purpose is to organize articles into logical units.

Sections and their titles are very important because they tell your site visitors what kind of information you are going to present to them. For example, a site about gardening might have sections on Flowers, Trees and Vegetables. Or, you might have sections on designing a garden, planting a garden, and maintaining a garden. Both sections relate to gardening. However, the two sets of captions in each section present the site visitors with different expectations of the information and content they will find.

Deciding what sections you need for your site is one of the first items you need to complete—and it all has to do with deciding on why you want to create a site in the first place and what you expect it to accomplish for you and for your site visitors.

### Navigation

Navigation is such an important element of a Website one needs to consider it from the start. Your site visitors need to know how to get to the information they are looking for—and how to get from one part of your site or section to another.

Your home page must link directly to the most important items on your site and all sections. Every page on your site should have navigation buttons (links) that let your visitor get to your home page and all main section pages.

Navigation should be consistent from page to page. This is so your visitors do not have to figure out how to navigate each and every page.

For larger and complex sites visitors should be able to search all text.

### Links

The Web is based on the idea of linking—from page to page and from site to site. Links within your site help you break up information into logical pieces, and help your reader go to related information quickly and easily

Some people are hesitant to include links to other sites because they do not want visitors to leave. It is possible to set your links so they open a new browser window leaving your site open in the original browser window.

### Some basics to remember:

Visitors should know where they are at all times—the name of the site, the name of the area within that site. Otherwise they may never want to return to your site or never be able to find the information again.

Make sure to include an easy way for your visitors to contact you! Feedback is a vital part of the Internet experience so make sure to include links that allow visitors to easily e-mail you—plus your traditional address and phone numbers. One should include your site address, e-mail address and telephone number each page. That way if someone saves or prints a page (or pass the printed page or file to someone else) they can view your contact information without access their computer and/or Internet again.

You do not have the normal constraints of printing (or reprints when information is updated), printing costs, postage/distributions costs.

Make sure to detailed site content and information. Web readers may want details. You should offer condensed overviews with links to more complete information—that way casual viewers are not bored by details—but the details will also be available to those who want further information.

Detail content will not only help your visitors it will help you and/or your staff and your business by supplying answers to question that otherwise be handled in person or over the telephone.

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