

Your web site should be easy to read

The most important rule in web design is that your web site should be easy to read. What does this mean? You should choose your text and background colors very carefully. You don't want to use backgrounds that obscure your text or use colors that are hard to read. Dark-colored text on a light-colored background is easier to read than light-colored text on a dark-colored background.

You also don't want to set your text size too small (hard to read) or too large (it will appear to shout at your visitors). All capitalized letters give the appearance of shouting at your visitors.

Keep the alignment of your main text to the left, not centered. Center-aligned text is best used in headlines. You want your visitors to be comfortable with what they are reading, and most text (in the East) is left aligned.

Your web site should be easy to navigate

All of your hyperlinks should be clear to your visitors. Graphic images, such as buttons or tabs, should be clearly labeled and easy to read. Your web graphic designer should select the colors, backgrounds, textures, and special effects on your web graphics very carefully. It is more important that your navigational buttons and tabs be easy to read and understand than to have "flashy" effects.

Link colors in your text should be familiar to your visitor (blue text usually indicates an unvisited link and purple or maroon text usually indicates a visited link), if possible. If you elect not to use the default colors, your text links should be emphasized in some other way (boldfaced, a larger font size, set between small vertical lines, or a combination of these). Text links should be unique -- they should not look the same as any other text in your web pages. You do not want people clicking on your headings because they think the headings are links.

Your visitors should be able to find what they are looking for in your site within three clicks. If not, they are very likely to click off your site as quickly as they clicked on.

Your web site should be easy to find

How are your visitors finding you online? The myth, "If I build a web site, they will come," is still a commonly held belief among companies and organizations new to the Internet. People will not come to your web site unless you promote your site both online and offline.

Web sites are promoted online via search engines, directories, award sites, banner advertising, electronic magazines (e-zines) and links from other web sites. If you are not familiar with any of these online terms, then it is best that you have your site promoted by an online marketing professional.

Web sites are promoted offline via the conventional advertising methods: print ads, radio, television, brochures, word-of-mouth, etc. Once you have created a web site, all of your company's printed materials including business cards, letterhead, envelopes, invoices, etc. should have your URL printed on them.

Not only should your web site be easy to find, but your contact information should be easy to find. People like to know that there is a person at the other end of a web site who can help them in the event that:

1. they need answers to questions which are not readily available on your web site;
2. some element on your site is not working and end users need to be able to tell you about it,
3. And if a directory editor need you to modify parts of your site to be sure that your site is placed in the most relevant category.

By giving all relevant contact information (physical address, telephone numbers, fax numbers, and email address), you are also creating a sense of security for your end users. They can contact you in the way that makes them feel the most comfortable.

Your web page layout and design should be consistent throughout the site

Just as in any document formatted on a word processor or as in any brochure, newsletter, or newspaper formatted in a desktop publishing program, all graphic images and elements, typefaces, headings, and footers should remain consistent throughout your web site. Consistency and coherence in any document, whether it is a report or a set of web pages, project a professional image.

For example, if you use a drop shadow as a special effect in your bullet points, you should use drop shadows in all of your bullets. Link-colors should be consistent throughout your web pages. Typefaces and background colors, too, should remain the same throughout your site.

Color-coded web pages, in particular, need this consistency. Typefaces, alignment in the main text and the headings, background effects, and the special effects on graphics should remain the same. Only the colors should change.

Your web site should be quick to download

Studies have indicated that visitors will quickly lose interest in your web site if the majority of a page does not download within 15 seconds. (Artists' pages should have a warning at the top of their pages.) Even web sites that are marketed to high-end users need to consider download times. Sometimes, getting to web site such as Microsoft is so difficult and time consuming that visitors will often try to access the sites during non-working hours from their homes. If your business does not have good brand name recognition, it is best to keep your download time as short as possible.

A good application of this rule is adding animation to your site. Sure, animation looks "cool" and does initially catch your eye, but animation graphics tend to be large files. Test the download time of your pages first. If the download time of your page is relatively short and the addition of animation does not unreasonably increase the download time of your page, then and ONLY then should animation be a consideration.

Finally, before you consider the personal preferences of your web page design, you should consider all of the above rules FIRST and adapt your personal preferences accordingly. *The attitude "I don't like how it looks" should always be secondary to your web site's function. Which is more important: creative expression/corporate image or running a successful business?*