

12 Design Tips For a Successful Website

By Evan Mangan

1. Know Your Audience

Be very clear about your target audience and ask key questions which will affect the design. What % of the audience is likely to have broadband as this will affect whether you use large files. What % is likely to be elderly as this will affect the font size. What % are young versus older as this will affect the tone of voice.

2. Fast Loading

Around 80% of web traffic comes from search engines. That means people land on your site and expect to find what they want quickly. Ensure the homepage loads within a *maximum* of seven seconds. If users have to wait for your page to load, they will bounce off the site and go to the next site that appeared on the search result list.

3. Clarity

The purpose of your site and what you are selling should be clear within 7-10 seconds. If a user needs to click on a link or play with the navigation in order to figure out what you are selling, you will lose visitors in large numbers.

4. Less is More

A simple and uncluttered site with a single-minded message on each page makes for the best web experience. Avoid trying to include too much information on one page. Ask yourself, "What is the one thing I want the visitor to think and then do" on this page.

5. Avoid Design Overload

Avoid filling your site with lots of whizzy graphic devices. Certainly avoid music in the background - if it doesn't annoy the visitor in the first visit, it certainly will in the second. Never have more than one animated device on a page as it is too distracting.

6. **Showcase the Product**

If you are selling a beautiful product such as a golf course, a resort, hotel or restaurant, avail of the latest macro flash technology. Flash viewers are now ubiquitous with almost 90% of browsers containing the plug-in. Use this to showcase your product, as small photos often won't do your product justice.

7. **Simple Navigation**

Navigation should be simple and intuitive. A child should be able to immediately understand how to find the information. A person visiting your site should never be more than three clicks away from what they want.

8. **Comparison**

You should always keep an eye on what your competitors and the companies you aspire to emulate are doing on their websites. Bookmark them all and visit once a month. Incorporate any new ideas from their site into your site.

9. **Online Sales**

If you are selling on your site, ensure your users are never more than two clicks away from ordering the product.

10. **On Brand**

In a few words, describe the personality of your brand. Ask yourself what tone of voice and what kind of experience your customers expect online. Ensure your web designers understand how to translate your offline brand to your website. Ask them how they will go about it.

11. **Visitors and Conversion Data**

Ensure you have web-tracking software, which will tell you:

- How many visitors go to the site daily
- What town, region or country they are from
- How many get past the home page and what pages they tend to look at or rarely visit
- What % of visitors convert to sales

This is vitally important data to help you refine your website. For example, if you discover that only 20% of visitors go beyond the homepage, that is a big issue. Or if you can see that very few users visit a key page that explains the benefits of your product, your conversion

rate will be low. This information provides the guidance you need to refine and optimize your site design.

12. Think of Traffic

Finally, and most importantly, always design your site with traffic in mind. Many small businesses make the mistake of designing their website and then start thinking about driving traffic to it. The problem is that the way you design your site can result in your site being ignored by the search engine spiders, meaning you will receive very little traffic. (80% of web traffic tends to come from search engines). When designing your site, improve your SEO (search engine optimization) performance by ensuring you avoid the certain pitfalls. Ask your marketing agency to confirm that they have avoided the following:

Avoid flash sites. Sites are designed in either HTML or flash. Search engine spiders sent to index your site cannot read flash.

No frames. Spiders cannot read what is inside a frame, so you won't be indexed and noticed by search engines.

No dynamic pages. Some sites are developed with a database which generates dynamic pages. You can tell if there are dynamic pages on your site if there is a ? within the page URL. Again, spiders cannot read dynamic pages.

Text within graphics. To ensure text is read uniformly by different browsers, design agencies often put text within a graphic. It looks great. However, a spider cannot read what text that is in a graphic and simply moves on.

About The Author

Evan Mangan is a former Head of European Marketing for Yahoo! Mobile and was Head of International Operational Marketing for Orange. He is founder and Managing Director of The Marketing Crowd (www.TheMarketingCrowd.com), a full service marketing agency which

makes the marketing techniques employed by major brands available and affordable to smaller companies.

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