

Appendix A

Design User-Friendly Web Pages



2 How to Do Everything with FrontPage 2002

If you have surfed the Web for any significant period of time, you know that there are plenty of Web sites out there with some significant problems. You may not have paid much attention to what those problems were, but you know you didn't stay on the site for very long. Perhaps issuing a sigh of disgust, you moved on to another site and have never been back. Obviously, you don't want your own site to fall prey to those sorts of problems.

Common Web Site Problems

The most common Web site problems are the following:

- **Pages take too long to load.** Perhaps the pages have one or more large graphics, or a huge scrolling chunk of text, or fanciful animations, or (God forbid) a large number of banners accessing other sites that are slow as well. All of these items can cause a page to load very slowly, while the person attempting to view the site gets more and more impatient. Remember that unless you are designing a corporate intranet site, most people are viewing your site over a dial-up line—and that is not likely to change for the next few years.
- **Pages have no clear purpose.** Then there are those Web sites that seem to exist for no other reason than to prove that the person posting the site was capable of doing so. That is all fine and good, but if a site has no clear purpose, why bother to post it? You are wasting your own time (and money, if you pay for Web hosting). Worse, you are wasting the time of the people who come to your site (for however brief a time they spend there before getting a clue and moving on!).
- **Pages are poorly laid out.** This one is so common! Multiple frames that are too small for their contents, requiring a lot of scrolling. Columns of text that flow into strange places. And let us not forget tables that spill off the sides of the screen, large page-top banners that contain nothing useful, but force you to scroll down the page—and so much more! Poor layouts are often the result when the person designing the site uses a very high-resolution screen to do the layout, but does not anticipate what the site will look like at a lower resolution.
- **Pages are poorly written.** In the end, the content of a Web site is its most important asset—not the fancy layout, the whiz-bang special effects, or the

high-resolution graphics (unless the graphics communicate something useful). There is no substitute for concise, clear writing, but too few people know how to do this well—and even fewer (it seems) bother to practice this dying art when building a Web site. Think of a Web site as another way to deliver content. Ask yourself this: would I consider this content acceptable if I were submitting it on a memo to my boss? If not, it probably isn't acceptable for your Web site either.

- **Site is hard to navigate.** Making the site hard to navigate is a sure way to drive away viewers. Unlabeled hyperlinks. Pages with a way in but no clear way out. Frames that nest (one set of frames inside another) with no way to break out of the nested set. Multiple windows that pop open and get in the way. And so on. Spend some time getting the navigation right—if viewers get lost on your site, they might just leave and never return.
- **Pages have no useful content.** The ultimate sin. These sites are usually created by people who are just experimenting. The site is full of useless ramblings. If you ran into these people in real life, you might characterize them as blatherers. If you find that your site lacks useful content, it's time to go do something else.

Hints for a Good Web Site

How do you avoid creating a site that just wastes bandwidth and disk space? Certainly exercising care and planning is a good start. Don't just throw your Web site together any which way. A Web site should be treated like any other project: plan, analyze, and design before you begin to build.

You can also do some very specific things to make sure your Web site is a quality site.

Focus on the First Page

The first page of your Web site is, well, the first page your viewer sees. Spend time on its design, and people will hang around long enough to see your other pages. Make sure your home page appears quickly (no big graphics!), has an immediately identifiable purpose, is well laid-out and well written, and has useful content. Don't overwhelm—even the home page for a huge company is usually relatively sparse, simply telling you what else you can see on the site. And for goodness sakes, make sure all the hyperlinks work!

Avoid Unnecessary Graphics

Unnecessary graphics and animations lengthen the download time for a page to the point that people will often get impatient and go elsewhere. Make sure the graphics serve a useful purpose (are not just decorative), and keep them as small as possible. Consider using thumbnails so that people viewing the page can decide for themselves whether it is worth their time to view the whole graphic by previewing the image in a smaller, faster-loading version.

Don't Overdo the Fonts

Remember that people viewing your Web site may not have the same fonts you do, so your audience may not see the fancy fonts you use. In addition, using more than two or three fonts on a page, especially fonts that vary widely in appearance, can have a jarring effect and shouts "Amateur!"

Avoid Long Blocks of Scrolling Text

Forcing your readers to scroll (and scroll and scroll) is annoying and makes it tough to keep track of the content. Instead, it is usually better to break the text into multiple blocks, linking them through a contents page with hyperlinks. Use this guideline: a little bit of up and down scrolling is acceptable, but *no* sideways scrolling.

Use White Space on a Text-Heavy Page

It is tiring to the eye to read text-heavy pages. Use margins and sizeable breaks between sections to provide a more attractive (and less oppressive) page design.

Give Your Page an Informative Title

Getting lost on a Web site is no fun. Page titles can help readers orient themselves. In addition, the page title is used in banners and shared border hyperlinks, so make sure readers know where they are and where (if they click the hyperlink) they will be going. In addition, the page title is often picked up by search engines, so the more unique and informative it is, the greater the chance people will check it out.

Write Clearly

Write clearly and use care with spelling and grammar. Bad spelling and grammar look amateurish. After all, if you can't be bothered to get these things right, readers will wonder about how accurate the rest of your information is.

Make Your Navigation Controls Consistent

Use navigational controls that are consistent from one page to another. It can be confusing to viewers to see different navigational buttons or other graphics on different pages. And always make sure the viewer has a way to exit a page without leaving your site. Making sure that each page has a link back to your home page is one good way to achieve this.

Open Hyperlinks to Other Sites in a New Window

To make sure that visitors don't lose track of your Web site, open hyperlinks to other sites in a new window. That way, they can always close the window containing the other site page and still see your site's contents.

Test Each Page with Different Browsers

At a minimum, test each page with Netscape Navigator and Internet Explorer, the two most common browsers. Remember, different browsers render pages differently. You may end up with a page that looks bad (or even causes an error) in one browser or the other.

Always Use Alternative Text for Graphics

Many people run their browsers with the graphics turned off to minimize download time. You should always supply alternative text for graphics, especially for graphical navigation controls. Without the alternative text, these readers won't be able to navigate your site.

Avoid Hyperlinks that Don't Give an Idea of Where They Go

People don't like to click on hyperlinks without having some idea of where they'll end up. This is especially true of people using dial-up connections (most of them!) because they may have to wait a while to find out they didn't want to go there, which is very annoying.

Don't Overdo Hyperlinks

Overloading a page with hyperlinks can be overwhelming. Try to plan your site so you don't have a page with too many hyperlinks.

Keep the Hyperlinks Short

Don't make the text of a hyperlink a whole sentence or a very long phrase. Instead, use a sentence that gives a small, clearly defined area to click on for the hyperlink. For example, with this sentence:

“To view a full-scale map of the world and see all the airline routes, click here.”

make the word “here” the hyperlink.

Don't Change Hyperlink Colors

Most people are used to seeing the default hyperlink colors, so changing the hyperlink colors can be confusing. Unfortunately, many of the FrontPage themes break this recommendation, so you may want to consider customizing the themes to set the hyperlink color back to the normal blue.

Don't Overdo Special Effects

Special effects, such as blinking, fades, dissolves, and animation, can be very distracting if done in large quantities. If you want to call attention to something, use a limited effect, but don't go overboard.

Make Your Image Maps Obvious

When you design image maps (graphics with embedded hyperlinks), make sure the clickable areas of the image maps (hotspots) are obvious, so readers will realize they can click on a portion of the graphic to execute a hyperlink. Make sure the hotspots are large enough to click on easily. In addition, always provide text hyperlinks that duplicate the image hotspots' functionality.

Avoid Wide Graphics

If you create wide graphics, portions of the graphic can be cut off if viewers have their screens set to a lower resolution than you did when you designed the site. Many people with 15-inch screens or inexpensive laptops are limited to 800 × 600. So, unless absolutely necessary, keep the graphics narrow enough to fit on the screen without scrolling at a reasonable resolution (800 × 600 is a good compromise).

Use Tables to Align Contents

Nice, evenly spaced rows and columns of information look great and are easy to read—although not so easy to create! Use tables with invisible borders to ensure that the information is aligned correctly on the page.

A

Keep Forms Brief

What is true about paper forms is also true about Internet forms: keep them short and only ask for the information pertinent to the subject at hand. Get too nosy, and people will leave without giving you *any* information.