

Fine-Tuning Your Website

By Gillian Gaston

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You can spend hours, days, weeks or even months getting your website to look wonderful. There is nothing in the world that feels beats the feeling you get when someone comes to at your site and tells you that it looks great. All your hard work has paid off!

But has it? Apart from looking good your site has to work smoothly for it to be successful.

By looking good I don't mean that it has to have loads of pictures and graphics and animated gifs. In fact the opposite is often the case. A well designed site that is clear and simple to navigate will stand head and shoulders above one that is full of complex graphics making it visually confusing. Just remember, when it comes to website design, LESS is MORE.

OK, so you have kept the site clean and simple. That's a great start. But not only must it look great it has to work smoothly and that means regular maintenance and checking.

There is nothing more frustrating than to visit a site offering say a software product where you read the synopsis on the home page and you are interested in what the program could do you for you. You want more information, so you click the link marked "Detailed Product Information". What happens? The page can't be found. You try again, and again the page still can't be found. Are you impressed? No, not at all, particularly if the site belongs to a company that is supposed to specialise in software programs designed for the analysis of surveys carried out on the web!

Precisely this happened to me today with a company I read about in a professional market research journal. I gave up on this site and checked out the site of one of their competitors - and all their links worked perfectly and their product looked every bit as attractive. Guess which company I would choose if I decide to buy the package?

Checking that ALL your links work is vital. On a one or two page site, that is very simple to do - but if your site is larger it can take time - but it is time well spent. It is particularly important to remember to check that any banners or other reciprocal links you have on your site are working properly. If the link isn't working properly or the site has ceased to exist, remove it immediately.

It is also a useful exercise to check how your site looks on different browsers and on computers using different screen resolutions. You could ask some people you know to let you view your site on

their computers or you could check out the systems used at your local library or Internet café. It is well worth doing - you may see some things that need to be changed to make the site look good regardless of the browser.

How others view your site is obviously of critical importance. Why not ask your visitors for their feedback on your site? You could invite them to send you an email or to fill out a short, on-line questionnaire. To encourage them to respond you might consider offering an incentive such as a free ebook or report or you could hold a prize draw for a product that you sell for the best or most interesting reply.

The Internet is constantly changing and it is vital to keep up to date with trends. Use your visitors to tell you what they want so that you can offer it to them before your competitors do!

Gillian Gaston is a marketing specialist with 18 years' experience. She is a partner in JGN media, which offers expert information and resources for on-line business.

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