

4 Tips to a More Visitor-Friendly Website

By Angela Wu

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I remember my very first website. I thought it was the most amazing thing ever created; it had Flash, Javascript, an animated graphic I designed all on my own, plus various bits of 'artwork' placed at strategic locations throughout the site. Plus it used frames, something I thought would ease navigation for my visitors. What an astonishing display of talent!

Now when I look back on that first website, I'm forced to come to an inescapable conclusion:

It sucked.

You see, like so many beginners, I had succumbed to the lure of 'technology'. Instead of designing my site according to what my *visitors* wanted, I designed it around what *I* wanted to show off.

Don't make these common website blunders! Visitors come to your site for a reason - make it easy for them to get what they want. Here are a few tips ...

__1. Don't Use Flash Frivolously.

Flash movies are all the rage these days. Sure, it's new and cool and can do all sorts of neat things - but just because you CAN use it doesn't mean you SHOULD.

This is particularly true of content-rich websites. Visitors come to your site looking for information, not for an in-your-face Flash movie. Annoy them and it only takes a simple click of the mouse before they're gone forever.

Flash requires users to download a plug-in, if they don't

already have it. It can chew up your machine's resources and make it darn near impossible to get out - even a 'Skip Intro' link is hard to click on if your computer is too involved with Flash! And it takes too long to load. Not everyone has a high-speed modem!

Of course there are legitimate reasons to use Flash. For example, graphic artists or web designers who sell their Flash talents will want to showcase it. If you use it make sure you give people the OPTION of viewing it or not. A couple of suggestions are:

- * Put two links on your entry page: one to view the site using Flash, the other to view it without Flash.
- * Move your Flash movies deeper within your site. If your visitor wants to view them, they can simply click on a link.

__2. Use Graphics Sparingly.

The **right** picture can say a thousand words. But don't use graphics for the sake of using them; unless they convey something specific and relevant to your site then you might as well leave them off.

How many times have you come across an agonizingly slow site, filled with images dancing, whirling, bouncing, and beckoning to you from the screen? It's irritating to say the least.

If you have to display a lot of graphics on one page, make them into thumbnails. Visitors can click on the image they want to see in order to view the full-sized version.

Also be sure you compress your images to make them as small as possible, and specify the image WIDTH and HEIGHT in your HTML tag.

__3. Forget the Frames.

A lot of people like the look of frames. However, search engines cannot read them properly and improperly designed frames can leave your visitor 'trapped'. You can bet they'll never be back if you try to force them to stay! Unless you know how to properly use the NOFRAMES tag, don't use frames.

BigNoseBird.com has a nice little tutorial on how to get the 'Frames look' without actually using them. Read it

at <http://bignosebird.com/k3.shtml> .

___4. Keep it Simple - and Use Common Sense.

The simpler and cleaner your HTML, the more likely it will display exactly as you intended on different browsers.

- * Limit the number of fonts and colors you use. Pick a color scheme and stick to it.
- * Keep your navigation consistent from page to page.
- * If you use Javascript or VBScript, provide another way of viewing your information. Not all browsers support them.
- * Use tables to properly layout your site. Don't force your visitors to use the dreaded horizontal scroll bar to read your information! Tables can also add white space to your site for easier readability.
- * Spell-check! A site filled with spelling errors is very hard to read.
- * At a minimum, check your site with the two most popular browsers, Internet Explorer and Netscape.

Creating a web page is easy. Creating a *good* web page, however, takes a little more thought. Offer a content-rich site that's a pleasure to visit and your visitors will keep coming back!

Angela is the editor of Online Business Basics, an exclusive newsletter for eBusiness beginners. OBB features ongoing tutorials on how to build a profitable Internet business on a shoestring budget. You don't need a million-dollar budget to be successful! Find out how you too can join the thousands quietly earning a living online:
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