

Web Design Blunders That Can Cost You Lost Profits

By Angela Wu

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It's hard enough to bring people to your little corner of cyberspace, and once they're there, you have just a few brief seconds to catch their attention. A simple click-of-the-mouse and your site visitor is gone!

Keep as many interested prospects on your site by avoiding these blunders:

__Multiple Popup and Popunder Windows.

Many online business owners swear by the effectiveness of popups and popunders for getting more subscribers, making sales, or generating leads.

At the same time, a large percentage of users claim to dislike popups and popunders. And it's no wonder; many of us have been 'held hostage' by popups that spawn even more popups when you try to close them, until your screen is filled with windows and you're completely frustrated. Most people simply do NOT appreciate multiple popups or popunders!

If you choose to use them, try for a 'happy medium' -- a window that appears only once upon entry or exit. One such script is available fr*e at DesignerIndex, http://www.designerindex.com/Free_Tools/popupwindow.shtml .

__Unreadable Text.

Certain formats are easier to read than others. For example, it's generally accepted that black text on a white background is the easiest to read. The reverse -- light text on a colored background -- can cause fatigue when reading large blocks of text, and is better used to

highlight a portion of the page.

Similarly, text that is too small can cause problems. Although it's possible to change the displayed text size on a browser, many Internet users don't know how.

___Confusing Navigation.

Ever been to a site where it's hard to get around? It's just as easy to leave and go instead to a competitor's site. Make your navigation clear and simple.

___Trapping Visitors In Your Frames.

Improperly designed frames can leave your visitor 'trapped' on your site, unable to use the 'back' button on their browsers to leave. You can bet they'll never be back if you try to force them to stay! 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> .

___Broken ordering links!

It sounds silly... heck, it **is** silly. Check your order links regularly to ensure that they still work. Enough said.

___Splash pages.

You only have a few seconds to catch your visitor's attention. A big showy graphic that serves no real purpose is an easy way to lose your visitor -- particularly if they're forced to wait for it to load!

___Flash animation.

Flash movies are commonly used on websites these days. However, to view them often 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! Plus the load time can be far too long for those without high-speed Internet connections.

Of course there are legitimate reasons to use Flash. But if you use it make sure visitors have the OPTION to view

it. 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.

___'Forced' disclosure of personal information.

You may have seen sites that ask you to enter an email address, a name, or other personal information before you're allowed to 'enter' the site. Again, this is an easy way to lose a visitor! Without knowing anything about a site, what reason does the visitor have to give up personal details?

Give your visitors the option to sign up for your newsletter, product updates, etc. But let them into your site first. If they like what they see, they'll willingly provide you with contact information. This helps *you* too, by 'pre-screening' the people on your list to help ensure that it contains only interested prospects and not just people who were 'looking around'.

___S-l-o-o-o-w loading pages.

Huge graphics and HTML errors are just a couple of things that can affect the load time of your web pages. Many HTML editors will check your code for errors, or use NetMechanic's HTML Toolbox: <http://netmechanic.com/> . NetMechanic also offers a free tool to help minimize the size of your graphics.

___General 'unprofessional' look-and-feel.

A few of the more commonly seen design problems include: spelling mistakes; bright/clashing colors (or too many colors); too many fonts; a sloppy or disorganized look; too many banners or graphics blinking, flashing, dancing, or beckoning from the screen; lots of broken links; and horizontal scroll bars.

Creating a web page is easy. Creating a *good* web page, however, takes a little more thought. A clean, well-designed site is worth the effort. Your bottom line will thank you!

Angela is the author of Online Business Basics, a practical guide to building a profitable Internet business on a beginner's budget. It's received rave reviews -- see why by visiting <http://onlinebusinessbasics.com/article.html> or request a series of 10 free reports to get you started: <http://onlinebusinessbasics.com/freereports.html>

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