

Has your Design firm run Amuck?

By Lee Traupel

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What's happening to good web site design? Somehow we creative types at interactive and traditional ad agencies have run amuck – we're building web sites that may dazzle the senses, but don't really communicate much about our client's business or products and services!

1) Somehow I don't think anyone has a burning desire to spend 30-60 seconds on the Index page of a web site while another fancy Flash animation loads, complete with snazzy graphics, audio, and way cool cutting edge graphics – not!! People want to get real information, not razzle-dazzle graphics showing how great a developer is using the latest whiz bang technology!

2) I thought Frames went out of style like adding a .com to your company's name. Apparently not, as there are still lots of web sites using Frames – forcing users to see a web site with mix and match (bad) graphics, odd menus and just a plain ugly interface.

3) I some times wonder if some of my fellow design geeks all own Adobe stock, or they are just trying to make sure HTML disappears as a content standard. The last thing many people want is to sit and watch as their 56 kbps dial up struggles with opening a doc in Adobe's proprietary PDF format – many click off and are gone to the next web site. Content should be offered in HTML or Word format, both of which open instantly – no, I don't own any Microsoft shares!

4) Another popular time waster appears to be designing web sites that require people to list all of their contact points, including first born children, their dog's pedigree – etc. Registration forms should be short and no more than 4-5 entries that just require fundamental contact information.

5) What's the value in running contests, games and other technology-enabled multimedia content on a web site? Recent studies have indicated most of the online user community isn't interested in a web site that drives branding – they simply want information about a company's goods and services.

6) The web is a wonderful medium for customer acquisition but it also works as a valuable tool for building dialogue with customers – approx 75% of the online community does not mind filling out short forms that ask them questions about goods and services, or providing feedback. More sites should ask people for their opinions and reviews – they don't mind sharing them and these comments provide valuable insight.

7) Content is still one of, if not the most important variables in good web site design. Today's savvy surfer doesn't want content presented in book form; they want short paragraphs with lots of white space, not long textual columns in a type font that forces anyone over 30 (perish the thought there are people on the web over 30) to put on their glasses and squint at the screen.

8) We marketing types jumped on the community bandwagon 12-18 months back – you couldn't read an article about web site marketing unless "community" wasn't included as a buzzword du jour! Well, times have changed, or maybe we all came to our senses – today's web user wants baseline information they don't want to chat with other users via web site or read about shared interests – give them information in "content bytes" and let AOL worry about building a community!

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