

# **The Secrets of Good Web Design**

*Diane Lee © 2002*

A good web site is about more than flashy graphics and a slab of text plonked on a page. Careful consideration needs to be given to the purpose of your site and the people who may be viewing it. In other words, you need to think about the message you want to send, and the person on another computer who is seeing it. If you remember that good web design is not just about the bells and whistles, but also about good communication, then you can plan a site that meets your needs and the needs of your customer.

Before you start designing your site, ask the following questions:

## **1. How quickly does your site load?**

The average Internet user has an attention span of 20 seconds. If your site doesn't load quickly, most users won't hang around. If you minimise the numbers of bells and whistles on your site, as well as the graphics, you'll find your site will load more quickly, and the site's "stickability" will increase.

## **2. Do you have too many animated graphics?**

Graphics not only slow your site down, but can also make it look "too busy". Users just don't know where to look, and could miss the very information you want them to see. If you keep your graphics to a minimum, sites look more professional.

## **3. Does a customer have to download special software before being able to access your site?**

People have a suspicious nature. Often, if they have to download software to view your site, you will find they won't. Try to keep things as simple as possible.

## **4. Be careful about the colours you choose.**

A large proportion of the male population is colour-blind, so choose colours that contrast well. You want to make things as easy to read as possible, so be careful about text and background colour choices. Don't put yellow text on a white background!

## **5. Do you use forms on your site?**

Forms are a great idea, but they can be really hard for people with visual impairments to see and complete. If you do use forms on your site, provide a printable alternative, or an email address.

## **6. How well is your information structured?**

Reading from a computer screen is different to reading from a hard copy, and information needs to be structured carefully for maximum benefit. Use headings and bulleted lists, and keep the text minimal. Use separate pages so documents can be printed off and read later. Check your grammar and spelling carefully.

## **7. Is your site easy to navigate?**

There is nothing worse than visiting a site that is hard to navigate. You can't find the information you are looking for and you keep going around in circles. You know it's there, but you just can't seem to find it. Plan your site structure carefully, and make it as easy as possible for people to find what they are looking for. Choose a font and a size that is easy to read. Label everything!

## **8. Is your site regularly updated?**

Always put a "site last updated" date on your site. Customers will then know they are viewing current information, and not wasting their time on a site that could be 2 years out of date.

## **9. Can you be contacted easily?**

Your site is a cost-effective, efficient way of advertising. Make it easy for people to contact you.

## **10. Do all the links and graphics work?**

I know that a business is serious about its site - and hence its business - by whether the links work, and the graphics files are loaded up properly. Anything else is less than professional.

## **11. Have you done your research?**

Always visit other sites for ideas and inspirations. You quickly get a very good overview of the duds and the greats by surfing the net and researching what other businesses are doing.

## **Do you need more information?**

If you are planning a new site or, after reading this article, you feel that your site needs an overhaul, you can contact me to discuss your options and organise an appraisal or planning session.