



Designing Effective Web Sites

The basics of organizing and designing
your site effectively



Overview of Topics

- ◆ Before you design – planning
- ◆ Designing for your audience
- ◆ Organizing Content
- ◆ User-Friendly Navigation
- ◆ Colors
- ◆ Style/Layout



Overview (cont'd)

- ◆ Images
- ◆ Special Effects
- ◆ Links
- ◆ Using Templates
- ◆ A Brief Intro to Content Management



Before You Design

- ◆ Plan, plan, plan!
- ◆ What do you want to say? – Determine Goals
- ◆ Gather Information
- ◆ Identify your audience
- ◆ Look at your competition
- ◆ Prepare a creative brief



What do you want to say?



- ◆ Determine goals of the site
 - Are you trying to sell something?
 - Give out information?
 - Attract new students?

Gather Information

◆ General Info

- Url – this is the name users will be typing to get to your site... simple is better!
department.newark.rutgers.edu

vs.

dptmntnwk.newark.rutgers.edu/depart/someothername.html

- If you are not using the Newark servers, where will it be hosted? Costs? Who will maintain the site?

Gather Info (cont'd)

- ◆ Review your current site
 - What's successful? What isn't working?
 - Get feedback from users
 - Focus group
 - User survey

Gather Info (cont'd)

- ◆ What content will be on the site?
- ◆ How should that content be organized?
 - Create an outline or sitemap
- ◆ Will you need a database or other programming? Who will create it? How will it be maintained?

Identify Your Audience

- ◆ Who is the typical user?
 - How old are they?
 - How comfortable are they with technology?
 - What do they use the web for?
 - What primary reason are they using your site for?
- ◆ You can profile more than one type of user

Look at Your Competition

- ◆ What do you like/dislike about their site?
- ◆ What type of content do they have?
- ◆ Is it easy to find information? If so, how is it organized? If not, what makes it difficult?
- ◆ How do you differentiate yourself from your competitors? How is your audience different?

Perception

- ◆ How is your area currently perceived - both on- and offline? (user survey can help here!)
- ◆ How do you want to be perceived? Be specific – use a few adjectives to describe the desired perception (i.e. friendly, forward-thinking, professional, etc)
- ◆ List sites you find compelling. What specifically do you like about them?

What is a Creative Brief?

- ◆ A summary of overall visual and conceptual goals
- ◆ Puts into writing the target audience, goals for the user (what should they get from your site?), visual style and tone.
- ◆ Can be a simple paragraph or more detailed

Designing for your Audience

- ◆ It's not you, it's them -- the web is all about the user!
- ◆ Ask some typical users what they like/don't like. User survey and/or focus group can help with this.
- ◆ Refer back to your user profile(s) – look at successful sites geared at the same type of users. What are they doing? Is there a common theme?

Your Audience (cont'd)

- ◆ What are their technical capabilities?
- ◆ What kind(s) of computer, monitor are they using?
- ◆ What browser(s) are they using?
- ◆ Are they staff/resident students with access to LAN or are they viewing the site via dial-up?
- ◆ Do they prefer simple text or full-scale graphics?

Organizing Content

- ◆ Without content, why visit your site?
- ◆ Look at existing content
 - Online
 - Brochures/print
- ◆ Audit what you have – don't use everything just because it's there.

Organize Content

Good information design is

“creating consistent and functional systems for navigation, graphics, page layout, and title languages so that the user knows where to go, what to do, and encourages them to return”

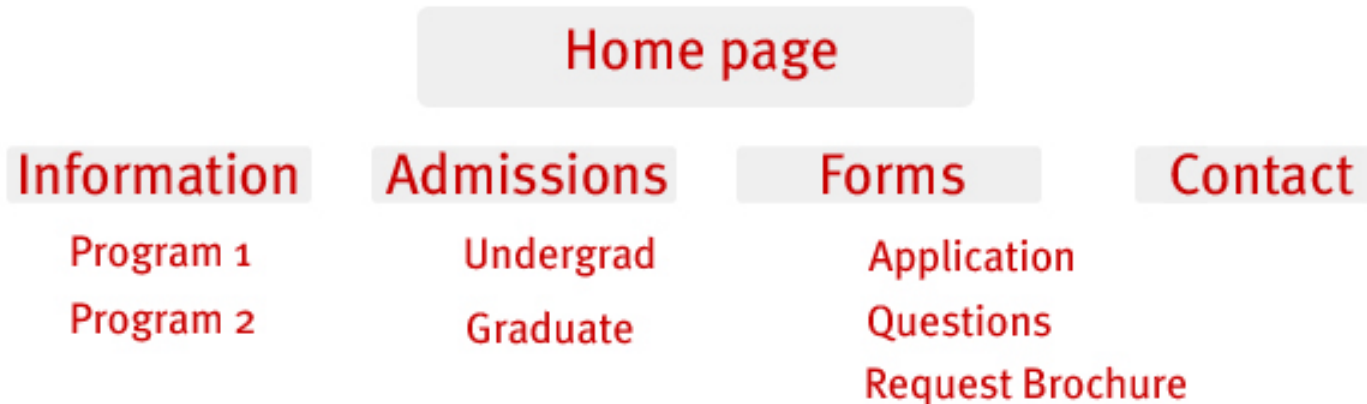
– Peter Morville, *Web Review*

Organize Content (cont'd)

- ◆ Information is useless if no one can find it
- ◆ Go through current information
 - What content logically belongs together?
 - Examine it from a user's perspective
- ◆ Create an outline, include new content you'd like to see
- ◆ Think about how expanding/adding to current content in the future might fit into the outline

Organize Content (cont'd)

- ◆ Create a sitemap from your outline
 - Show proposed links and main navigation – keep it simple!



User-Friendly Navigation

◆ Some tips:

- Navigation should be in the same place on all your pages
- Don't make your user scroll to the bottom of the page to find the links!
- Use short, but descriptive labels. The user shouldn't have to guess what's behind them
- Navigation should work on all browsers! If you use images, have an "alt" text. If you use javascript or anything requiring a plug-in (i.e. Flash), have an alternative version or test on different browsers

Navigation (cont'd)

- Users should be able to get from anywhere in the site to anywhere else without having to go back to the home page or dig through several other pages.
- If you have a large amount of unrelated data, consider posting a sitemap or complete page listing on your site (i.e. the A-Z web site listing on the R-N web site) or a search feature

Navigation (cont'd)

- ◆ Revisit your user profile(s):
 - Are they tech-savvy?
 - Would a lot of content on one page confuse them, or would they prefer to see more options at once?
 - Are they using high-speed connections with the latest plug-ins, or a text-only browser?

Are We Designing Yet?

- ◆ Why are we spending so much time on this before even starting on the actual page?
 - It's said that 1 minute of planning saves 4 minutes of (re)doing...
 - Even the most beautiful web site is useless if there's no content, or the user can't find what they need

Colors and Contrast

- ◆ A few notes before you decide on that color scheme:
 - While all monitors have slight variations, Macs will in general show all colors lighter than PCs.
 - Result is that graphics designed on a Mac will look darker and muddier on a PC, and graphics designed on a PC may appear washed out on a Mac
 - Test out your page on various monitors, platforms, and browsers



Colors (cont'd)



- ◆ Color is a powerful tool. When used appropriately, it can help organize sections of a page, highlight important text, or draw the eye somewhere.
- ◆ When used inappropriately, it can confuse, obscure text, or repel the user from your site

Color (cont'd)

- ◆ Some basics – the color wheel



Color (cont'd)

- ◆ The primary colors are red, yellow, and blue
- ◆ Complementary colors are formed by mixing two of these (red+yellow=orange, blue+red=violet, blue+yellow=green)

Color (cont'd)

- ◆ Some ways of creating a color scheme
 - Complementary color scheme uses two colors directly opposite each other on the wheel, i.e., blue and yellow, or red and green.
 - A three color scheme can be formed choosing 3 colors that are equal distance from each other on the wheel.
 - Another common scheme is to choose 2 or 3 colors next to each other on the wheel, or choosing different hues of the same color

Color (cont'd)

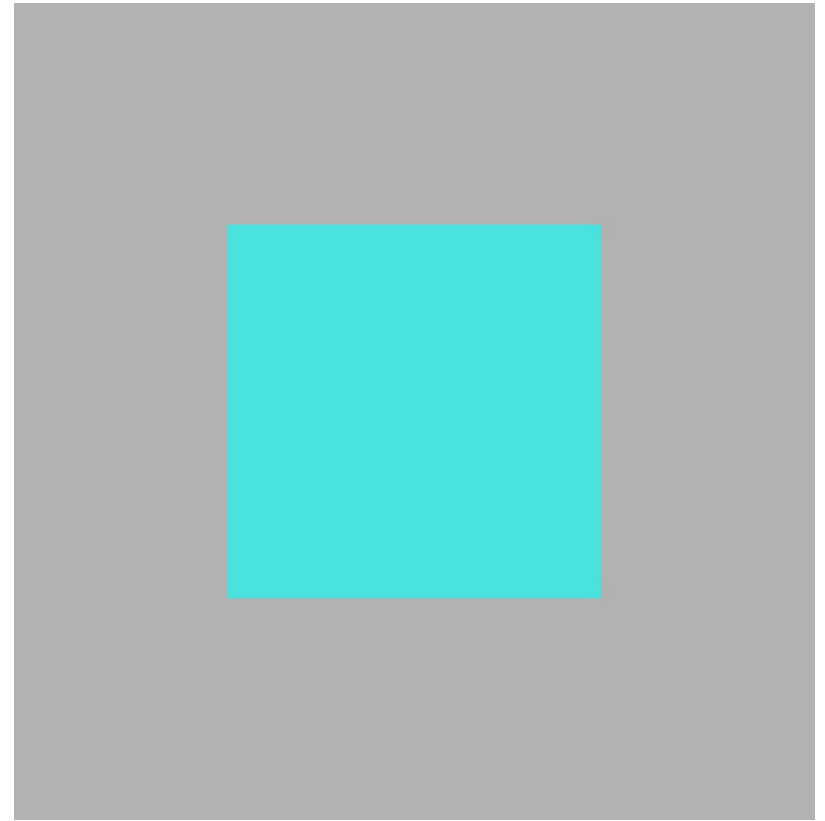
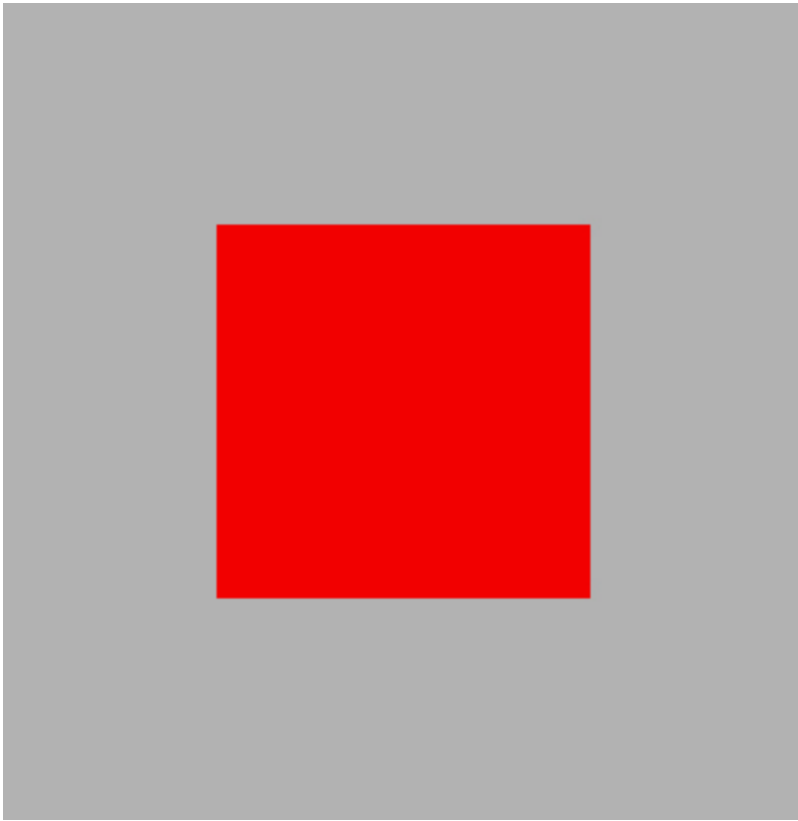
- ◆ Choose color carefully!
- ◆ Use color to enhance, not detract from your message. It isn't a good idea to have large amounts of text in red, for instance. Instead, use it to highlight something important.
- ◆ Don't use a light colored text over a light background, or dark text over dark background



Colors (cont'd)

- ◆ In general, warm colors (reds, yellows, oranges) are more vibrant and tend to “pop out” on a page
- ◆ Cool colors (blues and greens) are perceived as more calm and tend to recede on a page.

An Example



Color (cont'd)

- ◆ The primary colors (pure red, blue, and yellow) are very powerful – use them sparingly
- ◆ The same color might look different depending on what color is next to it.
- ◆ In general, light text on a dark background is more difficult to read than dark text on a light background Even worse is any text on a patterned background!

Color and Contrast (cont'd)

- ◆ Just like too much information, too much color in one place makes things more difficult to find
- ◆ Don't use color in random places just for the sake of color - use it to distinguish between links and regular text, to highlight an important box, or to visually separate the navigation from the content.

Style & Layout

- ◆ Before deciding on a style, go back over your creative brief and user profile(s) – a site designed for graduate research should not look the same as a site designed for viewing videos
- ◆ In general, simple is better
- ◆ Be consistent across the web site!

Style & Layout

- ◆ Again, what perception do you want the user to have of you?
- ◆ Don't use a *Super Fancy Script* just because you like it. Likewise, don't use something that looks **handwritten** if you're trying to portray professionalism.
- ◆ Basic fonts are most readable for regular text – leave the fancier fonts to special items like headings

Style & Layout

- ◆ Decide what your links will look like, and make all your links easily distinguishable by color, underline, or both
- ◆ Decide what headings will look like, and make them all the same
- ◆ Use the same fonts, color scheme, and layout throughout your site. Don't make the user wonder whether they've left your site.

Images

- ◆ Images can add a lot to a web site; however
 - Be careful about file size – larger images take longer to download. Also be careful about the physical size of the image. Don't make the user scroll around to see the full image.
 - Images for R-N web use are available through our online image gallery at:
www.newark.rutgers.edu/imagegallery

Images (cont'd)

- Use descriptive “alt” tags – so that even users who aren’t viewing the image know what’s there
- Use images to add, not distract from the message. Random images of bears, for instance, on a web site about research will only confuse the user (unless the research is about bears)

Images (cont'd)

- ◆ If you have extensive images you want on the site, consider creating a photo gallery and placing them there.
- ◆ Divide the gallery into categories, and use thumbnails so viewers don't have to wait for large images to load unless they specifically want to see them

Special Effects

- ◆ Just because you CAN make that text bounce around the page, doesn't mean you SHOULD
- ◆ Think hard about why you're using a certain effect. Does it add anything to the message? Is it distracting? This goes double for anything the user has to wait through before getting to the information he/she is there for

Links

- ◆ Keep links throughout the site visually similar (same font, color, or boldness), so users can intuitively know what's a link and what isn't
- ◆ Always let the user get back to the home page from anywhere on your site
- ◆ When linking to other sites, review them every so often to make sure the link still works
- ◆ Include a contact link somewhere on the site so users can give feedback or ask questions

Using Templates

- ◆ Templates can be useful if you can't or don't want to spend time on design
- ◆ R-N has templates available for use at:
www.newark.rutgers.edu/occ/web/templates.php

Cross-Browser Issues

- ◆ Always test your pages in as many browsers and platforms as possible – sometimes the results are surprising! Some of the most popular browsers include:
 - Internet Explorer
 - Netscape
 - Safari
 - Firefox

A Few Final Things

- ◆ Periodically review content
 - Your web site is only as good as the content that's on it – make sure it's current and accurate – or delete it altogether
- ◆ Proofread!!!
 - If possible, get more than one person to proofread. Typos happen to everyone.
- ◆ Get feedback from your users. See what's working, and what's not.

A Brief Overview of Content Management Systems

- ◆ What is it?
 - A system that manages the content of a web site
“Content” is any information on the web site
(i.e., News, events, faculty list, etc)
 - Content does NOT include layout or design info



Typical Parts of a CMS

- ◆ The Application that manages content
- ◆ The Database that holds the content
- ◆ The application that displays the content



The Content Management Application



- ◆ Allows authors to create and edit content without needing to know HTML or software such as Dreamweaver
- ◆ Is usually a web-based interface, similar to an online form



The Database

- ◆ Where all the data and its relationships with other data are stored

The Content Display Application

- ◆ Determines how the data is displayed on the web site
- ◆ Can include information about how to layout the page, what headers/footers to include, what common elements (like navigation) to include, font colors and sizes, etc.

Benefits

- ◆ Consistency across the web site, no matter how large
 - Authors only deal with content and not design, all content is displayed in the same way regardless of who entered it

Benefits (cont'd)

- ◆ No knowledge of HTML, programming, or design is needed
 - Simpler to use than Dreamweaver or other html software
 - Separates the job of updating content from that of the web designer
- ◆ Data can appear in multiple places, but is only stored once

Benefits (cont'd)

- ◆ Separating the content from design means web designer can change only one template instead of having to manually change dozens or hundreds of pages (i.e. a group of News or Events pages, vs. every singly News item or Event)
- ◆ Changes in content can be made from anywhere, at any time (i.e. school closings)

Benefits (cont'd)

- ◆ Can set a publish and/or expiration date on an item
 - Can specify when an item should start appearing on a page, and when it expires (useful for things such as events and emergency notices)



So Who Needs a CMS?

- ◆ Large sites with a lot of content
- ◆ Web sites that must be frequently updated
- ◆ Web sites maintained by multiple people



Questions?