

What to consider when building a website

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When building a website (whether you do it by yourself or with a help of a professional), there are several important points and rules to follow. Here are my three most important guidelines to follow:

1. **Content** – when thinking about the content, you should have your target audience in mind. Use only the relevant information. Before you start the website, think of what you want to say and what to convey to your audience. A website is an image of you, and you have to put a lot of thought in what you want to be “out there”. Once the website is created, even if you take it down, it is still out there.
2. **Organization/Navigation** – your website has to be logical and easy to navigate. Navigation, just like the content must cater to your intended audience. Navigation is a map to your website.
3. **Design** – develop a brand, use consistent font and colors, choose appropriate backgrounds, attractive images, clean lines. You may think about branding – creating a logo, or something similar (good example simple but very effective logo-like design is on Alejandro Cremaschi website <http://www.alejandrocremaschi.com/> Look how letters A and C are positioned and crossed on his name! Very simple, clever and effective.

Much can be learned from bad websites: Here are some of the most glaring examples that earned the honors of the worst websites in 2008 (by www.webpagesthatsuck.com – no joke!)

Bad:

<http://www.havenworks.com/>

- Too much information on one page (Content)
- Horizontal scrolling (very bad thing – avoid at all costs) (Design)
- Confusing menu, too many links from the front page (Navigation)
- Visually very confusing

<http://yvettesbridalfomal.com/>

- Music starts playing while opening the website, no way of stopping it (Design)
- No rhyme or reason to navigation to speak of (Navigation)
- Orphaned pages (pages with no menu on them, not connected to other pages)

<http://www.stexps.com/>

- Cursor has a “tail” – simply maddening (Design)
- Design changes from page to page – no consistent “brand” (Design)
- Menu items change from page to page (Navigation)

Good:

<http://sites.google.com/site/kgtuition/> - very nice clean website that has pertinent information about the teacher, clear laid out studio policy, pictures of the students (have to be careful about getting releases from the parents). Website does not really have his own domain name - not always a good thing, but the design is nice.

<http://www.shaunaleavitt.com/index.php> - created by Handmade Designs. This is a very nice website. It has clear navigation, menu is consistent everywhere, the text is precise and informative. There is a definite color scheme for design. It also has a page for payment, something you may consider making a part of your website.

Summary:

Don'ts

Content:

- Too much information on one page
- Poorly chosen language, grammatical mistakes
- Images that are too large (take long time to come up on the screen)
- Displaying copyrighted images without permission
- Do not put anything on the website that you do not want to be downloaded by anybody (everything on the website is downloadable).
- Pictures of minors without their parents' expressed permission

Design:

- Busy backgrounds
- Flashing or moving images
- Music or videos starting with the webpage!
- Elaborate fonts (serif fonts)
- Random changes of font color, size and style

Navigation:

- Inconsistencies of the menu from page to page
- Complex drop down menu. If you are going to have a drop down menu, keep groupings logical
- Pages that are not connected to the home page
- Keep important information (e-mail, phone number, or however you would like to be contacted) on your home page, so that it is easy to find

Dos:

- Put some thought into the website: for whom are you creating the website, do you want it to be instructional, educational, informational? . . . Remember, once you put it out there, it is out there for good. Be thoughtful of what you say and how you say it. People will forgive bad design, but not if what you say is inappropriate or controversial.
- Try the "low-tech" approach first – before you ever venture into a website-building adventure, write it out on a piece of paper. This is especially helpful for figuring out your site plan and navigation. I recommend working on navigation using post-it notes – they are easy to move around.
- **Keep things simple**
- **Have fun!**