

Successful Website Planning From Conception to Launching

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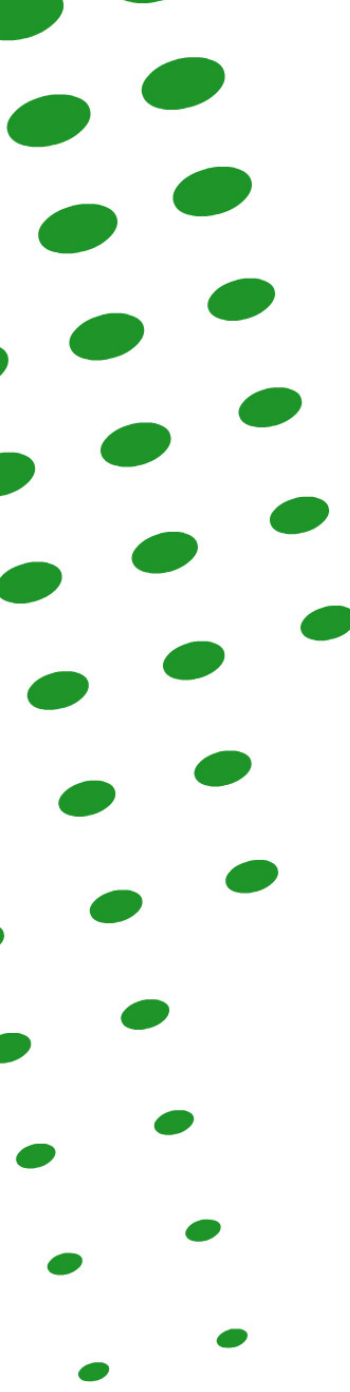
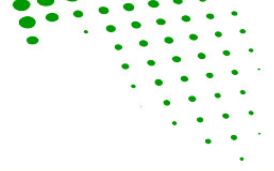


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Defining a Website:

A website is an entire collection of web pages, specific to a particular domain or subdomain from the World Wide Web.

Nowadays there are 81 millions registered site domains worldwide.

A webpage is a [HTML/XHTML](#) document that is always available through [HTTP](#).

All the public available sites are seen as informational components of the [World Wide Web](#).

All the pages of a website will be accessed on a common [URL](#) address, called a [homepage](#), which usually belongs to the same server. The URL organises all the pages in a hierarchy, even if the [links](#) between them give a different perception to the user.

Some websites require registration in order to access some of their content. Examples of such sites: sections of the majority of news sites, games, forums, email services, etc.



Planning a Website

The planning of a website is the first step to building a successful site with a great potential.

1. Choosing the right niche

Discover the right niche for your site. The purpose is to discover a successful subject. Your passion will make the creation process easy and fun.

2. Findind key words

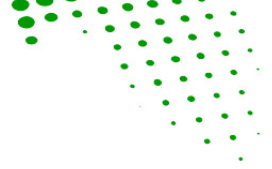
Find the the most appropriate key words and choose the most advantageous concept. Write out a table of key words that are frequent in searches and that can accomplish the predicted traffic. If you have several concepts from which you have to choose, analyze the key words for every concept and choose the most profitable one.

3. Analyzing the competition

Choose the best concept by analyzing the competition. The purpose of this step is to develop the keyword list, to find more ideas for the web content and possible associates (companies that offer affiliated programs or pay-per-click advertising).

4. The site's structure

Build the most appropriate site structure that corresponds in your most profitable keywords table. A good structure will develop into an user-friendly site and it will make it easier for the search engines too.



The Architecture of a Site

After having decided the purpose of your site, you must choose the elements needed to fulfill it.

Most of the sites are divided in subsections, and every category contains pages with a link to the main page, but also links that allow the visitors to navigate between pages without having to return to the main menu every time.

Many psychologic studies have been made, in order to determine the most appropriate place for the navigation bar. The results show that it is not that important as long as it is at sight and it looks good.

After deciding how the pages will link to each other, think about the title of every page. Keep the titles short and relevant to the content. The name of the page will become the name of the domain and that is the first thing search engines see, so you must choose the most efficient words.

The way search engines interpret the words is very important. If the "about us" link from the navigation bar says the same thing, the search engine will act conforming to this, and if this link is called "our design team", that will lead to a totally different search.

Cascade Menu vs. Index Navigation

There are two common ways of presenting the menus: hierarchical cascade (menu items are shown when the pointer is on them) and placing the items in a categorized index. Cascade menus have the advantage that they demand little space on the screen, but have other disadvantages. Firstly, they are more difficult to use because the user must control well the movements of the mouse in order to select the right menu. Secondly, cascade menus hide the information until the user is with the pointer on top of it. On the other hand index menus tend to take more space. At the same time they can show a great deal of information at the simultaneously. Unfortunately there have been too little empirical research made to compare the two different menu layouts.

A 2003 study conducted by the professors of the Software Usability Research Laboratory compares the performance of these two types of menus.

Because users have different motives and methods of searching the net, this study analyzes implicitly the performance of the two types of searching: direct search and implicate search. The users' activity has been recorded using the Ergobrowser™ software.

The participants looked up in 3 kinds of menus. The first was an index-type menu (Figure 1), another was a drop-down cascade type (Horizontal, Figure 2), and the third menu was also a cascade, but a vertical one (Vertical, Figure 3). The links of the menu had the same size (Verdana, 10 pt.) for all three menus.

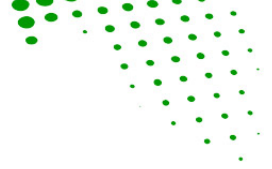


Figure 1



Figure 2

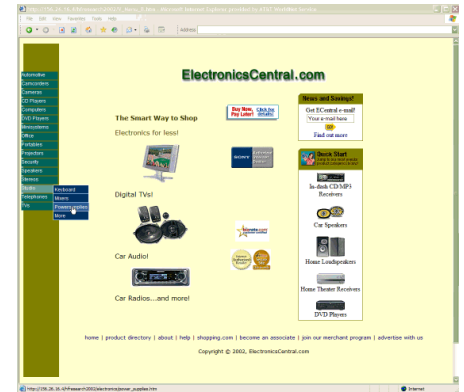


Figure 3

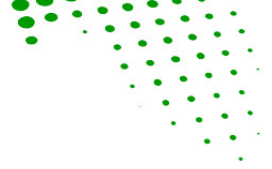
There were 18 participants (8 men and 10 women) for this study, with the age between 20 and 49 (with a medium age of 36). 89% of the participants were daily users of the computer and the majority (72.2%) use Internet minimum 25 hours a week.

Participants were presented with three web sites, each with a different menu layout condition.

For each variant, participants were instructed to search for specific information using explicit and implicit task questions. Each question had to be properly answered within five minutes to be considered correct. Participants could repeatedly search until they found the correct information by selecting the Back button, or until the time expired.

The menu layout conditions, the web domain, and the task questions were counterbalanced by means of a Latin square design.

After finishing all the questions for each condition, participants answered a questionnaire for determining the scale of satisfaction. The questionnaire consisted of a 6-point scale, with 1 = "I Agree" and 6 = "I Disagree" as anchors. The questions were as follows: "I felt lost/disorientated while searching for information", "The site was easy to navigate", "The menu structure was frustrating to use."



Results:

A within-subject was used to investigate actual performance (meaning task completion time and search efficiency) and perceived performance for four types of menu item conditions. Post hoc comparisons were done using the Bonferroni test. The preference for each condition was measured by means of a Friedman χ^2 .

Task Completion Time

Assessing the time needed to complete the search tasks found a significant layout main effect. The participants searching in the Index condition found task information more quickly than the other two conditions. Participants searching with explicit task questions found the information significantly faster than searching with the implicit task questions for all three conditions (Figures 4, 5, si 6.)

The Horizontal menu layout was perceived as being the most disorientating of the three menu item layouts. The index menu was considered by the majority of the participants as being the most easy to use. They motivated their choice stating that all the sugcategories are visible and that the menu was at the centre of the page, factors that improve its performance.

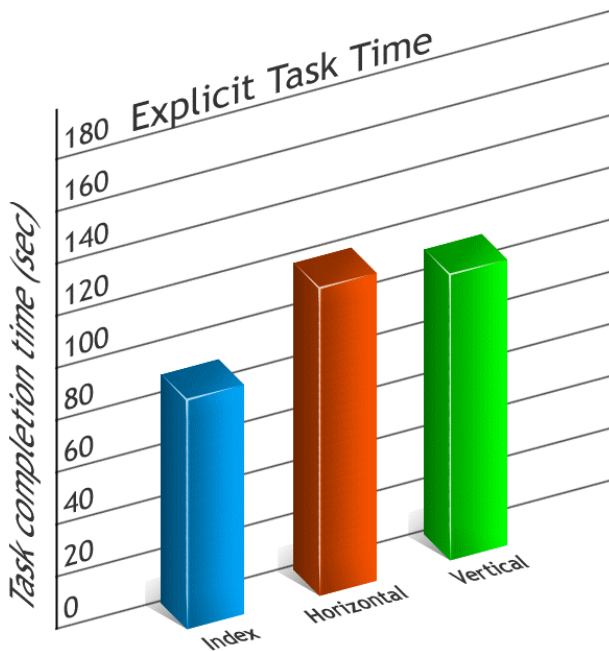


Figure 4

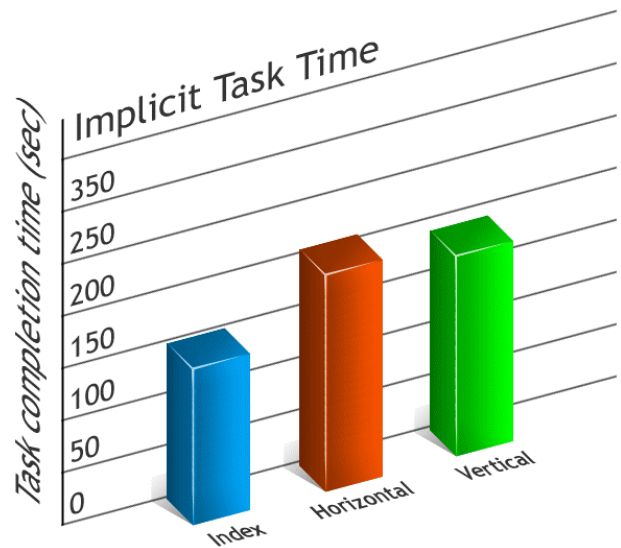


Figure 5

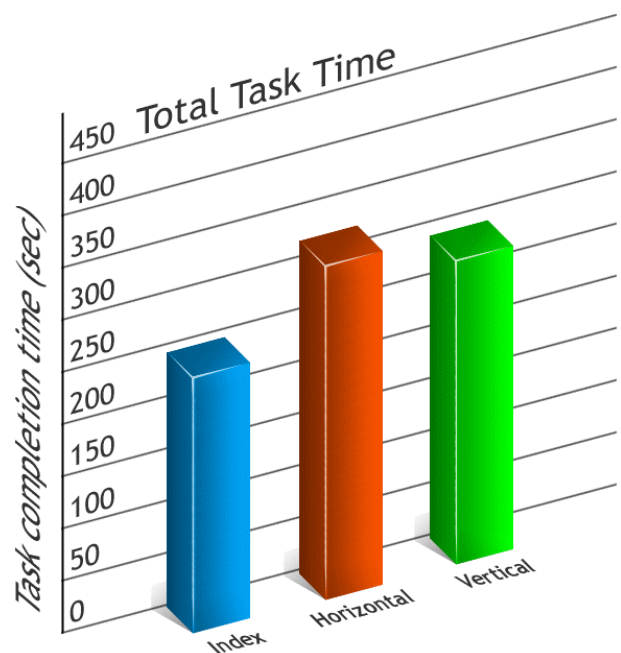
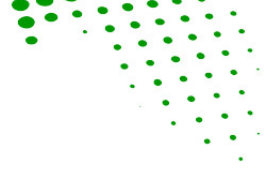


Figure 6



Search Engines Optimization

Before writing the content of the site, you must improve your search engine, so that you develop the applicable key words table to your site and discover the right structure.

Main goals of the site:

1. It provides valuable information to the readers; they must obtain exactly what they searched. It meets their problems and questions. It satisfies the needs for which they have performed the search.

In order to reach all the steps above, you must be well familiarized with and passionate by the topic.

2. Convince each search engine that your site is the most relevant (at least in the first 30) result for the targeted results. Key words are most important in succeeding.

Detailed goals:

1. Potential users must find your site on the first or second page in the search for the key word.

2. Potential users must read the title and descriptions listed in the search results and must find them interesting and also relevant in order to access your site.

3. If the information they find on your site is helpful to them, they will get to trust and follow your piece of advice, even if they have to buy the product or subscribe to the newsletter.

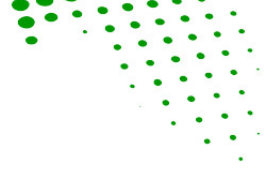
Improving the website:

- Pages are improved for relevant words and deliver useful content to users;
- Make sure you choose the targeted words;
- No fake pages, invisible links or anything else that is not normal to a web content;
- Do not create more versions of the same site, one for each search engine. Instead, you would better focus on building a site version compatible with most of the search engines, that contains a lot of key words.

Each page must contain something that refers to the keywords. This is the word that you want the search engines to display in the first results. From now on, we will refer to it as the main key word.

Also, there are general key words - generic words that get associated with the main key word. For example, when the key word is "improvement of the search concepts", general words accordingly can be "ranking", "score", "positioning", "promoting" etc.

Not even once will you get successful in trying to improve your campaign by using only key words. However, if you mix some general with specific words, you will get results when the users perform the search with mixed words. You only have to include them once or twice. This will surely bring you targeted viewers.



Website Design

Your site needs to be clean, simple, and well-structured. People use Internet to find information. The best website design includes informative content, simple layout, easy navigation and fast loading graphics. It allows users to search and locate the information they desire in the quickest and most convenient manner possible.

On the other hand, your website design is a reflection of your business, the quality of your product. Web surfers looking for some information not only want the right info, they want it from the right source.

Browsers

One of the first things about the professional website design is understanding that your site will be viewed on a variety of computer platforms and browsers. Mostly it doesn't matter, but occasionally it does. Different browsers display the same page in different ways (or sometimes don't display it at all). Older versions don't support all the new tag additions and modifications. Always check your Web design on at least the latest versions of the most popular browsers - Internet Explorer and Firefox. While no site looks identical on all monitors, browsers, and computers, you can design sites that look good on all, but only if you test them on all browsers.

Loading Time

One of the most significant problems that Web designers face is slow loading time, which often annoys users to the point where they give up and go on another site. So it is extremely important to design your pages in order to be loaded as quickly as possible, which means keeping page sizes as low as possible.

Internet users are the least patient people in the world, and if your site is slow, they know they can get the information, products or services they desire on another site. Keep your graphics down to a reasonable size.

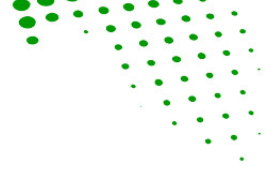
You can decrease the loading time of your website by using images that are on some of your other pages, because the images will be loaded from cache or even the server itself.

This Web design tactic is especially useful for title bars, which can be broken up into individual images. When a new page is loaded, the elements from the old page are loaded from the cache, leaving only the new elements to be loaded.

Consistency

When developing professional website design, consistency is the most important thing to keep in mind. Nothing is more unprofessional in website design than a different colored background for every page. Backgrounds, colors, fonts, navigation buttons all need to present your site visitor with a uniform appearance.

A consistent website not only lets users know where they are, but can also help build a "brand" so your site is recognizable.



Navigation

If your site isn't easily navigable, all your hard development work will be worthless. Keep navigation simple, and make sure it's consistent from page to page. An efficient navigation must allow the user to know permanently three things: where he is, where he can go, and how he can return to the starting point. Every page must include a *home* link.

Fonts

If your site is straying from the standard fonts that everyone has installed on their computers (such as Arial, Verdana, Times New Roman) the viewer won't see your fonts as intended.

Your users' computers will display your site in their default fonts. So stick to standards. You can use bold or italic to underline some words, but you must not forget that italic goes with serif fonts, while bold goes with sans serif fonts (serif are those little ornaments from the ending of each letter). Some sites use graphics in order to step out of the common fonts. If it's absolutely necessary for the design of your site, don't forget to include the entire text in an ALT tag, so that all the users can see it. The ALT text is important because it can be indexed by the search engines.

Resolution

The most used resolution these days seems to be 1024x768 although there are still a small number of people using 800x600, mostly because they don't realize they have the ability to switch to a higher resolution.

It's a good idea to design your entire page for 1024x768, but keep the width of text within 800 pixels. People with older computers will still be able to read your content, even if some parts of the page require scrolling.

Learn from other sites

One way to the best website design is looking around on the Web and learning from what you see. That doesn't mean copying, but instead, studying what others have done and understanding what works and what doesn't.



Conclusions:

A simple web page construction is not enough anymore. That is because of the significant increase of companies' interests in developing web communicational strategies and also because of public interest. Therefore, you must be professional and meet the latter standards above. In order to have a good, clear, simple and well structured site, you must pay attention to the steps above.

Once a site becomes more complex, its structure must assure a clear hierarchy of the pages and also enable a simple surfing for the user. A well-structured site will group the pages, in this way enabling users to get to the information they need and also offering a simple surfing through the subpages .



Resources:

1. <http://www.buildwebsite4u.com/>
2. <http://www.asiostudio.com/>
3. Software Usability Research Laboratory - <http://www.usabilitynews.org>

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