

Home Page Design

By virtue of designing your homepage, you are actually designing your site. The initial homepage design will be the basis of your overall site design. There are many important building blocks to developing the home page of your site. We'll devote a paragraph or so to each. First, we'll address a couple of overarching considerations.

Architecture

Design should be more about functionality than look and feel. Put yourself in the shoes of your prospects and customers (indeed, ask them) and determine the breadth and depth and utility of the information you want to give them. Think about how they might interact with you, starting with your web presence. Determine the values your prospects and customers are seeking a supplier and design to deliver them. Your buyers are far more interested in painlessly finding what they're looking for than what color scheme you embrace.

Pay particular attention to the navigation scheme you'll employ, and the quantity and quality of the content you'll deliver via that navigation.

Consider carefully the utilities you'll offer, where they'll be located and how they'll be presented within the site's architecture.

Corporate Identity

Unless your site is a pure Internet play that has no grounding in an existing business, start by identifying existing elements of your corporate identity that will be incorporated in the design of your site. Your web presence should be consistent with your other marketing materials. As stated earlier, when a person who has seen you before, via your literature, in trade journals, or at trade shows, comes across your web presence, they should know instantly that they've seen you before. A consistent look and feel between your web presence and your other marketing materials will tell visitors they know you somehow, whether they're unconsciously familiar with you or they have an instant, conscious recognition of exactly who your company is and where they've seen you before.

Screen Resolution

Another basic design consideration is the screen resolution you choose to design for. Until the summer of 2002, we generally designed for 640 x 480 pixels (the lowest common screen resolution) for industrial clients, 800 x 600 pixels for companies that appealed to more technically sophisticated markets. Because higher resolution monitors are becoming more commonplace all the time, we've increased our design recommendations for a base of 800 x

600 pixels and higher.

If you'd like to become more familiar with screen resolutions, take a few minutes to acquaint yourself. Simply right-click on a "Windows" desktop, go to "Properties" and click "Settings". If you are on a fairly high-resolution system, you can set your display to emulate lower resolution settings. View a few web pages in the various settings to get an appreciation for the differences in resolution.

More often than not, site design should be elastic these days. Elastic, or stretchable design is just that. Your site appears largely as intended regardless of screen resolution. Elastic design does cost a bit more than static design. You still want to design for a baseline, probably one or two levels above 640 x 480 so the stretched copy and graphics don't become distorted. Anyone still using a 640 x 480 monitor is going to run into horizontal scrolling on virtually every visit to the web anymore. The same will likely be said of anyone using 800 x 600 pixel resolution before long.