

Ten Ways A Designer Can Help You Build A Better Web Site

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A well designed web site ought to start with a plan. Just as you would with a brochure or an annual report, someone needs to sit down and **determine the purpose of the communication**. Our preference would be to work with you at this phase in a collaborative client-designer relationship, but we have seen it work just as well if the client works out the big picture issues before calling in the designer.

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The next step is to **analyze the audience** that you want to attract and retain. Once a designer understands the characteristics of your audience, she/he can draw upon a great deal of experience to help you create the most effective graphic style for the message you wish to communicate.

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A designer can be very helpful in **defining the scope of the content** that is to be included. This might sound strange, but designers have a good sense of how much is too much when it comes to content. Take advantage of their ability to integrate copy and graphics in a way that maximizes the effectiveness of your message.

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Establish a tone or style for your web site in the planning stages, not as an afterthought. A designer can use preliminary tissue sketches or computer generated mock-ups to give some idea of the possibilities. The objective is to appropriately match a graphic style that is compatible with your intended audience.

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Before you can begin any real construction of the site, you should **create an information design**, a detailed plan for how to turn raw material into a message. A lot of copy from other mediums can not be shoveled on to the web site and be called communicating. Delivering a message requires some thought about how to turn facts into knowledge, and knowledge into action. You want to tell your audience something, and then you want them to act on it. Genuine information design will help you achieve that goal.

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Execute your preliminary planning with detailed storyboards. This way you can have a precise map of the site that will help you refine the potential links as well as gauge how much copy you want to incorporate at each level of the site.

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The biggest challenge a designer can help with is **merging the technology with good design**. Cool looking art that takes 3 minutes to load is not only uncool, it is unseen. Upfront design decisions can smooth out the process so that the end product performs acceptably.

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Central to the efficient operation of any website are **quality graphics designed for optimal viewing**. If it's a simple graphic, GIFs may work best, while JPEGs are better for high-resolution photos. An experienced designer can not only prepare the graphics properly, but also will test their work to make sure it has both speed and accuracy.

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One of the last but most important steps in the process is to **get feedback from the client**. If the designer has kept in communication with the client, the final product should contain no surprises. But a good designer knows that the job isn't over until the client is satisfied.
and finally,

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the most important function of a designer is to **constantly remind you that while content may be king, looks count** when you want to be sure your audience gets the message. Sometimes you get so close to your web site that you don't realize it is being suffocated by text content. A designer can help you maintain a balance between text and graphics in a way that promotes a strong connection between you and your audience.