AIM: To brows and critique existing Web sites. To create critical awareness of navigational, design,

aesthetic and content components of Web sites and to introduce the features and building blocks of a good

Web site. To create awareness of features that makes a Web site difficult or unfriendly to use. To produce

a list of do's and don'ts that applies to building a Web site.

Checklist for the analysis of Web sites

This list below includes various criteria by which you can evaluate Web sites. It is not always

immediately obvious why we prefer some sites to others, but by taking the time to understand what makes

a Web site 'work' for us, we can begin to establish some best practice rules for creating really effective

Web sites.

Develop a list of some web sites for analysis and assign each site and score for each question:

• Excellent

• Good

• Not good, but not entirely useless

• Useless

1- How navigable is the site?

• Is it easy to find the information you're after, given the various signposts on the Home Page?

• Is it easy to find your way back to the home page or other main section pages from the site's

'interior'?

• Are the navigation graphics self-explanatory?

• Do you have to click through too many pages, to get to your destination page?

2- How readable is the information on the site?

• You've found the section of the site with the relevant information for your needs -is it easy to

read?

• Are there clear headings on the page?

• Is the size and color of the text easy on your eyes?

• Do the graphics on the page compliment, or detract from, the text content?

3- Is the site aesthetically pleasing?

• Do the colors of the site design work well together?

• Is there a continuity of style between the graphics?

• Is the spatial arrangement of text and graphics complimentary, incidental or Irritating?

• Is the design of the site in tune with the subject matter/organization?

4- How informative is the site?

• Does the information on the site stick to overviews and links to other resources, or are there

opportunities to access in depth resources?

• Are there opportunities to interact with the site and ask for additional?

• Information (e.g. 'contact us' buttons etc.)?

• Are the search pages, discussion forums, guest books and other special features clearly explained

and easy to use?

• Are the lists of contacts, resources and links annotated with useful descriptions, explanations and

advice?

5- How long does it take to get the page loaded onto the screen?

• Are there large graphics that slow down the delivery of text onto the site?

• Are there text alternatives to the graphics to read whilst waiting for the graphics?

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• Does the length of the page force you to wait a long time before you can read what is at the

bottom of it?

6- How does it look on the different browsers and different resolutions?

• How it appears on Internet explorer?

• How it appears on Netscape Communicator?

• Does it look same on the different resolutions?

7- How does it come with Daily Updates and Breaking News?

• Does it look static all the day?

• Does it provides follow ups and updates constantly, throughout the day?

8- Does it provide any system to enable readers to alert to mistakes and hold us accountable?

• Does it manage for the corrections, modifications and changes on daily bases?

• Does it make corrections in the follow up stories?

9- Does it provide the facility of Feed back?

• Does it include two-way, interactive communication systems?

• Does it provide the facility of inter personal Communication?

• Does it provide the contact information or any other way of getting response and queries of users?

• Does it provide the way to users to comment on news story or other journalistic content?

10- Does it provide the facility to view or read the old versions of news paper?

• Does it archives or create a directory for each year of issues?

• Does it provide the facility to search the articles with respect to date of publishing?

11- Does it provide the facility of Search the site because the larger sites need a search feature so

visitors do not get lost?

Information architecture

Information architecture, as its name implies, is fundamental to your design. Information architecture

(also know as IA) is the foundation for great web design. It is the blueprint of the site upon which all

oilier aspects are built - form, function, metaphor, navigation and interface, interaction and visual design.

Initiating the IA process is the first tiling you should do when designing a site. Information Architecture

includes:

1- Defining the mission and vision for a site;

2- Determining the content and functionality of the site:

3- Specifying how users find information on the site; and

4- Mapping out how the site will accommodate growth and change.

When describing information architecture, designers often focus on the third role, which is specifying

how users find information on the site. This role can be broken into role into the following tasks:

• Designing ways to group your content;

• Designing a labeling system for those content groups;

• Designing navigation systems to help you move around and browse through the content; and

Designing searching systems for your content.

Navigation

Navigation is a sub-set of information architecture. It also emphasizes the interlocking relationship

between navigation, content grouping and site structure within the overall information architecture. Navigation is the means you offer your users to locate their position within your site and find their way

around the structure, both forwards and back again. It gives them something to hold on to and, if you get

it right, it will increase both their confidence in your site and their ability to use it.

Three fundamental questions of navigation on a web site are as follows:

• Where am I?

• Where have I been?

• Where can I go?

No matter what navigation design you pick for your site, there is one common theme to all navigation. All

it does is visualize the user's current location and alternative movements relative to the structure of the

underlying information space. If the structure is a mess, then no navigation design can rescue it. Users

like to build a mental picture of the organization of a site. This is not possible if there is no proper

structure. Web sites are built around basic structural themes. These fundamental architectures govern the

navigation interface of the web site and mould the user's mental models of how the information is

organized.

User interface

For successful navigation design, it's important to consider the interface as well. In the graphical

environment of the Web, interface design has to do with constructing visual meaning. The happy

marriage of architecture and interface - of logical structure and visual meaning - creates a cohesive user

experience. The marriage is crucial to helping users get around on the web.

The user interface can extend, for example, to how well or badly you have labeled your content sections.

If the labeling is ambiguous, you are making it more difficult for the user to operate within the

environment of your site. However, with the web, the focus is on making sense of the environment

generated by the medium, with its interactive and graphic capacity. You can structure your content

logically and provide the right navigational help, but how your user is able to relate to them and work

them is the key ingredient of interface. User interface can be everything from having standard colours for

visited links to using metaphors that help deliver the other elements of the information architecture (e.g.

content categories and navigation). You may use the disciplines of graphic design to present your

interface, but they arc not your interface design. That should centre on functionality and utility.

Graphic design

To some beginners, this is web design, i.e. the layout, use of typeface, colours and graphics. It is in fact

just one stage of the process, but a critical one. Being a graphic designer must be a frustrating business.

To the uninitiated it looks easy because you can change the font and text layout with the click of a mouse.

This gives people the false impression that as they can 'do a little graphic design', they can try it on a web

page. This is not the case. There is a good argument for saying that if you only have enough budgets to

call in a single expert for your web project, you should make it a graphic designer. It is a highly skilled

discipline, particularly on the web, which is not an understanding environment for graphic designers. It is

difficult for them to control how the same page is seen by every user because, among other things, not

every user uses the same type of web browser.

Usability experts

Usability is now a big issue in the web world. Expectations have risen and choice has been extended.

Sites must deliver. But do not confine usability to information-based content. If an entertainment site is

not entertaining, it's got a usability problem. A good way to test whether a site is delivering the highquality is constantly to check with your users and consult a usability expert.

Site mapping

Aim: The aim of site mapping is:

• To develop a strategic approach to site planning and development.

• To understand why it is necessary to develop a 'statement of purpose' for a Web site and why the

target audience of the site should be identified before building a site.

• To understand why it is important to plan the structure of a Web site.

• To map out the site in a manner that ensures easy and effective navigation by users.

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• To map out the site in a manner that will make it easy to maintain and add new information on an

ongoing basis.

Plan and build a site

You will now plan and build a site as follows:

1. Discuss the purpose of the site. In other words, what do you want the site to achieve?

2. Who is the intended audience of the site? Not just the people that will access it, but also the people that

you really want the site to have meaning for.

3. How does the site relate to the broader goals and communication strategies of your organizations?

4. What kinds of information circulate in the organizations in which you work, or have worked? This

could include: staff profiles; project work, recent news, events, newsletters etc. Try and make the list as

long and varied as possible. Assess whether this information is relevant for the Website. Use the purpose

of the site, as defined earlier, as a yardstick.

5. Look at the list and try and come up with 6-8 headings that are inclusive enough to accommodate all

the items on the list. These headings will form the entry points to information within the site, so they need

to be as self- explanatory and useful as possible. They will become the main links from the home page.

Avoid acronyms, and keep the headings simple.

6. Now link the items in the first list to their relevant section heading, by drawing lines from one to the

other. Some headings may contain several items on the list, while others might contain only one item.

E.g., newsletter may be the only item that is linked up with the News section heading, while staff, history

and Donors may all be linked to the About Us section heading.

7. We now have enough information to draw a map, which shows the basic structure of the site. This map

will also show routes around the site, that is, how users can navigate their way from one page of

information to another. The different headings will become different sections of the site.

8. Draw a diagram that contains a box to represent the Home Page and boxes for each main section page,

on a single sheet. Place the Home Page in the top left-hand comer. Draw arrows from the Home Page to

all the pages it should link to.

9. Having established where the user can go to from the Home Page, we now need to look at links from

each of the other Main Section pages. Insert arrows to demonstrate these links on your diagram.

10. Now we can start adding documents to the main sections to see how this affects navigation of the site.

The news stories or 'documents', which make up the News Section, are all linked to from the News page,

and link back to it as well. They also link back to the home page, but these are 'one-way streets'. Each

Main Section page should give the user an opportunity to return Home, or visit the site's other main

sections. This results in the site developing 'two-way streets' between all these 'principal' pages.

11. The site has been mapped for the user that will navigate it. Now we can turn to the Web master's plan:

the file and folder (or directory) structure of the site.

12. Consider each of the Main Section Pages in turn. Check which ones will form entry pages to other

documents, and establish which ones will contain that section's information within that single Main

Section Page. For example, the News Page will probably link to other pages with news, while the Links

Page may well contain all its information on that one page. It is important to think ahead when making

these decisions. Assess which sections are likely to grow into collections of pages, and which ones will

remain concise and no longer than one page. Any section which looks like it will grow into several pages Following are the key stages in developing a web resource. These stages will guide you, as you take your

content through the design process.

1- Ask yourself if online the right medium for your message is.

2- Define who you are trying to communicate with and what you are trying to communicate.

3- Define your mission and the goals for your site.

4- Consider all your potential content.

Four main types of content are:

• Static - any information that is unlikely to change, for example contact details, site rules and

codes of conduct;

• Dynamic - 'what's new' sections, daily news and articles; links and references;

• Functional - menus, navigation bars, etc.; and

• Interactive - e-mail, members' areas, forms and scripts.

5- Organize the content into sections.

6- Choose a structure for your sections.

7- Give users the tools to find their way around the sections.

8- Present the whole package effectively.

9- Ensure that the whole package works within the online environment.

10- See what your users think before going live.

Qualities of a good web site:

1- The freedom enjoyed by users roaming where they wish, gathering content, comes at a price that you,

the provider, have to tell your users where they are within the web and the site, and to help them find their

way around all the other pages; helping the users to operate in a screen-based interactive environment.

2- Give users the tools to find their way around the sections.

3- The first thing you must offer is consistency. You may want to offer a rich mix and variety of content,

but if you want users to find it you must give them clear and consistent guidance around your site

structure. Remember, not all your visitors will come through the front door. Some may be delivered to a

single page, deep within your site. by a link from elsewhere. So each page should be able to stand alone

editorially with a clear identity and provenance.

4- Each of your pages should contain your site identity, usually a consistent logo or heading.

5- Each of your pages should state who created the content on it.

6- Also inform the readers when it was created or revised.

7- Provide an informative title for the content.

8- Indicate which area of the site the user is currently in.

9- Provide a link to the home page.

10- Provide a link to an index or site map.

11- Provide a search facility; 12- Provide a way for the users to return to previous pages.

13- Provide a linkable summary of where else on the site they can go; and

14- Link them to web content anywhere that is specifically related to that page.

15- Don’t put ambiguous labels on content categories

16- Standard features that can support navigation

There are certain standard features that can support navigation, such as links being underlined and the

cursor arrow turning into a hand when over an interactive area. In theory, your browser window can help

with backtracking by offering 'Forward', 'Back' and 'History' buttons, although these do not help users

who have parachuted in from another site to navigate yours. The 'Back' button will only return them to the

previous site they were visiting. So you've still got a bit to do.

17- Do not put search facilities at the bottom of the page and, so, usually off- screen unless the user

scrolls.

18- A page must have a visual balance. The size of graphics and images should be in relation to others.

19- Do not forget the white space:

White space - the space between visual elements - is an integral part of the message ... the white space

tells you where one section ends and the other begins ... systematic use of white space can vastly improve

the presentation of text for easier reading and better comprehension. Designers have always been aware of

its potency on the printed page. The screen is no different. Some of the most successful web pages use the

background to the content to form a design as much as the content itself. The successful use of white

space is a great skill. It is not just the holder of the text, images, etc. It has a visual weight of its own.

20- Use of color:

Color is a powerful tool in the designer's box, so you are advised to use it carefully. Color can say much

about your site and you. It should be used in line with your mission statement. Color designed by mission.

But if the purpose of your design is to communicate, color is an important part of this process. If you

think carefully about your users and what they want, you can provide a color scheme that will enhance

your message and encourage user involvement.

21- Use of Type

Type plays an important role on almost any web page. The two main issues for type are readability and

legibility.

Readability is important when reading a lot of body text. A serif text such as Times New Roman or

Georgia is often used because the extra lines on the edge of each character helps the flow of our eye

movement and makes it less tiring to read large amounts of the text. However, poor screen resolution can

reduce the benefit of this by making the serifs less distinct.

Legibility is important for short sections of text such as headlines. Sans serif fonts such as Arial or

Veranda are preferable, not just for headlines but also the body text if the serif font is indistinct Useful Tips for Effective Web Design

Here are some essential web design tips that every web site should follow. Design your web site by

following these tips and I guarantee that visitors will have a great first impression of your site.

1. Fast Loading web site designs - This is the number 1 tip that every web designer should follow. You

might design a web site that looks fantastic but few people are going to see it if it takes a long time to

load. Your designs should be optimized for the web and should not take more than 15 seconds to load.

Remember, you might have a great design but very few people are going to see it if it takes a long time to

load.

2. Clear Navigation - Once a visitor has come to your site you need to make them go through your site.

To do this you need to have clear navigation. Make sure all your important links are at prominent places.

Preferably right on top - that's usually where a visitor first looks. Make use of menus on the right and the

left. Try to link to as many pages of your site. Let your information be accessible from all parts of the site.

You never know what a visitor may be interested in. Try to also use the footer for your important links.

3. All Resolutions - Today, there are computers with all kinds of resolution. They range from 640 x 480

to 1024 x 768 and go even higher. Your job is to design your site for all these resolutions. The best way to

do this is to design your site in terms of percentage and not pixels.

4. Browser Compatibility - Make sure your site is browser compatible. Your web site should look good

in Netscape as well as in Internet Explorer. Don't stop designing your site as soon as you find that it looks

great on IE. Usually Netscape gives some problems, especially when you try doing complicated HTML

designs. But don't give up too soon; usually with patience these problems can be easily fixed.

5. Readable and professional looking fonts - Don't ask me how many times I've clicked out of a site just

because the font is in Comic Sans and the color is a bright pink or green. Just by looking at the font you

feel that the site is not a professional site. Don't use Comic Sans and other fancy fonts that may not be

available on most computers. If the font you use is not available in a visitors computer the web site will

use the default font of your computer which is much worse. So try to keep to common and professional

web fonts. The fonts that I always stick to are Arial and Verdana.

6. Minimize the use of images - I believe that sometimes simple designs are the most effective for the

web. Keep your site simple but neat. Don't clutter your page with big, bulky images that take ages to load.

Instead use tables creatively and design eye - catching icons that will draw a visitor's attention to a

particular section of your site. Tip - Visitors are usually more interested in content than in design.

7. Use of white space - Try not to clutter up your page with too many images, backgrounds and colorful

fonts. Again use the Keep It Simple principle by minimizing the use of graphics and using a lot of white

space. White space gives a sense of spaciousness and overall neatness to a site. Notice the white space in

our site.

8. Check for broken links - Always check for broken links within a site before uploading it to your web

server. In Dream weaver you can check for broken links by right clicking on any file in the Site Files

Window and then clicking on Check links - Entire Site. If you don't have this facility you need to upload

your site and then check it using online tools like Net Mechanic.

Tips to Fast Loading web site designs

The Number 1 rule that every web designer should follow is to create a fast loading web site. You might

have a great design but very few people are going to see it if it takes a long time to load. While designing

a web site always think about how long it will take to load. Try out our tips to build a great looking web 1. Minimize the use of images - The key to a fast loading web site is to minimize the use of images.

Images do enhance a page but don't make 80% of your web site only images. Instead break it down as

much as possible to simple HTML. Notice the popular sites like Yahoo, Google, Ebay, Amazon etc., they

have very few images because the load time is more important. Very often simple designs are the best.

2. Optimize images for the web - Once you have decided on the images that you need on your site, make

sure that it is optimized for the web. They should be in the gif or jpeg format. You can also minimize the

size of the image by choosing the number of colors you need, from the color palette. The less the colors

you choose, the less the size of the image. You can also use online tools like Gif Wizard to optimize your

images or to get a recommendation on how to cut down the size of an image.

3. Use Tables creatively - You can get some great looking designs by using tables creatively. Tables load

very fast because it is just HTML code. Tables can be used in the

homepage, menus or anywhere you like. Check out our homepage and our menus to see how we have

used tables in our site.

4. Cut down the use of animated gifs - Don't use animated gifs unless it is necessary. Animated gifs take

a long time to load and can also be very irritating. But since they catch your attention you could use small

animated gifs to draw a visitor's attention to a particular section of your site.

5. Design simple icons - Instead of using big, bulky images use simple and small icons that add a

little color and draw the attention of a visitor. We have used small icons in our homepage to highlight the

main sections of our site.

6. Use background images instead of big images whenever possible - Use background images whenever

possible. This is usually a very useful tip for headers and footers. Instead of using an image of width 580

which is a uniform design you can use just a part of that as a background fill. This reduces the size of the

web page as the image is small.

7. Try out CSS Styles - Have fun with CSS styles to get some cool text effects. Again, a CSS Style is

simple HTML code so it loads very fast. You can create cool rollovers using CSS Styles. Rollover the

text on the right menu to see how we have used CSS Styles to get a simple but nice text effect.

8. Use Flash cautiously - There seems to be a lot of hype about Flash but I recommend that you

minimize the use of

Flash on a site. Don't make entire sites using Flash. It may look great but it takes hours to load and can

really put off visitors. If you do want to use Flash use it within an HTML site and make sure it loads fast.

9. Design most of your site in HTML - As much as possible try to design your site using HTML. You

can create great designs by just using HTML code. Use tables, CSS Styles and simple fonts to design

your site. Minimize the use of animated gifs, Flash, bulky images etc.

10. Keep checking your load time - Last but not least, before you decide on the final design of your web

site, check its load time.

Effective Navigation Guidelines

Website navigation is the most important aspect to consider while designing a website. The primary aim

for effective navigation is get your visitors to stay in you site and also for visitors to easily find what they

are looking for easily and quickly. Designing effective navigation can also entice your visitors to try out

the other things you offer on your site. In this article we will look at some of the basic guidelines you

need to follow while designing the navigation of a website.

While designing the navigation for your site keep the following points in mind:

• Organized Links

Make sure your links are well organized according to the order of importance. Visitors should be easily

able to find what they are looking for under different categories. All main links should found on the top.

Other interesting links are found on the right of the page. These are common and consistent throughout

the site. You can also place the related links to the web page category below the right menu and also at

the bottom of the page.

Note: Related links are very important as visitors coming to a particular page will probably be interested

in more information you have under the same topic.

Clear and Prominent

Once you have decided on your navigation links, you need to think of the best place to put them.

Navigation should be clear and consistent. Try to design your navigation on the top or on the left as these

are the first places our eyes go to. Also locate the primary links high enough on the page so that they are

visible without scrolling. Navigation images should be seamlessly integrated into the site design. Avoid

putting navigation links at the bottom of the page as visitors will need to scroll right down to see the links.

If you like you could put the important links at the top AND bottom of the page just to make sure your

visitors don't miss the link.

• Consistent

Navigation should be clear and consistent. The important links of your website should be on every page,

in the same location, and in the same sequence. Don't confuse your visitors by putting your navigation

links in different places in different pages.

• Easy to understand

Make your links easy to understand and to the point. Usually you won't have enough place to have long

links so make use of the space wisely. Visitors need to know where they will go on clicking on a

particular link, so make sure your links are understandable or nobody is going to click on your links,

which will defeat the purpose of designing a good navigation system.

• DHTML Menus

If you have a large number of links under categories and sub- categories you could use navigation menus

to organize your links. There are many cut 'n' paste scripts available on the Net that you could use to

create great navigation systems. You can find tons of useful navigation menus that are very easy to install

on your site. Keeping these basic points in mind you can go ahead and design an effective navigation

system for your site. Take a look at other sites to get some ideas on good navigation techniques! Another

good idea would be to use eye-catching visuals and small chunks of information to draw visitors to click

on a link.