Tourism e kit

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WEBSITE 101: VISUAL DESIGN AND CONCEPT

Reading time: 15 minutes	Prerequisite: n/a

This tutorial is the first of two that will look at the essential elements required for your website. The focus will be on visual design and content.

1)   VISUAL DESIGN

The design of your website, its look and feel, should connect with your target audience and strive to create a bond between your product and the consumer. **A user will automatically associate the quality of your website with the quality of your offer.** If your site appears low budget or only marginally professional, it will negatively affect the chances of engendering trust in your visitors.

The site design will convey the importance and authority of your business through its design. Below are two examples of design:

Screen capture copyright:
http://thebiguglywebsite.com/reviews

Neglected, untargeted design

Screen capture copyright:
www.paddlingontario.com

Professional, targeted design

The design of your website should be either left to a graphic designer specialising in web design (this profession is also known as web designer) or based on a template. **The web designer will then hand over the design to a web developer whose role is to translate the look and feel into HTML and CSS.** HTML and CSS are the programming languages used to create documents for display on the Internet.

In the early days of the World Wide Web, style settings used to be integrated to the HTML (which holds the content) of your website. The World Wide Web consortium, who is the Internet regulatory body, now recommends stripping the style from the content of a website and putting it in a separate file. This separate file is called a Cascading Style Sheet (CSS).

If your website does not follow the World Wide Web consortium's recommendations your webpages will most certainly not display properly on different browsers and machines. More importantly, the website's

content risks not being picked up (indexed) by search engines. If your website is not accurately indexed in search engines, it may not attract much new business.

If you are planning on developing a website yourself rather than hiring a professional, please ensure you adhere to the World Wide Web consortium's HTML (www.w3schools.com/html) and CSS (www.w3schools.com/css) guidelines. If you are not 100% familiar with these, it is strongly recommended that you outsource the design and development of your website to a trained and competent web designer and developer.

a) Font type

Unless you use standard fonts on your site, you cannot guarantee that they will be available on the web surfer's computer. If their computer does not have the font installed, your user's browser will display a default font and your website might look different.

As a rule of thumb it is nicer to use Sans-Serif fonts (a font category that has no serifs, also known as extensions on letters) and avoid Serif fonts on the Internet.

Below is a list of fonts that are installed on both Windows and Mac computers or that have counterparts on each machine. If you choose any of these fonts you will be safe:

- Arial (Helvetica) (sans serif)
- Comic Sans MS
- Courier New

- Tahoma (Geneva) (sans serif)
- Trebuchet MS (sans serif)
- Verdana (sans serif)

A good web developer will always set a series of preferred fonts so your website renders nicely on different browsers (such as Internet Explorer, Firefox etc.) and operating systems (Microsoft Windows, Mac OS, and Linux).

Photo credit: http://flickr.com/photos/inconsistency/

b) Font size

An em is a unit of measurement in the field of typography, which equals the point (pt) size of the current font. In web terms, this signifies that setting the base font to 1em will ensure the font size is set to the user's preference.

ALWAYS SET THE BASE FONT SIZE FOR A WEB DOCUMENT TO 1EM (OR 100%).

Use 1em (or 100%) as the smallest font size on your website and increase it for your titles, headings etc. For instance, your main heading (also known as Heading 1 in HTML) could be 1.8 em (180%). That signifies that it will be 1.8 times the size of your user's standard font size.

c) Can my site's colour, fonts and look be altered very easily?

Yes, a trained web developer will be able to do so by changing a few lines of code in the cascading style sheets (CSS). If a website is not written using cascading style sheets this may not be possible.

2) CONTENT

a) Changing website content with a content management system

A competent web developer will provide you with a content management system (CMS) that will allow you to edit the content of your website, while at the same time, preventing you from altering the style (which is held separately in CSS). Unless you are a programmer, you won't be able to install a content management system on your site.

Having a content management system professionally installed might cost an extra AUD500-1,500 but it is real value for money as it is the only way you will be able to edit your content directly. Using a content management system can save you hours every month.

There are many CMS on the market and the majority of them are free (thanks to an open source licence). All you will require to pay is for a professional to install it on your site. Below is a list of open source CMS that have come highly recommended by the web developers and users community:

- CMS Made Simple

- Drupal

- Joomla!

- DotNetNuke

- PHP-Fusion

- Wordpress

b) Depth and volume of words on a page

It takes less than a few seconds for a first impression to be made. **You need to engage your visitor and showcase how your product can make a positive difference to their holiday experience.**

Remember, your website is your only chance to convince your visitor to book. You will not be able to talk to them unless they contact you first. You need to be able to express what you would easily convey in a phone or face-to-face conversation.

Be imaginative. Use sound, videos, and photos but also organise your content to ensure it is attractive and eye-catching.

Research has shown that **users scan-read online text**. They move their eyes quickly down a page seeking specific keyword or phrases. To assist the user experience, use headings, bold text and hyperlinks throughout your text. Write small paragraphs using bullet points when you can and illustrate your text with images.

Focus on giving the customer what they want, on a gold platter.
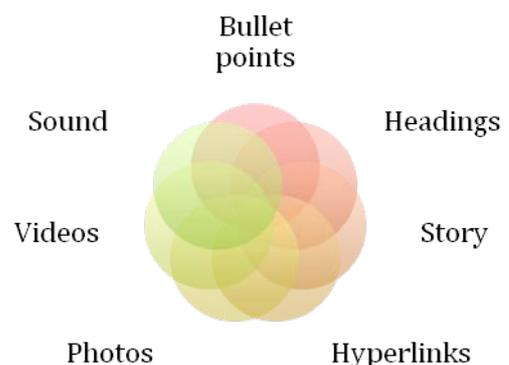
c) What is a call-to-action?

A call-to-action is a set of words that entice the reader to take a specific action. Call to actions can be expressed in different ways:

- A call-to-action can be added to a print ad to visit a website (or a specific webpage). The main advantage of this will allow the visitor numbers and origin to be tracked with an analytics program such as Google Analytics to let you know if the campaign was successful.

Imagine you are placing an ad in a travel brochure targeting Melbournians. Add a call-to-action such as "See the special package offer on our website www.mysite.com/special-package-for-melbourne". You will be able to track the success of your ad by viewing the number of unique visitors to the "special-package-for-melbourne" page on your web analytics program. A web analytics program will provide you vital statistics about the performance of your website.

- At least one call-to-action needs to be located on each webpage to direct the user to the next page you would like them to visit. Call-to-actions are done using hyperlink, which is text that can be clicked on. Search engines give high importance to hyperlinks as it helps them understand what a website is about. It is therefore best to avoid "click here" and have keywords used as hyperlinks instead.

Imagine you are selling adventure tours. On both the tour description page and your home page you need to have a call-to-action to take the person to the booking page. This call-to-action needs to be eye-catching.

The 2-day Katherine Gorge kayaking tour will take your muscles on an adventure that will be hard to forget. Check out the availability of the Katherine Gorge tour (instead of having click here for the prices).

It is **crucial** to use call-to-actions. Make them as subtle as possible to avoid "hard selling".

d) What about images and brand?

Pictures speak a thousand words! Use them as often as possible when relevant. **Be creative**, you don't only have to use your own images.

There are many images that you can use to reinforce the message you are trying to convey with text. You can use your own photos, photos taken by guests (seek approval from each party before using the photo), stock photos, photos under licence (called a Creative Commons licence). There are many avenues to explore.

Photo credit: UntangleMyWeb.com

e) Should I have a lot of images?

The key issue with images is that they can take a long time to load. If you images are of a good size (around 400x300 pixels) and resolution (max 72 dpi), you can use a reasonable number of them per page (2-6).

f) Branding my content

On your website, your brand identity will not only be portrayed by your logo but also by:

- The tone of your website's copy

- The colour-scheme and font of your website

- The images and videos you use

Having the style of your website separate from the content will also allow you to easily rebrand yourself by asking your web developer to make simple changes to your website's CSS.

For instance, if your brand colours change from blue and red to green and gold your web developer will be able to, in a couple of clicks and lines of code, change the colours of all headings and text!

Your content will automatically be protected by copyright; however, neither your brand nor your logo will be automatically trademarked, unless you have previously registered them with www.IPAustralia.gov.au.

3) RELATED MATERIAL

a) Related tutorials

- Target market 101

- What is a content management system

- Images 101

- Images: going online