



Ecommerce for Artists

An integrated, modular curriculum developed collaboratively by CraftNet member schools and artists as an introductory guide to establishing an entrepreneurial Web presence. Created with the generous support of the Appalachian Regional Commission.

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MODULE 4: Develop a Design to Entice

What elements need to be included to make a good website?

When you design your website, you should ask yourself a number of questions:

- Can the customer easily understand my website?
- Can that customer find what they are looking for?
- Can they leave the site feeling good?

How you design your site to accomplish those ends requires you to consider how you use the following components:

- Written content.
- Headlines.
- Pictures and other images.
- Lists.
- Tables.
- Forms.
- Navigation tools, like footers and links.
- A tool for searching your site.

You also need to decide whether or not you want to include any kind of paid advertising. Many people feel that it makes a site feel too commercial, but others see it as a way of making money to support and sustain a site.

There are a number of websites that can provide you with additional information about these elements. For one, check out <http://www.wdvl.com/Authoring/Design>.

ACTIVITY: Visit three sites and using the first three questions in this section, critique each site, noting elements that you would like to include in your site.

What is a “template” and what does it have to do with the Web and me?

You don’t have to “reinvent the wheel” if you decide to design your own website. A tool called a template can be used to help you create your website. In some ways, it is like following a format for a business letter.

A number of templates are available for free as downloads, while others can be purchased. You as the “designer” then can fill in the information fields with your own product information. To find these site design tools, either do a Web search for the term “Web template” or go directly to one of the following sites:

- www.templatemonster.com/
- www.freewebtemplates.com/
- www.buytemplates.net/
- www.oswd.org/

ACTIVITY: Find a template that appeals to you. Then find online reviews of that particular template and, if it’s available to download on a trial basis, use it in a test run to explore the ease of actually using it.

What are typefaces and fonts? Why are they critical to a website?

The shape of a letter is its typeface. That shape affects how we respond to the word it forms. Some typefaces—like Garamond or Times New Roman— are very easy to read. A non-serif typeface like Arial or Helvetica (without the small lines on letters like t’s and i’s) tends to convey a more contemporary feel.

Typefaces, also called fonts, come in a variety of sizes (like 10-point, 12-point, or 16-point) and effects (bold, italic, underlined). How you choose to handle a particular typeface enhances its effect. For example, a headline might be bolded and cast in much bigger point size than the body copy. Bolded copy tends to draw attention, while there are style rules to check for the appropriate use of italics.

There are some do’s and don’ts to follow in using typefaces:

- Don’t fall into the trap of thinking that by using a wild mix of typefaces, you will add excitement and individuality to your site. It will simply confuse the look of the site. Remember the old adage, “Less is more.”
- Be consistent in how you use the typefaces. Don’t shift typefaces from page to page.
- Be sure that your typeface is large enough to read easily with causing eyestrain. With an aging population, you need to increase the type size.
- Use contrast to help your text become more readable. For example, a bright red font on a black background will be difficult to read, while a dark font on a light-colored background likely will be easy to read.

- Be sure that you allow enough space between lines. Cramping your words adversely affects readability of the passage.

What do I need to know about the psychology of color as I work on my site?

Color is a very personal thing. Everyone has a “favorite” color. However, color can be used to grab the potential customer’s attention, as well as convey meaning and catalyze action. Color has been proven to trigger emotions. On the other hand, an uncomfortable combination of color at best confuses your message and at worst chases away customers.

How color is translated, emotionally speaking, varies depending on factors like age, nationality, profession, or the influence of the most recent fad. Most interior designers consider red, orange, and yellow as colors that excite. On the other hand, green, blue, and purple are colors that calm.

Also, there are some generally accepted meanings of color:

- RED—Passion, danger.
- BLUE—Trust.
- GREEN—Growth.
- GOLD—Preciousness.
- PURPLE—Royalty.
- BLACK—Death.
- WHITE—Purity.

However, it is important to remember that those meanings can change from culture to culture. For example, a customer from China or Southeast Asia likely would use white, not black, to signify mourning.

Other points to remember about color are:

- Use color to “brand” your business. Once you have decided on your company’s color or colors, stick with that combination.
- Too many colors are worse than no color. Pick one main color and no more than two complementary colors. Or use lighter or darker shades of your main color.
- Don’t forget basic color theory in your design work. Use a color wheel to show you what colors work best together. Colors that are opposite on the wheel are complementary and work well together. Colors near to each other also can be easily and effectively used together.

Consult www.colormatters.com or www.tamingthebeast.net for additional information about using color effectively on your website.

ACTIVITY: Decide on the colors that you will use on your website. Then test your choices against the guidelines presented in the above section.

How can I use line, shape, and texture to add interest?

There are other graphic elements that help in building an effective website:

- **Lines** can be used to help organize a site, because the eye will naturally follow a line. However, you need to remember that there are a number of types of lines (straight, dotted, dashed, curved, textured, doubled), and each type can help to convey a mood.
- **Shapes** help to organize your site. If your site has rectangular text boxes, adding a circle, an ellipse, or even an irregular shape adds a different component that grabs the reader's attention.
- **Dividing a page into sections** helps to improve readability. The customer's eye doesn't need to take in as much information at once.
- **Texture** can really help you add another element subliminally. Texture can be added, for example, by screening an image back to 20 percent so that it provides a "ghosted" image on the page. Imagine scanning a photograph of a tree and its leaves, scanning it back to 20 percent, and then using the much lighter image as the backdrop for a page about ecology. Be cautious and sparing in how you use this element, however, so that you don't clutter the visual dimension of your website and thereby muddy its meaning.
- **Contrast** in size, shape, and color all add interest to your site. Again, too much muddies your message.

How do I position the different components of my site?

A website are like newspaper sin that both are designed to be read quickly. Newspaper editors strive to place their most important stories on the top half of the page, or, as they would say, "above the fold." When the paper is folded in half and sits facing out in the newspaper sales rack, the stories that show themselves and immediately draw the reader's interest are the ones presented in that top half of the front page.

The same holds true for a webpage. Even though a potential customer can scroll down the page, you will want to put the most important information near the top of the page. Check out <http://library.albany.edu/imc/webdesign> for more detailed information regarding webpage layout.

How should I organize my website pages so that it is easy for a customer to navigate the site?

You, the business owner, want to help your customer find the information they want as quickly as possible. English-speaking customers read from left to right and from the top of the page down, so the first place that their eyes land is in the upper left-hand corner. After landing on a page, the eye will naturally look briefly at a sequence of several points on the page.

All this means that as you design your page, you need to remember what will draw the reader's eye as it scrolls down the page. A large headline, a photograph, a spot of color all will help draw your reader's eye from element to element. Then, using short paragraphs will help your customer quickly absorb information, retain their interest, and keep them reading.

How you place the elements on a page also will help your customer navigate a page. For example, if you have a photograph of a side view of a person, be sure that the person faces into the page, not on the edge of the page looking out. The latter situation will draw the reader's attention off the page and away from the content.

Why is it important to avoid clutter?

It is always tempting to “throw the kitchen sink” at a potential customer, displaying lots of options in the hopes of prompting them to buy. The same is true with designing webpages. You may be tempted to use too many colors, too many shapes, streaming video, shadowed letters, etc. The result can be highly confusing.

Don't forget the power of white space—the empty space around your content, photographs, or other design elements. The old saying, “Less is more,” holds true here, because if your website is too crowded, the reader's eye doesn't know where to look. In the confusion, it's probable that the reader will simply leave the site.

Remember that your website needs to be useable. That means it needs to be easy to use *and* easy to understand.

Should I have advertising on my website?

Again, this is a personal choice. Having advertising, whether it is a banner ad or a pop-up ad, on a website is a continuing debate.

Display ads undoubtedly can be used to earn at least a little money, which may defray some of the expense involved in maintaining your website. That advantage, however, needs to be weighed against what the advertising will do to the design of your website, as well as your own ebusiness. Pop-up ads are especially annoying to customers. Because you are selling art, you need to be especially careful that your website reflects the quality of your artwork and your professionalism.

What kind of links should I have on my site?

A link is a word or image that the reader can click on and be taken to a different website, a different page, or even a different part of the same page.

Such links, called “hot links,” usually will be underlined and displayed in a different color. Some may change color as the mouse passes over them or, alternatively, after they

have been clicked. If used effectively, links help a reader find information more quickly. They also can lead the reader to additional information.

To ease navigation in your own site, you need to add a navigation bar that runs along the top of the page or down the left-hand side. If you change the placement of this bar, it may be difficult for your reader to figure out how your website “works.”

As with other elements on a page, too many links can be confusing. Research shows that more than seven links are too many and confuse the choices that the reader makes. If you have more than seven pages or sections that you want to link to, you may want to create some subsections.

As a final thought on links, you will also want to include a link on every page of your website that will take your reader back to the website’s home page.

ACTIVITY: For each of your pages, sketch a rough draft of how you plan to place the difference elements you want to use.