

Website Homepage Ideas

14 Website Homepage
Design Tips For a
User-Friendly Website

Don Nicholas
Chris Sturk

Mequoda Team

Don Nicholas
Chief Executive Officer

Kim Mateus
Chief Content Officer

Aimee Graeber
Chief Operating Officer

Laura Pittman
Chief Financial Officer

Amanda MacArthur
Social Media Specialist

Chris Sturk
Managing Editor

Michael Phillips
Senior Information Architect

Patrick Hughes
New Media Producer

Roxanne O'Connell
Senior Usability Analyst

Gail Odeneal
Senior Editor

Terri Edmonston
Information Architect
Contributing Editor

Lowell Allen
Senior Information Architect

Peter A. Schaible
Senior Copywriter
Editor-At-Large

Julie Ottomano
Consulting Services Manager

Jeanne S. Jennings
Contributing Editor

Jack Edmonston
Executive Editor

Jane E. Zarem
Senior Editor

Robert W. Bly
Copywriter
Contributing Editor

John Clausen
Copywriter
Contributing Editor

Peter J. Fogel
Copywriter
Contributing Editor

Laura Logan
Copywriter

Larry Kerstein
Usability Analyst
Contributing Editor

Roger C. Parker
Contributing Editor

Roger C. Parker
Contributing Editor

Advisory Board

Cheryl Angelheart
Active Interest Media

Phil Ash
Capitol Information Group

David Ball
Consultant

Todd Bierle
Meredith Corporation

John Bolton
Aspire Media

Robert Brady
Business & Legal Resources

Laura Carlsmith
EatingWell

Andrew Clurman
Active Interest Media

Helmut Graf
VNR

Susan Hackley
*The Program on Negotiation at
Harvard Law School*

Clay Hall
Aspire Media

Elizabeth Hall
Business Management Daily

TJ Harty
Aspire Media LLC

Caroline Heine
VibrantNation.com

Stuart Hochwert
Prime Publishing

Matthew T. Humphrey
Employer Resource Institute

Jeff Jackson
Farm Progress

Bob Kaslik
Aspire Media LLC

James Kerwin
*Program on Negotiation;
Harvard Law School*

Carl Kravetz
VidaySalud.com

Susan Laden
Biblical Archaeology Society

Jeff Lapin
Farm Progress Companies

Ronald Liem
DestinAsian Media

Dra. Aliza Lifshitz
VidaySalud.com

Pat McKeough
The Successful Investor

Stephen Reily
VibrantNation.com

Jody Reynolds
*American Quarter Horse
Association*

Larry Somers
EatingWell

Tom P. Vick
*National Health Advisory
Institute*

Tom Winsor
Equine

Natalie Yelen
Equine

Copyright © 2012 Mequoda Group LLC

Terms of Use

All rights reserved. No part of this report may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, faxing, emailing, posting online or by any information storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the Publisher.

All trademarks and brands referred to herein are the property of their respective owners. All references to Mequoda™ and the seven Mequoda Website Publishing Models™ are trademarks of the Mequoda Group, LLC.

Legal Notices

While all attempts have been made to verify information provided in this publication, neither the author nor the publisher assumes any responsibility for error, omissions or contrary interpretations of the subject matter contained herein.

The purchaser or reader of this publication assumes responsibility for the use of these materials and information. Adherence to all applicable laws and regulations, both referral and state and local, governing professional licensing, business practices, advertising and all other aspects of doing business in the United States or any other jurisdiction, is the sole responsibility of the purchaser or reader. The author and publisher assume no responsibility or liability whatsoever on the behalf of any purchaser or reader of these materials. Any perceived slights of specific people or organizations are unintentional.

For More Free White Papers

<http://www.MequodaFree.com>

Contact Information

Mequoda Group, LLC
Customer Service
(866) 713-1005
77 Main Street
Hopkinton, MA 01748

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
How To Rate a Website Using the Mequoda Website Scorecard	5
Is It Time to Test Your Website?	15
An Online Optimizing Tool.....	17
3 Deadly Website Design Mistakes.....	18
4 Essentials for Website Homepage Design.....	21
Homepage Design Insight from Mequoda’s Systems Director	23
Conclusion	25
More Free White Papers	25

Introduction

Website homepage design is not just about the visual graphics and effects that are found on your website. A large part of it has to do with the usability factor that the visitors to your website experience.

Before creating your website homepage, you may have some specific ideas in mind for how it should look. Work with your ideas, but also pay attention to considerations from designers who have created best practices for usability.

This report discusses a few basics that will help your website homepage become user-friendly for your visitors.

How to Rate a Website Using the Mequoda Website Scorecard™

First impressions have never been more important than on the Web. The increase in broadband availability and the increase in user expectation have resulted in a fantastic explosion of technology and complexity. The age of the Internet has also created many websites that are like older homes that have been remodeled again and again with no master plan for making the rooms work together. Our research indicates that many of these complex websites will function much better when untangled to create a network of websites, each with streamlined functionality that the user can learn to use effectively.

This means there are many pitfalls waiting to ensnare the overworked, over-extended website publishing team. Brand integrity, clear messages, easy-to-use order flows and intuitive navigation fall victim to the race to keep up with "technology." It may give you some relief to know that best practices in website design and execution are often a simple case of common sense—that, and an understanding of your audience's expectations and perspectives.

To create the 14 Website Design Guidelines, we've reviewed hundreds of websites and interviewed dozens of website publishers. We've conducted a series of expert usability reviews and actual user tests to determine what we believe to be the top 14 best practices for the running a Mequoda system.

While these 14 guidelines are by no means the complete list of website design practices, they are essential to sound, effective website design. We're sure that implementation of these practices will result in happier, more satisfied, readers.

1. Strategic Intent, or Purpose

To communicate strategic intent you must know two things:

1. What are your users trying to do at your site?
2. What do you want them to do at your site?

At least one of those goals should be a way to monetize the visitor. Clear strategic intent is much easier to achieve when the website has very simplified functionality. Complex websites confuse users.

The Mequoda System™ asks two key questions to classify websites into one of seven models:

1. Is the user looking for, content or commerce?
2. Who pays the website publisher for successful task completion, the user or the sponsor?

Knowing the answers to these questions is key to designing a website with clear strategic intent.

STRATEGIC INTENT	
A	Clearly indicates the action to be taken
B	Action to be taken in present
C	Too many actions to be taken
D	Fuzzy about what can be done
F	Can't do anything

2. Content Webification

The Internet is not a book, magazine or newspaper. Nor is it TV, a live event or a brick-and-mortar store. The Web is a unique medium. A well executed website offers the opportunity to do things that other media and physical venues cannot do, the execution of which is particular to the Web.

Let's look at a few examples:

- * Users buy books at Amazon because it offers a selection and an interactive capacity not available in any physical bookstore.
- * eBay lets users interact in a way that wasn't possible from traditional classified advertising or auctioneering.
- * ConsumersReports.org makes 48 months of magazine content available in a searchable format, which is very differently from the same content delivered by the monthly magazine.
- * Forbes.com offers 1,500 new business stories to its users every day with searches and alert services to guide them to the content they want.
- * eDiets helps users choose which information program is best for them and then communicates daily, automatically, with timely, personalized information and inspiration.
- * AmericanGreetings.com can deliver a gift card across town or around the world in a matter of seconds.

Website Homepage Ideas

For more free white papers, visit <http://www.MequodaFree.com>

© 2012 Mequoda Group LLC

The key to successful website publishing lies in exploiting the user benefits that the Web has to offer at the expense of traditional media and retailers. Successful website publishers use content to create unique user benefits.

CONTENT WEBIFICATION	
A	Innovative use of interactivity and multimedia technology
B	Some use of web-based communication technology
C	Text and graphics have been webified
D	Website looks like a book, magazine or other old media
F	Website content is non-existent and/or hard to consume

3. Relationship Building

Website success depends on providing incentives to encourage visitor email registration. Email registration permits the website to follow-up with visitors at a later date, using alerts or newsletters. If a website does not attempt to capture the visitor's email address, visitors may never revisit. While every website should have an email capture method, the Mequoda Editorial Website Model is designed to be at the hub of a Mequoda Website Network that uses frequent email communication to drive traffic to the network's ecommerce websites. For an editorial website, capturing opt-in email newsletter subscribers must be Job One.

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING (EMAIL CAPTURE)	
A	Aggressively invites visitors to receive content via email
B	Clearly invites visitors to receive content via email
C	Email newsletters available, but not prominent
D	Email newsletter is hidden
F	No email newsletter

4. Community Building

Some of the Internet's most successful websites enable their users to generate more than 99 percent of website content. Monster.com, eBay and BookReporter.com are all websites that build community by letting the users do the talking. The user forums at Spirituality.com and the user product ratings and reviews at Amazon are two more ways to let the users participate in building the websites. Does the website encourage feelings of belonging, enthusiasm and loyalty? Does it motivate you to become involved by asking a question or contributing a comment?

COMMUNITY BUILDING	
A	Clearly invites visitors to become involved with other members
B	Community involvement devices are present
C	Community involvement devices are available but not prominent
D	Community devices hidden
F	No community involvement devices

5. Persistent Navigation

Users of your site should be crystal clear about where they are in your site, where they can go and how they can get back to somewhere they've been. With the exception of certain processes, like order flows, they should be able to navigate to all major areas of your website from anywhere in your website. Does your persistent navigation reflect the depth and breadth of your content? Does it provide quick and easy access to customer service? Is it intuitive? Is it consistent throughout your site?

Our research indicates that a change in top-level navigation is best accomplished when you also change the nameplate and the URL. Playboy.com, a pioneer in successful website publishing, is the gateway to a network of websites each with its own navigation, nameplate, and URL. This network of sites includes a variety of clearly branded membership and retail website types as illustrated in the seven Mequoda Website Models.

PERSISTENT NAVIGATION	
A	Does an excellent job at letting user fulfill goals
B	Is confusing or has too many levels
C	Is not persistent or not consistent
D	Changes without any perceptible reason
F	Isn't persistent or universal

6. User Task Depth

Does the website encourage you to take the next step, such as request more information or make a purchase? We have found that there are three to five fairly common tasks that account for 80 percent of user activity at each of the seven Mequoda Website Models.

Not surprisingly, for content sites, the top task is to get more detail on a news headline. For commerce sites, the user is most often trying to complete a purchase. Browsing and searching are common to all seven Mequoda Website Models. For retail websites that involve the shipment of physical products, users are increasingly seeking to take care of customer service tasks at the website—canceling or returning an order or reporting a problem with delivery.

USER TASK DEPTH	
A	User was able to complete all four tasks
B	User was able to complete at least three tasks
C	User was able to complete at least two tasks
D	User was able to complete at least one task
F	User was not able to complete any tasks

7. Affordance

Proper affordance means that something that is linked should look like it is—and that which is not linked should have no underlining or color-coding. Good affordance means that you aren't making the user mouse-over the page looking for links. Good affordance also requires a website publisher to understand how different age groups expect a website to behave.

AFFORDANCE	
A	Links and buttons do clearly what they can "afford"
B	Most of the links and buttons have clear affordance
C	Some of the links and buttons have clear affordance
D	Links and buttons are inconsistent and confusing
F	Links and buttons clearly violate web conventions

8. Labeling and Language

Far too many websites use language that is better understood by the site's sponsoring organization than by its audience. Attention needs to be paid to the labels used in navigation and page titles so that it is consistent with itself and with the audience's mental models for the content. The added bonus here is that key phrases and words that your audience understands will also improve your ranking in search engines, as they have been designed to evaluate relevancy as a "human" would.

LABELING & LANGUAGE	
A	Is audience-centric, has good representation of key words and phrases
B	Some confusion in taxonomy for labels
C	Uses jargon or language reflective of organization, not reader
D	Labels are inconsistent and confusing
F	Poor language and labeling

9. Readability (Content Density)

We've known for ages in print that effective use of white space (number of columns, bolding, margins, etc.) increases reader pleasure. The same design principles apply on the Web. Actually, white space and employing Gestalt principles of continuity, similarity and proximity are even more important when formatting news content for the Web. This is because Web users tend not to read pages to determine if the content is relevant to their information search. Instead, they scan the page seeking information or clues to where they might find what they are looking for.

READABILITY (CONTENT DENSITY)	
A	Uncluttered, adequate white space, column width, type size and face
B	Does a reasonable job balancing graphics to text
C	Too many graphics or too much text, too many columns
D	Cluttered, jammed or confusing
F	A total mess

10. Organization (Marketing Quadrants)

On content-heavy websites, finding space to provide important marketing links is a challenge. Actual eye-tracking tests have revealed that people use a "Z" shaped scanning pattern when scouring Web pages for information. More importantly, they are less likely to scroll down the homepage than they are on pages that are several levels down. Keeping critical marketing information and contextual navigation "above the fold" is essential. Using primary marketing quadrants to generate brand-related revenue or build relationships and communities with users is the sign of a well-designed site.

ORGANIZATION	
A	Marketing quadrants are appropriately exploited, navigation OK
B	Primary links in only one top quadrant
C	Primary task links present, but obscure
D	Primary task links missing
F	Total lack of organization

11. Content Freshness

How up-to-date is the information on the website? Website credibility plummets if the homepage promotes an event that occurred two months ago. Websites should be considered "works in progress" that are constantly updated if only so that they don't bore repeat visitors. Research has shown that websites with a high update frequency generate more repeat visits per month per unique user. With the average number of websites per user going down and the average time spent on the Web going up, it is imperative that the content on your website be as fresh as possible.

CONTENT FRESHNESS	
A	New content is available throughout the day
B	New content is available daily
C	New content is available weekly
D	New content is available monthly
F	The update schedule is infrequent or unclear

12. Load Time

Two phenomena contribute to the users expectation of download time:

1. Broadband has dramatically shortened download time and
2. People are no longer going to the Web to be entertained.

They are looking for information. If they can't get a bead on what they are looking for they will Google their way right off your site and onto another.

The Pingdom Tool will test your full website page by loading the complete HTML page, including objects such as images, CSS, JavaScripts, RSS, Flash and frames/iframes. The tool then acts as a web browser would and loads the page. The load time of all the objects tested will then be shown visually with time bars.

Each test will give you valuable information including statistics on the total load time of the page, the total number of objects tested and the size of the site including all of the objects.

LOAD TIME	
A	Under 3 seconds
B	3-6 seconds
C	6-9 seconds
D	Over 9 seconds
F	Gave up waiting

13. Aesthetics

The average user expects professional websites to be clean looking, information-rich, and intuitive. They respond best when the aesthetics of the site support the purpose of the site and are consistent with the user's mental model. Is the design appropriate for the firm or organization the website serves? Layout, colors and typefaces determine the site's personality and image.

AESTHETICS	
A	Support the purpose of the site, is consistent with the user mental model
B	Support the purpose of the site, but confused about user mental model
C	Disregards user mental model
D	Totally ad-driven
F	Totally ugly

14. Brand Preference

Most websites have a strong brand that often has roots in the physical world—but on the trend to dot-com, the brand can sometimes cause confusion. Are you building and maintaining your brand? Or are you using valuable space on your homepage to promote a "new brand" that represents you and a bunch of other players? Are you creating the type of brand preference that websites like Amazon enjoy where more than half of all visitors arrive by typing "Amazon.com" directly into their browser's URL field?

BRAND PREFERENCE	
A	Clearly supports and builds brand preference; encourages return visits
B	Supports and builds brand
C	Sends confusing messages and subjugates brand to higher authority
D	Sells something else
F	Doesn't support brand at all

Evaluating websites

The Mequoda Website Scorecard encourages you to score your website on each of the 14 Mequoda Best Practice Guidelines, add them together and arrive at a cumulative score. The goal is to emphasize the importance of balanced, usable websites. Your website should achieve respectable scores in all areas, rather than over-emphasizing a single area or two or omitting other areas completely.

These 14 Website Design Guidelines were developed by Don Nicholas with the help of Roxanne O'Connell, Roger C. Parker and Kim Mateus.

Is It Time to Test Your Website?

This free tool can help you

In the world of digital evolution, you have to be at the top of your game to stand against the competition. The number of broadband Internet users is constantly increasing. For businesses, the penetration of broadband usage is over 90%.

With this increase in usage comes the need to increase the quickness in which your website loads.

Imagine someone searches a term in Google and your website comes up on the first page. The user clicks on your site, but since it loads slowly, the user decides to click off your site and choose another one from the Google list.

You just lost a potential customer because of this.

Unfortunately that scenario is not uncommon. Today, when websites often have a lot of images, video content, or audio content, it's easy for websites to load slowly if they are not optimized properly.

Two helpful pieces of information

One way to help your load time is to optimize your images. To do this you can use imaging software like Photoshop or Fireworks.

I personally use Fireworks to do this task. I take my image and then open up the Export Wizard, which is found under the File tab. After opening up the image in the Export Wizard, you can set it for the web, enhance the clarity of the image and save the image to put on your website.

The other helpful tip involves a tool that will test your website and tell you how it's loading.

The Pingdom Tool will test your full website page by loading the complete HTML page, including objects such as images, CSS, JavaScripts, RSS, Flash and frames/iframes. The tool then acts as a web browser would and loads the page.

The load time of all the objects tested will then be shown visually with time bars.

Each test will give you valuable information including statistics on the total load time of the page, the total number of objects tested and the size of the site including all of the objects.

The best part of this website is that you can do a test for free. There are more options on the site including paying ones, but you can do the general test to see how valuable the service will be to your needs.

These results will help in the way you go about fixing your website homepage design. If you notice your webpage designs are loading too slowly, and you offer a lot of visual content to your visitors, you may now be able to fix this problem.

Try optimizing your images first, and test again. If it is still loading slowly, and we define slowly at 6 seconds or above, then you may want to take some images off of your website. Be selective of course, we don't want you to ruin the complete aesthetic of your site, but we also want it to load quickly so you can remain competitive in your industry.

An Online Optimizing Tool

Make your website load quicker for free

Are you having trouble balancing between attractive graphic design on your website and a quick load time?

Images add a feel to your website. They help enhance your online environment and may create connections with your visitors.

So if you want to have graphics and a website that loads quickly, you will need to reduce the size of your image file sizes.

A tool to help your website load quickly

NetMechanic has a tool that can help you optimize your website for free. The Bot is found at NetMechanic.com [<http://www.netmechanic.com/GIFBot/optimize-graphic.htm>].

While on the site, you can enter the specific image or the URL for your website. It will help you slim down the size of your images and the quality will only be slightly affected.

3 Deadly Website Design Mistakes

How to use magazine design principles to minimize periodical website traffic, usability and reader satisfaction

Mistake #1: Bury your frequency

Mistake #2: Hide your content

Mistake #3: Avoid keyword phrases

A week in Singapore...

For five days last week, Greg Jones and I worked with about 80 Asian magazine publishers, editors and marketers to help them extend their legacy brand to the Internet. Virtually all of them have websites and many were making the same common, but deadly, website design mistakes. Designing magazines and designing websites are as different as night and day. But since both use pages, words and pictures, many people assume the mechanics of good design for magazines and websites are the same. However, they are not even close when viewed through the eyes of the average user.

Magazines are an episodic linear medium

As a magazine designer, I am creating a package of information that is delivered to the user periodically. Each issue has a theme and flow that begins with the cover. The cover story of a magazine sets the tone for the issue and is almost always the best-read article in the issue. The cover story also impacts the readership of every other article in the issue. Magazines are experienced like books are read and movies are watched... they have a beginning, a middle and an end. The editor manages the flow with that in mind and expects that a serious reader will spend an hour to two hours with each issue before filing it away for reference. The issue is prepared so that it can be read completely and finished like a book or a movie.

Periodical websites are on-demand reference sources experienced randomly and selectively

A periodical website is not a magazine. Its closest dirt-world cousin, in terms of information architecture, is a loose-leaf reference book that gets regular updates. A periodical website includes a number of website templates. Most of these templates, including the home page template, are indexes of the article or post

Website Homepage Ideas

For more free white papers, visit <http://www.MequodaFree.com>

© 2012 Mequoda Group LLC

pages that contain the website's minimum information units, or MIUs. Every great periodical website is a filing and retrieval system that allows users to quickly locate the information they seek. The average successful periodical website visit lasts less than five minutes and covers five or so pages of content, including index pages and article pages. Every article page is tagged with keywords, topics, authors and dates to facilitate successful content retrieval. Thus, a website does not start with home page design, it starts with a taxonomy that will define all its index pages.

With that as a short background, let me share the three most common website design mistakes we encountered last week in Singapore.

Website Design Mistake #1: Bury your frequency

Bad Website Design: The upper left quadrant of your website homepage and topic pages are dominated by a feature story or stories that update at a much lower frequency than the rest of your periodical website. Many of the websites we reviewed were updating their lead story once a week or once a month, treating the homepage like a magazine cover. This design shows users that you update your entire website at that frequency. It also sends the message that there is no reason to visit more often.

Good Website Design: Websites that include their most current posts in a list from newest to oldest in the upper left website homepage quadrant are using the homepage properly by showing users what is new at the website, or new in a given topical section of the site. Check out the upper left quadrant of the Discover Magazine periodical website for a great example of how to let users know what's new and thus encourage them to visit often.

The screenshot shows the Discover Magazine website homepage. At the top left is the large "DISCOVER" logo with the tagline "Science, Technology, and The Future". To the right of the logo are navigation links: "Log In", "Subscribe", "Give a Gift", "Archives", and "Customer Service". Below these is a search bar with "SEARCH" and "SEARCH" buttons. A horizontal menu below the search bar lists various categories: "Health & Medicine", "Mind & Brain", "Technology", "Space", "Human Origins", "Living World", "Environment", "Physics & Math", "Video", "Photos", "Podcast", and "RSS".

In the upper left quadrant, there is a "Latest News" section with a "Most Popular" sub-section. The "Latest News" section contains a list of articles:

- Japan's Damaged Asteroid Probe Could Limp Back to Earth in June
- Stephen Hawking, for One, Does Not Welcome Our Potential Alien Overlords
- Do Asphalt-Loving Microbes Point the Way to Life on Titan?
- A Tropical, Fatal Fungus Gains a Foothold in the Pacific Northwest
- First Full Face Transplant—Jaw, Nose, Teeth, Etc—Declared a Success
- Hubble's 20th Birthday Pic: "Eagle Nebula"

To the right of the "Latest News" section are two featured articles. The first is titled "Art That Breathes and Grows—Because It's Made Out of Plants" and features a cartoon illustration of a man in a hat and coat holding a plant. The second is a ConocoPhillips Energy Prize advertisement with the text "They won \$125,000 for their bright energy idea. Do you have a winning idea? Click to find out more." and the ConocoPhillips Energy Prize logo.

Website Homepage Ideas

For more free white papers, visit <http://www.MequodaFree.com>

© 2012 Mequoda Group LLC

Website Design Mistake #2: Hide your content

Bad Website Design: Websites that only allow users the internal search to find content discourages users from browsing. It also stops external search engines like Google, Yahoo! and Bing from giving the perma-link topic page URLs they need in order to index and show your content by keyword cluster.

Good Website Design: Use perma-link topic pages, tag pages and author pages. Example: Your website may have dozens of listings for seafood restaurants in the Back Bay area of Boston, but unless you have a perma-link topic page with a URL that ends with “.com/boston-restaurants/bay-bay/seafood,” you force the search engines to choose between the posts for your individual listings (MIUs). Search-generated URLs inside your site will make your site virtually invisible to search engine users. Make sure you use perma-link pages to index your content in every way possible.

Website Design Mistake #3: Avoid keyword phrases

Bad Website Design: Use the cleverest headline and navigation terms and you can be sure to make your content hard to find.

Good Website Design: If you have a section of your website dedicated to restaurants, DO NOT label it “Dining Out” or “Places to Eat” because that is not how users search for restaurants. Filing a restaurant review post in a topical section called “Places to Eat” is like storing soap in the refrigerator... Only you will know where to find it.

Good Website Design: Use the free Google Keyword Tool to research how users really search for the content on your website and use the most popular keyword phrases in you taxonomy, tags, headlines and body copy.

Getting more revenue from your magazine content

Websites are not magazines. However, magazine content can be the basis of a successful periodical website that follows the basic rules of periodical websites design and content management.

4 Essentials for Website Homepage Design

Make a great first impression with these helpful tips

Long before our love affair with content marketing came the love of the Internet. The days of 56K modems didn't even deter the desire to experience a number of different websites; ones designed specifically for entertaining or educating, hosting topics from modern music to quantum physics. The tiny computer screen was the door to endless knowledge.

Throughout our years surfing the Web, we have come across sites that we visit regularly, and ones that were truly disappointing. The disappointing ones were typically designed poorly and had awful content on them. Needless to say, we stopped visiting those disappointing sites and honestly don't even remember their names.

Make your website memorable

Why were those websites designed so poorly? This question has been asked many times. It's assumed even then, that if someone was going to take the time and effort to create a website, shouldn't it be done correctly, in a manner that will encourage visitors to return? Then again, during that time the Internet was so new. Web design was in its infancy and best practices weren't yet established.

However, there is no excuse for it nowadays. There are a slew of best practices for web designers, many of which focus on the homepage design. As you may know, we here at the Mequoda Group have created a Website Design Scorecard. It's comprised of 14 Guidelines, which of course is not a complete list of best practices, but an essential set for effective design that will satisfy visitors and encourage them to return for your content.

4 Essentials in Website Homepage Design

Website Homepage Design Tip #1: Strategic Intent – You need direction for your website. If you want a visitor to sign up for a free email newsletter, click on a sponsored advertisement or even sign up for a paid membership, you need it to be perfectly clear to them. Entice them with a clear message and a clear design.

Website Homepage Design Tip #2: Content Webification – Design your website so your visitors know they're on the Internet. The Internet isn't like any other medium; not print, TV or radio. Take your content and make it compatible to the

Website Homepage Ideas

For more free white papers, visit <http://www.MequodaFree.com>

© 2012 Mequoda Group LLC

World Wide Web. We like to call this process “webification”. Offer videos, audio and other digital platforms for repurposing content that your audience will enjoy.

Website Homepage Design Tip #3: Relationship Building – Speak with your audience. Show them that you want to start a relationship and make it easy for them to sign up for your email list. Pay close attention to the language you use to convert visitors into subscribers. Your message needs to resonate with them.

Website Homepage Design Tip #4: Community Building – Do you encourage interaction between users and editors? How about between users? Doing so will help the number of subscribers and visitors increase, and will help relationships grow as your community gets stronger.

Those four website homepage design tips are essential, and a good starting point to get your design on the right path.

Homepage Design Insight From Mequoda's Systems Director

Nancy Horan discusses her experiences

Stepping into the world of online marketing or online publishing involves a lot of thought. You need to have a plan, a strategy to execute on that plan, and all of the right tools to allow for success.

If you're coming from the world of legacy publishing, or any other industry unrelated to the internet, the components of your website may be harder to establish than previously expected.

Upon entering the online area, you may have ideas on how your website homepage design should look. You may want a specific layout, colors, images and video to be part of your homepage design. It is of course always great to have creative insight, but also keep the aspect of usability in the front of your mind. You want your website to look great, but almost more importantly, you will need it to be user friendly. A website that doesn't cater to the audience's needs will be exited quickly.

A dialogue on website homepage design with Nancy Horan

For the past year and a half Nancy Horan has been the Systems Director of the Mequoda Group. During this time she has worked with many clients, ranging from new website design clients to Internet veterans. I asked her about design issues that come up that may not be obvious to someone not as design savvy as a systems director. Her answers were certainly interesting. They are definitely worth noting to anyone who operates a website of their own, or anyone about to take the leap into doing so.

CS: What are a couple of the biggest issues you've faced as Systems Director of the Mequoda Group?

Nancy Horan: When working with new website design, clients often decide on design changes that go against information architecture best practices. The Mequoda Design Team knows how to create the best design for user experience, yet sometimes clients want to follow a different path. It is often hard to convince clients to use our recommendations when they have their own idea of what their website should be.

The other issue I often face involves usability testing. Many clients want to eliminate this phase in order to save money. However, I strongly advise against it. Usability testing is key in creating the best user experience possible on a website. It is worth every penny spent in order to avoid user frustration and high abandon rates on the website. I tell clients whenever a change is made that it is important to test, test, test.

An outsider's thought process on website homepage design

Whether you are or not, consider for a moment that you're an outsider who does not know how to build websites.

If I was creating my own website I would want to take charge of the creativity behind its design. However, after hearing Nancy's comments on the matter, the need to focus on the usability of the site is clear. Ultimately, what's the point in having a website if no one wants to return after their first visit?

Conclusion

Increasing the load time and usability of your website homepage design will keep visitors coming back to your website. Taking our suggestions into consideration will help you reach your goal of a more user-friendly website.

For more free white papers, visit:

<http://www.MequodaFree.com>