

Website Development

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11 Design and Evaluation

We always notice really horrible websites that irritate or don't perform. We rarely notice good websites, taking them for granted. We look at what makes a good website and how to formally evaluate it.

11.1 The User

The user is the kind of person who is going to visit your website and then want to visit it again and again and again.

1. KISS - keep it sweet and simple. This is the fundamental rule.
2. Appropriate colours, fonts and graphics. What is appropriate for one age group, or kind of user, may not be for another.
3. Load time - 3 seconds maximum; any longer and users either get annoyed or move on.
4. Navigation - straightforward with clear menu system either along the top or down the left hand side, and able to reach any page from any page.
5. Consistent - entirely.
6. Informative, useful, up to date and complete.
7. Provides client contact details.

11.2 The Client

The client is the person who pays you money for writing and maintaining their website.

1. Presents the client in the best possible light, poor websites damage credibility, reputations and sales.
2. Advertises client's goods and services honestly and completely.
3. Wins friends and informs customers, users love coming back to the website.
4. Makes money for the client, otherwise its is a waste of time and resources.
5. Invites feedback, so that you get a users eye view of the website.

11.3 The Website Designer

Effective websites never stay the same for long. They change to meet new requirements, changing expectations and technological developments.

1. Separation of content and presentation, helps with implementing changes and managing size and complexity of large websites.
2. Clear box structure, helps control layout.
3. Descriptive division and class names, essential if you (or somebody) have to come back to the website and make changes at a later date.
4. Logical directory structure, helps manage size, complexity and growth.
5. Works on all recent browsers; there are still people who use Windows 98 and Windows Explorer 5.0!

11.4 Evaluation

Evaluation involves making informed judgements about a product or service against clear criteria. For example, evaluating <http://computing.lec.ac.uk/terrymarris> against user requirements:

1. List the criteria
 - to provide intended users, lecturers and students (aged typically between 16 and 30) on Level 3 Computing courses, with a collection of useful resources
 - to support Computing students following the Website Development unit
2. Describe the product
 - The website has just one page with a heading and three columns.
 - Each column, Website Development 2007-2008, Systems Analysis & Design 2006-2007 and Visual Web Development 2007-2008, contains a list of links to resources.
 - The font used throughout is clear, adequately sized and entirely blue (except for the update notice at the bottom of the page and the item numbers). The font can be re-sized by the user.
 - The links are also coloured blue and do not change after they have been visited, but an underline appears when the cursor hovers over them.
 - There is just one image - a static picture of the lecturer.
 - The website loads quickly - within 3 seconds, but the first link takes a lot longer, about 15 seconds. However, subsequent links are much quicker and load within 5 seconds.
 - The site was last updated in September 2007.
 - The email address of the author is provided, but not as a link.

3. Make informed judgements

- The website is simple and clear, but perhaps too much space is taken up by the image and title.
- The blue text shows up clearly on the white background. The distinction between link and non-link blue text is easily missed. The display is rather plain: younger students might like to see more imaginative use of colour, images and humour but older students and lecturers might appreciate the no-nonsense layout.
- Navigation is at its simplest because everything is on just one page.
- The columnar layout is useful and the layout entirely consistent.
- The website is useful for the intended users, largely up to date (except the Systems Analysis and Design column) but could include more subjects. The Visual Web Development has just one entry, but this may be because it is a new course and does not start until October 2007.
- The website does not invite feedback. The e-mail address of the lecturer is provided, but the user has to manually enter the address in their e-mail package. A contact form could usefully have been provided.
- Overall, the website does provide students and lecturers with a (limited) collection of resources and it provides adequate support for students on the Website Development unit.

You could provide similar evaluations from (a) the clients point of view and (b) the website designers point of view.

11.5 Exercises

1. Evaluate [Google.co.uk](http://www.google.co.uk) and [Lycos.co.uk](http://www.lycos.co.uk) as search engines from the users point of view.
2. Evaluate <http://www.running-fox.co.uk> from the client's point of view.
3. Evaluate your own website from the website designers point of view.
4. Visit www.webpagesthatsuck.com, choose a website from their 10 worst of 2006, and perform a complete evaluation of it.