Designing your Web Page

How Users Think

In order to design an effective web page, we first need to understand how users interact with websites. Basically, users' habits on the Web aren't that different from customers' habits in a store. Visitors glance at each new page, scan some of the text, and click on the first link that catches their interest or vaguely resembles the thing they're looking for. In fact, there are large parts of the page they don't even look at.

Usability, not the visual design, determines the success or failure of a web-site. Usability is making your website easy for users to quickly find the information they need. Remember that the user is the only person who clicks the mouse so you must consider the user for a successful web design. After all, if users can't find or use a feature, it might as well not exist.

Focus Users' Attention

As websites provide both static and dynamic content, some aspects of the user interface attract attention more than others do. Obviously, images are more eye-catching than text and sentences marked as bold are more attractive than plain text.

Focusing users' attention to specific areas of the site with a moderate use of visual elements can help your visitors to get from point A to point B without much thinking. The fewer question marks visitors have, and the better sense of orientation they have, the more trust they will have in the site's content.

Guide Users

The use of visually appealing 1-2-3-done-steps, large buttons with visual effects, and other guidelines help lead visitors through the site content in a very simple and user-friendly way. Letting the user see clearly what functions are available is very important. It doesn't really matter how this is achieved. What matters is that the content is well understood and visitors feel comfortable with the way they interact with the system.

Keep it Simple

The "keep it simple"-principle (KIS) should be a primary goal of site design. Users are rarely on a site to enjoy the design; furthermore, in most cases they are looking for the information *despite* the design. Strive for simplicity instead of complexity. Use a maximum of 3 typefaces and a maximum of 3 point sizes. Don't overuse graphics. Use them only to relate important content or navigation, not just as decoration. From a usability point of view, less is always more.

Include Whitespace

It's really hard to overestimate the importance of whitespace – blank space between paragraphs, images, or other elements. This space actually helps visitors understand the information presented on the screen. When a new visitor approaches a design layout, the first thing he or she tries to do is to scan the page and divide the content area into digestible pieces of information. Complex structures are

harder to read, scan, analyze and work with. If you have the choice between separating two design segments by a visible line or by some whitespace, it's usually better to use the whitespace option.

References

- 10 Principles of Effective Web Design (http://uxdesign.smashingmagazine.com/2008/01/31/10-principles-of-effective-web-design/)
- 10 Usability tips for Web Designers (http://www.webdesignerdepot.com/2008/12/10-usability-tips-for-web-designers/)