

Become a Web Warrior

*Are you putting your Web site to work for you?
Or, are you just putting a lot of work into your Web site?*

Creating a basic Web site that works for you means balancing form and function in the interest of your user. The longer you keep a user on your site, the more they will become engaged, and the more likely you will connect your cause with their intention.

Therefore, when working on different elements of the site, consider if that feature is really worth the user's time. Ask if the graphics load quickly enough and the contact information can be found easily. Ask if the design and atmosphere reflect your intention and your brand.

Function

The most effective Web sites have mastered three attributes of functionality: Usability, Compatibility and Navigation.

USABILITY. Usable sites are easy on the eyes and the mind. Paragraph text ranges from 8pt to 12pt font and headlines range from 14pt to 18pt. The fonts used are those created for screen projection such as Verdana and Georgia. And, there aren't more than 2-3 fonts or colors. When choosing colors, remember that black or darker colored fonts on light or white colored backgrounds are best for readability.

COMPATIBILITY. Make sure your site is compatible with major browsers on the market (e.g. Internet Explorer, Firefox, Safari). Frames, animation or flash content on your site may look different across platforms or not show up at all. Keep the size of each web page under 50KB and aim to keep load times under 8-10 seconds (thus being selective with graphics).

NAVIGATION. Web visitors are fickle. Anything more than a few clicks to locate a bit of information, and they're gone. So spend time developing your navigation and apply it consistently on every page of the site. And, be sure they can find their way home.

Form

Your Web site is a reflection of your brand and makes an impression. Make it representative and unique.

Representative Web sites reflect the look and feel of your company as an extension of the identity package. Brand consistency integrates fonts, colors, imagery and tone from print to the Web with a focus on function.

Unique Web sites pass the cut-and-paste test. If you cut out identifying elements such as your company name and logo from the Web site, could you just as easily paste another company in there? What about a competitor? Give your site personality to engage the user.

Visibility

Even the most perfectly designed site will be useless if no one knows about it. Make your URL easy to spell and remember. Whether the organization's name or a branded gimmick, you might also reserve variations of your URL such as .com, .org, .biz along with common misspellings to re-direct people where you want them to be.

Plan, too, for search engines with your content. A site packed with solid content will catch your audience's attention and help your ranking.



And don't forget a promotion plan. Use it to drive people to your Web site.

Maintenance

You're not done when the site "goes live." Frequent content updates reflect the currency of your value; timely e-mail replies indicate your commitment to service. So don't go live and go home. Stay in the game and use the Web to your advantage.