CONVERT VISITORS INTO CLIENTS WITH
WEBSAFE COLORS

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INTRODUCTION

We all know a great looking Web page when we see it, but it can be extremely difficult to take the page apart piece by piece and understand what exactly makes the site successful. It's a question that Web designers and marketers have been asking since the Internet initially gained popularity in the mid-90s: how do researchers discover your page, stay to explore it, and then act on an offer?

At Foster Web Marketing, we specialize in the answer – and we understand that the solution is one that changes regularly with technology, with the times, and with research. If someone tells you that they know absolutely all the answers to successful Web marketing and design, run! Our team knows that the world of Web design is evolving every day, and that the most we can do is study that evolution, create our own innovations, and apply timeless lessons and philosophies in the field.

Why should you care about Web design if it is still evolving? The simple truth is that a well-designed website can significantly help you build business, find clients, sell products, and establish a presence. The Internet continues to gain importance with each passing year in our world, and consumers are more and more likely to turn to Google when looking for a service than to flip through the Yellow Pages or even ask a friend. Many visitors to your site will be either looking for answers or comparing you to your competitors – and a user-friendly, informative, up-to-date, and emotionally affecting website will win out every single time.

Want to learn more? Let's take a look at exactly what it takes to build a website that attracts viditors and turns them into paying clients.

BRANDING AND CONSISTENCY: HOW TO CREATE CHARACTER AND EVOKE EMOTION

Small companies, businesses, and firms may not think that branding is that important; after all, many are not likely looking to build an international symbol like Coca-Cola, Apple, or Facebook. However, even if you are not planning to spend considerable time and effort on creating a strong brand that will be imprinted in customers' heads and on their hearts, some branding techniques are useful for companies of all shapes and sizes, from attorney Web pages to local non-profits, to personal pages and blogs.

What exactly is branding? Branding is a combination of symbols, images, fonts, colors, names, terms, and design themes that work together to create a lasting image of your company and differentiate you from your competition. When considering your new or renovated website, branding consists of a lot more than slapping on a logo – it is the overall look and feel of the space, the tone of the content, and the emotional crux of your message.

What can branding techniques do for my website? At the simplest level, branding is about consistency. Your website herd want to see the same voices, images, colors, and fonts as they navigate from your homepage to your article library to your video section to your contact page. They want a clear message and they do not want to feel lost or confused or they will leave! On the next level, branding is about creating a character: do you want your business to be perceived as fun, innovative, and progressive? Or assertive, hardworking, and serious? Or reliable, knowledgeable, and wise? Finally, a great brand will evoke a specific emotional response in readers. Hopefully, that emotion will lead many readers to call your number, request more information, hire you, trust you, or purchase your product.

Here are just a few ways you can successfully brand your website:

- Create a logo and position it near the upper left corner of your website.
- Choose a color scheme and stick with it on all pages.
- Choose one or two fonts (perhaps a serif and sans-serif style) that are easy to read, common, and not too big or too small.
- Choose a consistent tone of voice, and make sure all of your pages are written in this tone.
- Make sure to share your values and your philosophies with your readers.
- Make sure your readers understand that you have a higher goal, such as educating them, helping others, seeking justice, or making the world a better place.
- Carve out a unique personality that sets you apart from your competition.
- Use your colors, logo, voice, and personality to evoke an emotion in your readers that connects them with your product or service.

So, how do you successfully build this brand? Let's take a closer look at some of the components mentioned above.

CHOOSING A COLOR SCHEME: FIRST IMPRESSIONS COUNT

Whether they realize it or not, the first response that Web surfers will have to your page is an almost instant gut reaction to your color scheme. As your brain responds to the visual information it is receiving, it will quickly associate colors with instinctual feelings, cultural cues, and everyday associations. For example, a red and black page – which you might think looks bold and wonderful – may have readers thinking about blood, accidents, anger, mourning, and danger. A brown and yellow page that you might think is "earthy" may have readers thinking about bodily functions instead of enlisting your services.

Here are a few common color associations and what they can mean for your Web page color scheme:

- **Red**. While red is generally a strong and popular color, it can be a very aggressive choice for Web designers that is often associated with violence, injury, risk, rage, and revolution. Even its positive associations – romance, lust, warmth, and love – may not be appropriate for most companies.

- **Orange**. Orange, a color associated with movement, innovation, energy, individuality, fun and friendliness, can be a great choice for some companies, such as those offering light and fun products or entertainment services. However, certain orange hues that look great on your own monitor may look sickly or brownish on some computer screens.

- **Yellow**. While bright hues of yellow can convey happiness, positivity, enthusiasm, and warmth, dull shades can create feelings of age, sickliness, ill-humor, and, yes, urine. Choose black and yellow for your color scheme and you could have your readers acting overly cautious – those are the colors of hazard signs and bees.

- **Green**. Green is heavily associated with nature, life, the outdoors, safety, money, relaxation, and success. It is a top choice for companies marketing natural, organic, or healthy products.

- **Blue**. Blue is a top choice for attorney websites and others who want to convey authority, wisdom, calm, acceptance, trust, and order. No other color shares its unique combination of non-threatening sincerity and confident intelligence.

- **Purple**. This is a mystical color that relates to spiritual power, intuition, dreams, creativity, and empathy. A culturally feminine color, this choice is best for those designing websites regarding guidance, entertainment, or spirituality.

- **Brown**. Although brown can be seen as earthy, natural, and comforting, it can also be seen as dirty, dull, used, and low-tech. Brown websites not associated with food or nature have been found in studies to produce lower sales.

Choose Web-safe colors. When choosing a color scheme for your website, it is vital to understand that the colors you envision – or even the colors you see on your screen – might not be the exact colors that your readers see. Because different monitors show slightly different colors due to factors like settings, angles, and various Internet browsers, different people will see slightly different versions of your website. You might have picked a silver color to represent your company's technology and strength, but many of your readers could see grey. You might have picked a gold color to represent wealth and power, but many of your readers could see a mustardy yellow. Make certain that the colors your select will look good on a variety of screens and browsers by consulting with an experienced Web designer.

Pair colors carefully. Using two or three different colors together can be extremely successful, but it can also change the original feeling you meant for your website. Green and red are fine colors, but when paired together your readers will only be thinking about Christmas (which is only great if you are in the ornament business). In the same way, while black and white can both be very strong, bold, and clean choices, having an all black and white website can seem uninviting, amateurish, and out of date.

Make sure your site is still readable! You could have the most brilliant color scheme on planet earth, but it is absolutely useless if your website is difficult to read because of poorly contrasting backgrounds or an oddly colored font. Above all, don't have your colors overwhelm your content.

COLUMNS, BUTTONS & FONTS: THE KEYS TO MAKING YOUR SITE EASY TO USE

When it comes to the architecture of your website, there are a lot of experts who will tell you that there is absolutely only one way to do things – but it is tough to find two experts who will agree on what exactly that one way is. The truth of the matter is that you can have a successful two-column design or a successful three column design, and you can have square buttons or buttons with rounded edges and none of these choices will ruin your website forever. Web design preferences change somewhat frequently, and what is wrong today might be the next fresh idea tomorrow. However, as fashions come and go, some guidelines are timeless.

Instead of subscribing fervently to one type of template or another, we prefer to be guided by a few simple rules:

- Make sure your website is easy for all users to navigate.

- Make sure your website's message is clear within a few seconds of landing on the page.

- Make sure your website is easy to read.

- Make sure to update your website frequently.

- Make sure all of the most vital information can be seen without scrolling.

- Embrace simplicity and white space.

If you follow these guidelines, it will save you from falling victim to the latest trends and cure-alls – and ending up with a page that will quickly look stale (and exactly like your competition). You will also achieve an end result that is both user-friendly and unique. Let's take closer look at some of the elements mentioned above:

Choosing a font. It is vital to choose a font that is easy to read, that doesn't draw attention to itself, and that is available widely on both Macs and PCs. Generally, we recommend Arial, Verdana and Trebuchet for body text. Many designers recommend serif fonts for body text (fonts that have embellished letters) and sans-serif fonts for headlines (fonts that do not have embellished lettering) for headlines. However, there are many exceptions to these rules. Again, as long as the font is sized correctly and easy for users to read, it could be the best choice for you and your company.

Creating buttons. Many Web designers are on a quest to design the perfect button – and you may see a variety of buttons as you surf the Web: round, three-dimensional, shaded, and shiny. But what should a button ultimately accomplish on a website? At Foster Web Marketing, we believe that buttons should solve problems and answer questions, and our use of buttons reflects that. For example, one of our popular banner designs includes a three-button cluster at the top of the page that attempts to address the most common reasons readers visit the page. For example, an accident attorney's website might have three buttons that say, "I was in an accident," "I think I need to speak to a lawyer," and "I was injured and it wasn't my fault."

Column design. There are advantages to both three-column and two-column website layouts – and the choice that you make may depend on your own goals for your website and your personal preferences. A two-column design offers a narrower page width, a cleaner look, and a greater focus on the most important content. A three-column design allows for a larger variety of information above the fold and less scrolling, as well as a larger range of options for content display. Whichever you choose, remember that it is important to keep up-to-date and regularly changing content above the fold, such as new blog entries, news items, or new offers.

Navigation menus. Menus are the key to making your website easy to use and correctly orienting your readers immediately after their arrival. As with column design, navigation menus often fall victim to trends and "innovations," some of which can greatly confuse readers. Simple, clear, and relatively large navigational buttons at the top and right of the page are a good solution for most.

CONTENT FOR READERS & RANKERS

One big mistake that businesses make when designing their website is to erroneously think about content as nothing more than filler or small print. For the best results and the most conversions, though, it is best to think of content for what it can be: a great tool for connecting with your users and a fantastic way to improve your search engine rankings. A healthy mix of keywords, hyperlinks, and subheads can help your SEO goals significantly, while the correct tone and character of the writing can help your readers connect with your message.

Here are just a few quick tips for effective and affecting content:

- **Keep both the human reader and the search engine in mind.** It is absolutely possible to address the deepest concerns of your reader while also writing for search engine optimization without hurting the natural tone or thrust of your writing. And remember: search engines want the most informative, highest quality, and most helpful articles to come out on top.

- **Avoid large blocks of text.** No one wants to wade through a huge sea of text, especially when attempting to learn about something new. Keep your sentences short and simple, and break up paragraphs with pictures, graphs, lists, and subheads. Don't bother writing something you doubt anyone would want to read.

- **Stick with a consistent tone.** Will you write in the "I" voice or the "We" voice? Will you be warm and friendly or professional and assertive? Is it appropriate to inject humor into your site? Answer these questions and then stick to your answers.

- **Address your reader's concerns instead of stroking your ego.** Businesses often want to focus on what they've accomplished and what they care about, but the most successful websites focus on what their readers want to accomplish and what they care about. It's a small but vital distinction. It's great that you went to an Ivy League school, but your reader would much rather know how you are going to help them get a settlement from their car accident.

Finally, it's important to note that many people believe that they can write their own content when they are in fact better off choosing a Web content creator with a professional writing background and SEO training. There are certainly people who can successfully write for their Web page, but it is important to know when to hand off such tasks to those with specialized marketing experience.

VIDEOS: ALLOWING YOUR READER TO MEET YOU FACE TO FACE

Videos on websites used to be extremely troublesome: they would take forever to load (or they would play haltingly), they would be expensive to produce and edit, and they would seem disruptive or surprising to readers. *This has all changed dramatically.*

Today, many Web surfers seek out videos, expect videos, and are moved by videos. At the same time, improving technology has made it significantly easier and less expensive to embed professional and persuasive videos onto your website. All in all, millions of Web surfers watch videos on the Internet each day, and many have begun to prefer watching short video clips to reading information on the Web.

What are some of the major advantages of video?

- **Video creates a personal interaction with the reader.** Within seconds of seeing a video, a Web surfer has seen your face and heard your voice. This gives you a significant advantage over sites that don't use video – sites that a browser might think are faceless, impersonal, or cold. Videos can be especially important if you are promoting a service that involves working directly with you and your staff, as readers can become comfortable with you and "meet" you immediately.

- **Video is a fast and easy way to deliver your message.** Put very simply, some visitors may prefer watching a video to reading a block of text. Visual and aural learners will be more drawn to your message and more likely to act, while all visitors will have another way to learn about what you do and what you are offering. Some research has found that videos also make visitors stay on your website longer.

- **Videos can help drive traffic to your website.** Web surfers are actively searching for videos, and with the correct SEO, your videos can help readers find you. Posting your videos on websites, like Youtube and Facebook, can also attract new readers.

It is important to note that not all videos are created equal. Just as a video with great sound, a great script, and great editing can help improve the effectiveness of your website, a "home video" quality clip with poor light and poor resolution could cost you customers and clients. You wouldn't design your company website by yourself, and you probably shouldn't create your own videos without professional guidance, either. Find a specialist to help you create and integrate video into your website.

CALLS TO ACTION AND CONVERSION TOOLS:
A READER IS JUST A READER UNTIL THEY TAKE THE NEXT STEP

Most Web designers know that every good website should have a clear call to action: a simple, effective way to get someone who is surfing the Web for information to take the next step and reach out to you.

In the old days of Web design, a call to action might be found at the very bottom of page, after scrolling through several blocks of text – and it could be nothing more than a hyperlink or a phone number. However, after years of researching how surfers browse websites and make decisions, we've learned a lot about what it takes to create a successful call to action:

- **Before you call your readers to action, present a problem and a solution.** Readers won't act unless they believe they are going to solve an issue and make their lives better. Most readers who find and visit your page are looking for something: information, an opportunity, an object, an answer or someone to talk to. Understand clearly what your reader needs before deciding what to offer your readers.

- **Make each call to action, big, bold, and obvious.** Don't force readers to scroll down to see a call to action – keep each call "above the fold." Use buttons that are large and in a contrasting color to the rest of your website color scheme. Use strong and active verbs, like "call," "donate," "download," or "subscribe."

- **Have a call to action on every page.** When using search engines to find your page, many readers will not end up on your main page – they will end up on a specific blog entry, article, or subpage. Because most readers will not navigate back to your homepage naturally, it is vital that each individual page offers them opportunities to act. Put your toll-free number or report offer in your main banner or have a quick contact form in your right hand column.

Perhaps the most important advance we have made when it comes to successfully converting readers is the understanding that different readers have very different preferences when it comes to taking the next step. While one reader might love speaking to a real human on the telephone, another reader might be more comfortable chatting with someone in a pop-up window. Still another person might want to request more information before making a decision or pop in at a physical office location. As you offer more choices, a greater amount of people will be able to find one that they are comfortable with pursuing.

Here are just a few offer ideas:

- A telephone number, preferably toll-free and trackable.
- An opportunity to chat with a live operator.
- An opportunity to download a report or request more information.

- A "Contact Us" page that includes a physical address, office hours and a contact form.
- A quick contact form that appears in a side column.
- An opportunity to sign up for a newsletter.
- An opportunity to schedule a free meeting or consultation.

🚫 DESIGN ELEMENTS TO AVOID — AT ALMOST ALL COSTS!

So far, we've talked about a variety of great tips, approaches, research results, and theories regarding effective and hard-hitting Web design. However, we should also mention some common pitfalls that could hurt your search engine optimization, your user experience, and your conversion rate. While none of the below rules are written in stone, focus groups and studies have found that these elements, ideas, and add-ons simply don't often help companies successfully reach their goals, solidify their brand, or properly paint their image.

- **Avoid clutter and animation.** When it comes to Web design, simplicity rules. Busy backgrounds, flash animation, and other unnecessary bells and whistles aren't just tacky – they also make it difficult for the reader to navigate your website and understand your message and call to action.

- **Say no to pop-up windows.** Web users find pop-ups to be distracting and often associate pop-up windows with cheap advertisements. Many Web users have their browsers block all pop-up windows from even appearing, and others will close pop-ups without even glancing at them. Live chat boxes are the exception though.

- **Background music doesn't offer benefits.** There is simply not a good reason to have background music on the site. It does not aid the message of your website and only serves to distract or annoy guests. On older computers, it can also slow how quickly the website loads.

- **Ignoring contrast is a big mistake.** We can't stress this enough: never, ever let design get in the way of people being able to easily read your page! Grey text on a while background may look sleek and professional, but if users can't read it without squinting and tilting their head, you might as well not have a website in the first place.

- **Funky fonts repel readers.** Sure, your website might look different if it has a fancy-looking or novel font, but it could also make your website seem corny and difficult to read. There is a reason that a small handful of fonts are commonly used: they are proven to be easy to read and pleasing to the eye.

- **Copied content offends readers and rankers.** Copied, duplicated, or shared Web content can be cheap or free – but there's a good reason people don't pay top dollar for it. Recycled content can seriously harm your search page rankings and turn off readers. Even if readers don't recognize that the content is canned, they will probably notice grammatical errors, poor writing, and the lack of a unique message and voice.

As you can see, most poor and harmful website design elements break the basic rules of good Internet design: they distract readers from your unique message, cloud your call to action, and hurt your search engine rankings.

CONCLUSION

This is simply a brief overview of the building blocks that go into creating a successful brand and building a easy-to-navigate, energetic, and reader-centered website. We don't expect anyone to become an expert in all of these areas, or to keep up with the ever-changing technologies and evolutions in the industry. At Foster Web Marketing, we have a large team of specialized professionals – including video producers, coders, designers, content writers, and SEO experts – who are each passionate about the individual subjects that we covered above in just a few paragraphs. Partnered with us, you can ensure that your website stays up-to-date, fresh, and effective as innovations in Web design, social media, and Web marketing continue.

In the past, companies were judged by their storefronts, their newspaper ads, or, later, their television commercials. Today, we live in a world where businesses are increasingly evaluated by their online presence, and where the average person is more likely to type search words into Google than to open a phone book or walk into an office. It is simply vital that you not only take advantage of marketing your business on the Web, but that you do so in a way that makes you shine among your competition.

Do you have an out-of-date website, a website that isn't generating leads, or a website that isn't showing up on search engines? Did you read this report and realize that your website isn't being used to its full potential? Partner with us today.

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