A Dozen Ways to Create World Wide Web WOW!!!

Whether your goal is to make some money or to make a difference, there are twelve ways to add some "wow" to your organizational or departmental site.

1. Choose a good name.

Your web site address is so important. Choose a name that is memorable. If you're going to use the initials of your organization's name, limit that to no more than four letters. Any more than this is tougher to remember. For example, LT ComDesign's former web site address was www.LTCD.net.

2. Understand your purpose.

Why do you have a web site? So many people build sites without understanding why they even have one. Answer these questions: Why does my organization need this site? Why do my visitors need this site?

3. Plan, plan, plan.

A plan will simply help you focus. Your plan should help you define your site's purpose, declare the site's goals, identify the target audience, and describe the site's features and how they'll work.

4. Build for them, not for you.

You mustn't forget why you're doing a site in the first place. It's for your users, not you! Your users have a specific purpose for visiting your site, and you should want to help them accomplish it. It's best to focus on what they need to do and not on what you want to say.

5. Meet a need.

This is very basic but must be said: To attract more visitors, you must fill a need. When you meet a need and offer an effective solution for doing so, people will be knocking down your door (or punching those keys) to find you!

6. Stay focused.

Get rid of that "add-on" spirit. More stuff is not always better. Users define a good web site as a simple one. All the extras end up being more distracting than anything else.

7. Take the easy way out.

The easier your site is, the more people will use it. If you truly want to gain momentum with your site, be safe and keep it simple: Make choices obvious, choose clear names, and follow the design conventions people have come to expect.

8. Make it snappy.

Don't let all of your efforts go to waste by building a web site that loads pages s-l-o-w-l-y. People are short on both time and patience and will not stick around to wait on your pages to load.

9. Be consistent.

Get rid of that temptation to do something different on each page! Consistency is key to a usable site. As visitors move from page to page, they expect things to remain in more or less the same place. So don't move your navigation or page elements around. Pick a system, and stick with it.

10. Choose colors carefully.

Unlike most print projects, where color is expensive, web sites can use unlimited colors for free. While this may be liberating, it's also dangerous! It's hard to use a lot of colors well. The best approach is to keep it simple. Choose color combinations you've seen before (and know you like). And don't choose too many: 1 - 3 colors can go a long way.

11. Stay in touch with email.

Stay top of mind to your site visitors by sending scheduled email communications. People will visit your site when they remember you, so keep them coming back by sending emails. Don't overdo it though; don't let your email reminders give way to harassment.

12. Freshen things up.

People will visit your site more often if you keep your site fresh. Updated content need not be extensive. Simply add new projects to your online portfolio, offer a tip or daily morsel, or run a promotion. But remember: Updates are effective only if your users know about them. Use email to keep them informed, and promote new items right at the front door.

Adapted from The Unusually Useful Web Book, June Cohen, New Riders

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