

Website Useability Tips

It's amazing when you get the chance to learn about a topic you've been wanting to study - just how much you can absorb in a short amount of time. In efforts to restructure my current website, I have recently read two books on backend site programming and development options and two books on important aspects of web design from a usability perspective. Coming down from this huge learning curve - I realized that there are some simple tips I can pass along that might help you evaluate the useability of your own site.

If you have a moment, I'd appreciate if you click here to participate in a brief (private) survey so I can provide targeted and relevant marketing information and free resources on my new website in the future.

Tip #1

Welcome to 2007, Lose the Flash Intro:

Like most busy people accustomed to using the internet regularly, whose attention spans have shrunk rapidly (to an average of 30 seconds) due to media saturation, potential clients really don't want to wait for your flash intro page to load - no matter how cool the graphics may be. There is nothing impressive about wasting 15-30 seconds watching random images fade in and out when in reality, all I'm doing is impatiently watching the streaming "loading" graphic at the bottom of the screen, contemplating hitting the back button to return to the Google search from whence I came and hit the next search result in the list (the one below yours).

Ultimately, people are more impressed by clean, organized structure of a sites' main menu and type of content as well as the intelligence of the opening volley of your home page introduction - which should be kept short and sweet and lead immediately into the most important sections of your site... your track record, costs and what sets you apart from your competitors. Your potential clients will be more likely to research and hire you based on the last three criteria than your saavy flash intro.

Tip #2

Provide Content and Organized Clearly Titled:

If you have an article on your site that provides valuable information that would be useful to your website visitor and have the added bonus of keeping them on your site longer and possibly hiring you, don't randomly title the article in your attempts to be clever and notable. Call it exactly what it is and put it in appropriately labeled sub-categories under appropriately labeled menu pages.

For example, an article including 3 valuable tips for saving money on car insurance shouldn't be called "Why the cute green gecko is so rad." Random titles are for personal blog entries, TV advertising and websites in the entertainment industry. Another Valuable point to consider: Spiders and Bots - the automated programs sent out by search engines to review and index websites, are looking for a reason to list your site within the database of their particular search engine. Along with the metatags set up on your site - you want to make sure that your content and the organization of it are relevant to the services you are offering so that you will be more accurately listed. You will be more effective in obtaining a higher ranking if the keywords and titles of your articles pertain to the actual content therein. Otherwise, you could be spending a lot of money on SEO and making the job much more difficult.

Finally - if those article are more than 2 years old, archive or unpublish them! Keeping your content updated keeps your site fresh and keeps you appearing relevant. Users don't want to see the same material on your site that was there when it was first published in 1995.

Tip #3

Easy Navigation or "Where the heck am I?":

Ever heard of breadcrumbs? Neither had I until I started reading about web navigation. It turns out that it was the handy tool I always liked when I was shopping on certain e-commerce sites - the one that showed me where I was in relation to the overall site heirarchy. Breadcrumbs are useful for all sites but especially for sites with a lot of varied content and multiple navigation layers - they help you find the optimal path back to the original pages you came from without having the click "back" multiple times or search multiple sections to find what you are looking for. Another useful although somewhat obvious tool for navigation is displaying an obvious page name for each site page. Very often the menu and page layout will appear almost exactly the same no matter which page of the site a user is visiting and it can be confusing for them to tell which page they are on. Highlighting the section through a tabbed menu, or just an obvious page title can make a huge difference and cut down on user frustration.