



WEBSITE DESIGN CHECKLIST – S&J Enterprises

When building your site, PLEASE ADHERE TO COPYRIGHT RULES. Just because something is on the web DOES NOT mean it is free for the taking/using. This applies to photos, music, graphics and page content. Before using make sure, you have owner permission unless there are specific guidelines listed about utilizing content from a given page. Rearranging a few words of content or presenting information in a different venue, but using content taken from another source could still be considered copyright infringement. Be original.

Prior to beginning the design or re-design on any page, place the 'NoIndex,NoFollow' tag in the <Head> tag box under the Advanced tab on Properties Editor. This prevents the search engines from indexing an incomplete site or page that could hurt you in the rankings. Copy and paste the following tag in the <Head> tag box for every page. Once the site is complete, remove the tags and republish the page(s). <META NAME="ROBOTS" content="NOINDEX,NOFOLLOW"> Leave the tag on any pages you do not want indexed such as Legal and Privacy policy pages, etc.

1. Load Time

- Slow loading sites are the number one gripe of viewers.
- There is **no magic number** for what page weight should be.
- 8 - 10 seconds is acceptable load time (keep in mind that with more high-speed users this number could well change). 8-10 seconds on dial up means page weight has to be less than it does on high-speed systems.
- Load time is now one of the factors that search engines are using to determine how a site places in searches.
- Judge your page weight by your targeted audience, but 'skinny' pages are always best.
- Check major competitors page weights.

2. Navigation

- The navigation or menu should be located in the top portion of the page or the top left hand sidebar and should be in the same place on every page. It should stand out from the banner/header/logo to make it easy for viewers to find and use. A Home (Index) page link should always be included.
- Longer pages benefit from having bottom navigations in addition to the main navigation.
- If the menu provided by Homestead is used then add a secondary navigation (bottom) using plain text OR a site map page using plain text and links to the respective pages. Place a plain text link to the site map on at least the Home page. Search Engines cannot 'read' java script, which is what HS navigations are, and thus are not able to follow the links through your site to index the pages. Tutorial on site maps at: www.homesteadconnection.com/Tips-AddASitemap.html
- Use sub-navigations to reduce main navigation clutter.

Example: Your site is about pets

Rather than trying to list everything in the main navigation as below:

Home – Cats – Dogs – Birds – Guinea Pigs, etc.

Use navigation such as:

Home – Pets – About – Contact

The pet page would then offer a sub-navigation listing the individual pet pages.

Another way to address this is to use two navigations - one that has links to the general pages; Home, About, Contact, Site Map and a second navigation in the side bar that lists and links to the individual pet pages.

- To help visitors navigate and reduce scrolling on longer pages use a 'Back to Top' option.

- Link your logo/header to the Home page. It offers viewers a quick way back to the main page and is beneficial in the event they get totally lost within your site.

3. Page Design

- You have 10 seconds to capture a visitor's interest. Your most important information, the info that the visitor is presumably looking for based on the search criteria that brought them to your site, should be 'above the fold'. This is the area that a visitor sees when the page fully loads and before having to scroll. Different screen resolutions will effect where 'above the fold' actually is for each user.
- Your design should be pleasing, appropriate to your subject and present a professional appearance. Use of animations, hit counters, and so forth detract from the professionalism of a site. Use of guest books should be appropriate to the site. (Not recommended for use on business or professional service sites). The more of these non-essential elements on a page the greater the page weight.
- Color scheme/page color and design should remain consistent throughout the site. This helps the visitor maintain a sense of where they are if the site has many pages and presents the site in a professional light.
- Fonts and Text should be easy to read and fall within the following guidelines:
 - Use a web safe font (see Fonts below)
 - Use mixed case
 - Minimize the number of different fonts and colors
 - Use bold for emphasis only
 - Avoid large blocks of bold text
 - Save underlining for active links only
 - Use italics sparingly
 - Font size should be readable – avoid using VERY LARGE or very small font sizes. Size 10 or 11 is usually adequate. This will depend upon the font you use, as a size 10 in one font can be larger or smaller than a size 10 in another. Just make sure you aren't screaming at your visitors or sending them running for a magnifying glass.
- Be sure there is enough contrast between the font color and the background to make the content easily read. Don't overlook your link, visited link and hover colors as well.
- Page Width: As more people purchase larger monitors, the 1024 width page is becoming increasingly popular and 1280 is a strong second. A page width over 800 will require people who use an 800 x 600 resolution to scroll not only vertically, but horizontally as well. Judge your page width by your targeted audience and what your site stats show.
- Quick Sites and other templates are great for getting a site up quickly. Both lack originality, have inherent issues and lack a personalized touch. The web site designer should make them as 'personalized' as possible. The copyright/footer on Quick Sites is a link to Homestead and looks unprofessional. Create your own copyright and footer using plain text.
- Avoid centering blocks of text. Use left or justified text and save centering for titles, captions or headers.
- Copyright information should be present on all pages.
- Sites with more than 5 pages should offer visitors a site map or directory of all the pages within the site. The listed pages should link back to the respective pages within the site. A short description of the page, utilizing the main keyword/phrase for that page can be used or simply list the page titles. An xml-site map for the search engines is also recommended.
- Present the main points of the page in a larger, bolder font. This enables viewers who skim pages to pick out the high points in just a few seconds.

- Underline links. Viewers are used to the underline and know that it indicates there is additional information available. Removing the underline can remove your chances that the visitor will find and use the link.
- The purpose of the site should be clearly stated and offer the viewer information pertaining to the theme of the site.
- Text should be limited to 65 - 70 characters per line. Studies indicate that anything over or under that makes it more difficult for viewers to read.

4. Content

- It is helpful to have a search capability on larger sites to enable viewers to search within the site for information. Master.com offers a free on-site search function. <http://www.master.com>
- Correct spelling, grammar and sentence structure are important. A site full of spelling errors, poor sentence structure and grammatical errors can give the visitor a poor impression of the site and thus the product or service offered. If you are targeting English speaking areas and English isn't your first language it will benefit you to have someone else edit your page who is familiar with the nuances of the language.
- Page length should not be excessive. Consider breaking up the content on a page(s) that requires more than 2 - 3 scrolls. Create a new page that focuses on a new topic or offer a link to the next page. Technical articles can run to 4 scrolls, but at that point they too should be carried over to another page.
- Descriptive page titles are **very** important for both Search Engine Optimization and for viewer information. A page titled Home does not give the SE's good descriptive text to utilize and if a visitor bookmarks the page all they would see in their Favorites is Home.
- Unless your business name is very well known avoid using it in the title. If you feel a majority of viewers would search for you under the business name then place it last in the title text.
- Content on the page should be at least 250 words of **informative** text. It should contain the keywords/phrases you are hoping to be found for and provide your visitors with knowledge about your page/product. Avoid sales hype without benefit of explanation. "We Are the Best" - how are you the best? What makes you stand out from the competition? Give the viewer a reason to want to know more. Explain your product or service and what it can do for the potential buyer.

5. Graphics – Photos - Elements

- All photos and important graphics should have alt text added. Search Engines are unable to see/read pictures and thus you need to provide them with content. Some people view pages in text only and the visually handicapped often use an electronic reader. Providing alt text gives these types of viewers some information about the photo or graphic.
- If your logo/header that appears on every page (or should!) is a graphic, it too can have alt text added. A site with only a few pages can use unique alt text for each page logo. Sites with many pages can simply use something like, "Site Name logo".
- Optimize photos and graphics to reduce load time. Simply making them smaller in size (width x height) does not reduce the weight. Use a photo-editing program to reduce the resolution as well as the size. Consider using thumbnails if you have many photos. The thumbs, when clicked on, can link to a larger view.
- Animated graphics and flashing, spinning, scrolling objects should be avoided. They add little to the informative aspect of a site, expand the load time, increase the code the SE spiders have to crawl through and most visitors consider them an annoyance.
- The music element should give the viewer the option of turning it on/off and Off should be the default.

- Photos and graphics should be appropriate to the site content and not used just to fill space. White space can be a positive as it gives the viewer's eye a rest.

6. Miscellaneous

- Internal linking (links from one place on a page to another place on that page or to a different page) is important for Search Engine optimization. This shouldn't be overdone, but used in an appropriate manner.
- Make contact information easy to find. Incorporate it into your navigation or logo. Viewers tend to be more trusting of sites that offer 'real' contact information such as a phone number, business address, fax number, etc.
- Meta tags, Meta descriptions, Meta keywords should be used employing good SEO techniques. Each page should have its own unique Meta tags. The SEO Building Blocks™ e book has comprehensive information and instruction on how to optimize your site for the search engines.
www.seobuildingblocks.com/TheLearningCenter.html
- Check links regularly to be certain they are not broken.
- Pages within a site should load in the same browser window. Off-site pages should load in a new window - This keeps your site open if the visitor clicks a link that takes them to another site.
- Keep your site fresh. Add new content, new photos, move things around. This indicates to the search engines that the site isn't stale and also gives frequent visitors a different perspective.
- Sites that are loaded down with ads and links tend to send visitors away rather than keeping them on the site and can be deterrents to receiving good ranking with search engines. Create professional, informative sites that offer something more than ads and links.
- Visitors are most likely not going to view pop-ups since the majority of web users now have some type of pop-up blocker. If your information is important put it on the page, not in a pop-up. Pop-ups are an annoyance and 'cheapen' a site. Kontera ads are particularly annoying in this regard.
- Sites should view the same in different browsers. Check your site in IE, Fire Fox, Chrome and Safari to be sure there is no element overlap or misplaced text as browsers do not always render code the same.

7. Fonts

- Keep in mind when you venture outside of the basic fonts that a creative font will not be seen by viewers UNLESS they have the font installed on their own computer. The browser will show the default text (Times New Roman, unless the viewer has changed the default font). The only way to ensure that all viewers would see the font would be to turn it into a graphic.
- Web safe fonts are fonts that are present on all or most computer systems and can be relied on to display consistently on web pages. The fonts most safe to use are:
 - Arial / Helvetica
 - Times New Roman / Times
 - Courier New / Courier
 - Verdana
 - Georgia
 - Comic Sans MS
 - Trebuchet MS
 - Arial Black
 - Impact
 - Tahoma

**For Complete Information About
WEBSITE DESIGN AND SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION**
www.seobuildingblocks.com