

Websites: The Good and the Bad¹

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This publication on understanding what makes a good and bad website is the second of a four-part series on writing and designing for the web. This series also covers how to write and design a basic web page, understand the difference between good and bad websites, and develop visual elements for the web.

What makes a good website?

Before you begin making a website, take the following questions into consideration:

- *What is the purpose of this website?*
- *What needs to be communicated?*
- *Who is the target audience?*
- *What does your audience want to know, and what do you want to convey?*

After you have answered these questions, you are ready to conceptualize the web pages. Here are some ideas as you get ready to build your website:

- *Create a site map for the website.* This is an organizational chart of the entire website and how the pages link together.
- *Think about the sites you use on a regular basis.* What do you like or dislike about them? Use these answers to help you incorporate the “likes” and exclude the “dislikes” in your own website.

- *Decide on the site’s theme and style.* Will it be more informational or educational, or will it be entertaining?
- *Determine how many pages you will design.* Small personal sites can be three or four pages, while large sites can have dozens or hundreds of pages.
- *Draft a wireframe for each of the planned pages.* A wireframe is a simple sketch of a page to plan where content, navigation, and other elements will be displayed.

Websites follow the conventional rules of good document layout and design. They are, after all, a form of a page and are similar to print when it comes to good use of design. Refer to the EDIS publication series *Document Design* (https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/topic_document_design) to review elements of design.

A well-designed website contributes to a positive user experience (UX). An important element of the user experience is how a user interacts with the website’s content, navigation, and other interactive features. This element is known as the user interface (UI).

The interactive features of a website add some additional factors that should be taken into consideration when determining what makes a good website. For example, users typically do not read web pages in depth; they scan them, trying to pick out cues to information for which they are looking. Users do not like long scrolling pages. They prefer shorter pages that are contained within the page window and do not require lots of scrolling. They like white space

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and visual graphics, but graphics need to be complementary to the rest of the page and not too big and overpowering, which can slow download times. Good websites are

- accurate, helpful, and useful,
- easy to use and navigate (UI),
- visually interesting,
- informative, and
- not cluttered or difficult to read.

Readers want visually-interesting web pages. You should use these tips to attract attention and maintain readers' interest in your web pages:

- Give your page a theme and style (consistent color, font, page elements).
- Give readers something interesting to look at from the first page.
- Design your pages to be visual, not text-driven.
- Do not overuse animation and effects.
- Anticipate how your page will be navigated and the content will be consumed.

Make every word count. In most cases, visitors are not on your site for very long. Put yourself in the shoes or, in this case, at the fingertips of the visitor. What would she be looking for on your website? If she finds what she is looking for, she will return to you again and again as a resource.

With an increasing number of users accessing websites on mobile devices, it is also important to ensure that your website is scalable to a variety of screen sizes and mobile-friendly.

What makes a bad website?

Websites provide the opportunity to use your creativity to design with graphics, color, white space, photos, and interactive elements in an almost unlimited variety of ways. But since the goal of a website is to communicate, you also need to think about designing your website so that the elements work together harmoniously and communicate in an effective and appealing way. There are some general rules of thumb when it comes to designing websites and some things you want to avoid if you want your website to be an effective form of communication.

An effective Web page uses complimentary colors, text broken into columns rather than running the width of the page, and white space around the graphics to give the page a bright, open look. A poor web page does the

opposite—poor choices of colors (like red text on a black background); text that runs the width of the page, making it hard to read, and too many elements crammed onto the page; multiple links; and graphics that have been stretched and distorted. Furthermore, websites that are slow to load, contain broken links, and are not accessible on mobile devices contribute to a poor user experience (UX).

Reference

Telg, R. & Irani, T.A. (2012). *Agricultural communications in action: A hands-on approach*. Delmar: Clifton Park, NY.