

10 Tips for getting the most out of designing your home page

1. **PLAN AHEAD.** *Designing a home page need not be arduous, but it does deserve the same serious attention to planning as, say, a piece of conventional marketing collateral. That means identifying and honing your key messages, organizing them in a logical structure, developing a prototype page design, testing it on representative users and refining it through successive iterations.*
2. **KEEP IT SIMPLE.** *The home page is to the rest of your Web site as a book's cover is to its contents. The design should be bold and understandable at a glance. Don't clutter it up with unnecessary details or overcomplicated layouts. Use it to make a few essential points clearly: who you are, what you offer, what's inside.*
3. **KEEP IT LEAN.** *These days most users access the Web via modem, which means they spend a lot of time waiting for pages to load. Don't add to the wait. It's best to use 64 colors or less, and to hold top-of-the-page images to around 40 kilobytes or less. Remember to design for the lowest common denominator: small, standard-resolution monitors, not big, high-resolution screens.*
4. **GET VISUAL.** *Yes, it has to be lean and mean, but you also have to catch surfers' attention. Use imaginative layouts and good-looking typography to give your Web pages a unique and identifiable look. Graphical content should be some practical value. Avoid empty window dressing. To save time, many users set their browsers to ignore graphics; all they see is text. It's essential that any important messages or links contained in graphics be duplicated in textual form. Test-drive your page in text-only mode to make sure it works.*
5. **MAKE IT EASY TO NAVIGATE.** *One of the home page's primary roles is as a navigational tool, pointing people to information stored on your Web site or elsewhere. Make this function as effortless as possible. In the interest of clarity and speed, keep the number of links on the home page to a few high-level categories (e.g., "The Company," "The Products," "Services and Support"). Also, don't bury information too deep in the page hierarchy. Stepping through five or more links can get pretty tedious.*
6. **INCLUDE THE ESSENTIALS.** *Here are a few things most every home page should have: a header that identifies your Web site clearly and unmistakably, an e-mail address (such as your webmaster's) for reporting problems, copyright information as it applies to online content, and contact information, such as a mailing address and phone number.*
7. **RECYCLE.** *In many cases, your home page (and other Web pages) need not be created from scratch. It's often possible to reuse text, graphics and resources from existing sources: customer brochures, public relations documents, technical manuals or databases. Some of this can be adapted to your Web pages with little effort.*
8. **KEEP IT FRESH.** *Users could get jaded if your Web site never changes. Encourage return visits by giving them something new to look forward to. Include your Web site in your established publicity and document programs, so that new information (such as press releases), appears concurrently on your Web pages.*
9. **FOLLOW THROUGH.** *Don't make promises you can't keep. Don't solicit input from users, such as forms-based orders, until you have a fulfillment process in place to handle them. Don't list a contact number unless you're ready to respond promptly. Ensure that links are in working order.*
10. **INVITE USERS IN.** *After all the work you've put in sprucing up your home, it would be a pity if no one came. Make your home page easy to find. Notify other Web sites, such as those on related subjects, that might want to link to yours. Publish your URL on the Internet and through traditional media such as print ads, PR documents and sales collateral.*