

## Poor web page design will turn visitors away

Just as there's no point having a 'great site', when you have no traffic, there is no point generating traffic to a poorly designed site. Business promotion strategies should be viewed side-by-side with web design techniques.

Even experienced webmasters and marketers have at one time or another been guilty of poor design, which has in turn, lost traffic.

Poor site design can affect traffic generation in several key ways:

1. Poorly designed pages often perform badly on the major search engines. Chances are, if you haven't taken the time to produce a quality site, you will have forgotten to include Meta information in your underlying code, which is used by search engines to determine rankings (as discussed in previous articles).
2. If the visitors have arrived via search engines, reciprocal links, or otherwise, and your home page is attractively built and uncluttered, you have won the first part of the battle. Now, you must keep the visitors in your site. If navigation is poor, and your other pages are hard to find, you visitors will leave as soon as they arrived.

There are a number of classic 'mistakes' made on a daily basis by web designers. Even experienced webmasters and marketers have at one time or another been guilty of poor design, which has in turn, lost traffic.

1. Poor navigation - Getting visitors to your home page is only the beginning of the battle. You want people to navigate the rest of your site, to increase page views and drive up response to articles and advertising features. So create clear and simple menu bars on your site, to facilitate this process.
2. Graphics – Whatever you do, keep graphics to a minimum, and ensure they are well designed and meaningful for the theme of your site. Slow loading graphics will kill off your visitor retention rate.
3. Timeliness – The Internet is the most up-to-date communications medium ever seen. Make sure your site appears current and topical. If you are unable to update your site on a daily basis with the 'what's new', you might consider including a date/time field within the structure of your pages.

4. Spelling and Grammar – If you are an information provider, double-check your text for typos before uploading. You'd be amazed at the number of high traffic sites who have forgotten that 'millennium' contains 2 'n's, for example. You may get away with the odd error, but you won't keep regular visitors if your site appears to have poor editorial control.

5. Code Structure – Wherever possible, try to keep your relevant text towards the top of your code. Search engines will analyse only the first few hundred words to determine your site rankings. Unnecessary JavaScript code towards the top of the page may have a direct impact on successful traffic generation. Why not store the JavaScript separately, and reference it within your HTML? If this is not possible, 'Doorway' pages will be a better option for your site.

6. Frames – Many search engines cannot index frames. Unless frames are essential to your site design, we would recommend you leave them well alone. If you must use frames, then creating 'doorway' pages would be a good idea – these pages will point to your main (framed) site.

7. Hyperlinks – Make sure that your internal and external links are working. Other sites may change their URL's from time to time, so you should check all links on occasion. There is nothing worse than clicking on a link and finding the classic error: '404 Error – Page does not exist'!

8. Use of fonts – Try to stick to a single font (e.g. Verdana, Arial), in various sizes depending on the emphasis placed on each section of text. More and more key sites use 'Verdana' as the standard, since it appears both business-like and user friendly. Arial is another favourite for site designers.

There are no hard and fast rules for web design – with all products and services now available on-line, a vast array of design techniques are employed by designers and webmasters. However, make sure you don't make the fundamental errors listed above, and you'll be one step nearer your goal of good visitor retention.