

## Tips for Designing Your Web Site

### value-added and alternative e-agriculture



**Written by:**

Annette Dunlap, MBA

Extension Associate in Value-Added and Alternative Agriculture

#### **OVERVIEW**

(Note: For more information on developing the content for your web site, please see the Tool Kit item, "Marketing Strategies for Your Web Site," which can be found at: [http://cals.ncsu.edu/value-added/marketing\\_website.pdf](http://cals.ncsu.edu/value-added/marketing_website.pdf))

"You only get one chance to make a first impression." That piece of advice applies to web sites, just as much as it applies to people. A successful web site is one that has good design, easy navigation and readable fonts and colors. Here are some things to keep in mind as you create the "look" of your web site.

#### **KEEP IT SIMPLE**

Good web design relies on simplicity. By simplicity, we mean that your message is quickly identified by visitors to your site. They can find information and navigate between web pages with as few clicks as possible.

Simplicity is enhanced when you use layouts that are common for business web sites, so that a visitor to your site immediately feels "at home." Fancy and elaborate sites frequently take away from your core message, discourage people from spending time on your site, and may cost you customers.

#### **LIMIT YOUR GRAPHICS**

Download speeds are no longer as much of an issue as they once were when everyone accessed the Internet through a dial-up connection, but the basic concerns about use of graphics remain the same from a design standpoint.

Too many graphics (photos) take away from the impact of your message, because the eye cannot find a central point of focus on the screen. Smaller images often work just as effectively as larger ones. You can resize your photos using image editing software, such as Photoshop or Fireworks.

Most royalty free sites that provide photos require you to show the source of the photos somewhere on your web page. You can typically include the information at the bottom of each page where a photo appears. A simple statement that reads, "Photos courtesy of..." or "Photo source:..." works well.

#### **CHOOSE READABLE FONTS**

Script-like fonts, Gothic lettering and other artistic-style fonts should be limited to your logo or 'signature' on your web site. Otherwise, use a highly readable font that is easily scanned by the eye.

You may encounter the word 'serif' when selecting fonts. Serifs are the little 'hooks' that you see on fonts such as Times New Roman, whereas 'sans serif' (from the French, 'sans,' meaning 'without') does not have these hooks, such as Arial. Arial, and similar fonts, are becoming increasingly common in web design because of their clean look, the spacing between the letters and the ease of reading them.

#### **CHOOSE COMFORTABLE COLORS**

Generally, you want the colors of your web site to match the colors of your farm's logo, but sometimes this is not practical. For example, bright yellow and bright green backgrounds, which are commonly used by many farm enterprises on their signs to catch people's attention at farmers' markets, can be hard to read on a computer screen. Also, different browsers and different monitors show colors differently.

You can control some of a color's appearance by using 'browser safe colors' – these are colors that are defined by a specific color code, and are not affected by the browser that is used. Most web development software defines the browser safe colors. Choose your palette from these options.

The growing standard for web design is to select black or a similar dark color font for your font, and a background light enough to make the font easy to read. Use color for accents or highlighting – or to show a progression of information from one point to the next. The key is to encourage your viewer to stay with your site and read the information you have taken so much time to place there.

### **MAKE NAVIGATION EASY**

Navigation refers to the number of clicks it takes visitors to get to the page they want. Ideally, you want to design your site so that, in most cases, one click moves a visitor from one section to the next. Navigation tools include the typical navigation buttons that appear at the top or along the side of each page. Additionally, consider adding navigation links at the bottom of each page and “Return to Top” or “Return to Home Page” links on content-heavy pages that require a lot of scrolling to read.

### **FIND AN EXPERIENCED DESIGNER**

You may feel more comfortable choosing an experienced web designer to create your site. Choose someone who has a good reputation, understands agriculture and who has developed sites that you like to visit. It helps to take time to contact the designer’s clients and learn how easy it was to work with the designer. You want someone who will take the time to listen to you and who understands business from your perspective.

It is also a good idea for you to do some ‘homework’ before contacting a designer. Take time to write a short description of your enterprise: define your target audience; list your products; identify the types of information you want to have on your website; include the history of your farm. You may even want to select pictures that you would like to use on your site.

When working with a designer, remember that you have hired the person for his or her web expertise, but the two of you may have to do some “cross-education”: the designer to explain to you what is possible with a web site; you to explain how you view your customers. A good working partnership helps create a good web site.

### **RESOURCES**

[http://delta.ncsu.edu/teach/web\\_development](http://delta.ncsu.edu/teach/web_development) – Information from NC State University’s DELTA training unit

<http://smallbusiness.yahoo.com> – Tips on web design and selection of a professional designer

<http://it.cas.psu.edu/training/selfpaced/AandD/Design.html> – An online tutorial from Pennsylvania State University on web design and development

<http://it.cas.psu.edu/training/selfpaced/AandD/principles.html>

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