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Websites: What You Need to Know *Before* You Start!

Tips to consider

by [Sunny Carney](#), DBS Design

Part II of a two-part guide to establishing a presence on the web

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Other Website Considerations

You may need to make some decisions beyond attractive pages and efficient navigation, depending on the nature of your business and the purpose of your website.

Real-Time Information: For example, if your website needs to display the latest available information in real time, you will definitely need to engage the services of a database developer (your designer may have a favorite subcontractor). By linking to a database, people within your organization can update the information as it becomes available. Fields on your site will pull the current information directly from the updated database. This is an absolute necessity for some business sites. A ski resort website will definitely want to provide visitors with current snow conditions as soon as the viewer accesses the page.

On the other hand, an art gallery, personal site, author-information site, etc. can be updated by someone in your IT department or by your site designer or webmaster (most designers will offer to provide updates on a monthly, annual, or "as needed" basis for an agreed-upon fee).

Forego the Animated Splash Screen: Avoid the temptation (at least initially) to place a flash animation on your home page, unless there is a very good reason to have one. They can be appropriate for art or photography galleries, music sites, etc., but can be annoying to visitors who simply want to shop or to quickly find specific information. Depending on the length and complexity of the animation, design/development costs can be very high. When considering "splash screen" animations, remember that not everyone has a high-speed internet connection, and some Flash movies take forever to load, even with high-speed connections. A clever animation *might* be worth watching once. Always provide an escape ("skip intro") option for those who don't care to sit through it a second time!

Animations are valuable for presenting demonstrations of how a product works, or perhaps a narrated demo of features. Put a link on the appropriate page, letting the visitor choose whether or not to view it.

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Provide a link to a downloadable MS Word or .pdf document for those who want the information without watching the demo.

Flash Websites: A good Flash developer can create a spectacular website that is fast, provides constantly updated information, and allows freedom of design beyond what your designer may be able to achieve in a non-Flash web page. Hotels and airlines may be customers for this kind of site. The costs can be high, but can be worth it in some cases. Visitors can, for example, use such sites to book rooms and get immediate confirmation of availability. (When you enter the date(s) of your visit and the type of room/suite you'd like, you will know immediately if the room you want is available on the date you selected.)

Such sites can potentially pay for themselves fairly quickly. For example, what does it cost you annually to set up and maintain a call center for live reservation representatives? You can reduce that cost considerably by letting potential guests "do it themselves" and significantly reduce the number of booking agents (and the cost of your 800 number calls)!

Avoid annoying animations that serve no useful purpose! You know the ones I'm referring to; they are in constant motion on the left or right side of the page while you're trying very hard to concentrate on the information in the middle of the page! You simply cannot ignore them completely! If you need to call the viewer's attention to a new bit of information, allow the animation to run for perhaps one (1) SECOND when the page first opens, then turn it off!

Listen to your designer and/or developer: You may like the idea of your logo, in full blazing color, filling all that empty space behind the site content. Your designer will do everything possible to talk you out of it! Why? Because visitors to your site will not be able to read the content! If your target audience is senior citizens, there is a whole set of recommendations for making websites user-friendly for the frequently failing vision and common color blindness in older viewers. Your designer should know about these recommendations, as well as accessibility issues. Don't argue! You'll be wasting your money if you don't follow the advice (or at least modify your ideas) to conform to "best practices" for older viewers and others with impaired vision and/or hearing.

There are many good books on the subject of website design, if you have the time and inclination to understand why your designer/developer insists on doing things a certain way. One of the first I read (required for my first class in web design) is "The Non-Designer's Web Book: an Easy Guide to Creating, Designing, and Posting Your Own Website" by Robin Williams and John Tollett. It's a paperback, fairly inexpensive, wonderfully illustrated, colorful, and fun to read, and it will help you understand what it's all about. If you prefer something less fun and much more "scholarly," you can read "The Web Style Guide: Basic Design Principles for Creating Websites." It's absolutely free and available to the public [here](#). Or, you can simply find a designer you trust and pay attention to his/her advice!

I hope this information helps you understand some of what to expect when you decide it's time for a web presence for you, your company, or just to share snapshots of the kids or your vacation photos with the family and friends six states away!

Sunny Carney works part-time as a freelance web and document designer and copy editor, and part-time in aviation. She continues to refine her photography and digital art skills in her free time. The former

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co-owner of a theatre company and ballet instructor has a B.F.A. in performing arts and professional certifications in Web Design and Training Design/Development.

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