

Fusionbox :: Denver Usability Consulting

A Featured Article from the [Fusionbox SEO Blog](#)

Ten Ways to Instantly Improve Your Usability

by Ivy Hastings

Whether it's an e-commerce site, an online tool, or just your company's corporate site, smart marketers know that [web site usability](#) is key to the success of any online presence.

Still, there are many other marketers out there who don't know the basic principles of usability. They don't understand that the absence of these critical best practices on any website can ruin an online presence before it's built, whether you're offering great content or a unique product. The prevailing truth remains the same: If users have a negative experience interacting with your site, they won't be back.

Here are ten very easy ways to make an immediate improvement on the usability of your site:

Home – Users want a home and they expect to see a link to home in the same place: the top left-hand part of your site. Don't try to be creative and place your link on the right hand side, or at the bottom of a left navigation, or even worse, leave it off your navigation completely. You'll just end up frustrating your users.

Links – Make [links](#) look like [links](#). Designers hate the ugly blue, underlined text that indicates a hyperlink, but users *love* it, and they're accustomed to it. The standard blue, underlined text shows users implicitly that the content is a link. Now you don't have to use that blue, underlined text, but do make sure your links look like links. You'll want to also make sure that a visited link changes color.

Text Size – Another designer pet peeve is text size. Designers tend to use the smallest size they can get away with. If users can't read your text, they'll bail out. Make sure your text size is 11pt. or above. One of the great trends that stemmed from Web 2.0 is the use of really large text, buttons, and features. When [generating content](#), keep this in mind.

Navigation – Your navigation is central to the usability of your site. Your navigation should be placed on the top of the page under your logo, or down the left side. Never place your navigation on the right hand side, or worse change the location of your navigation. Users are accustomed to seeing navigation in the same place. If you make them hunt for it, they'll bail and you'll lose out on that sale, lead, or client.

Orientation – If your site is deep, meaning it has a lot of pages and many levels of navigation, make sure that users know where they are in the site, as well as how to get back. A great way to accomplish this is by adding a breadcrumb trail. This basically shows users their click path. For example, a user who is shopping for skirts might see: Home > Women's > Clothing > Skirts. Each of these categories should be a link that takes the user back to that category.

Content – Though content is usually not mentioned as an aspect of usability, it's important to use web best standards for your written content. In this case, less is always more. Your site is **NOT** an online brochure. Web users don't read, they **scan**. Use short, active sentences and calls to action that are engaging. You can do this with bolded text, bullets, buttons, and call-outs.

Placement – Put features where users expect to see them. Your logo goes on the top left and is a link to the homepage. Search belongs at the top right hand side. Contact Us should be the last section in your navigation. Login should be at the top left. Eye tracking studies show that users start at the top left, scan back and forth from left down the page, and end up at the top right expecting to complete an action.

The 30 Second Rule – The “30 Second Rule” states that users should know who you are, what you do, and what they should do next on your site. Do a gut check and make sure you pass. Ask anyone who is not familiar with your site or business to perform this test.

Search – Fifty percent of users prefer to use a search tool rather than drill down through your navigation. Give your users search so they can find what they are looking for fast without hitting the “Back” button and leaving.

Speed – Users hate nothing more than waiting. Do you think they really care about the fancy Flash effects your designer talked you into? Every last study also says that Flash-based intros are useless. So, if you're considering spending good money on a fancy intro, think again. At least 8 out of ten websites are breaking at least one of these rules if not all of them. Do your users a favor and fix these issues right away; your users and you bottom line will thank you for it.

Ivy Hastings is a Project Manager at Fusionbox, a full-service [Denver interactive agency](#) specializing in [web design](#), development, and [search engine marketing](#). A graduate of UC Berkeley, Ivy has published many articles about Internet Marketing and Web Design and Development Best Practices. She currently sits on the Board of Directors for Arts Street, a local non-profit that teaches at-risk youth the craft and business of the Arts. Ivy can be reached at her Fusionbox email: ihastings@fusionbox.com or at 303.952.7490.