

Fusionbox :: Denver Web Usability Experts

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Designing for Usability: Best Practices

by Ivy Hastings

As an online marketing professional, you've heard the term “[usability](#)” tossed around more than you'd care to admit, and by now, you've realized that the usability of your website is important, maybe even paramount. But what does “usability” mean and where do you start?

Usability begins with an in-depth knowledge of your target audience and their motivations, purposes, and goals. This, of course, both starts with and stems from excellent planning and user-centered design.

Here are some important best practices to consider when creating a usable [web design](#).

General Layout:

- Avoid internal scrolling if possible
- Keep important information and calls-to-action above the fold
- Avoid design elements that might look like outside advertising
- Avoid horizontal scrolling at all costs
- Keep consistent layout throughout the site (the homepage is the exception)
- Use white space
- Separate logical content into buckets

Images:

- No busy backgrounds
- Minimize the use of imagery so the page loads quickly
- Keep graphical text to a minimum

Text:

- No text over background images
- No white text on black backgrounds
- No large text blocks
- Use web-safe fonts (Arial, Verdana, Helvetica, Tacoma)
- Make sure that text line length is not too long
- Text size should be 10 or above
- Avoid dense content and un-scannable text
- Remember, users don't read, they *scan*

Navigation:

- Navigation should be at the top horizontal or left vertical of the page
- Make the navigation obvious and easy to use
- Your logo should be top left and link to the homepage
- There should be a bottom horizontal navigation repeating main navigational items
- Maintain navigational consistency throughout the site
- Make links look like links (i.e. underlined)
- Links should change color once they are visited
- Make sure user can orient themselves on the site at all times
- Avoid difficult drop-down menus

Follow these usability rules and you'll be well on your way to creating a site that's clean, easy-to-use and centered on your target audience's needs.

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.