

Six “Must Have” Website Conveniences

By Philip A. Grisolia, CBC

For anyone who manages a Website -- whether for business, or personal use -- there are six conveniences visitors to your site have come to expect. If you don't provide them, your site's traffic -- the number of visitors who stop long enough to browse your site -- is sure to decrease.

Of the 18 billion Web pages said to be floating around in cyberspace, yes, billion -- many belonging to the more than 16 million already abandoned Websites -- it's obvious that more than one Website failed to meet its visitors' expectations.

Oh, I'm sorry. Did you think the purpose of your Website was to satisfy one or more of your business or personal needs? Wrong! It's all about the needs of your site's visitors -- those potential customer of yours -- about what they are looking for, what they expect, what they demand!

Yes, demand. Fail to provide at least the following minimum conveniences on your Website and the parade away from your site can begin almost immediately.

1. **Download times** of no more than three seconds: It used to be eight, but Web users have apparently become impatient. Oh, and it shouldn't take them more than three clicks of a mouse for any visitor to find what he or she is looking for on your site. Huge graphics can slow the downloading. So can frames. (Anyone use 'em anymore?) So does sound, Flash and all those other rarely necessary visual and auditory lollypops Web designers like to add, things most content writers hate.
2. **Content that's brief**, to the point, but that answers visitors' questions: Content, after all, is king -- though not in a vacuum. Don't use typefaces smaller than what 12 point type looks like in a newspaper. Do use short sentences -- eight to 10 words. Short paragraphs -- three to four sentences. And “bulleted” content wherever possible. People today seem to dislike reading, at least reading from a computer monitor. Instead, they skim, browsing headlines and sub-heads to determine what's worth actually reading, what's not.

3. **Color and design** that contributes to the overall feel and tone of the site – that make visitors feel comfortable – are also important: But minimize the eye candy. Any graphic elements you include should be functional, not a distraction.
4. **Forcing visitors to scroll** left or right is a No-No! Scrolling up and down is acceptable – though not endlessly – but scrolling left and right kills visitor interest. Besides, no line of your site’s contents should be wider than 6.5 inches. Narrower is better.
5. **Give visitors a “Print” option:** And make sure whatever they choose to print from your site fits portrait-style on standard 8.5 x 11 inch paper, preferably with 1” margins left and right. Never force your visitors to change their print options. They resent being “forced” to do anything. Blame ‘em? Why the “Print” option? As I explained earlier, people dislike reading, particularly on a computer screen. Many print a site’s contents to read or refer to later. Oh, and make sure that whatever they choose to print ends up at least as large as that 12 point type.
6. **“Email This Page”** – or “Send This Page” – is another expectation of today’s Website visitors. When your visitors find something of interest, they often feel an uncontrollable urge to share it with other people who think or feel the same way they do. Make that sharing easy for ‘em to accomplish.

An item not on the “Visitors’ Wish List,” but one that always appears on sites I’m involved with is fresh content.

Keep your content fresh by updating it at least quarterly. Preferably monthly. For some clients I create updated content weekly. But update frequency really depends on what’s being offered on the site, to whom and why. Rarely do visitors come back to sites looking for content they’ve already seen.



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