



Web Design[®]

Overview

So you need a web site. How does one go about designing a web site? What makes a good design?

As with most design projects, personal taste plays an important role. However, there is a general procedure that one follows, and general web design guidelines that one can use.

Design Styles

Web sites make use of HTML (hypertext markup language) which inherently results in pages that are **rectangular in layout**. This page is an example of a rectangular layout. It is functional, easy to create.

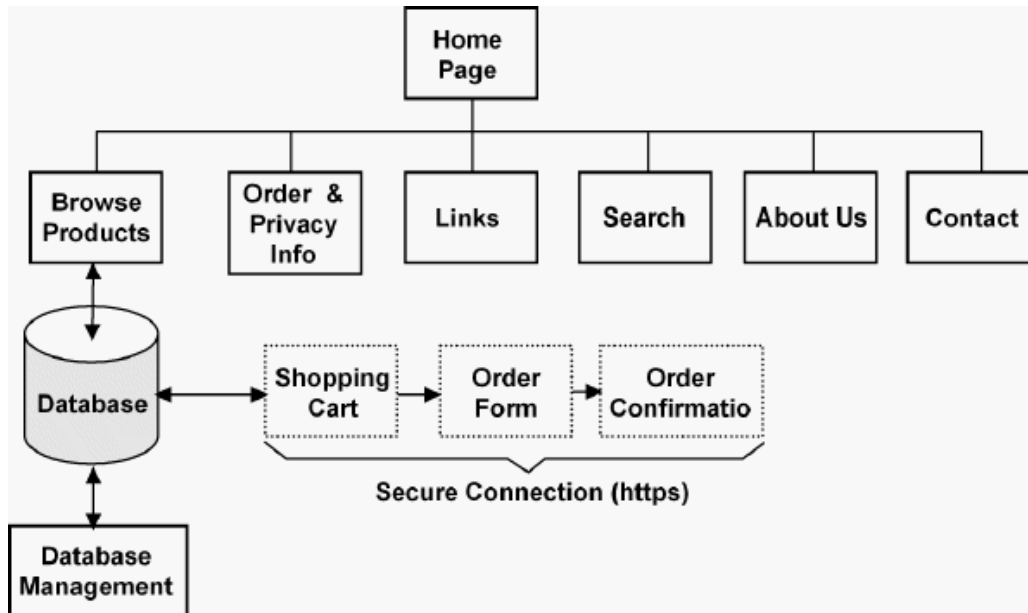
Many designers like to create pages where the emphasis is on looking interesting. This requires a **graphical layout**. This type of page is typically designed using a graphics program and offers many more layout possibilities. The downside is that it is very time consuming and hence more expensive.

Design Process

The starting point is to develop a **functional specification** for the web site. In the specification we look at three aspects: your corporate identity, your target audience, and your objectives.

- **corporate identity**
Your corporate colours and logo will feature prominently in the design. For example one expects to see blue in IBM's web site and red in Coca Cola's site.
- **target audience**
The target audience influences the style of language, graphics, fonts, etc. So a web site targeting Wall Street executives will look different from a web site targeting snow boarders.
- **objectives**
In this section of the specification we describe what the web site is expected to achieve. There are many possibilities: inform, entertain, sell products, create brand awareness, educate, collect statistical data, etc.

Once the specification has been compiled, the second step is to determine the structure and pages that will be required to implement the web site specification. This is typically done in the form of a **block diagram** or site map as shown in the example below.



Then one designs a typical page layout for the web site. It will reflect the requirements ("look and feel") identified in the specification. This page is referred to as the **site template** and will be used to design all the pages in the web site. This ensures a consistent look and feel.

The Text (Copy)

The client normally provides the text for most of the web site pages. The client is the expert on their products or services. However, in many cases the text provided by the client has been designed for printed documents, and need to be revised for the web - the way we read information on-line is quite different from the way we read printed information.

Programming

Many web sites require programming - implementing e-commerce would be an example. Programming is expensive and can add considerably to the overall cost.

Maintainability

One needs to build maintainability into the web site design. This will minimize the cost of keeping the web site updated, and often also reduces the initial cost.

Animation

In the early days of the Web, people were still excited by new things. Today most of us are overwhelmed by the amount of information available and the lack of time to read everything. Most of us want to get to the information with the least amount of fuss - and no gimmicks! With tools like Flash and video it is possible to provide powerful and exciting animation where it is useful.