

September 16, 2004

Mandarin Web master says designing a site is not like brain surgery

By HERB DRILL
GUEST WRITER

Janice Stewart believes it isn't exactly brain surgery to achieve the "total Web site experience," which she views as "combination of good Web graphics and good Web design. Without solid navigation, the most graphically-pleasing Web sites can prove to be very difficult to use."

She points out that there are so many differences between Web design and print design that "it's necessary to take different approaches to utilize the strengths of each medium and minimize weaknesses. The key advantage the print world has over the Web is a huge canvas with ultra-high resolutions. A Web page is fundamentally a scrolling and linking experience, with Multimedia and interactivity."

On the subject of identity, Mrs. Stewart notes the Web site URL is the "virtual street address. It sets the stage for how a Web site will be received, using a Web name which matches the company name gives the impression the company will be around for the long haul." Next, you must answer two questions: Who is responsible for the site? The answer is "the author or institution responsible for the existence of the site (Webmaster, author, or institution) accessible via email." What is the site about? "Each Web site should have an 'About this Site' or 'About Us' page accessible from the main page."

On Web page identity, she emphasizes the "title," which displays on the top, is the "virtual name tag" of each Web page within a Web site. The title is the first thing loaded by the browser and is displayed in the search engines. "Each title should include the Web site name followed by a subtitle which describes the purpose of that page," she offers.

Let's not forget "navigation



Janice Stewart is a Mandarin resident and Web site designer.

etiquette," Mrs. Stewart poses. "In the real world, before you can go anywhere, you must know where you are. Each page in a Web site should have a descriptive 'title and header,' which will be in the same spot on every page. Dead-end pages are pages in a Web site which don't have a link to another location within the Web site. Having a link back to the main page is essential; however, having complete navigation on every page makes the Web site equally accessible from any page within the Web site."

The Mandarin Web master says every page in a Web site should be part of the same Web site. "Good interface continuity of all pages consists of a common theme, same backgrounds, same fonts and sizes, same non-link colors, same link colors, and ensuring that link colors and non-link colors don't conflict," she adds.

Obviously, users of the Web don't seek excessive amounts of text online.

So, Mrs. Stewart notes, "Web content is typically smaller and more summarized than the print counterpart. Once the content is collected and categorized, it must be segmented into manageable units. Just as a page in a book has a limit to how much content should be delivered per page." Like a book, a white background is preferred. A

soft-colored background is generally easy to read. Care must be taken to choose good text and link colors that don't conflict with the background color. A bright background is very difficult to read and visually unprofessional. A black background can be easy to read and have a professional look, but care must be taken to choose colors that work well with the background."

Okay, NASCAR fans, let's throttle to speed. Mrs. Stewart rushes to point out that "the faster a Web page loads, the more likely a user will stay."

Optimization is achieved by ensuring the content on all Web pages is as small as possible without affecting the look and feel of the final product.

On average, a browser can receive 2000 bytes (2K) per second, which means it would take 15 seconds to receive a 30K file. Graphic optimization is achieved by ensuring the graphics on all Web pages are the correct size, coded correctly, and compressed."

Herb Drill is the principal of Able Me & Associates!, Mandarin-based marketing consultants to the overlooked disabled community. He writes and edits www.notaccessible.com and is a charter member of the now international Society of American Business Editors and Writers. His e-mail address is herbdrill@ableme.com, or herbdrill@notaccessible.com.