

How to be ethical when developing web sites

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When I was in Junior High School I remember my *Ethics* teacher saying everything we do has an impact on the people who surround us; whatever decision we make it will always affect them directly or indirectly. Back then I did not understand these words, but now that I am doing something else than just thinking about me, I get what she meant.

I am a computer systems engineering student, and now I can tell that programming for others affect not just the client but the *end- user*. Thinking about what things might affect others is not a simple task, but as Morten Rand-Hendriksen says **“Making ethics part of our design process helps us build the world we all want to live in.”** [1]. This may sound like utopia, so why should we really be ethical? Consequences may vary from one person to another, for example, as the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), regulates truth in advertising, the company Nutella was sued when they advertised that their product was healthy for kids, as they obviously lost the sue, they had to pay up to \$20 dollars to anyone who bought their product due to this misleading advertisement [2]. Can you imagine how much they had to pay?

As you see, being unethical when developing web sites has a tremendous impact, the truth is that consequences does not only affect our finances, for example, according to *In the black* online magazine **"Unethical**

behavior... also affects those who witness it and even those who commit it." [3]. Being unethical leads to

stress, anxiety, depression, head disease and even blood pressure... Do you still have doubts about why being ethical is good?

Because of the consequences mentioned above, this article is going to talk about how to be ethical when developing web sites.

So, the question that you must be wondering by now is “what ethical responsibilities does a web developer has? This interrogative might have a couple of good answers. Before I answer with my opinion, let me remind you ethics are a practice, not a one- reading essay or as Anthony Bryant said ethics are *a set of standards governing the conduct of members of a profession* [4]. Taking that into account, I am going to share you my *abc* of ethics in web development:

1. Be **inclusive**: whenever you develop a web site you must ensure that people with different abilities can access to the same content and understand your message. Make sure that your site is visitor- friendly [5].
2. Let the user have **control**: while a user is navigating, he or she should be capable of maintaining control of the web page. Having feedback when filling a form or allowing the user to cancel an operation is a good start.
3. Do not depreciate **quality**: ensure that the solution provided to a client not just satisfies him or her, but that has good quality by following the best practices: comment your code, make your web site text readable and better organized, design clean and simple, and remember, **always think of the end- user**.

4. Be **honest** with your co-workers, clients and end- users: do not try to take advantage of any situation because of their inexperience or lack of knowledge.
5. Do not violate the **laws**: no matter what situation you are in, always respect the laws, this includes copyrights, spamming, misleading advertisements and other practices that are not tolerated by the law.
6. Respect user's **privacy** and **security**: as a programmer you should handle user's information with responsibility [6]. Would you give your personal information to a stranger? Of course not! The same thing happens when you are surfing in the internet, nobody would ever like to be vulnerable or exposed.
7. Be a good teammate: share your knowledge with other developers, be open to new ideas and value other's opinions to **create a better web for everyone**.
8. Be **humble**: own your mistakes and learn from them.
9. **Inspire** others and forward to learn new things.
10. **Test** with real users: when you already have a prototype of your site, you should test it with people who are actually going to use the page, otherwise it will not be helpful enough.

In web development, as in any other profession, we must consider responsibilities, decisions and consequences to measure what is good and what is bad when designing and creating a web site, because even what we think is an insignificant decision, as I said at the beginning of the article, it could have an enormous impact in others' life. Because of this, we should always have a

reference to measure what we are doing and take the best decision not just for ourselves, but for the client and, the most important of all, the end- user.

I hope the principles I proposed raise awareness about the importance of thinking about our implications when developing because I mentioned before, consequences affect every person who is involved. I also hope it can be helpful to guide yourself and others into the good path, and most important, I hope you use this manual as a reference to develop strong web sites.

References:

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