StomperNet™

Web Design Basics

Color Choices

A special report by StomperNet.

Web Design Basics: Color Choices

StomperNet

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Special Report by StomperNet™

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Smashwords Edition

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StomperNet™

StomperNet™ is your premiere source of SEO and Online Business resources, tips, strategy and information. With StomperNet™ you can enjoy fresh new content every week, over 200,000 searchable forum posts with paid moderators to help you, over 1,400 in-depth how-to videos, plus you can get direct access to our world-class faculty, highly trained coaches and so much more!

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Brad Fallon, CEO

Brad started out like all entrepreneurs… but quickly discovered the power of SEO when he founded Smart Marketing and MyWeddingFavors.com and rocketed to the #1 spot in Google, and went from a basement operation to over $20 million in annual revenue. Since then, he's gone on to co-found StomperNet and continue to build his reputation as a visionary Internet marketer among thousands of business owners and entrepreneurs both inside and outside of Internet Marketing. His latest breakthrough, uQast.com, is already revolutionizing the paid (and free) online content industry and is capturing worldwide attention from entertainers, corporate leaders, entrepreneurs and media giants.

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Introduction

StomperNet™ has made several changes over the years. Recently we changed our website and added a landing page. We followed our branding, which is targeted toward our audience, with the StomperNet™ Green, black and white.

The website was white, with StomperNet™ green and splashes of black and black text. The landing page however was dark, with StomperNet™ green and white text.

After a few weeks, Lee Collins, the Managing Director and MJ Schrader, the Director of Web Presence, both decided this contrasted too much with the branding of the website.

They wanted consistency and felt like white with black text was easier to read. They were confident the team would agree. But the team; was of mixed opinions, when presented with the new option.

The Director of Operations, Ryan Taylor, felt like the dark design was more elite. He felt like the design was closer to what our clients would expect. Colton Swabb argued for better readability with the dark and liking the way the colors looked against the dark background.

The other members of the team listed the advantages of both the dark and light. They liked each design for particular aspects, mentioning reasons that were listed above but did not like one over the other enough to say which design was better.

This presented StomperNet™ with the unique opportunity to ask our visitors what they wanted. It also presented the opportunity to share valuable information on web design and how color choices are a valuable aspect of that.

The viewers, not only voted, they were quick to comment on why they voted the way they did. We were able to know exactly what our visitors wanted by asking, but we already had our basic design in place. If you do not have a site already, or want a change, you need to know what colors your readers want.

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Web Design Color Basics

Any website should have some basic design rules that should be followed. The most basic of which is that good web design follows most of the same rules as good design anywhere else, this means focusing on the needs and concerns of your audience.

By knowing who your target audience is, you can better cater to their expectations from you and your website. That said; there is still room for arguments and discussions on what they may want or what will get them to buy. While visitors are great, the vote that actually matters is the vote they do with their wallet.

You want people who buy. Thus you do not want to be in a hurry to slap up a website that brings you visitors, but not buyers. Be prepared to take some time to plan your website and design before you build it. You also want to be prepared should you need to make changes later.

What colors are best for your visitors?

You need to know your visitors and what they want. This may sound hard, but it is pretty easy to eliminate colors quickly if you understand their power. The colors you use will set the mood and function of the site. Thus your website color choice makes a statement about what your website will offer.

Many websites choose a background color, a theme color, and a headline color. Some choose the background and two colors for their theme. Then they use one of the theme colors for headlines.

You may also consider that two colors that look good offline, may not look as good together online. Your background color also needs to be very different color from your text. A light blue background with darker blue font may be hard to read. However a contrasting color like red on that blue background will often be hard to read as well.

Colors and Their Expression

Colors can be used to pull a psychological response from visitors. Depending on who you want to buy from you, you want colors that appeal to those buyers. Below is a list of some common colors and the emotions they evoke.

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PINK is connected with softness, romance, sweetness, innocence, youthfulness, tenderness.

RED is associated with love, passion, danger, warning, excitement, food, determination, impulse, action, adventure.

ORANGE is connected with enthusiasm, creativity, celebration, fun, youth, cheerfulness and affordability.
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YELLOW is associated with being attention grabbing, curiosity, playfulness, happiness and amusement.

GREEN is associated with money, nature, animals, health, healing, life, harmony, durability, optimism, and freshness.

BLUE is connected with trustworthiness, depth, success, stability, calmness, power, professionalism, reliability and honor.

PURPLE is considered with royalty, mystery, ambiguity, uncertainty, luxury, fantasy, dreams, elegance, and magic.

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Think about how the warm colors, (red, orange yellow) are tied with passion, happiness and energy. Cool colors such as blues, greens, and purples are considered calming, relaxing and even somewhat reserved. These are typically your accent colors that go along with other neutral colors like the ones below.

These neutral colors are often used as background colors, with a high contrast font. Sometimes the links and headings are in one or more of the accent colors.

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BROWN is thought of as being related to earth, nature, tribal, confident, simplicity, casual, enduring, and relaxing.

WHITE is associated with innocence, cold, sterile, purity, cleanliness, simplicity, newness and peace.

GREY is considered neutral, reserved, traditional, intelligent, conservative, and serious.

BLACK is associated with seriousness, darkness, mystery, secrecy, elegance, sophistication, formal and strength.

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If your website is about racing, you want warm colors to reflect the energy of racing. A site about beach decorations on the other hand is going to use the cooling colors to reflect the calm nature of life on the beach. For an environmental site, you might use a pale brown background with accent colors in the green and blue ranges.

Depending on your visitors you may want to use contrasting colors, such as yellow and blue to reflect the essence of your site. This also depends on how the saturation and hue of blue, yellow or other color your site uses.

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Hues, Tints, Saturation

Most websites, companies and/or logos are not the actual basic colors, but they are various shades, hues, and tints. These differences can cast a different message than the basic colors. Think about how a bright yellow is different that a soft yellow.

Look at gray; it can be a simple color. Perhaps it is a medium color. But it could be a pale gray that is almost white, or so dark it almost black. Add some red or brown for a warmer gray. With some blue tinting, gray becomes even cooler.

These may seem like minor differences, yet they can change the mood of a website. Imagine having pastel pink and blue colors on a website for football statistics. That is probably not going to appeal to most football fans. Bright primary colors will probably not reflect what most visitors want to see on a website about mattresses. A mattress site would want to have muted colors that reflect a restful experience.

What if you aren't certain?

Then there are times when you decide on everything but the website theme you like is not quite right. Or you find yourself looking at two different versions of your site, both of which look good, but you are not certain which the correct one for your visitors is. This was the predicament that we found ourselves in at StomperNet™.

We have changed, and we want to reflect the current needs and wants of our visitors, so we presented you with a light landing page and a dark landing page. And over 75% of you voted light. But let's discuss the advantages and disadvantages of a dark background or a light background.

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Dark Background Website

When computers first became mainstream, the background was dark with light text, on the monitor screens that were often either green or orange. Later monitors upgraded to 8 colors, and slowly into the all the colors that available today. But what are the advantages of a dark background?

Great for art

The dark background is considered edgy, elite, elegant, artsy or other terms depending on the site. Many photographers have started using the dark background for any pictures that people click to look at a photo. The dark background helps the picture or other type of art stand out and looks good.

As Douglas Stafford told us "My feeling concerning the darker background is that for a company selling Internet Marketing the darker version is more appropriate because it has a more impressive, authoritative feel. Also all images, colors, text tend to

stand out more. Whereas with the lighter version things seem to come off as a little more bland and washed out."

Readability

There have been a number of studies; including Hall and Hanna (2004), and Buchner and Baumgartner (2007), that have shown that white text on a black background have shown better readability. This they measured through retention and comprehension scores. They offered two slightly different tests in order to score these results.

Nora Firestone told us that the dark background was "Easier on my eyes when reading. That's important, as I spend a lot of time on the computer and my eyesight is suffering."

Quicker Scanning

This is another point where you need to look to your visitors. If they are typically scanning your website, then a black background may be your winner. The dark background was proven to allow users to scan a site up to 32 percent faster.

If you have ever looked at sports sites, you will notice they often have a dark background so visitors can quickly look at scores and statistics. Rob Paris told us that "I have always liked white text on black for me it is easier to read that's just me maybe."

Uses Less Power

Well, that seems odd, but yes a dark background can use less power. *Can.* We had people mention this. Yet I will not mention

their names or quotes. Being an analytical person, I did some research.

The problem with saying any percentage or statistic is that monitors come in a wide variety of shapes, sizes, types, and settings. Even two people with the same monitor may have their settings set up differently which would create a different result.

That being said, a dark background does save energy, so if you still have a CRT (cathode ray tube) monitor, you will save energy. In one study a dark background used 20% less energy than a light.

With LCD Monitors it actually depends. Most LCD monitors actually block light to create a darker background. This actually requires slightly more energy, which depends on the size and type of LCD monitor.

If you want to see an actual demonstration, visit YouTube, and see how the black uses slightly more energy than a light background on an LCD Monitor. There are fewer and fewer people using the CRT monitors. So energy saving is not a factor for most computer owners; for now.

This could change as computers and monitors progress. With LEDs this could then flip back toward dark backgrounds. With each advancement in technology, monitors are using less and less energy. The savings of energy is becoming less and less of an issue.

Light Background Website

The advantages of the dark are going to overlap with that of a light background. Simply because while statistics say one thing, the tests are older and current information about how to do things online always changes.

Plus like stated prior, it really comes down to your visitors. If the majority of your visitors want a light background, provide it to them.

Professional

While a dark color may be great for backing an art site, it does not look professional for most other sites. We think of medical professionals, most of whom wear white. Many offices still have a large number of professionals in white shirts. But perhaps the biggest persuader that white is professional is what the opposition represents.

Often it is the game sites that have a black background. These sites are geared for young people, and even if the visitors are older, they are coming to the site with playing in mind. The same is true with the music industry. Many types of music groups are drawn to the dark background.

This was actually the biggest complaint by the people who voted in the contest. They were quick to state that black is not the right

representation for a professional company.

As Chuck Scifers said "Darker site appears richer. However, the type of service that StomperNet™ offers should be paralleled with a clean, clear, rational business-like persona devoid of 'artsy' compositional elements. "

Readability

Wait, this was mentioned in the dark backgrounds!

Yes, but compare a light colored site to a piece of paper. Actually this is what many people do, as it is a familiar reading environment. People find scanning across a black background easier, not reading. For reading paragraphs and articles, the light background with dark text is the way to go.

The thing that really makes the readability important is what visitors say. While some visitors may not like reading black text on a white background, they are okay with reading it. However many people find reading white text on a dark background stressful.

Stressful is not where you want your visitors to be.

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I feel a conflict I have to resolve to read the white on black, almost like the colors themselves are challenging me. I don't have to reconcile that feeling in order to read the white," said Darcy White.

Clean

This does not mean that dark is dirty, but rather that the light background does not read as cluttered. The reason that dark is

easier to scan is that people can grab bits of text. People often find the dark background as looking busy and harder on the eyes.

The problem many people had on our study and on other studies is that the white font on black background tends to start looking "muddy" after a bit. The colors start to blur and make it hard to read the font. While it is possible to reduce this by using a pale gray font, with people coming to a site from a variety of formats; including various mobile devices, the higher contrast becomes important.

And as Heather Abbey said "I'm on 'Team Light' because when I look at the page it is more open and non-cluttered. It also has a nice contrast that is way easier on my eyes and I can stay focused on the material." Since any good website owner wants their visitors focused on the material, a light background is good option.

Printing

If someone wants to print the page, the light background with dark text is much easier to print. This will present a clean copy for them to read now and later. If you want to use a dark background, you may want to have a print button that offers your visitors a clean PDF format of your pages.

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Conclusion

The most important aspect of designing a website is realizing that your website should be designed for your visitors. Your visitors are the ones you need to appeal to and match the site to their tastes. Remember they are expecting certain things from your web design due to what you offer.

Look at how environmental sites are often in earth tones to reflect the nature of the industry. Energy drinks are sites full of color.

When you find yourself facing a difficult decision of deciding between two colors, ask your readers. This is what we did. Yes, we read the responses, as you can see from what we have posted in this report.

The first day light had 83% of the vote. During the second day light was down to 73% of the vote. We decided to have both pages, and change them out on occasion.

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How did the numbers stack up?

When this report was published, we were only mid-way through the contest that runs from Aug 22-26, 2011 (Monday-Friday). Most of our voters were very definite about their choice, and gave us great comments. As of Wednesday, August 24, 2011 we already had 389 people vote for Team Light and 131 people vote for Team Dark. With 75% already choosing light, it was a clear winner, but the voting was far from over!

Did Team Light carry to victory?

Or did Team Dark stage a miraculous comeback?

For final numbers and more information please visit our "Light or Dark" page. This page has all our latest numbers and some great feedback from our voters – plus more awesome tips for web design! You can also read some of the comments in the report and a few fun ones here.

Some comments from Team Dark voters

Suzy Cassidy "I thought it would be easier to read the light but was surprised that the dark background was just as easy and the letters seem to pop off the page with an almost 3D effect. The light background is too glaring, maybe a warmer color would be better but, then you lose the contrast."

Sharon Halpin "Normally I go for light backgrounds for the usual reasons but in this case I much prefer the dark - it's sharper, cleaner and cooler and just seems to 'balance' better"

Andrew Allen "I was surprised as I had been advised against a black background for my blog...but yours is much easier to read in black, and cooler!"

Some comments from Team Light voters

Constance Mctair "It's easier on the eye and offers a better understanding of the copy. The dark background is reading through molasses."

Kelly Thomas "Brighter, nicer = friendlier. It's more traditional, like paper. It should be easier to read. "

Dave Simon "Cleaner and easier to read. It feels more like daytime and your open for business. The dark would be good for a night club black hat or grunge site. I design sites for local small businesses."

Paul Duffy "Dark text on a light background is the most easy to read with minimal eye strain. It's a time proven formula that works!"

Visit our “Light or Dark” page for more info!

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Recommended Resources

StomperNet Membership - The community for serious entrepreneurs. Choose the Business-Building Benefits you need with 4 membership levels. In their online community you can learn from real business owners who use online marketing. Attend online workshops with experts. Get a coach to help push your business into overdrive!

SEO Pro Workshop - StomperNet™ is considered the leader in SEO. We have spent the last 2 years perfecting our SEO Pro workshops with 2 key audiences in mind. Those who want to sell SEO and Internet Services to Clients and those who want to optimize their own business website. You will learn what you need to start your own SEO business in a weekend.

The Net Effect - Join the ranks of online entrepreneurs who have discovered The Net Effect. It is a concentrated, income-exploding monthly journal from the world-class instructors at StomperNet™.

Report Writer MJ Schrader

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