

Principles of website design

Millions of websites are built on a daily basis, so more emphasis is now given to the principles of good website design. Following these standard principles is important as it allows every website the opportunity to be successful in a market which is very competitive. When you combine these principles of good design with elements of innovation and creativity, your website has every chance of being successful. In terms of business, if you get the website right, the business is more likely to succeed.

- ▶ **Usability** – This is the ease of use of a website, that is, how user-friendly it is. For example, an important element of website usability is ensuring that website content is flexible and works on all browsers and devices.
- ▶ **White space/spacing** – This is the space on web pages that is left untouched and white. Website developers utilise white space to separate design elements such as text, graphics and other elements. Unless you utilise spacing, your web pages will look cluttered and messy, and it would be hard for visitors to interpret which words relate to which images and understand what they are looking at. Therefore, when designing a web page, it is crucial to use spacing between elements so as not to overwhelm and confuse website users.
- ▶ **Site layout** – This means giving consideration to where elements go on a web page and how content will be spread across a website. For example, where the header, navigation links, text and graphics will appear on the page. The layout used for one web page should be consistently used across all the pages on a website, where similar content is being included. For example, headers should be positioned in the same way on all pages. A good site layout is one that is uncomplicated, has clear navigation and is intuitive and user-friendly.
- ▶ **Accessibility** – Website developers must ensure that websites are correctly designed and developed to enable all users to have equal access to information. This is important as it removes barriers that would otherwise prevent a person with disabilities from using a website. The BBC is an example of a website that provides excellent website accessibility. It includes features that advise users on how to customise their computer set-up and remove barriers to using the website. People with poor vision can change the font size and colour. In addition, it provides accessible games for children with motor and cognitive disabilities.
Alexa Traffic Rank consistently rates the BBC website in the top 100 websites worldwide. One reason for this is the excellent way that it caters for all users.

Key terms

Alexa Traffic Rank – ranks websites based on a combined measure of page views and the number of visitors. From this, it creates a list of 'top websites' averaged over three-month periods.

Serif – a type of font that has embellishments at the ends of letters. An example of a serif font is Times New Roman.

Sans serif – The word 'sans' is French, meaning 'without'. Therefore a sans serif font is one without embellishments at the ends of the letters. An example of a sans serif font is Arial.

Link

The World Wide Web Consortium is committed to ensuring that the web is accessible for all, regardless of their disability. Find out more about their Web Accessibility Initiative at www.w3.org/WAI/

- ▶ **Navigation** – It is important that users can navigate their way easily around a website. The navigation must be intuitive and simple to use. Good navigation on websites involves making it obvious where website links are and being consistent across the whole website. There should be an intuitive structure of pages.
- ▶ **Typography** – The type of font used on websites is important. Websites need to have clear and legible text in order to be user-friendly and accessible. There are two main types of font families: **serif** and **sans serif**. Most websites utilise a sans serif font such as Arial because they have no embellishments to the letters, making them clearer and easier to read.

Research

Research how typography is connected to disabilities such as dyslexia. When building a website, what font would you use and why? Consider what else you could do as a website developer to ensure that all users can access your website regardless of disability.

- ▶ **Alignment** – Alignment is how elements are positioned on a web page and how they interact with each other. For example, if you place an image on a web page which is aligned to the left and the supporting text was aligned to the right of the page, this would suggest to users that there is no relationship between the two elements, whereas, if they were both aligned left, there would appear to be a connection between the two elements.

Clarity - Clarity, being clear, is key to good website design. It is pointless choosing a visually appealing design if users cannot understand it because it is not clear. Therefore, any website you develop must communicate what you want it to say clearly, but also have clarity of design and layout. For example, if you want a user to contact you, you should provide a visible email address or phone number. Asking users to fill in forms takes additional time and does not put the user first. Good design matters, but good communication matters more.

Consistency - Consistency means keeping elements within your website the same throughout. This is considered one of the most important principles in website design. Website consistency involves using the same page layout, the same font and the same design and colour scheme, throughout. An inconsistent website is unintuitive and difficult to navigate.

Accuracy - Everything included in the website needs to be accurate: that is, it should be correct and meaningful. To keep information accurate and current, websites should be updated regularly. Moreover, it is important that the information provided on websites is checked for factual errors as well as spelling and grammatical mistakes.

Content - The content of the website includes the text, graphics (diagrams, artworks and photos) as well

as media and objects. Content needs to be accurate, consistent in style (where appropriate), and you need to ensure that you have permission to use any content that you did not create from scratch.

▶ **Media and objects** - Some websites include interactive content, such as videos, background sounds, Flash images and **applets**. Media elements are used to captivate and grab the attention of website users. The use of media must be appropriate as its overuse can slow down a website, clutter the appearance of web pages and put off some users.

Key term

Applet - a mini software application that can be built into a web page, for example a calculator that can be used by website users upon clicking a button on a web page.

▶ **Simplicity** - Websites which are straightforward in their design are often the most visited. They manage to combine the content they need to get across with a clear and simple, easy-to-use design that attracts users back because they know they will get what they need from it without fuss. It is important when developing a website that you do not overcomplicate the design by introducing too many elements on the pages.

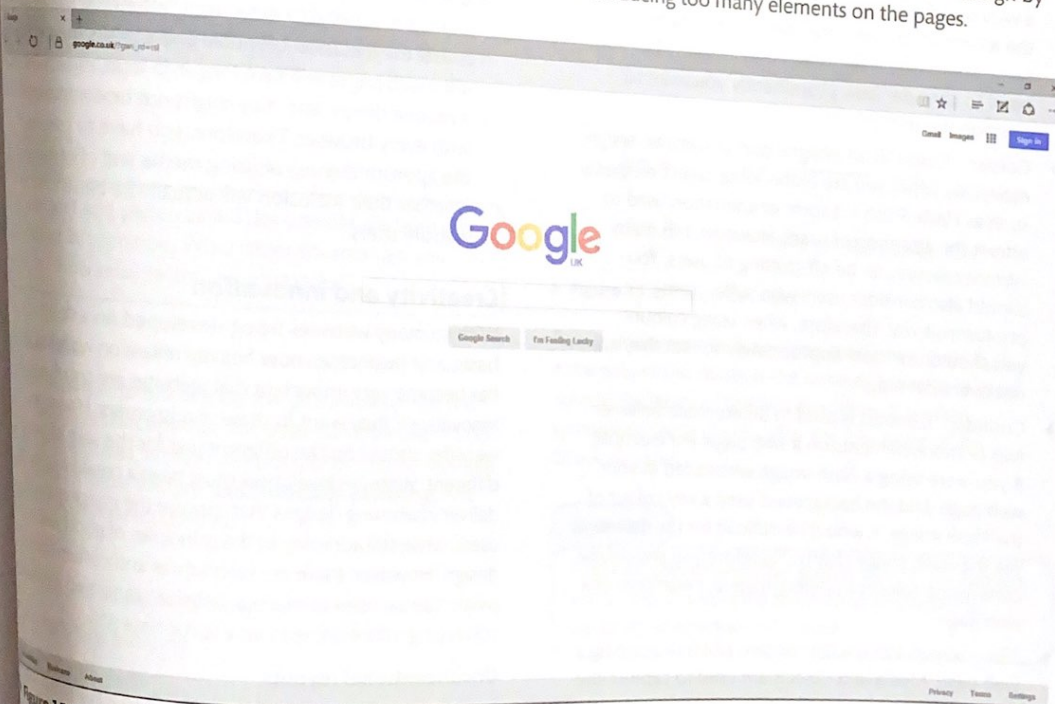


Figure 15.1: Google.com home page. (Google and the Google logo are registered trademarks of Google Inc., used with permission)